Journal of Student Affairs

STUDENT AFFAIRS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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In Memory of Keith Miser: SAHE *Journal of Student Affairs* Founder

Oscar Felix & Nick Sweeten
Colorado State University

Keith M. Miser, age 78, passed away on Monday, October 28, 2019, in Bloomington, IN.

Keith initiated the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs* in 1991 to develop and produce a scholarly publication that reflects current education issues and the professional interests of student affairs practitioners. Keith served as advisor from the inception of the *Journal* and was instrumental in the development of a high-quality publication. Those who worked with Keith remember him as caring, insightful, curious, and having a wonderful sense of humor.

Keith attended Indiana University, Bloomington, where he earned a bachelor's degree in biology, a master's degree in guidance and counseling, and a doctoral degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs. In 1971, he began a career in Higher Education and Student Affairs that spanned more than 40 years. Keith mentored hundreds of students in the course of his long career as a Dean of Students, Vice President for Student affairs, and Associate Professor within three universities - University of Vermont, Colorado State University, and University of Hawaii at Hilo. In addition, he helped reorganize, along with several colleagues, the country of Belize's tertiary educational system, an effort which ended in the founding of a new University of Belize and a pathway to higher education for numerous Belizean students and faculty.

Colorado State University
Journal of Student Affairs

Mission Statement

The mission of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs* is to develop and produce an academic publication that intentionally engages in and promotes justice and excellence in educational scholarship that is grounded and informed by practice.

Goals

- The *Journal* will promote scholarly work and perspectives from graduate students and student affairs professionals, reflecting the importance of professional and academic research and writing in higher education.
- The Editorial Board of the *Journal* will offer opportunities for students to develop editorial skills, critical thinking, and writing skills while producing a professional publication.

State of the Program

D-L Stewart, Ph.D.
Jennifer Johnson, Ph.D.
Pamela Graglia, Ph.D.

This marks the 52nd year of the Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) program at Colorado State University. The SAHE program continues to respond to the demands of our changing profession while centering the learning and development of our students. We extend our appreciation to faculty, staff, advisors, assistantship supervisors, and alumni who all contribute to providing a high-quality experience for our students.

The SAHE program maintains a strong relationship with both the Division of Student Affairs and the School of Education at Colorado State University. The Division of Student Affairs contributes roughly $300,000 in funding for graduate assistantships and other funds which support SAHE. Through support for SAHE's full-time faculty and contributions to residential faculty pay, the School of Education also makes a significant financial investment in SAHE.

The revision of the SAHE curriculum has nearly completed the approval process at the university and we look forward to fully implementing the new curriculum with the incoming class. As we shared last year, the new curriculum gives students more options to explore their interest areas through elective courses, greater access to research opportunities, and better preparation for working with the unique needs of today's college students.

We welcomed new instructors this year to the SAHE faculty including Ty McNamee, Jr McGrath, Allana Forté, and Shauna DeLuca. Ty McNamee taught our program evaluation course this summer and with Dr. Amy Dinise-Halter this fall. Jr McGrath joined us to teach introduction to research. Allana Forté, a senior administrator at the University of Denver, stepped in to teach law in student affairs, residentially and online. We welcomed Shauna DeLuca to carry on in Karen Gardinier's stead teaching the workshop on international programs. We had to say farewell to Dr. Gardinier as she accepted an amazing opportunity that took her back to her Peace Corps roots. We also were delighted that current SAHE faculty stepped into new roles: Dr. Lea Hanson came on board to offer valuable leadership to the online program while Dr. Jen Johnson was at Semester at Sea in Spring 2020. Adam-Jon Aparicio has also joined Teresa Metzger as co-advisor for the *Journal of Student Affairs*.

This January, Dr. Jody Donovan, Dr. Oscar Felix and one of our second-year SAHE students serving in the capacity of International Field Experience Coordinator (Sydney Shackelford) led a group of 10 students on a trip to Costa Rica in conjunction with their eight-week Global Perspectives in Higher Education course.

We continue to have a strong program graduating students who are prepared to enter the field as practitioner-scholars. Over 90% of the 2019 graduating cohort had a placement within three months of graduation. SAHE continues to be the most diverse graduate program in the School of Education and across the university.

Our ability to recruit and yield minoritized students from multiple social groups—including People of Color, queer and trans students, undocumented students and international students—illustrates our demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as equity and justice. It is also an indicator that these values are shared across our alumni, faculty, and assistantship supervisors. We remain committed to furthering our work in this area so that principles of equity and justice further permeate our curricular content and instructional pedagogy as fundamental components of professional practice in student affairs.

Producing a high quality SAHE journal year after year is no easy task. It requires the work of many including content and style readers, Journal editorial board members, and dedicated advisors (Teresa Metzger and Adam-Jon Aparicio). We'd like to express our thanks and appreciation for all who contributed to making this 29th edition of the SAHE Journal a success. Happy reading!

Colorado State University
Journal of Student Affairs

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The editorial board is proud to present the 29th edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs*, its first solely online publication. For 28 years, Colorado State University (CSU) graduate students have worked diligently to produce this annual scholarly journal. This year's *Journal* highlights themes around mental health, such as graduate students' mental health; underrepresented institution types, such as community colleges; and minoritized students such as formerly incarcerated persons. These themes are timely and bring forward student populations that are often left in the shadows of academia. As a board it was very exciting and important for us to choose articles that spoke to our mission and that contributed new knowledge to the scholarship in the field.

CSU SAHE students comprise the editorial board, with this year marking the first year of two online SAHE students serving as editors. In addition to increased diversity within the editorial board, our outreach efforts resulted in manuscript submissions and reviewer applications from scholars across the country. The emergence of COVID-19 in the final stages of publication presented new opportunities to examine our practices, with a focus on inclusion and equal access. In a time of primarily virtual communication, new meeting formats pushed us to reimagine our operations and inclusion of online students.

This year's publication process was characterized by innovation and redevelopment. As an editorial board, we critically examined our previous operations to continue building the foundations for a more intentional and attuned publication. We revisited our mission statement, maintaining our values of being a graduate student run developmental journal with goals to expand the current scholarship in the field of student affairs; however, we adjusted certain phrases and language to better reflect who we are today. We created a new article review rubric, supplemented by updated training materials, that included more opportunities for reviewers to provide constructive feedback. This change improved our collaboration with the review team, as we had more tangible data and explanations from reviewers that we brought to our decision meetings. And, there is still more work to be done. With every new editorial board member, who we are changes. We are grateful to strengthen the foundation for future SAHE graduate students to build upon.

In November, the Managing Editors had the opportunity to travel to Portland, Oregon and attend the 44th annual Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference. This experience was monumental in the innovation and redevelopment of the *Journal*. The Managing Editors attended a roundtable discussion to learn from and ask questions of other academic journals and editors. We met some of our scholar idols and had a chance to connect, network, and market the *Journal of Student Affairs*. We want to thank the SAHE program for continuing to prioritize ASHE as a developmental experience.

While attending ASHE, we met Dr. Kari Dockendorff, a new faculty member in the Higher Education Leadership program at CSU. Dr. Dockendorff graciously agreed to be the guest author for the 29th edition of the *Journal* with their article, *Queering Data Collection: Strategies for Reimagining Survey Instruments in Student Affairs*. Their research interests align with the mission and values of our *Journal* by examining how gender and sexuality are measured and exploring new strategies for disrupting binary measures of gender. Our heartfelt thanks goes to Dr. Dockendorff for their contribution to this edition.

Further, the Managing Editors want to express our gratitude to the advisors, Teresa Metzger, Adam-Jon Aparicio, and Dr. D-L Stewart, our interim advisor in the Fall semester. Moving forward, we welcome Dr. Lea Hanson to the advisory team and thank Teresa for her support and seven years of service. The advisors' guidance was essential in the production and success of this year's publication – they pushed us to grow as individuals and as a team to create innovative change in the service of this project. We look forward and are excited for the contributions Dr. Lea Hanson will bring to future editorial boards. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Leadership Team of the SAHE Program, Dr. D-L Stewart, Dr. Jen Johnson, and Dr. Pamela Graglia for their on-going support to the *Journal of Student Affairs*.

We want to give a special thank you to Teresa and Dr. Karla Pérez-Vélez, who have dedicated many years to the *Journal*. In August, Dr. Pérez-Vélez transitioned out of her role as advisor. We want to thank her for her constructive feedback, expertise, and support during our time together. Additionally, Teresa will be transitioning out of her role as advisor after seven years of commitment to the *Journal*. Teresa has given the *Journal* direction, insight, and continual support over the years. We appreciate the care, time and effort both of you have put into the *Journal*.

In addition, we want to extend our gratitude to the authors of this year's edition. Their dedication, inspiration, creativity, and flexibility were fundamental in the production of this *Journal*. Their words contribute valuable scholarship to our field that continue to push us to become better practitioner-scholars. Additionally, this edition could not have been published without the hours dedicated by our reviewers. They provided valuable feedback to the authors, pushing them to further explore their ideas and expand upon their claims.

Finally, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the Associate Editors: Bryanna, Manilyn, Mary, and Sam for bringing in their knowledge, dedication, and enthusiasm to learn and provide new ideas. We are confident we are leaving the *Journal* in good hands to continue the innovation and redevelopment we started as we transitioned to the Managing Editor role. As the *Journal* continues to evolve, we look forward to future editorial boards and advisors developing new strategies for community building and outreach, both within the CSU residential and online community, and beyond. We hope you enjoy the 29th edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs* and continue to learn and grow with us.

Advisor's Perspective 2019 – 2020

The 2019-2020 Colorado State University (CSU) Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE) Editorial Board for the *Journal of Student Affairs* has had an amazing year of transformation as the format of the *Journal* has changed from a printed publication to an online format. My hope is that you will enjoy reading this year's *Journal of Student Affairs* and appreciate the hard work and intentional planning that the board has dedicated to the *Journal* this year.

I would like to thank Dr. D-L Stewart for his mentorship through the last year of revisioning the *Journal*. I am grateful for the extra time spent in meetings, brain storming strategies, and helping our group explore all the possibilities of the *Journal* in the future. Additionally, we would like to extend our gratitude to the SAHE Supervisors, Advisors, and Faculty for without their support of the students and staff participating in the Editorial and Review Boards, the work of the *Journal* could not be accomplished.

I have been honored to serve as an advisor to the *CSU SAHE Journal Board* for the last seven years. This has been my last year working with the *Journal* as an Advisor. It has been a privilege to work so closely with the *Journal Board* through the years as part of my own professional development and as part as their growth as a practitioner-scholar in the field of Student Affairs. I am excited to announce that Adam-Jon Aparicio and Lea Hanson, both current faculty in the program, will be the new Advisors for the *Journal*. They are truly dedicated to the development of the *Journal* and the future of SAHE.

Lastly, I am so proud of the eight students on the board this year and your hard work in the production of the *29th Journal of Student Affairs*. It has been an exceptional year in the field of Student Affairs. I applaud your commitment to excellence. You have strengthened the foundation of the *Journal* through your thoughtful conversations and I thank you for your time and dedication. Each of you makes the advisor role a gratifying and educational experience.

Teresa Metzger
SAHE Journal Board Advisor

Acknowledgements

Past Leadership

As we produce the 29th edition of the Colorado State University *Journal of Student Affairs*, we acknowledge those who have laid the foundation for our success.

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Queering Data Collection: Strategies for Reimagining Survey Instruments in Student Affairs

Dr. Kari J. Dockendorff

Higher Education Leadership, School of Education, Colorado State University

Abstract

Despite calls for increasing diversity and inclusion, one area that remains limiting is in survey instruments and how gender and sexuality are measured. When gender is limited to binary, categorical options of male and female, trans* students are erased from existing on the college campus. This essay points to new strategies for measuring gender as a way to reimagine survey instruments in student affairs.

Keywords: Critical quantitative methods, trans* students, gender, student affairs

Student affairs and higher education are purported to be welcoming spaces for every student on campus. Mission and values statements for both institutions, and student affairs more specifically, often include phrases of prioritizing diversity and inclusion. This is evident in mission statements for both ACPA and NASPA, as well (ACPA, n.d.; NASPA, n.d.). For me, when I see mission statements focusing on diversity and inclusion, I first look at the forms and surveys being used in collecting information about the student population on their campus. Inclusion starts with how identity is being counted on that campus, and when gender is reduced to a binary check-box option of male or female (meaning sex-assigned-at-birth is really what is being measured), then that campus is erasing the possibility of trans* students from existing within the institution. Ultimately, when the possibility of trans* students to exist is limited, access to the institution is also limited or erased for trans* students (Marine, 2017).

To really focus on inclusion, one action student affairs can take is to reimagine admissions applications and survey instruments that measure gender and sexuality. Admissions' applications are often a first point of contact for students, and thus filling out the application can send a message to the student of what identities are seen as real on that campus. Other survey instruments used within higher education that measure important factors such as graduation rates, retention rates, sense of belonging, and other measures of student success fail to capture more nuanced student experiences if trans* students are erased from the data. As Garvey et al. (2019) argue, "Survey instruments are tools to capture data for analyzing the representativeness and operationalization of social identities in higher education research" (p. 2.). Student affairs is at a unique position to imagine and utilize new strategies for measuring gender on their campuses and

thus providing ways for students to exist on their campus.

The use of diversity and inclusion within institutions' and student affairs' mission statements means that the institution itself must be critiqued. Genderism, the notion that gender is the same as sex and there are only two real possibilities of gender which are reinforced by society, is institutionalized (Nicolazzo, 2015). To begin to undo how genderism is institutionalized and to allow for possibilities of queer and trans* students on campus, the system must be reimagined. My aim with this essay is to take up a critical and queer quantitative framework to discuss new and developing strategies for using quantitative and survey methodologies to examine and measure the trans* student experience. By examining how gender is measured and counted within student affairs, and more broadly the institution, student affairs professionals can start to understand how gender is enacted within the roles of their functional areas and campuses, and begin to imagine new possibilities for gender within colleges and universities. Within this work, my goal is to shift focus from the trans* student to examine the actual institution in identifying ways that genderism is both constructed and institutionalized.

Positionality

I approach this work as a non-binary, queer scholar. I started my path into this field as student leader in residence life and then assistant hall director. After I completed my master's in student affairs, I became an academic advisor. Thus, my approach to imagining new methods and strategies for measuring gender and understanding the trans* student experience within higher education is largely driven by my own experiences. I have often been frustrated by the limitations within student data and feeling like I am not represented within the data, or that I could somehow get a question about my gender wrong on a survey. Coupling my frustrations with data alongside working within student affairs, my aim has been to reimagine how gender is measured in key functional areas of student affairs.

A Review of Literature

In order to provide a bit of background intro trans* and LGBTQ+ students in student affairs and higher education, my aim with this literature review is to discuss the use of quantitative methods and gender and sexuality. I will also provide an overview of genderism in higher education, as well as a brief overview of trans* students in higher education and why I shift the gaze from the students towards the institution in examining how to reimagine colleges and universities for more possibilities of queer and trans* students.

Genderism

Genderism limits the possibilities of gender to exist beyond the binary options of male or female (Biloudeau, 2009). This idea of only a binary system of gender, which is conflated with sex, is reinforced in society through gender roles and

expectations, as well as though systemic, cultural, and institutional norms and practices (Beemyn, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016b). Within higher education and student affairs, the institution reifies genderism both through policies and structures. Housing and residential life is one area of student affairs that only allows for two genders to exist as students often placed into rooms based on their sex-assigned-at-birth (Garvey et al., 2018; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Nicolazzo, Marine, & Wagner, 2018). Similarly, other spaces and practices, such as sex-segregated intramural sports, and bathrooms and locker rooms, that divide students up by gender also reinforce the idea that only two genders exist on the campus (Marine, 2017). Additionally, functional areas of campus that collect data on their students by measuring gender with a binary option also reinforces the idea of genderism on campus and erases trans* and queer students from existing within offices (Garvey et al., 2019). These examples of genderism go unchecked when the institution, specifically data collection practices, itself is not critiqued when mission statements include diversity and inclusion.

Trans* Students in Higher Education

Within the field of student affairs and higher education, there is a growing body of trans* scholarship written by, for, and about trans* students and their experiences on campus (Adair, 2015; Catalano, 2015a, 2015b; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015). This work highlights the ways in which trans* students move about the campus and through their experiences illustrates the nuanced ways trans* students are both made visible while simultaneously erased from campus through harmful policies and practices. Name and gender change policies that do not allow students to change their name, gender, and/or pronouns put trans* students at increased risk for being outed or misgendered in the classroom and other spaces where staff rely on official records to know their students, thus rendering trans* and queer students visible in ways they may not desire (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017). These same policies and practices tend to only allow certain students to change their name, gender, and/or pronouns if they meet certain requirements such as approval from a doctor or other medical professional, or are changing their gender to another 'real' gender (e.g., from man to woman or woman to man) (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017). Limiting the options for gender on campus through both gender change policies as well as survey methods furthers the erasure of trans* students on campus. While much of the rich scholarship directly highlights the voices of trans* students (Catalano, 2015a, 2015b; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Pryor, 2015), what is missing from this scholarship is how trans* students are viewed within the institution.

Quantitative Methods and Gender and Sexuality

Quantitative scholarship focused on the experiences of queer and trans* students

in higher education has been quite limited (Dugan et al., 2012; Marine & Catalano, 2014; Renn, 2010; Garvey et al. 2019; Rankin & Garvey, 2015). Much of the quantitative scholarship has been focused on campus climate studies for LGBTQ students (Rankin et al., 2010; Garvey & Rankin, 2015). Campus climate studies are often limited due the binary options of gender operationalized in the survey instrument used to gather data (Dockendorff & Geist, Under Review; Garvey & Rankin, 2015). While it is true that quantitative approaches to data collection have limited queer and trans* students from existing within the data, quantitative methodologies can be reimagined through a queer and critical framework to push how data is collected and identity is counted within student affairs and higher education.

A Queer and Critical Framing

I approach this work through a critical quantitative and queer framework. What do I mean by that, you may ask? Researchers and practitioners who take up a critical quantitative approach to their work must acknowledge that traditional and conventional uses of survey measures and other practices have a history of reproducing oppression based on race, class, and gender (Spade, 2015; Stage, 2007). Instead of using methods in ways that have always been done, those using surveys with a critical approach must examine and question traditional assumptions and ask who is being privileged, as well as, who is being excluded by the means in which identity is being measured within a survey instrument. Adding a queer theoretical approach to critical quantitative methods means allowing for more fluidity and possibility within gender and sexuality identity categorizations. Briefly, queer theory questions what is considered normal, and is used to undo binary, categorical representations of gender and sexuality. Thus, in using queer theory alongside critical quantitative approaches to surveys, researchers and practitioners must examine how identity is limited by being reduced to static, binary, or categorical check-boxes. Instead of a binary option of male or female, can new approaches be developed that allow for more nuance and fluidity?

In thinking about survey instruments and the use of quantitative methodologies, identities are being measured, and often categorized into 'simple and neat' check boxes. But, oftentimes, surveys are limiting in that they do not allow for the fluidity or complexity when it comes to gender, sexuality, or race and ethnicity. For example, gender is a fluid term, and an individual's gender identity can evolve over time as well as place. To take up critical quantitative approaches, researchers and practitioners must challenge and examine survey instruments to ask who is being included from our data, and more importantly, who do we exclude from our surveys, and thus, our institution?

I want to take moment to point out that this essay focuses on gender and sexuality within survey instruments. Gender and sexuality are not the only pieces of survey instruments that need to be critiqued and reimagined. Race and ethnicity,

immigration status, ability, and other important student characteristics are areas that student affairs administrators and practitioners need to examine. There is power in how identity is measured, and who is counted, and administrators and practitioners need to acknowledge that power and question how they use the information about their students. For example, Lopez and Marley (2018) and Faircloth, Alcantar, and Stage (2015) make recommendations for exploring postsecondary experiences of American Indian and Alaska Native students within large-scale data sets. Museus et al. (2018) uses the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) Model to explore students' sense of belonging uses critical quantitative approaches. Many more scholars use a critical quantitative approach to their work on survey methodology in higher education. As student affairs practitioners and administrators look to critically examine their surveys and counting of identities, all aspects of measuring identity should be examined, as no student experiences only gender or only race. Identity is complex and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989), and our survey instruments need to allow for that complexity.

Stage (2007) points to two main objectives in taking up a critical quantitative approach in research in that researchers must:

1. Use data to represent educational processes and outcomes on a large scale to reveal inequities and to identify social or institutional perpetuation of systematic inequities in such processes and outcomes, and

2. Question the models, measures, and analytic practices of quantitative research in order to offer competing models, measures, and analytic practices that better describe experiences of those who have not been adequately represented (p. 10)

In the spirit of these two main objectives for critical quantitative work, I want to provide some examples for use in survey instruments within student affairs.

Strategies for Queer Survey Methods in Student Affairs

As mentioned above, I want to illustrate a couple of examples of how new survey instruments can be imagined for student affairs. The first example is a creation of a scale aimed at measuring trans* inclusivity of student affairs staff and aligns with the first objective of critical quantitative approaches articulated by Stage (2007). The second example, which aligns with Stage's (2007) second objective for critical quantitative methods, provides a strategy for rethinking how gender is measured on survey instruments.

Trans* Inclusivity Scale for Higher Education

My first example is using critical quantitative methods to use a survey to closely examine how the institution functions in ways that may be limiting or exclusive to trans* students on college campuses. In a recent study, I developed a survey

instrument aimed at measuring trans* inclusive behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge student affairs staff had of trans* students on their campuses (Dockendorff, 2019). The Trans* Inclusive Scale for Higher Education (TISHE) examined the relationship of student affairs and academic advisors at four-year public institutions with how they viewed and interacted with trans* students. A 30-item survey instrument was developed and validated through exploratory factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to measure how student affairs staff in functional areas of academic advising, enrollment management, career services, and housing and residence life viewed and interacted with trans* students in their roles on campus (DeVellis, 2017). In order to understand how staff make meaning of gender and what they knew about trans* student experience on campus, I felt that it was important to this create this instrument to shift the gaze away from trans* students directly and examine the institution through these key institutional agents. Since genderism is enacted through policy and practices this instrument provides a way to understand the ways in which genderism is being implemented in certain areas of campus. The data provided by this instrument points to strategies for improving training and education on gender within specific functional areas of campus (Dockendorff, 2019).

Expanded Measures of Gender Identity

Another strategy for queer survey methods is in the spirit of critically examining measures to "better describe the experiences of those who have not been adequately measured" (Stage, 2007, p.10). In often being frustrated by binary measures of gender I aimed to explore new ideas of measuring gender that felt less exclusionary. Magliozzi, Saperstein, and Westbrook (2016) illustrated that gender identity could be measured through the use of scales that measure levels of masculinity and femininity in all participants in a survey. I was intrigued by this idea set forth by Magliozzi et al (2016), but the use of only masculinity and femininity still felt limiting since it was still reproducing a binary version of gender in masculine and feminine levels only. After being inspired by the work of Jourian (2015), my colleague and I decided to test out an adapted version of scaled measures of gender identity and expression by measuring levels of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny in a survey aimed at understanding gendered experiences of students on campus (Dockendorff & Geist, Under Review). Our measure of gender identity and expression (See Figure 1) allowed us to see a more nuanced version of how students identify and make meaning of their gender.

In general, how do you see yourself? (Please answer all three scales)

	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very
Feminine	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Masculine	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Androgynous	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

In general, how do most people see you? (Please answer all three scales.)

	Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very
Feminine	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Masculine	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Androgynous	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Figure 1. Survey measures of gender identity and expression

I offer these previous two examples not as best practices of survey methods. As I will discuss later, best practices are not my end goal. My hope is that with these examples, practitioners and scholars, alike, can use these to imagine new and varying methods for what works best on their own campuses. I will use the remainder of this essay to discuss specific implications for student affairs.

Discussion and Implications for Student Affairs

In taking up a critical, queer approach to how surveys are conducted on campus, student affairs administrators have the opportunity to rethink what they know about their students on campus. Identities based on gender and sexuality and dynamic in nature and are socially constructed, and reinforced by institutions of postsecondary education, and thus scholars and practitioners must reimagine survey instruments to be culturally responsive to the complexity of gender and sexuality (Garvey et al., 2019).

Admissions Applications

Institutional data collection start with admissions applications. As the application process is an early contact point for students with the institution, how gender and sexuality are measured on the application is an indicator for the student of whether or not their gender will be seen as real on the campus. Yes, it is true that there are federally mandated requirements for data to be reported to the Department of Education or the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), and the way those demographic characteristics of students may be more difficult to change. However, admissions offices, and student affairs more broadly, could shape the conversation at their institutions for how different data of the student population could be collected for use within the campus.

Survey Research

Student affairs research often utilizes survey research to measure and predict student success in areas such as sense of belonging, graduation rates, retention rates, and campus climate studies. Garvey (2019) argued that large, national surveys must include LGBQ students. Additionally, Lange, Duran, & Jackson (2019) also point out that the inclusion of queer and trans* identities within national survey instruments aimed at higher education and student affairs, "is critical because this information is not collected by many admissions offices or federal data sets" (p. 516-517). For administrators and practitioners to truly understand student success on their campus, as well as nationally, these instruments must do a better job of allowing for the fluid gendered possibilities of the students.

Further, survey research also provides a strategy for understanding the institution itself. Little remains known about how key institutional actors meet the needs of queer and trans* students (Lange et al., 2019). Thus, surveys like the TISHE can be utilized to flip the focus to understanding the institutional practices and structures that play a role in the experience of trans* students (Dockendorff, 2019; Lange et al., 2019).

Institution and Policy Implications

In reimagining how gender and sexuality is measured on survey instruments and institutional data, it becomes possible to more closely examine how genderism has been institutionalized. These types of measures can help to provide data for why binary, sex segregated institutional structures such as bathrooms or campus housing do not fit the needs of students. A more complex, scaled measurement of gender identity and expression allows for administrators and practitioners to see why binary categorizations of their students maintained through structures and policies do not work. Using new data collection measures can inform how gender is enacted within functional areas of campus. With a more complex understanding of the nuances of gender identity, areas of campus can reimagine policies within student affairs. Rigid name and gender change policies can be reimagined to allow for students to determine when they make changes to their names or gender, and how staff and faculty should address them. These types of policy and institutional changes start with new strategies for measuring identities of the students.

My Challenge to Student Affairs

My challenge to student affairs is this: if diversity and inclusion are embedded within your mission statements, reimagine how you survey students. Critically evaluate your use of demographic data of your students, and ask who is being excluded from your campus through how identity is being measured? I have focused this essay on expanding measure of gender and sexuality within survey research in higher education, but this challenge extends beyond gender and

sexuality.

Nicolazzo (2017) discusses best practices within student affairs and higher education. In her critique of best practices, she cautions that best practices assume that there may be one correct way of doing things within student affairs (Nicolazzo, 2017). Thus, best practices fail to consider the nuance and evolving nature of students and their identities. Similarly, in the spirit of a trans* critical quantitative approach, whatever strategies for measuring gender and sexuality within survey measures are implemented, scholars and practitioners must constantly reevaluate these measures and not let them become stagnant (Curly, 2020). Identity is dynamic and evolves, just as our students do, and thus it is important through a critical, queer lens to continue pushing our survey methods and strategies to be dynamic and evolve with the students.

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Breaking the Silence of Struggle: Experiences of Students Facing Food Insecurity

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Abstract

Recent research related to food insecurity on college campuses has significantly increased public awareness of this issue. Though many quantitative studies conducted in the past decade have confirmed that food insecurity is a prominent issue among college students, little qualitative research is available to illuminate the stories of students facing food insecurity or describe the nuances of the issue. This study addressed this need for qualitative exploration, and addressed a call from previous qualitative researchers for more research specifically focused on social implications of food insecurity among college students. Individual interviews were conducted with a sample of three students facing food insecurity at a large, public institution in the Midwest. Participants shared their experiences with food insecurity in a variety of academic and social contexts, as well as their experiences with seeking food assistance. Findings indicated that participants faced a range of barriers to achieving food security, resulting in negative experiences related to their academic performance and physical, emotional, mental, and social health.

Keywords: food insecurity, college students, hunger, food pantry

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Though food insecurity has long been a focus of research and public attention in K-12 schools, food insecurity among college students has only recently emerged as a topic of research. Recent research has significantly increased awareness of this issue among higher education professionals and

administrators, demonstrated by the sheer number of institutions designing services to alleviate hunger on campus. Hundreds of colleges and universities have responded to this issue by launching food assistance programs, evidenced by the College and University Food Bank Alliance's (2019) list of affiliated campuses. Today, the College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA) lists over 700 member institutions on its website, compared to only 200 members in 2015 (CUFBA, 2019). Members of CUFBA include institutions providing food assistance resources to members of the university community.

Although public awareness of food insecurity among college students is increasing, understanding of this issue largely rests on quantitative data and ambiguous figures, perpetuating student food insecurity as a nameless, faceless, and silent issue (Henry, 2017). Researchers have noted a deficiency in qualitative exploration, advocating for its use to investigate the underlying causes of food insecurity among students, as well as the role of social barriers in preventing students from seeking assistance (Henry, 2017; Morris, Smith, Davis, & Null, 2016). This study was designed to address this call for qualitative exploration, utilizing individual interviews to shed light on the stories of students facing this issue. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to describe the experiences of students facing food insecurity at a large, public institution in the Midwest and investigate how social barriers prevent students from seeking assistance. The findings of this study may benefit institutions by providing administrators with a deeper understanding of the nuances of this issue, which will aid in effectively addressing food insecurity on college campuses. The following research questions (RQ) directed data collection and analysis in this study: 1) What are the experiences of food insecure students? 2) What social barriers and perceptions inhibit these students from accessing assistance?

Food Insecurity in Existing Literature

The United States Department of Agriculture (2019) measures food security on a four-part scale. An individual or household with *high food security* demonstrates no indication of food-access problems or limitations, and *marginal food security* if there are only one or two reported indications of food-access problems (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). In a condition of marginal food security, there may be anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food, but there is little indication of changes in diet or food intake. If economic or other factors result in a reduction in "quality, variety, or desirability of diet," but not necessarily a reduction in food intake, an individual is in the category of *low food security* or *food insecurity* (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019, para. 3). Finally, *very low food security* is characterized by a disruption in eating patterns and reduced food intake (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019).

An estimated one in eight Americans were food insecure in 2017, equating to approximately 40 million people (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). Food insecurity is a complex issue that does not exist in isolation. People impacted by food insecurity are also likely to be impacted by issues such as lack of affordable housing, social isolation, medical costs, and low wages, not to mention the potential long-term impact that an unhealthy diet may have on overall health and well-being (Decker & Flynn, 2018; Feeding America, 2019).

Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among College Students

The most readily available research related to food insecurity among college students is quantitative research designed to measure the prevalence of food insecurity on college campuses. Researchers from the Hope Center can be credited for what is perhaps the largest survey of college student needs to date, surveying nearly 86,000 college students from 90 two-year colleges and 33 four-year colleges in 2018 (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, Looker, & Williams, 2019). Their findings indicated that 45% of respondents experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to taking the survey and 56% of respondents were housing insecure in the last year (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019).

Studies conducted on a smaller scale have found similar results. Findings from a survey of four public Illinois universities indicated that 35% of respondents identified as food insecure (Morris, Smith, Davis, & Null, 2016). Results of this study revealed a strong correlation between low levels of food security and federal grant eligibility, as well as low food security and low grade-point average (Morris et al., 2016). A survey of students at a large mid-Atlantic university yielded results suggesting that 15% of students surveyed identified as food insecure, while another 16% of students surveyed were at-risk of food insecurity based on economic factors and housing instability (Payne-Sturges, Tjaden, Caldeira, Vincent, & Arria, 2018). While these studies demonstrate a wide variety in rates of food insecurity (15%-45%), even the lower end of this range warrants significant action and further investigation.

Negative Implications of Food Insecurity on Student Well-being

Students facing food insecurity have self-reported poor physical health and poor nutrition (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017; Hickey et al., 2019). In a study conducted at the University of Alberta in Canada, researchers sought to measure the extent of food insecurity faced by clients of the university food bank (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Fifty-eight of the food bank's 284 clients were surveyed, with findings indicating that clients demonstrated a poorly balanced diet, eating few fruits and vegetables, and reporting a low daily intake of other nutrients such as calcium (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Prolonged food insecurity has been linked to chronic disease, resulting from a lack of sustenance or a lack of access to nutritious food (Decker & Flynn, 2018).

Beyond negative implications for physical health, available research strongly suggests that food insecurity inhibits academic performance (Henry, 2017; Hickey et al., 2019; Paola & Debate, 2018). In a qualitative study conducted at a large public university in California, students facing food insecurity discussed a diminished ability to concentrate in the classroom as their focus shifted to hunger (Meza, Altman, Martinez, & Leung, 2019). Additionally, students discussed how food insecurity negatively affected their sleeping patterns, which further impacted their energy for academic pursuits during the day (Meza et al., 2019). A qualitative study conducted at the University of North Texas found that students facing food insecurity felt decreased motivation to attend school and engage in activities, as well as decreased academic performance (Henry, 2017). Beyond these implications for academic performance, students who had experience with food insecurity self-reported low self-esteem, stating that food insecurity had adverse impacts on mental, social, and emotional health (Henry, 2017; Meza et al., 2019).

Limitations of Existing Research

Previous researchers on this topic have commonly cited limitations in accurately representing their target populations. Payne-Sturges et al. (2018) cited a possible selection bias caused by students who dropped out of school due to economic hardships or other reasons that may be related to food insecurity. This idea suggests that students most severely impacted by food insecurity and related issues may be the most difficult population to fully understand, as it would require collecting data from students no longer present at an institution.

At the time literature was reviewed for this study, only two peer-reviewed qualitative studies were found specific to food insecurity among college students. This lack of qualitative research specific to college students has also been identified by past researchers, who have called for qualitative research to illuminate the nuances of food insecurity as it impacts college students (Henry, 2017; Morris et al., 2016). After finding that many students did not perceive themselves as deserving of or qualified for food assistance, Henry (2017) specifically called for further research into the social stigma of food insecurity and student perceptions of assistance.

Theoretical Framework

Abraham Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory provide the theoretical framework used to explore food insecurity in this study. Maslow's widely-cited theory establishes five levels of needs which influence human motivation, often represented in a pyramid diagram including needs related to physiology, safety-security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Physiological needs precede safety-security needs in the hierarchy, but the characteristic uncertainty of food insecurity is a threat to both physiological and safety-security needs. Based on

Maslow's theoretical framework, ensuring physiological and safety-security needs are met will increase students' ability to focus on achieving the intended outcomes of a college education, which naturally are situated within the higher-level needs of belongingness, esteem, and potential for self-actualization (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory was incorporated into this research because Schlossberg's concept of transition closely reflects the concept of "tipping points" outlined by Henry (2017), which appeared to be a common experience of students facing food insecurity. These tipping points were usually "a combination of events that prevented students from being able to manage for themselves," such as the breakdown of familial relationships, newly developed medical conditions, loss of employment, transferring schools, and divorce, among other experiences (Henry, 2017, p. 12). Similarly, Schlossberg defined transitions as "event[s] or non-event[s] result[ing] in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world," necessitating a corresponding change in an individual's behavior and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). As a result of having to navigate several developmental tasks, college students often face a number of critical transitions, but Henry's (2017) findings further illustrate the possible negative outcomes of these transitions if students are not adequately supported. Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory can provide a framework for higher education professionals to assist students in developing strategies to work through these transitions by analyzing an individual's situation, characteristics, and support systems. Applied at the institutional level, Schlossberg's theory articulates the importance of providing support at the physical setting of a transition and providing institutional resources for students working through transitions.

Summary

The scholarship outlined in this literature review was used to determine the methodology and specific goals of this study. The review of literature determined that sufficient research exists to confirm that food insecurity is impacting college students in numerous ways. Additionally, previous researchers have called for qualitative exploration. Therefore, it was determined that this study should focus on illuminating the nuances of this issue through a qualitative approach, utilizing Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory as a theoretical framework.

Research Design

The aim of this study was to describe the experiences of students facing food insecurity and investigate how social barriers inhibit students from seeking assistance. The following research questions guided data collection and

analysis: 1) What are the experiences of food insecure students? 2) What social barriers and perceptions inhibit these students from accessing assistance?

Participants

Participants in this study included a convenience sample of three students who self-identified as food insecure. Participants were recruited through a variety of advertising efforts in collaboration with multiple campus departments, including the campus food pantry and the financial aid office. Advertising materials provided potential participants with a brief overview of the study, information about food insecurity sourced from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and instructions to contact the researcher with questions or to arrange a 30-minute interview. The sampling frame criteria was limited to current students, regardless of classification or enrollment status, who self-identified as food insecure. A $5.00 gift card to an on-campus coffee shop was advertised as an incentive for participation. Students who participated were each given a gift card, as well as a document detailing campus and community resources related to food assistance and overall wellness. The Institutional Review Board granted approval for the researcher to interview between three and five students.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Participant interviews were conducted in the spring of 2019, after the study received approval from the Institutional Review Board. A locally developed, semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to gather participant responses. A semi-structured interview format was chosen to provide the researcher with the flexibility to ask follow-up questions to elicit richer data (Henning & Roberts, 2016). The protocol consisted of approximately 15 open-ended questions, which were used to collect information about each participant's experience with food insecurity, food assistance on and off campus, and perceived social barriers to seeking assistance. The development of the protocol was heavily influenced by Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory, Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, and Henry's (2017) call for additional research focused on social implications of food insecurity. Prior to data collection, the interview protocol was pilot tested with two graduate students to enhance its credibility and slight modifications were made. After each participant interview, the researcher used an online service to transcribe the audio recordings, followed by a thorough review to ensure accuracy. Following transcription, the researcher conducted an open coding process to develop themes in the data.

Findings

Interviews were conducted with three students, including one part-time sophomore who began at the institution as a first-year freshman, one sophomore transfer student, and one graduate student. The data was organized into three themes. Two themes, *Barriers to Achieving Food Security* and *Impact of Food Insecurity on Overall Well-Being,* directly relate to research question one (RQ1) regarding the experiences of students facing food insecurity. No themes emerged relative to research question two, concerning social barriers preventing students from seeking assistance. However, a third theme emerged, *Social Implications and Perceptions of Food Insecurity*. This theme expands on research question one regarding the experiences of food insecure students. The three broad themes and 11 corresponding categories that emerged from the interviews are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Themes	Corresponding Categories
Barriers to Achieving Food Security	Transitions and unexpected life circumstances
	Lack of resource awareness
	Inability to increase financial support
	Physical barriers to food
Impact of Food Insecurity on Overall Well-Being	Reduced state of physical health
	Diminished mental health
	Reduced sense of autonomy and worth
	Obstruction of academic progress
Social Implications and Perceptions of Food Insecurity	Struggling to connect with others
	Feeling discomfort in addressing the issue
	Persisting and conflicting stereotypes

Barriers to Achieving Food Security

When asked about their first experiences with food insecurity, participants identified a range of circumstances that triggered food insecurity or prevented them from achieving food security. These circumstances provided the basis for categories that can be described as *Barriers to Achieving Food Security*. Categories are explained in more detail below.

Transitions and Unexpected Life Circumstances

Responses confirmed that food insecure students have often experienced life transitions triggering a state of food insecurity. Outside of unexpected medical bills, other events triggering food insecurity that were mentioned could be considered common transitions for college students to experience. For example, all three students discussed taking on additional bills and responsibilities as college students but absorbing these responsibilities with a minimal increase in

income or no increase of income. For two participants, the level of financial support offered by family members also decreased when the participants began college. One participant stated that unexpected medical costs was a major triggering factor of food insecurity. Due to unexpected medical circumstances, the student was forced to put large portions of their paycheck straight toward repaying medical bills.

Inability to Increase Financial Support

The undergraduate participants discussed difficulties in securing employment, while the graduate participant discussed the financial implications of policies prohibiting them from working outside their assistantship. Neither of the undergraduate participants had reliable transportation, meaning their job prospects were limited to employers on or near campus. One of these students recalled:

> Financial things here have been very stressful. I didn't know exactly what [the financial aid office] needed from me, then at the last minute we realized it was all wrong and I lost my Pell Grant. And then I wasn't able to use work study...Then I found out that I am not eligible for any transfer scholarships because I transferred from another four-year institution. After transferring, I'm thinking, maybe I just shouldn't have even come here.

With minimal financial aid to reduce the cost of attending college, this student considered finding a job, but had concerns that they would not find a job within walking distance and that their grades would suffer. The other undergraduate student initially funded their education and related expenses through their father's GI Bill benefits, which ran out at the ending of their first year. Following this, the student struggled to find scholarships and grants to make up the cost.

Lack of Resource Awareness

Both undergraduate participants were largely unaware of available resources. While the graduate student was aware of the on-campus pantry, they recalled struggling with food insecurity for months before learning of any assistance programs. "Not knowing that there was a food pantry on or near campus, and not being aware of other resources are the main things that kept me from reaching out." A university counselor told this student about the new on-campus pantry (opened January 2019), and this student began utilizing the pantry soon after becoming aware. This student also expressed that food insecurity among graduate assistants is more common than they expected, indicating they knew several students with similar experiences. When asked about assistance programs, one undergraduate participant seemed to believe that government programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),

were the only options, or that participating in SNAP was a prerequisite to receiving any other kind of food assistance, which is false.

Physical Barriers to Food

Both undergraduate students discussed how a lack of reliable transportation not only limited their employment options, but also limited their grocery shopping and dining options. Additionally, while both students had experience being on the most inexpensive meal plan, both students explained how their class or work schedules sometimes made it difficult to access campus dining options. For one of these students, medical conditions and sensitivities to certain foods further limited access.

Impact of Food Insecurity on Overall Well-Being

When asked about the impact food insecurity has had on their lives, participants discussed multiple dimensions of health beyond the physical. This information provided the basis for categories that can be described as *Impact of Food Insecurity on Overall Well-Being*. Categories are explained in more detail below.

Reduced State of Physical Health

Two participants discussed how food insecurity impacted their physical health by reducing their energy level and drive for physical activity. A lack of regular, consistent access to food also decreased the ability of these individuals to establish regular eating patterns. One participant said they often found themselves binge-eating when they do have enough to eat, which leads to sickness or enhances feelings of hunger later. Another participant said that in addition to struggling to afford quality food, they struggled to purchase hygiene products and had to adjust to a "low hygiene life," which had both physical implications and implications for self-esteem. Finally, each student indicated that the food they had access to did not reflect their idea of nutrition. One student cited a concern about nutrition as a reason for not seeking assistance. "I'm so thankful for [food pantries] and I support them, but it's usually more of what I'm already eating and what I already feel is hurting my body." While this student's fear that assistance programs lacked healthy choices kept them from utilizing assistance, the student who did utilize food assistance shared this concern. This student was thankful for access to pantries but said true food security would mean having the ability to decrease reliance on pre-packaged or highly processed foods.

Diminished Mental Health

While each student suggested food insecurity had negative implications for mental health and induced feelings of anxiety, one student shared how food insecurity intersected with a mental health diagnosis. "Whenever I was diagnosed with depression, I had to be able to afford my medication. That definitely impacted my level of food security, because I had to afford my medication first." This student went on to say that though medication alleviated certain symptoms of depression, the impact of perpetuated food insecurity magnified negative mental health symptoms. The student discussed how this experience caused them to constantly question whether they were doing the right thing by choosing medication over consistent access to quality food.

Reduced Sense of Autonomy and Worth

When asked what food security looks like, each participant discussed the concept of choice. Food security was described as "ability to afford fresh fruits and vegetables," "being able to cook meals from my culture," and freedom to buy what is needed instead of what is on sale. Each participant discussed how a lack of choice caused them to feel a lack of independence and autonomy. When they initially confronted their food insecurity, participants recalled feelings of anger and embarrassment directed at themselves, asking "how could I let myself get in this position" and "what's wrong with me?" Each participant discussed how this led to a reduction in self-esteem and personal confidence, subsequently impacting their desire to connect with peers and friends. This was further addressed in questions regarding social implications of food insecurity. Though sense of worth was more often discussed in connection with peer interactions, one student discussed how those managing food assistance programs may unintentionally diminish the dignity of those seeking assistance. This participant said that when they use an assistance program, they want to be "treated like a person" rather than someone in need:

> I don't want to be asked if I need this or that. Yes, I need it—you do too. We all do, I just have to come here to get it. But that doesn't diminish my value. I want to be asked my name, my major, and my story.

This student clarified that this belief was influenced by past experiences with food assistance programs, prior to their time at the institution. However, it significantly impacted the student's willingness to seek food assistance resources on campus.

Obstruction of Academic Progress

Regarding the impact of food insecurity on academic success, each participant offered a unique perspective. The graduate student participant explained how food insecurity reduced their ability to focus in class. They stated, "when I don't

have good nutrition, or when I have skipped meals, it's hard to focus in class and study because I'm hungry. That's what I'm focusing on—hunger, not a lecture in class." The transfer undergraduate participant indicated they experienced increased academic stress, but said the stress fueled them to focus on achieving better grades. They were hopeful that better grades would lead to additional scholarships, which would eventually reduce the financial burden and resulting food insecurity. The part-time undergraduate participant discussed how food insecurity and financial instability caused them to switch from full-time to part-time status their second year. This student was beginning the process of transferring after securing a grant that is specific to a different institution. While the student was happy this grant would decrease the financial burden, they were also concerned that transferring would further delay academic progress and degree completion.

Social Implications and Perceptions of Food Insecurity

While none of the participants indicated that social barriers or perceptions prohibited them from accessing food assistance (RQ2), they had much to say about how food insecurity had impacted their social lives. This resulted in the development of an unexpected theme, *Social Implications and Perceptions of Food Insecurity*. Rather than describing how social barriers prevent students from accessing assistance, this theme includes information about the social impact food insecurity may have on a student, regardless of whether or not they are utilizing food assistance. This theme further addresses research question one regarding the experiences of students facing food insecurity.

Struggling to Connect with Others

All three participants discussed how peers connected by going to coffee, going out to eat, going out for drinks, or otherwise spending money. Each participant recalled times when friends invited them to an outing, and they had to decline due to financial concerns. All three students said they had used homework, family matters, sickness, and work as common excuses for not participating in outings, even though inability to pay was the true reason each time. One student felt it was easier to distance themselves completely rather than try to connect with others.

Throughout the interviews, students discussed the difficult social choices that accompany food insecurity. For example, in addition to weighing the benefits of working verses focusing on academics, or paying for important medications or groceries, students also discussed being confronted with difficult choices in terms of peer interactions. One participant questioned, "do I tell them I literally have two dollars and I can't go anywhere, or do I go with them and not get anything and watch them eat, trying not to make them uncomfortable?" Participants also discussed having difficulty discerning when to reach out to

family. Each participant listed family as a source of support, though two explained that their families also faced economic hardship. "My family is a great support to me...but I feel like I should be able to fend for myself and try not to be troublesome to family."

Feeling Discomfort in Addressing the Issue

Each student explained that they felt a sense of connectedness when they encounter other students who are experiencing food insecurity. However, food insecurity can more often be likened to "the elephant in the room." When asked if food insecurity is ever discussed in peer groups, participants said their peers often responded awkwardly if they have not experienced food insecurity personally. One participant discussed the initial process of telling friends and roommates about their experience with food insecurity. Though friends appeared to be supportive and understanding, the student said they continued to feel social pressures of spending money to connect to some friends, while other friends withdrew. Similarly, other participants sometimes feared that their stories would be met with pity, withdrawal, or even disbelief. Despite feeling discomfort in sharing their stories, participants all agreed that sharing stories of people experiencing food insecurity is the best way to increase understanding in people who have not personally experienced food insecurity. One participant noted:

> A lot of people's stories go untold. Even if they're told, they're not heard, and people just kind of don't think they're ever going to meet someone with food insecurity…Other than just telling [people] someone's story, there's really nothing you can just say…Helping people understand these stories is [how we] humanize the issue.

One participant said they wanted to be interviewed for this research because they knew telling their story would help someone else, somewhere experiencing this issue—even if they personally never heard anything about the interview or research again.

Persisting and Conflicting Stereotypes

Throughout each interview, the concept of stereotypes of college students and food insecurity were repeatedly discussed. One participant felt that other people questioned why they were not skinnier if they were experiencing food insecurity. Two participants discussed how other people assumed that if you could afford college, afford an apartment, or live in the residence halls, you must be affluent and have no barriers to basic need fulfillment. This stereotype exists in stark contrast to the even more pervasive "broke college student" trope. Reflecting on this idea, one participant stated:

> I guess there's always that joke that if you're in college, you're broke. So some people hear you talk about this and say "yeah, everybody's

broke." Okay, that's what you're telling me, but I see all these people around me and it feels like no one understands me. So what's wrong with me?

Similarly, another participant felt that conversations about food insecurity most often came up in the context of jokes about ramen noodles, "feeling starved" after back-to-back classes, or binge-eating when an opportunity for free food was presented on campus. These harmful stereotypes appear to not only diminish the reality and severity of the issue for students, but also cause students experiencing food insecurity to question the validity of their experience.

Discussion

Findings from this study confirm the importance of providing support to students through times of transition (Henry, 2017). While participants discussed unexpected transitions that are not necessarily common for all college students, each one also discussed very common transitions such as learning to manage their own finances, adopting new responsibilities, and a shift in extent of familial support. Therefore, we cannot assume that only students facing extreme life circumstances are vulnerable to food insecurity.

In the case of unexpected circumstances such as medical issues, participants reiterated the fact that food insecurity does not occur in a vacuum devoid of other stressors (Feeding America, 2019). Students experiencing food insecurity are likely experiencing concurrent stressors. Efforts should be made to increase student awareness of not only food assistance services, but also other resources to manage stress and mental health. This might include counseling resources, wellness programs, and other financial services available. While one student was aware of the new food pantry on campus, but did not pursue assistance for personal reasons, the other two students said simply not being aware of assistance was a major barrier. Participants' experiences with life transitions supports Schlossberg's (1981) theory that identifying supports and strategies that holistically address an individual's situation is crucial for working through transitional periods.

While social barriers were not as impactful as other barriers in preventing students from seeking assistance, perhaps the most troubling thing to hear from students experiencing food insecurity was how it impacted their sense of worth and ability to connect with others. Students spoke in detail about the difficult choices they were confronted with each day. This demonstrates that students who have come to the realization that they need food assistance may have been struggling inwardly with the issue for much longer. These students may have been struggling with feelings of shame and personal responsibility for their circumstances beyond what is emotionally healthy. Additionally, students indicated that the culture of spending money in order to connect with people can be a major burden on students facing food insecurity. This pattern of difficult

choices and food insecurity as a barrier to relationship-building was a stark demonstration of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, as lack of basic need fulfillment inhibited fulfillment of belongingness and self-esteem for the participants of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

The ultimate solution to student food insecurity is creating an environment where food insecurity is less likely to exist. Food banks and resources may alleviate hunger, but only concerted policy response aimed at the root causes of food insecurity can truly decrease the financial burden of higher education and allow students to focus on being successful, rather than being hungry (Farahbakhsh et al., 2016). However, it is important to address the immediate need of hunger while still advocating for large-scale policy change. Students who shared their stories in this study highlighted the importance of on-campus services in combatting food insecurity among students. Responses from all students demonstrated the importance of having centralized, accessible, and well-advertised assistance programs specifically geared toward college students. Additionally, findings confirmed that residential students cannot be excluded from food assistance, and assistance programs should be well-advertised to the residential community.

While on-campus solutions are ideal, it is crucial to ensure that these services are effective rather than simply present. To combat a lack of resource awareness, assistance programs on college campuses should be thorough in marketing efforts, ensuring that any student on the campus would encounter the message of assistance somewhere. One student specifically stressed the importance of bringing information about resources directly to students, rather than expecting students to know and find the exact resources they need through search engines or on-campus advertising. Marketing in common spaces or at major events is not enough, as this study demonstrates that students facing food insecurity may feel discouraged from engaging with peers and social events. Colleges should work with stakeholders across campus departments to identify outreach possibilities, such as working with faculty to provide information about assistance in course syllabi, providing information at orientation, and placing fliers or donation collection boxes in as many campus spaces as possible to raise awareness. Marketing materials should emphasize that food insecurity is an issue commonly faced by college students. If possible, pantries should also advertise what kinds of foods and services they are able to offer so that assumptions do not prevent students from seeking needed assistance.

Campus solutions should also be implemented with nutrition in mind. Even for the student utilizing food assistance programs, access to healthy, quality food proved to be a concern. While campus food pantries are often limited to non-perishable items, this research demonstrates that it is important to not only increase access to food, but to work to stock quality items. Beyond providing

sustenance for survival, quality food can energize students and improve the likelihood of achieving higher-level needs. Food pantries and distribution programs receiving donations should emphasize the need for quality, nutritious foods. Each student said they would not describe themselves as extremely knowledgeable about nutrition, but still emphasized concerns with the nutritional value of available foods. Because pantries are often extremely dependent on donations, donor education and communication should stress the need for quality food, and particularly items with more utility and nutritional value for the recipient (e.g. a box of multigrain pasta has more nutritional value and utility than a package of Ramen noodles, and the pasta would be more expensive for a student to buy independently of the pantry). Departments leading food assistance efforts should also understand how food insecurity may impact other aspects of life and wellness, and be prepared to refer students to other services.

Finally, higher education professionals should develop strategies to address the social implications of food insecurity. This could take the form of short videos to post on social media outlets that educate students on different aspects of the issue, vignettes that appropriately share stories of students experiencing food insecurity, or simple events that start a dialogue around the issue that works to deconstruct harmful stereotypes. Beyond increasing awareness of resources, professionals should work to increase awareness of the issue and break the silence that isolates food insecure students.

While confronting this issue, it is paramount that any programs related to food insecurity emphasize the dignity of students. Students seeking assistance should be able to do so free from judgment. If a student says a pantry is unable to meet their specific needs, students should feel welcomed to share their needs and suggestions rather than feel guilt for being picky, and professionals should be knowledgeable of additional resources in the event that their program cannot adequately serve the student.

Directions for Future Research

While this study addressed a need for more qualitative research on food insecurity among college students, findings indicated that each student comes to this issue with a unique situation and story. Qualitative research should continue to capture the stories of students, bringing a face to the issue of food insecurity and providing guidance to increase the accessibility and effectiveness of services. Future studies should seek to interview more students, employing strategic marketing efforts both to increase awareness of the issue and to extend the opportunity to interview.

Additionally, future qualitative researchers should consider how interview time constraints may limit the ability to collect rich data. While this study aimed to limit the length of interviews to 30 minutes, one interview lasted nearly one hour

as the student wanted to continue sharing their experiences and ideas. Future qualitative studies—and particularly those utilizing interviews—should be designed in a way that gives students space to share their stories fully. Future researchers should consider designing ethnographic or longitudinal studies that enable these stories to be captured authentically and completely. Such studies could provide insight into the impact food insecurity may have on students over time, including the overall impact on degree attainment and career readiness. To increase understanding of social stigma and implications of food insecurity, additional research should be undertaken to explore the perceptions of students who identify as food secure. This research may be used to identify effective methods of reducing social stigma and increase understanding of food insecurity among college students.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that students who could provide the most current insight into social barriers are a difficult population of students to reach. If the social stigma described by Henry (2017) exists in the research setting, students experiencing severe levels of food insecurity may have felt hesitant to participate in the study. Additionally, since advertising was done primarily through specific campus resources like the campus food pantry, students not accessing these resources may have not heard of this study. Future researchers attempting qualitative studies should take this limitation into account and ensure the scope of recruitment is broad. Besides posting recruitment information in food pantries or campus support systems, future researchers should consider utilizing social media, campus commons spaces, and even academic courses to share information.

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Career Advising and Development in Community Colleges: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Practice

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Abstract

Preparing students for careers is a primary responsibility of college administrators. However, career preparation can be challenging at the community college level since students attend two-year institutions with diverse motivations and goals, including transfer, vocational/job training, participating in recreational courses, or enhancing their skills and/or basic knowledge in a particular area of study. With the goal of understanding career advising and career development for community college students, this literature review describes the current climate of career development at the community college level, explores challenges that community colleges face in serving the diverse needs of students in the area of career development and readiness, and provides recommendations for effectively serving such a diverse body. This article concludes by discussing best practices and future research directions for supporting career readiness of community college students. It is important to use the information from this review to create best practices for effective career development initiatives at community colleges across the United States.

Keywords: community college, career, career advising, career development

The community college system in the United States serves and educates a diverse population of students with unique purposes and motivations for attending. As such, student support services at the community college level are challenged with providing appropriate and effective services to a diverse student body. Some common reasons why an individual might choose to attend community college include: transferring to a four-year institution, vocational/job training, recreational education, or enhancement of basic knowledge in an area of study (Guthrie, 2016). According to Ma & Baum (2015), much of the community college population does not fit a *traditional* college student profile as many work full-time, are over 25 years of age, or are academically underprepared. In addition, Cadenas, Cantú, Spence, and Ruth (2018) bring awareness to the fact that community college in the United States is a highly convenient and affordable option for minoritized, low-income, and non-traditional students. These

underserved groups face unique barriers to persistence in higher education, which drastically impacts their career-goal achievement as well. Engaging with traditionally underserved groups presents a special set of barriers for adminstrators that need to be considered and recognized when supporting community college students, such as challenges using technology, getting to class, accessing resources outside of the classroom, and more (Cadenas et al., 2018). Combined, all of these factors drastically affect a two-year institution's ability to provide student support services that meet the needs of all students.

One area significantly impacted by this reality of the community college setting is career development. At a four-year institution, it is common to see career centers provide resources for career development to their students, including resume building, career counseling, job search assistance, mock interviewing, and networking, among other activities and services. However, less is known about the career development opportunities offered in the community college setting. This literature review seeks to better understand career advising in the community college system in the United States and seeks to provide recommendations for practitioners in the field. When considering recommendations, it is important to look through the lens of social cognitive theory, which suggests that creating an environment that emphasizes career development is key for student success (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994). An overarching question guiding this literature review is: What is the career advising experience like in community colleges? This inquiry prompts two additional questions for consideration: a) What challenges do career advisors and advising centers face and b) What considerations need to be made when serving a diverse student body in regards to career development at the community college level?

Overview of Career Advising Services in Community Colleges

Most career advising focuses on aspects of career and professional advancement. Some institutions provide courses, seminars, and workshops to their student body with the goal of reaching more students in one setting (Grubb, 2001). Other institutions may choose to utilize advisors to participate in one-on-one conversations with students on topics related to occupational opportunities, resumes, interviewing, and job-seeking tips (Grubb, 2001). These conversations may be performed by a career advisor and/or a dual-advisor, who are meant to support students in other areas of their development, such as personally or academically (Ledwith, 2014). Some colleges take the initiative to integrate cooperative approaches to career advising through curriculum with faculty to engage students in career-readiness in the classroom (Grubb, 2001). As a general rule, healthcare programs, such as nursing, engage in more career development than other programs (Grubb, 2001). Regardless of the platform for which career preparation manifests at the community college level, it is important to know that each institution is unique in their approach to career advising and development.

Career Services Centers

Community colleges may have career services offices on campus to provide career support to students. Data is not collected regarding the existence of and/or interactions between career centers at two- or four-year colleges. This makes it challenging for practitioners to understand what is needed, as it is unclear what the current climate looks like for career services in higher education. However, navigation through community college career services websites suggests that some of the services offered include: a job board for job/internship postings, career counseling, mock interviews, resume and cover letter assistance, job search resources, and career fairs. In these spaces on campus, staff offer resources to students interested in engaging in career development. An example of a community college career services center is at the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) in Las Vegas, Nevada. The CSN Career and Transfer Services office works in collaboration with their ReEntry program, which consists of six full-time staff members serving in various capacities, to aid students returning to school and/or facing barriers to education or employment ("Career and Transfer Services," n.d.). In surveying different institutions' websites and career center webpages, it is evident that most offices offer the same common resources, such as resume reviewing, job fairs, career counseling, and more. For example, according to the Pasadena City College Career Center website, they offer very similar services, including meeting individually with a career specialist to facilitate these career development activities ("How to Explore Majors & Careers," n.d.).

Major Challenges Faced by Community College Career Advising

Common challenges faced by community college career services include staff concerns, challenges related to students' utilization of services, and data issues (e.g., collecting post-graduation salary and employment information). These challenges are described below, as community colleges that are unable to address these challenges often struggle to provide appropriate resources to students.

Staff Concerns

Community colleges are significantly understaffed and lack financial resources to support student services (Langen, 2011). According to a study conducted by Langen (2011), as many as 91 percent of community college staff are classified as part-time. With such a small pool of full-time employees to train on career development, there is a challenge in offering career advising to community college students. Services that are most often understaffed and under-resourced are typically related to career advising (Grubb, 2001). Many advisors who get the chance to work with students one-on-one at community colleges are often overworked with large caseloads that stymie their ability to best support their students (National Association of Colleges and Employers Staff [NACE], 2017). In fact, according to the 2016-2017 Career Services Benchmark Survey Report

for Colleges and Universities, the mean number of students per staff member at the associate degree level was 6,068 compared to 1,689 at the bachelor's degree level (NACE Staff, 2017). In many of these advisor-student interactions, the focus is placed on academic advising, which relegates career development to a secondary priority (Grubb, 2001). One way to avoid this would be to implement more career-readiness training for advisors to encourage them to actively think more about career preparation when engaging with their students. In addition to these staffing challenges, it seems that many community colleges are struggling to find professionals to assist students in career-readiness (Langen, 2011). Career development is a topic in student affairs practice which requires increased attention at the community college level in the United States.

Utilization of Resources

Research suggests that when career and professional development resources are provided to students in community colleges, students are not utilizing them (Grubb, 2001; Harlow & Bowman, 2016). Furthermore, those who significantly need these resources are less likely to engage with career services. Students use guidance and counseling differently and at differing capacities, often leaving those who really need them the most unable to capitalize on the resources offered to them (Grubb, 2001). In the early part of the century, community college students reported having low opinions of their career and academic advising centers (Grubb, 2001). Further, even if students do utilize resources, their needs are so diverse that it becomes quite challenging to fit the needs of all students through advising measures. Community college students also enroll in a higher percentage of online courses compared to four-year college students, which means advisors are more likely to serve a commuting population who are less likely to be physically on campus (Lederman, 2018). Suggestions to address these challenges could be to integrate career development into curriculum through engagement in focused assignments/activities in the classroom to support more students across disciplines and with varying identities. This practice may make it more convenient or accessible for commuting and online students to access career education information.

Data Challenges

Tracking progress and/or collecting data is a challenge experienced by community college career services professionals. First Destination Survey (FDS) data is one of the most utilized forms of identifying career-attainment at higher education institutions. These surveys provide evidence related to a student's placement after obtaining a degree/credential from an institution. For instance, this data may indicate how many students are employed full-time or part-time, pursuing service/volunteer opportunities, furthering their education, or even joining the military, and is crucial in understanding how an institution is preparing their students for life after college. Collecting this data in community colleges is challenging for several reasons. First, not all students who take a community

college course intend to complete a degree. Second, certificate programs do not have the same evaluation and outcome measures, which make it difficult to track and compare data. Third, some students who start at a community college do not complete a degree or credential before transferring, which means they are not included in FDS results, giving community colleges an inaccurate estimate of students who attend community college for transfer purposes (Guthrie, 2016). An example of a student who may not be included in this survey is a student who transfers to a four-year college or drops out before meeting degree requirements. Tracking students' career progression and next steps is a major hurdle in addressing the issues related to career advising. It might be beneficial for community college professionals to create a survey that provides students the opportunity to report a variety of post-attendance plans, such as transferring to a four-year institution, career obtainment, and other plans, encouraging more helpful data.

Considering Diversity

It is evident that community college students are very diverse. When considering the identities of students, approaches for career readiness and preparation likely need to manifest differently. Considerations related to race, ethnicity, and first-generation status is explored in the following sections to further understand the unique challenges faced by students engaging in career development at the community college level.

Racial & Ethnic Considerations

Supporting underserved, minoritized, and non-traditional students, who make up a large percentage of the community college population, can create specific challenges within career preparation and advising. Teng, George, and Anderson (2001) suggest "community college career counseling providers should be sensitive to the ethnic and age backgrounds of students in assisting them to identify their career goals, type of career plans, and utilization of career preparation action as related to attending career related lectures" (p. 125). This means that practitioners are encouraged to provide unique and equitable career-related opportunities to students of racial/ethnic minority groups. One suggestion to ensure sensitivity to the backgrounds of each student is by offering specific workshops on career education to students based on their identity (Teng et al., 2001). For example, providing workshops focused on supporting Native American students could help improve equity and effectiveness of career-related services. Individualization allows students to feel more supported in their career development. Another suggestion is to partner minority students with a faculty mentor, as studies report minority students are more likely to persist when they engage with faculty at their institution (Stebleton & Diamond, 2018). Offering targeted interventions and connections with faculty or career mentors of the same race can help to support minority students navigate their career aspirations.

Providing equitable opportunities for all students to be successful in their career advising experiences, regardless of race or ethnicity, is critical. This practice adheres to the universal mission of community colleges, which is to serve and support students in their academic and career pursuits no matter what their goals are. The benefits of same-race matching of faculty/career mentors and facilitating individualized workshops prove to be invaluable in providing equitable career education opportunities to minoritized groups at the community college level.

First-Generation Students

First-generation students face specific barriers that not all *traditional* college students experience. For instance, first-generation students often lack the general understanding of college processes, including financial aid, class registration, tuition and fee payments, advising, and program selection. Among these, career readiness is often a challenge for many first-generation students, especially in community colleges (Grubb, 2001). For example, a student who comes from an immigrant family may be unfamiliar with basic college processes and occupational opportunities (Grubb, 2001). With such little understanding and preparedness, community college practitioners must consider working in different ways to support first-generation students. Stebleton (2018) even found that first-generation students are least likely to say they used career services at their institution. Data recognizes that first-generation students are not using career advisors, thus it is important to be intentional about providing support to this subgroup. Creating programs geared directly toward first-generation students might be a good place to start.

Recommendations for Community College Career Services

This literature review has demonstrated that career development and advising in community colleges is important but challenging for a number of reasons. The following practical applications are derived from the literature and offer direction and recommendations to community college career professionals. To inform this discussion, the social cognitive career theory, in which career aspirations are influenced by one's environment, will be used as a framework (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994). These recommendations are based on the goal that, to be successful, community colleges must create spaces for students to actively and openly plan for their careers.

Career Pathways Programs

Community colleges have created unique ways to incorporate career and professional development into the student experience. One way is through career pathways programs, in which students engage in career-related activities, which are directly built into curriculum and instruction (Bragg & Krismer, 2016). Going to class and completing coursework is arguably one of the only things that

students are required to do to complete a degree or move onto their next step. Thus, a career pathways program is an innovative approach to career advising that makes participating in career development a requirement for students. Since it is considered a component of the curriculum, it can be a very effective way to engage in career exploration for community college students. Bragg and Krismer (2016) studied a career pathways program focused on competency-based principles that helped students secure and persist toward employment opportunities through intensive support services related to career goals. This practice helped to encourage and motivate students towards their individual career goals. Studies indicate that students in healthcare programs are likely to benefit from an innovative approach like this, in which students participate in career development in the classroom (Bragg & Krismer, 2016).

Guided Pathways

Guided Pathways is another potential approach to integrating career development efforts into the community college student experience. Guided Pathways is a program that maps out academic programs for students in order to create a coherent pathway of study, premised on the idea that creating clearly defined goals motivates students to persist toward their next step in career and academic pursuits (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Implementation of the Guided Pathways program has led to alignment with transferring to a four-year institution and meeting requirements for occupational programs and career advancement (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Essentially, Guided Pathways create a streamlined opportunity for students to more effectively and efficiently meet the goals and needs related to attending community college. According to Jenkins and Cho (2013), students who enter a program of study in a Guided Pathways approach are more likely to complete a credential (which can enhance their ability and chance of employment). Some Guided Pathways programs even partner with a local four-year institution to guarantee transfer if a student succeeds in their program, which contributes to advancing onto a four-year college and creating more opportunity for career and professional development (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Through these programs, students are offered additional student support services, such as integrated coaching and tutoring (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). This enhances a student's ability to be successful and meet program needs, thus persisting to transfer to a four-year institution, credential/degree completion, or job obtainment (Jenkins & Cho, 2013). Both academic and career services units would be responsible for implementation of this type of program, in that it both aligns with career and academic development. This type of program could serve as a source for collaboration among student affairs professionals at the community college level, providing a unique career and academic development service to meet the diverse needs of community college students.

Learning Communities

Institutions may also enhance career development through effective and innovative learning communities. The adoption of learning communities is a trending approach that creates an opportunity for students to persist through developmental education courses by working and collaborating within a learning community. While learning communities do not have a direct focus on career and professional development, they create a unique opportunity for students to engage with their peers and advisors to gain support, which improves their chances of earning a credential (Minkler, 2002; Tinto, 2003; Weiss, Visher, Weissman, & Wathington, 2015). As mentioned earlier, earning a credential enhances a student's ability to identify and secure career/employment opportunities. Horn and Skomsvold (2012) revealed that many community college students indicate their goal is to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher. A program that promotes student persistence to degree/credential completion or transfer can also contribute to their career development, especially if there is a thematic focus in the learning community. For example, having liberal arts students in the same learning community or engineering majors all in the same community can be highly beneficial as it relates to student development and retention. Grubb (2001) encourages institutions to establish new and innovative programs, such as learning communities and occupational programs, to improve career development efforts on campus. For example, occupational faculty (who serve as experts in a specific career field) may offer expert mentorship and advising to enhance a student's exposure to their career field and opportunities. Any approach that can enhance a student's exposure to or understanding of a particular career field is useful in their career development. While not traditionally used for career development purposes, learning communities and occupational programs can motivate students to complete their degree, which increases their career opportunities.

Campus Collaboration

With very little funding and so many part-time staff, collaboration may be a way to bolster career advising capacity on community college campuses. Across the nation, there are unique ways to collaborate across campus to promote career development, and one common way is having advisors serve dual roles on campus to students (Ledwith, 2014). For instance, sharing the role as a career and academic advisor may allow colleges to more adequately serve students and equip them for success. Creating a scenario in which a student can visit one advisor to meet both their academic and career needs is an effective strategy for meeting the unique demands of the community college population, in that students are often full-time workers with other obligations outside of their campus commitments (Ledwith, 2014). If a student can go to one advisor for both a resume review and academic planning, they might be more likely to use their advisor and persist toward degree/credential completion or transfer. Institutions can support their staff in serving this dual role by encouraging them to research both career and

academic development, attend webinars related to career and academic development, and engage in active self-assessment (Ledwith, 2014).

Career and Professional Development Programs

Building programs and creating opportunities for community college students to engage in career development is a creative and effective way to participate in career advising. An evaluation of one program, the Career Placement Project, showed that participation in career development activities, including job-seeking skill development, job shadowing, career exploration, was positively associated with strong engagement in their career preparation (Norton & Field, 1998). This program is designed to provide tools and resources to students to promote their chances of being career ready when they persist to their next step, whether it is transfer, job obtainment, or credential completion.

Stebleton and Diamond (2018) discuss high-impact practices for career development, in which faculty engagement plays a vital role in students' career readiness and preparation. Specifically, first-year students as well as students with minoritized identities positively benefited from engagement with faculty and staff. Thus, this study encourages institutions to extend the opportunity to engage in career readiness through credit and non-credit courses, reimagining the role of career services at each unique institution, and embedding career-readiness opportunities into the first-year experience through faculty engagement. In summary, "career-life planning and exploration during the first year of college would not only meet incoming students' demands for support, it would strengthen outcomes associated with overall student success, such as improved sense of purpose and self-efficacy" (Stebleton & Diamond, 2018, p. 161).

Implications for Practice

It is important to provide the opportunity to innovate and determine the best practices for supporting community college students in their career and professional development journeys regardless of their purpose for study, and regardless of whether their intention is transferring or career attainment. This literature review highlights key areas that need to be improved. First, it may be important that both structurally and socially, community colleges begin to emphasize career development as much as they tend to emphasize four-year transfer. Many community college students may feel pressured to pursue a four-year institution and avoid career development because that is what they are pushed to do but what may not be the best for them. As higher education administrators, it is important to be supportive of all students' educational pursuits. Second, more support is needed for career services professionals and agents of change in the community college systems. Institutional agents are those in an educational setting who are actively working to challenge systems (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In this case, more resources should be directed towards those practitioners

working to change the way career advising operates in the community college system (Bensimon, 2007). Lastly, according to the social cognitive career theory, career aspirations are influenced by one's environment (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994). Therefore, community colleges may seek to create spaces for students to actively and openly plan and discuss their career decisions. In addition, staff need to be provided advanced and interactive training to learn how to engage with a variety of students with varying challenges and opportunities. Both efforts would help to create a culture of career preparation on campus, which can help to support community college students in attaining their career goals.

Conclusion

Community colleges are systems of higher education that face unique challenges related to limited funding, lack of resources, and overworked staff, all while serving a diverse student body with varying needs. Under these conditions, it is challenging to find optimal ways to support students in their academic and career pursuits. However, community colleges need to be prepared to serve both the first-generation student who identifies as African American studying nursing and the parent working full-time and is studying to complete an English as a Second Language (ESL) certificate, among others. All students need to be provided resources to achieve their career goals. Practical recommendations include: career centers with more full- and part-time staff, joint academic and career counseling, Guided Pathways, the use of learning communities, faculty engagement, and more. Career advising and development at the community college level needs increased attention, and it is the responsibility of higher education administrators to marshal support for these important student service activities.

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Counseling Southeast Asian American Male Students: Insights from Community College Counselors

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Abstract

Engagement with counselors has been documented to positively impact the success of male students of color in community colleges. However, there is limited understanding of this engagement experience from the counselor perspective. This study highlights findings from a qualitative study focused on counselor engagement with male students from Southeast Asian ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese). Specifically, the current study sheds light on the different ways in which community college counselors engage with Southeast Asian American male students. Two themes emerged from the data and emphasized the significance of humanizing the counseling experience and providing intrusive counseling support. The first theme described how counselors individualize interactions with each student and invest time to understand the student's story and frame of reference. The second theme described how they create conditions contributing to student's willingness to disclose information and discuss educational goals. Implications for community college research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Americans, male students of color, college counseling

Although studies investigating factors contributing to the success of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) college students have proliferated in recent years (Gloria et al., 2017; Museus, 2013; Phommasa, 2015; Tang, Kim, & Haviland, 2013), few have explored their experiences in the community college setting (Xiong, 2019a, 2019b; Xiong & Wood, 2016). This is problematic because SEAAs are primarily concentrated in community colleges and have unique challenges in these environments in comparison to their SEAA counterparts at four-year institutions

(Pak, Maramba, & Hernandez, 2014; Teranishi, 2010; Wagoner & Lin, 2009). In addition to focusing on the community college experience, it is also important to concentrate on the SEAA male student experience. One-third to more than half of SEAA male students leave college without completing a degree in comparison to one-fifth of male students from other Asian American and Pacific Islander ethnic backgrounds (Teranishi & Pazich, 2014). Research has also indicated that SEAA male students are more likely to drop out of college in comparison to their female counterparts (Teranishi & Pazich, 2014). Therefore, empirical research is warranted to provide a more nuanced understanding of SEAA students attending community colleges, particularly SEAA male students.

Given these challenges, community college institutions and student affairs professionals must invest efforts to increase persistence and degree completion rates among SEAA male students. To increase persistence and attainment rates, community college leaders and practitioners must understand the factors that impact the success of this student population. While engagement with counselors has been found to be a promising practice that contributes to the success of male students of color in community colleges, there is limited understanding of how counselors interact with SEAA male students (Wood & Harris, 2017). As community colleges invest resources to close equity gaps in outcomes among male students of color and other disproportionately impacted student groups (Harris et al., 2017), counselor engagement with male students from ethnically diverse backgrounds must be better understood. The current study sheds light on the different ways in which community college counselors engage with SEAA male students.

Before proceeding, there are several noteworthy terms for consideration in the current study. First, the term *SEAA* used in this study refers to individuals from Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, or Vietnamese ethnic backgrounds. While Southeast Asians may include additional ethnic groups beyond these four ethnicities, this definition is consistent with other scholars who have explored the experiences of SEAAs in higher education (Maramba & Palmer, 2014; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Second, all participants in the current study were community college counselors from the state of California. As such, the use of the term *counselor* throughout this study instead of *advisor* is reflective of the distinct differences between minimum qualifications and roles among counseling faculty and educational advisors within the California community college system. Whereas the minimum professional education qualification for educational advisors is an associate or bachelor's degree, counseling faculty requires a counseling-related master's degree (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2012). Regarding their distinctive roles, educational advisors focus primarily on the advising needs of students while counseling faculty focus on addressing the academic, career, and personal counseling needs of students (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2012).

Literature Review

Over the past decade, scholars have highlighted some of the outcomes associated with SEAA student engagement with counselors. For instance, Palmer and Maramba (2015) explored the significance of social networks for SEAA college students and concluded that counselors provided them with critical information to access and succeed in college. Chhuon and Hudley (2008) conducted a qualitative study and found that counselors played a key role in supporting Cambodian American students' adjustment to the university. In a study of Hmong American college students, Lor (2008) found that counselors were identified as individuals who supported their persistence and completion of a college degree. Similarly, Xiong and Lam (2013) explored factors contributing to the success of Hmong American graduate students and found that counselors were instrumental in supporting their matriculation into a graduate program. Research from other scholars confirm these findings and indicate that engagement with counselors is positively associated with the success of SEAA college students (Maramba, Palmer, Kang, & Yull, 2018; McClain-Ruelle & Xiong, 2005).

Some scholars have also documented SEAA college student experiences with counselors. When counselors engaged more frequently with SEAA students, exhibited familiarity with their cultural background, validated their academic abilities to succeed in college, and cared for them not just as a student but as a person, SEAA college students were more likely to perceive the value of interacting with counselors more positively (Lor, 2008; Maramba et al., 2018). SEAA college students also reported positive experiences when counselors proactively engaged them in navigating academic policies and procedures, connected them to campus resources, and directed them to opportunities for professional development (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Maramba & Palmer, 2014). However, when these efforts were not present, SEAA college students did not find their interactions with counselors as beneficial, perceived counselors as unsupportive and unwelcoming, reported the counseling experience as transactional and dehumanizing, and limited their engagement with counselors (DePouw, 2012; Tang et al., 2013; Wagoner & Lin, 2009; Xiong & Lee, 2011). Findings from these studies suggest that the perceived value of counselor engagement is a function of the quality and quantity of interaction between SEAA students and counselors.

Other scholars have offered insights into approaches that may enhance the quality and quantity of interactions. For example, Xiong and Lam's (2013) study suggests that Hmong American college students may be more likely to interact with counselors when counselors employ intrusive, solution-focused, and reality counseling approaches such as proactive engagement that center student goals. Xiong and Lam (2013) contend that intrusive counseling approaches that centers proactive engagement from the counselor can communicate care; solution-focused counseling approaches may help to build self-efficacy; and reality counseling approaches may provide Hmong students opportunities to negotiate

balancing different needs. Additionally, counselors must understand how a student's race, culture, expectations, family, and peers are important considerations when working with Asian American students (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). Given these complex influences, scholars recommend the use of an intrusive approach that includes counselor-initiated engagement early and often, time investment to explore students' backgrounds and experiences, and opportunities to interact with counselors who share similar racial/ethnic background with the students or culturally competent non-Asian American counselors (Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Museus & Mueller, 2018; Phommasa, 2015).

Collectively, these findings provide insight into the critical role of engagement with counselors on SEAA college student success and the conditions that impact engagement, but several knowledge gaps persist. First, current literature has focused primarily on student perceptions of their interactions with counselors and the voices of the counselors are missing in these interactions. Second, the current literature on SEAA college student engagement with counselors does not account for the gendered experiences of students and how the experiences of male students are different from their female counterparts and the larger SEAA college student population. Third, except for one study (i.e., Wagon & Lin, 2009), this scholarship has been limited to exploring the counselor-student interactions of SEAA students at four-year institutions rather than community colleges. The current study begins to address these gaps in the literature and was guided by the following primary research question: What approaches do community college counselors employ when working with SEAA male students?

Methodology

Data for the current study were drawn from a larger qualitative study exploring the engagement between counselors and male students of color in community colleges (Xiong, Allen, & Wood, 2016). Criterion and snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit counselors for the larger study. Counselors that were recruited had five or more years of counseling experience, extensive work experience with male students of color, and were identified by their counseling peers as having a successful track record of serving male students of color. These criteria were used to ensure that counselors identified for the study have been effective in supporting male students of color over time and can offer insight about their counseling approaches with this student population. While the larger study focused on engagement with male students of color, counselors were instructed to limit their responses to only one racial/ethnic group (e.g., Black, Latino, Southeast Asian). Data for this study were extracted and analyzed from six counselors who indicated their responses were specific to SEAA male students. There were three male and three female counselors from four California community colleges. With regard to ethnicity, the participants consisted of four Hmong, one Cambodian, and one Latino counselor.

Data primarily consisted of written responses from counselors that were collected via an online questionnaire. Counselors were asked to explain in detail the different counseling approaches they employ when engaging with SEAA male students. For each counseling approach they shared, counselors were also asked to describe why this approach was unique or more important for SEAA male students. Detailed, selective, and holistic reading approaches were employed to identify themes as described by van Manen (1990) for thematic analysis. First, a detailed reading approach was used to review every sentence or cluster of sentences to understand each counselor's engagement with SEAA male students. Second, a selective reading approach was used to carefully identify and isolate statements that were essential to understanding their engagement. The final step used a holistic reading approach to review the written responses and identify thematic phrases that best capture their counseling approaches. Peer debriefing and data triangulation were employed to ensure trustworthiness of the thematic phrases (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Findings

Findings from this study delineate the different ways community college counselors engage with SEAA male students. Two themes related to counseling approaches specifically for SEAA male students emerged from analysis of the data. These themes reflect the significance of (a) humanizing the counseling experience and (b) providing intrusive counseling support. The first theme refers to the ways in which counselors personalized the counselor-student interaction and engaged in opportunities to learn more about each SEAA male student as a person. Counselors described how they individualized interactions with each student and invested time to understand the student's story and frame of reference. The second theme refers to the ways in which counselors were attentive to the help-seeking behaviors and prior counseling experiences of SEAA male students. Counselors discussed how they employed practices that contributed to the student's willingness to disclose information and discuss educational goals. The following sections provide an overview of each theme and include selected quotes from counselors to illuminate the various counseling approaches. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the privacy of the participants and anonymity of the responses.

Humanizing the Counseling Experience

The first theme emphasized the critical role of counselors employing humanized counseling approaches. By personalizing each counselor-student interaction and engaging in opportunities to learn more about each student as a person, counselors in this study felt that these approaches were critical in establishing rapport, developing trust, and demonstrating care with SEAA male students. Moreover, counselors understood the interconnectedness of how students' stories provided the necessary context needed for individualized support.

Many counselors made intentional efforts to ensure SEAA male students knew they were individually valued by personalizing the experience for each student. Saul, for example, validated their presence by thanking them for being on campus. He also ended his appointments with, "Did I miss anything? What could the student leave with to make them feel important as an individual? Right before they leave, ask an open-ended question…Is there anything else I can assist you with?" Saul's comments illustrated how many counselors did not rush through their counseling appointments and were committed to providing individualized counseling. Similarly, Kathy discussed how she intentionally "makes the first counselor contact very specific [to] learning about [her] student as a person." She reflected that "by not rushing straight into academics right away, [she was] able to build trust with the student so they can feel more comfortable in slowly engaging actively in their planning of educational goals." Thus, Kathy's comments highlighted how beneficial it can be to understand more about the student as a person before addressing the student's educational goals.

Counselors also discussed their investment in learning more about each student as a person. Saul elaborated on the importance of understanding SEAA male students' background and experiences before addressing their personal, academic, and career needs. For example, Saul discussed the importance of "taking time and patience to listen to their story and find value in past experiences." He also described how SEAA male students' stories and past experiences can help to "understand their perspective" and "see the whole person." Saul's comments emphasized the need to understand student's journey and frame of reference. Another counselor, Sheng, also described why this was important, writing that "counselors need to understand the [students'] backgrounds in order to provide effective advising." However, Moua explained that "time is needed to develop the counselor-student relationship prior to the student feeling comfortable enough to open up to the counselor. This is when the student's needs can be fully addressed." Moua's comments suggested that time is needed to gain a holistic understanding of the student as a person.

Providing Intrusive Counseling Support

The second theme highlighted the importance of counselors providing intrusive counseling support for SEAA male students that emphasized proactive engagement from the counselor. By understanding some of the apprehensiveness of SEAA male students to seek guidance and structural challenges they experience in accessing information, counselors in this study employed proactive approaches that allowed them to engage students first before they asked for help and educate students to consider all career options. Specifically, counselors described the critical role of counselor-initiated efforts to providing SEAA male students access to information.

Counselors discussed the need to be sensitive to and respectful of the ways in which SEAA male students disclose information. Kathy described the importance of this sensitivity, sharing that some SEAA male students "are not fast to disclose information" and she understands that "sometimes it can take a few counseling appointments for the student to open up." Additionally, Moua described how "the idea of opening up your internal emotions and personal struggles to a total stranger is very foreign for Southeast Asian men." He added that they may "not be very direct in terms of describing their goals or plans" but cautioned that they "should not be labeled as uninvolved and lacking interest in [their] education." He also discussed how "counselors need to develop extensive listening skills to catch subtle words or phrases to be able to effectively engage the student in an effort to help him to open up." Indeed, counselors' comments highlighted the importance of understanding how SEAA male students disclose information and the intrusive counseling skills needed to facilitate that process.

Counselors also discussed how they proactively connect SEAA male students to information, particularly campus resources and career options. Song, for example, discussed that some SEAA male students "are apprehensive about seeking help" and may require a more proactive approach. She described how she shares with them the benefits of utilizing campus resources, teaches them how to research available programs and services, and walks them over to personally connect them with colleagues. She emphasized the importance of this proactive approach because "sometimes they do not know who to talk to about a specific program and are not aware of where to start." Moua also spoke about how he engages SEAA male students to consider all career options. He discussed how some counselors "do not engage Southeast Asian men enough to discuss options that go beyond vocational training at a community college. They are not informed and made to consider the possibility of attaining something higher than vocational training." He described how SEAA male students need to be "reaffirmed that they too can attain professional careers" beyond vocational education. Counselors' comments illustrated challenges SEAA male students faced in accessing information critical to their success and proactive approaches that provided opportunities for them to engage with this information.

Discussion

There is a need to better understand the interactions between counselors and male students of color in community colleges. The current study addressed this issue by exploring how community college counselors interact with male students of color from Southeast Asian ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese). Findings from this study highlight the different approaches community college counselors perceived to be important and have found to be effective in their interactions with SEAA male students. As previously mentioned, these approaches include the role of humanizing the counseling

experience and providing intrusive counseling support. The findings of this study confirm and extend the current literature in several ways.

This study has provided an example of how the counselor perspective can be critical to understanding the SEAA male student engagement experience with counselors. Indeed, previous studies have explored engagement with counselors from the student perspective (e.g., Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Lor, 2008). However, this body of research has been limited to the student perspective and is missing the counselor perspective. It is important to note that student and counselor perspectives of the same interaction may vary. Both perspectives are necessary to provide a more complete understanding of the counselor-student interaction experience. What this study adds to the current literature is the inclusion of counselor voices and perceptions of approaches critical to their engagement with SEAA male students.

Counselors in the current study reported that humanizing the counseling experience was important in their engagement with SEAA male students. This finding is consistent with current literature that underscores the significance of institutional agents who employ humanizing approaches (Lor, 2008; Museus & Mueller, 2018). For example, this finding supports Museus and Mueller's (2018) conclusion that efforts to humanize the educational experience were among the key characteristics of institutional agents who SEAA college students perceive as contributors to their success in college. In the current study, counselors humanized the counseling experience by providing individualized attention and creating opportunities to learn from students' stories. This finding reinforces the importance of humanizing approaches but also offers a more nuanced understanding of how counselors employ these approaches specifically for SEAA male students in community colleges.

Additionally, counselors in this study emphasized intrusive counseling approaches for SEAA male students to access information. This finding provides additional support for previous studies that indicate proactive engagement from counselors as essential to SEAA students accessing resources critical for their success (Maramba et al., 2018; Museus & Mueller, 2018; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). This finding is consistent with Palmer and Maramba's (2015) study on SEAA college students and social capital. Participants in their study identified counselors as institutional agents who contributed to the development of social capital through providing them with information on how to access, adjust, and succeed in college (Palmer & Maramba, 2015). However, the current study extends the existing literature on how counselors provide SEAA male students access to information through counselor-initiated engagement opportunities. With an understanding of SEAA male students' help-seeking behavior and previous experiences with other counselors, counselors in the current study used that understanding to proactively engage them in the exploration of all major and career options and physically connect them to appropriate resources.

Furthermore, counselors in this study seemed more attuned to employ humanized and intrusive counseling approaches. Five counselors in this study were of Southeast Asian descent and one identified as Latino. All reported extensive background and experience in working with SEAA male students. It may be plausible that this shared commonality and/or familiarity with the students' cultural background provided them with a greater level of awareness to employ these approaches (Maramba & Palmer, 2014). Perhaps the counselors understand that their student may be one of the few SEAA male students enrolled on campus and the individualized attention could contribute to a greater sense of belonging on campus (Teranishi, 2010). Additionally, counselors in this study may also recognize the complex influences of the students' cultural background and past experiences and proactively created opportunities to learn more about the student as a person (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). This level of awareness may have contributed to their heightened sense of importance in humanizing the counseling experience and providing intrusive counseling support. In the absence of these approaches, the counseling experience could be perceived as transactional and counselors could be perceived as unsupportive, unwelcoming, and lacking care for the student's success (Xiong & Lam, 2013; Xiong & Lee, 2011).

Implications

The current inquiry has several implications for community college research and practice. First, it is important to understand the effects of these approaches have on SEAA male students. While counselors in this study perceived these approaches to be critical in their engagement with SEAA male students, the current inquiry did not explore how these approaches impact students' actual engagement with counselors. Thus, future quantitative studies should examine the relationship and effect of these approaches on SEAA male student engagement with counselors. Second, findings from the current study only focused on the counselor perspective. The extent to which SEAA male students also perceive these approaches to be critical and influence their engagement with counselors is unknown. Therefore, future qualitative inquiries should include SEAA male student experiences with counselors and their perspectives on the conditions that contribute to engagement.

Third, the current study included only counselors from community colleges in California. Although California is home to the largest SEAA population of approximately 980,000 (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015) and its community college system is the largest system of higher education in the nation, it is likely that counseling approaches may vary by institutional context and geographic location. There may be differences in approaches among counselors who engage with SEAA male students in different institutional contexts or in other geographic locations where there is not a critical mass of this student population. As such, future qualitative studies should explore approaches of counselors from four-year institutions in general as well as those at predominantly

white institutions, and in geographic locations where SEAA male students may be underrepresented on campus.

Regarding practice, community college counselors who work closely with SEAA male students must understand how humanized and intrusive counseling approaches can create the conditions necessary to provide effective counseling. Specifically, these approaches can help build rapport, communicate care, and establish trust. Therefore, counselors should incorporate this understanding into the delivery of culturally sensitive counseling services. When engaging with SEAA male students, for example, counselors could make coordinated efforts to personalize the counselor-student interaction and learn from students' lived experiences. Counselors could also proactively connect them to resources, staff members, and information critical to their success. Through these approaches, community college counselors can create conditions that communicate their investment and commitment to SEAA male students' success in college. Moreover, counselors must be aware of SEAA male students' developmental needs in order to incorporate these culturally sensitive counseling approaches. Without this level of awareness, counselors may misinterpret SEAA male students' behavior of disclosure and academic help-seeking.

Findings from this study can also be used as a basic framework for assessing and evaluating counseling services with SEAA male students. For example, community college counselors should be assessed on their ability to effectively employ humanized and intrusive counseling approaches. As such, community college leaders could include these approaches as items on counseling evaluation forms and other assessment tools to evaluate the performance of counselors. Additionally, these efforts should also provide opportunities for counselors to be assessed and evaluated from multiple perspectives. This may include student evaluations from SEAA male students, counselor self-evaluations, and peer evaluations from tenured counselors. Insights from multiple perspectives can be triangulated to capture a more accurate assessment and evaluation of the counselor's ability to deliver humanizing and intrusive counseling approaches.

Finally, counselors in this study emphasized the critical role of time in employing humanized and intrusive counseling approaches for SEAA male students. For example, several appointments were necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the student's background, experiences, and how these factors influence the student's help-seeking behaviors and decision-making process. Additional time was also needed to educate SEAA male students about resources and to physically connect students with on-campus staff members. While these counseling approaches are crucial to engaging SEAA male students, many community college counselors may perceive them as not feasible to implement because they do not meet with the student long enough or frequently enough to employ these approaches. Therefore, community college leaders must consider allocating

additional resources in counseling services so that counselors can provide humanized and intrusive counseling.

Conclusion

This study sought to better understand community college counselors and their engagement with SEAA male students. There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the current study. First, community colleges committed to advancing success outcomes for SEAA male students need to focus on the counselor-student interaction experience. This is important because engagement with community college counselors can positively impact the persistence and degree completion of male students of color, particularly SEAA male students. Second, community colleges need to also ensure that SEAA male students have access to and opportunities for engagement with counselors who can humanize the counseling experience and provide intrusive counseling support. These were approaches identified by counselors in the current study as critical in their interactions with this student population. Finally, if community colleges are dedicated to enhancing the quality and increasing the opportunities for engagement with counselors among SEAA male students, it is important to include the counselor perspective in student success efforts related to counseling. Student success efforts missing the counselor perspective may be incomplete. It is imperative to include multiple perspectives of individuals directly involved in the counselor-student interaction experience to offer a more nuanced understanding of factors that impact engagement.

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Cultural Capital and Formerly Incarcerated Persons: A Case Study

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Abstract

The concept of a traditional college student in the United States is quickly disappearing as the demographic landscape of postsecondary education changes (Biddix & Gabourel, Forthcoming; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). One student group in particular – formerly incarcerated persons – are increasingly present on college campuses. This paper explores the journey of JJ (pseudonym) from incarceration to college student to understand the unique cultural capital formerly incarcerated students may possess, and how colleges can support these students. I used Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model as a framework for analysis. Three important findings emerged from the analysis: (1) previously incarcerated persons possess unique skills and cultural capital developed through their lived experiences, including incarceration; (2) previously incarcerated persons benefit from receiving specialized support often given to underrepresented students; (3) previously incarcerated persons may possess a unique drive to give back to the communities which they identify with. Recommendations for policy, practice, and future research are provided.

Keywords: incarceration, cultural capital, case study, community cultural wealth, inequity

Research on prisoners participating in postsecondary education programs while incarcerated is robust, and the consensus is clear: providing educational programming is a cost effective tool which will decrease recidivism and increase employment upon release (Davis et al., 2013; Bazos & Hausman, 2004; Fine et al., 2001; Borden, Richardson, & Meyer, 2012; Abrams & Franke, 2013). However, scholarly analysis of postsecondary educational attainment following incarceration, and its potential benefits, is limited. With more than 700,000 persons released from incarceration annually in the United States (Cuellar & Cheema, 2012), postsecondary education represents a valuable avenue of reentry for previously incarcerated persons. Current research shows that attending a postsecondary educational institution following incarceration decreases recidivism, increases earning potential, decreases a person's willingness to

reoffend, and increases social bonds (Halkovic et al, 2013; Halkovic & Greene, 2015; Runell, 2015; Strayhorn, Johnson, & Barrett, 2013). This study further expands the literature to explore the unique cultural capital formerly incarcerated persons may possess and how institutions can best support these individuals as students.

This paper analyzes the experiences of one previously incarcerated person who attended a mid-sized public university in the Midwestern part of the United States. I conducted a case study based on the analysis of two 60-minute interviews, two observations, and document analysis to explore how JJ (pseudonym) transitioned from incarceration to postsecondary education. I used Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model as a framework for analysis, and specifically explored whether JJ developed valuable forms of forms of cultural capital – aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital – during his unique life experiences. While JJ is only one person, the insights he provided to this analysis contribute to the argument that postsecondary institutions must recognize previously incarcerated persons as not only a group to be supported, but also as students who possess unique and valuable skills and benefit the campus community.

Literature Review

History of Education as Rehabilitation

Education as a form of rehabilitation is not a novel idea. It is estimated that 90 percent of state prisons and 100 percent of federal prisons in the United States offer some form of education to those incarcerated, with the majority being secondary education programs for obtaining a General Education Diploma (GED) (Harlow, 2003). Due to the large number of incarcerated persons who enter incarceration without a high school diploma or GED (58.7 percent), these programs have become vast in both state and federal prisons (Harlow, 2003). Yet, Tyler and Kling (2004) found minimal benefit to obtaining a GED while incarcerated, and found that many positive effects, such as job attainment, quality of living, and likelihood to reoffend, dissipate shortly after release. It is unclear why obtaining a GED while incarcerated has minimal positive effect. It may be that the stigma of being convicted of a crime outweigh obtaining a GED, or perhaps the worth of a secondary degree is falling as postsecondary degrees become more desired in the work force.

Postsecondary Education in Prisons

A large amount of evidence exists that obtaining a postsecondary education while incarcerated reduces recidivism while also increasing the financial earning potential of the inmate (Davis et al., 2013; Bazos & Hausman, 2004; Fine et al., 2001; Borden, Richardson, & Meyer, 2012; Abrams & Franke, 2013).

Postsecondary education programs for incarcerated persons became more widely practiced after the passing of The Higher Education Act of 1965. This act expanded social programs with the aim of making postsecondary education more accessible, and allowed for many prisoners to access Pell Grants while incarcerated (Higher Education Act, 1965; Ubah, 2004). In a study on offender rehabilitation through correction education, Ubah (2004) found that from 1965-1994, correctional educational programs in the United States vastly improved. With Pell Grants funding tuition for most prisoners, correctional education administrators had the financial flexibility to improve access to programs and the quality of the education, as well as broadening the types of degrees offered (Ubah, 2004).

In 2013, the United States Department of Justice Assistance collaborated with the RAND Corporation to conduct meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults (Davis et al., 2013). The implications of this study were clear; providing educational programming, specifically degree bearing postsecondary programs, is a cost-effective tool which will decrease recidivism and increase employment upon release (Davis et al., 2013). As a result of this study, the United States Department of Education and President Obama announced a Second Chance Pell Pilot Program in 2015. This program invited postsecondary institutions to participate in an experiment to determine the direction the United States should take in Pell Grant Funding and the education of prisoners (Castro et al., 2018).

Postsecondary Education and Reentry

Research examining the experiences of previously incarcerated persons attending a postsecondary education institution is growing, yet still limited. In a study on postsecondary engagement among formerly incarcerated male youth, Abrams and Franke (2013) found educational engagement to be limited in their sample. The authors found that non-fathers and individuals who held a GED or high school diploma were most likely to attend and complete a postsecondary education; the authors call for further research on the topic, with larger samples and qualitative inquiry (Abrams & Franke, 2013).

Runell (2015) utilized a life-course perspective to investigate the life histories of previously incarcerated persons currently attending a postsecondary institution. The participants all participated in Project Achieve, a program dedicated to postsecondary education as reentry in the Northeast United States (Runell, 2015). The author specifically examined "structural inclusions based on race, social class, and place that result in divergent access to and success in college courses for inmates as well as ex-offenders post-incarceration" (Runell, 2015, p. 8). Findings of the study revealed that while participants experienced racial biases and barriers to achievement related to their other identities (low-income, minority, first-generation, non-traditional adult), participating in the program provided them with hope for the future and "something that's pulling you in the right

direction" (Runell, 2015, p. 148). Students participating in the program also benefitted from specialized tutoring, mentorship, and the formation of bonds with fellow students. Runell's (2015) study highlights the positive implications to colleges and universities supporting programs which establish a prison to university pipeline, while also working to address other barriers these students may face.

College campuses may also benefit from admitting and supporting formerly incarcerated persons (Halkovic et al., 2013; Halkovic & Green, 2015). When postsecondary institutions admit previously incarcerated students, they are admitting students who have a desire to give back to society, possess intimate knowledge of criminal justice systems and policies, and are able to bridge communities often secluded from one another (Halkovic & Greene, 2015). Strayhorn, Johnson, and Barrett (2013) similarly found that formerly incarcerated Black men attending college used their status as an ex-offender as motivation and displayed a powerful resiliency despite their criminal history. Participants in their study often benefitted from supportive social networks of other college students with similar backgrounds (Strayhorn et al., 2013). Runell (2015), Halkovic and Greene (2015), and Stayhorn et al. (2013) called for further research exploring successful practices which support formerly incarcerated persons, as well as continued investigation of the specific strengths formerly incarcerated persons may possess; their work, as well as Yosso's (2005) model of Community Cultural Wealth, guided the development of this study and the following research questions:

1. Do formerly incarcerated persons accumulate valuable cultural capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) from their unique life experiences, including incarceration?

2. Can participating in existing college support services benefit both formerly incarcerated students and their campus community?

Methods

This qualitative case study analyzed one previously incarcerated person's experience attending a postsecondary education institution. Case study methodology explores a bounded case that represents a larger phenomenon and often utilizes multiple sources of data to best analyze that case (Yin, 2017). I used Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Model (2005) as a framework for analysis, and specifically explored the evidence of the six forms of cultural capital in JJ's narrative. The research questions which guided this case study were:

1. Do formerly incarcerated persons accumulate valuable cultural capital from their unique life experiences, including incarceration?

2. Can participating in existing college support services benefit both formerly incarcerated students and their campus community?

Data Collection

For this case study, I gathered data from two 60-minute interviews with JJ, conducted observations of several courses taught by JJ, and amassed documents provided by the federal TRIO program that JJ had participated in and subsequently worked for (Project Scholar). JJ identifies as a male, Black, Christian, and heterosexual individual who grew up in a middle-class family. JJ was incarcerated from the ages of 17 – 19, roughly two and a half years, for an undisclosed felony crime. During our conversations, I chose not to ask JJ about the crime he committed, and instead focused on his journey to and through college.

Data Analysis

The taped interview was transcribed into Microsoft Word by a trained transcriber. I coded the transcript by hand, initially reviewing JJ's narrative for evidence of the six forms of capital defined by Yosso (2005). Sections of the transcript that I perceived to be evidence of JJ having unique capital were underlined and labeled (Merrian & Tisdell, 2015). Two themes which emerged from the literature review, specifically Halkovic & Greene's work (2015), claimed that previously incarcerated persons may benefit from increased support and can also bring unique strengths to the campus which they attend. Accordingly, I conducted a secondary analysis of the data to explore if JJ did in fact benefit from participating in Project Scholar and whether he brought unique strengths to his campus community. I employed several reliability techniques including triangulation (multiple sources of data); member checks (participants review of the transcript); and peer debriefing (colleagues check analysis) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Yosso's (2005) Model of Community Cultural Wealth serves as the theoretical framework for the analysis of the data for this case study. Yosso's model challenges the traditional interpretations of Cultural Capital from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective. Cultural capital, as originally conceptualized by Bourdieu (1984), is the accumulated skills, abilities, preferences, and social norms a person possesses due to their upbringing, social standing, or education. One criticism many have is that Bourdieu's theory has been used to examine underrepresented persons from a deficit perspective (Luedke, Collom, McCoy, Lee-Johnson, & Winkle-Wagner, 2019). Yosso's (2005) model was created to show the unique skills underrepresented persons may possess due to their unique upbringing and experiences. The model was conceptualized initially for

underrepresented minority populations and has not been applied to previously incarcerated persons.

Yosso (2005) detailed six forms of cultural capital found among Communities of Color; aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain dreams of a better future, regardless of current socioeconomic status and perceived or actual barriers to achieving that future (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital is the communication abilities (e.g., bilingual, story-telling, art, poetry, music) one may acquire through the variety of experiences in communicating within their community (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital refers to the cultural values and information learned and practiced among families in Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). Social capital is the networks and community resources shared within a Community of Color (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital is the skills learned and acquired by those who have been made to maneuver the various racially bias systems in the United States (Yosso, 2005). Lastly, resistant capital refers to the abilities learned when one must confront inequality as an everyday lived reality (Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) model has been used extensively in postsecondary education research since its conception (Gillborn, 2008; Milner, 2007; Wells, 2008; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). What made this particular theory valuable for this case study was that previously incarcerated persons represent communities which have often been observed from a deficit perspective. There is a limited amount of literature available which analyzes formerly incarcerated persons' accumulation of Yosso's (2005) cultural capital.

Findings

JJ's narrative supported Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model by showing that JJ possessed unique skills and experiences due to his experience as not only a Person of Color, but also as a previously incarcerated person. Furthermore, JJ's narrative revealed that he benefitted from participating in a first-year support program and was driven to give back to both the campus community and the Community of Color. I demonstrate the findings by providing JJ's reflections on his lived experiences while incarcerated and attending postsecondary institutions. Pseudonyms are used for all identifying information, including names of persons, cities, universities, and programs.

Community Cultural Wealth

JJ was incarcerated from the age of 17 to 19. During his prison sentence, JJ earned a GED, then attended college after release. He has stayed free of contact with the criminal justice system since his incarceration experience. To do so, JJ successfully utilized his aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital.

Aspirational capital. Aspirational capital played a crucial role in JJ's narrative. JJ came from a low to middle socioeconomic background and attended an urban public high school. Although JJ always believed himself to be intelligent and capable, many around him questioned his ability to succeed. While in high school, JJ stated he "was always told that I would never amount to anything" by his teachers.

Following his incarceration, JJ had a similarly discouraging experience with an educator after his first semester of college:

> She was a horrible advisor, instead of her going 'let's figure out something so you can succeed within pre-med,' she was like 'nah I think you should change your major.' I mean at that point in time I was already feeling crappy because I had a poor GPA.

While JJ did change his major to psychology, he still dreams of someday being a doctor. He stated "it's a struggle because I know I still want to become a medical doctor, and that will always be one of my aspirations, and who knows I might be 50 by the time I end up doing it." Regardless of the barriers and doubts JJ has faced, he continues to believe in himself and his ability to achieve a better life.

Linguistic capital. JJ also utilized his linguistic capital to transition from incarceration to college. JJ shared with me how he would interact with older persons who were also incarcerated:

> While I was incarcerated, I just seen so many older gentlemen in their 50s or 60s talking about how this was like their fourth time coming back and I was just like wow, I would never, ever, ever come back here ever again. And also being in there dealing with the older gentleman a lot of them didn't know how to read or write. So they get letters from family members and I'm reading it to them and writing letters back to them. And I just thought that was like heartbreaking to see, you know, somebody who that's probably spent the majority of their life locked up or incarcerated and they don't know how to read or write.

While incarcerated, JJ had the unique experience of helping others read and write, while also viewing those individuals in a mentor type role. JJ pointed out how many of the older gentleman told him "you're too smart to be here, you're not like the rest of them."

JJ used his linguistic capital accumulated while incarcerated when he transitioned into a role as mentor and tutor for Project Scholar and coordinator of the African American mentorship group. During an observation of a course JJ was teaching to freshman participating in Project Scholar, JJ showed how his linguistic capital benefitted his campus community. He spoke to a class of mostly Black students, holding each of their attention as he told his inspirational story. Much of what he told those students emulated his experiences communicating with older

individuals during incarceration. JJ used the linguistic capital developed during his time incarcerated to improve his community and uplift other students.

Familial capital. JJ's familial capital played a crucial role in his ability to be successful following incarceration. JJ detailed how his incarceration led to an improved relationship with his mother, who then pushed him to attend college:

> I think the best thing I ever did was get locked up, cause my mom kicked her drug habit and drinking habit. She realized she needed to make a change. Not only for me, but also for herself. [Following incarceration] I worked part-time for my mom. Until one day she just fired me…she just looked at me and she was like 'working there, I don't see you working there for the rest of your life.' She gave me the choice, 'either I can buy your school clothes, or I can pay your cell phone bill.'

JJ's mother valued education, so much so that she fired him in order to push him to attend college. Following being fired by his mother, JJ applied to and was accepted by several large Midwest universities.

Social capital. Social Capital also factored into JJ's success. He shared with me an experience he had while spending time in a half-way house:

> One day a guy came in, nice suit, nice tie, nice everything, and he walked up to this whiteboard they had and he wrote his prison number up on the board. And then he said 'now I'm a Dr.' And he was talking about how coming from inner cities and knowing what we know, mental health is never an issue to African Americans, you know, until it's too late. And we can change everything now. From that day forward, I just knew that I wanted to be something more than just a prison number. So, after that the sky was the limit.

Developing social capital by interacting with inspirational persons while incarcerated introduced JJ to valuable resources, such as a high school diploma equivalency program, work opportunities, and networks of others committed to improving their lives.

Navigational capital. It is important to be cognizant of the fact that many systems in our society have been built based on a foundation of oppressive beliefs, especially within educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In order to successfully maneuver himself through the criminal justice system and into higher education, JJ utilized his navigational capital. JJ shared how his career may be impacted by inequality:

> I can't see myself doing counseling for too long. Health care in America right now is a big issue, and people definitely in a lower socioeconomic

> standing are not getting health care, how are they going to be able to get some type of mental health?

JJ was aware of the potential for his career to falter due to inequality in the healthcare system and his felony conviction. He shared how he learned from others in prison how "difficult it would be to get a good job when he got out," and that it was important to always have options. His foresight showed that he has accumulated navigational capital through his experiences and used it to consider situations he may encounter in the future.

> **Resistant capital**. JJ demonstrated that he had accumulated resistant capital when explaining his plan if a career in counseling did not work for him:

> I started off in IT. I used to build computers for fun and sell them to people in church. I definitely want to get back into something like that. I'm always looking for new avenues to kind of make sure that I'm alright in the long run. This summer I'm restarting my mom's cleaning business. I told her we'll restart it, just get back at it and see if it'll thrive or not.

Through incarceration, being told he would amount to nothing, and almost failing out of school his first semester, JJ continued to demonstrate resistant capital. By starting a business with his mother as a backup plan, succeeding in psychology after feeling disenfranchised by his interactions with an advisor, and becoming a mentor and teacher to others despite his past incarceration, JJ exemplifies the abilities learned because of inequalities present in his everyday life.

Participation in Project Scholar

JJ benefitted from participating in the first-year support program for underrepresented students. Although JJ possessed valuable forms of cultural capital, his status as a previously incarcerated person and underrepresented individual presented barriers to succeeding at a four-year public institution. He struggled with the transition from incarceration to community college (Technical University) and then to a public four-year postsecondary institution (Mid-State College). JJ explained his initial struggles with academics at a larger college:

> Technical University is very different from Mid-State College. There's not parties, there's no distractions. But here at Mid-State I always had this vision of being like the movies. The problem was I didn't understand a lot of the things inside the classroom. I'm sure a lot of these kids learn about d2l [an online class platform] during their freshman year and I came in as a transfer student with credits so where I was beyond, you know, like hey log me into d2l and this is where your assignments and stuff at. So, I just read the book and I kind of just forgot about the assignments that was on d2l.

Much of JJ's struggle stemmed from his status as a non-traditional student and the institutions failure to adequately support him initially. Incoming traditional

students often go through extended orientation programs and first-year seminar classes. Like many non-traditional students, JJ gained his unique cultural capital through alternative life experiences (Yosso, 2005). However, his skillset did not initially match the capital which is valued in postsecondary education, an institution which often values the capital commonly held by the dominant social class (Harper, 2015).

After his first semester, JJ had a 1.7 grade point average and had failed his required math course. Policy at Mid-State College mandated he speak to an advisor, and since he was an underrepresented student he was sent to the Office of Multicultural Affairs:

> That's when I met Dr. Kameron and Tina Smith because, of course you had to appeal to get back into school, and I had failed math. I was telling Tina Smith at that point in time, and she taught math, and I was telling her I know I'm not stupid I can do this stuff. She ends up telling me to take her class the following semester which I did, and from there the sky was the limit you know. That's when she introduced me to Project Scholar.

Project Scholar was a program designed for first-year students, while JJ was a second-year student when he enrolled. Dr. Kameron and Tina Smith knew about JJ's status as a previously incarcerated person, and allowed him to participate in the program as a non-traditional student.

JJ shared how participating in Project Scholar helped JJ succeed at Mid-State by not only teaching him new skills and abilities, but by also emphasizing the strengths he already possessed:

> I would say that Project Scholar has taught me how to technically survive college. One thing I got to say about Dr. Kameron is that, and also with Tina, they both took the time out to kind of sat me down, tell me what I should or what I need to improve on. It gave me the sense of understanding how to make connections, how to go really get what you want. How to be more vocal about the things that you need. Because a lot of students don't understand that you need to assert your needs. It also taught me how to trust my abilities, you know a lot of time we don't know our own true abilities until they are tested.

Participating in Project Scholar enabled JJ to trust his own abilities, while also teaching him valuable information on how to be successful in college. JJ also benefitted from the mentor/mentee relationship he developed with Dr. Kameron and Tina Smith, both of whom took a special interest in his success at Mid-State College. JJ continued with Project Scholar, stating "I don't think I ever got below a 2.7 after that."

Giving Back

JJ's shared that he was determined to give back to both the campus community of Mid-State College and to his Community of Color. After completing Project Scholar, JJ participated in the McNair Scholars TRIO program. He described how his research would help other Black students:

> My research I did was the effects of labeling and the understanding of why African American students change their majors from the natural sciences to the social sciences. Basically, the effects of major changing within the African American population here at Mid-State, because at that point in time I wasn't the only one that was changing from pre-med, chemistry, biology, and so forth to a social science. So why are they not able to make it and they coming over to social work, counseling, psychology? And I know they were busting their butt because I was studying with them. So, I was just trying to understand why.

JJ experienced racial bias when he tried to major in biology with the goal of attending medical school. He had an advisor who made him feel like he was unable to obtain his desired degree. JJ strived to make the campus community better through research for students who were in a similar situation.

After completing Project Scholar, JJ continued to manifest his desire to help his campus community as well as his Community of Color by becoming a mentor for Black men on campus, teaching for Project Scholar, and pursuing a graduate degree in counseling. He hopes to one day become a motivational speaker for young men who are incarcerated, and stated:

"I feel like I have a story to tell and I'm able to inspire kids, you know. I just want to be happy and to actually be able to touch lives, that's my goal."

Discussion and Recommendations

Analysis of JJ's narrative revealed three important findings which can be utilized to further support previously incarcerated persons attending postsecondary institutions: (1) previously incarcerated persons may possess unique cultural capital (aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital) developed through their lived experiences, including incarceration; (2) previously incarcerated persons may benefit from receiving specialized support often given to underrepresented students; and (3) previously incarcerated persons may possess a unique drive to give back to the communities which they identify. Based on these findings, I provided recommendations for postsecondary institutions and educators.

The first finding revealed that the Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) can be applied to previously incarcerated persons. This model has been applied to extensively to underrepresented students (Gillborn, 2008; Milner, 2007; Wells, 2008; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), yet this study is the

first to observe it among previously incarcerated persons. Educators and administrators at postsecondary institutions must utilize this new information to change the way applicants and incoming students with an incarceration history are viewed.

Rampey et al. (2016) found that incarcerated persons in the United States fall well below the U.S. household average for literacy score, numeracy score, and work experience. Furthermore, incarcerated and previously incarcerated persons often come from geographic areas with underachieving secondary education and populations residing in low socioeconomic standings (Harlow, 2003). Institutions may mistakenly view previously incarcerated offenders as unqualified or underserving of admission. This deficit perspective is unfortunately often applied to traditionally underrepresented students who enter postsecondary education. The deficit perspective may be applied two-fold to individuals who are both formerly incarcerated and identify as a traditionally underrepresented student group. Indeed, 66 percent of postsecondary institutions collect criminal history from their applicants (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

This study revealed that previously incarcerated persons may in fact possess unique skills and cultural capital, and when these skills are emphasized by postsecondary education institutions it can lead to improved success for these students. The higher education system was built on the foundation of inequality and valuing attributes prevalent in the dominant class, in the case of the United States White middle to upper class persons. Yet, the findings of this study indicate that the cultural capital accumulated through incarceration may yield value on a college campus. Educators and administrators who make admission decisions must use this knowledge when considering the applications of previously incarcerated persons. Admissions decisions should be made based on a holistic review of applications informed by Yosso's (2005) model and other culturally relevant theories which focus on unique strengths and avoid the deficit perspective.

From a policy standpoint, the findings of this study support the numerous *ban the box* initiatives across the country. States such as Louisiana have moved to eliminate reviewing the criminal history of applicants for non-sexual offenses. Yet, many policymakers still remain apprehensive about removing criminal history from college admission applications. With college admissions falling across the country, policies which require applicants to identify themselves as justice involved are counterintuitive.

The second finding concerns the potential benefit to a previously incarcerated individual of specialized support. Research shows that underrepresented student populations (Students of Color, veterans, adult students) often benefit from programs specifically designed to increasing their success in college (Luedke et al., 2019; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). There are programs which specifically serve previously incarcerated individuals in the United States, such as the New

Jersey STEP Mountainview Community and Project Rebound of California. Studies show that these programs are effective at supporting previously incarcerated students through building a community, providing academic assistance, and creating safe spaces (Runell, 2015). Yet, securing funding to initiate and staff such a program may prove to be difficult for postsecondary institutions. JJ was fortunate to be admitted to a program for first-year students and would have struggled to persist if he had not been admitted to the program. The administrators of the program intentionally pushed JJ to enroll because they recognized his unique skills and ability to succeed. Programs such as Project Scholar in the United States must broaden their reach to include previously incarcerated students.

The third finding affirmed the research done by Halkovic et al. (2013); previously incarcerated students benefit the campus community. In Halkovic et al.'s (2013) study, the authors found that previously incarcerated students brought unique abilities to the campus which they attended; the desire to learn, the drive to excel, and the experience of marginalization. This study found that JJ sought to give back to both the campus community and his Community of Color by participating in research aimed at improving the experience of Persons of Color on his campus, being a mentor to other Black males, working for Project Scholar and teaching within the program, and his desire to work in a field where he can bring awareness to mental health in Black communities. JJ's positive impact on his campus was likely felt by countless students. By admitting and supporting previously incarcerated students, other postsecondary institutions can also benefit their campus community.

Conclusion

This case study analyzed the experiences of one previously incarcerated person attending a medium sized public four-year postsecondary institution in the Midwest. JJ's experiences may not be representative of all previously incarcerated students. Research using a similar framework on a larger sample across various states is needed to further explore if previously incarcerated persons possess unique forms of capital, and how the Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) model can be used to support previously incarcerated students. While this case study showed that JJ was successful during his time at a postsecondary education institution, longitudinal analysis is needed to explore the long-term effects of previously incarcerated persons attending a postsecondary education institution.

Practical applications revealed by the findings of this study can inform policymakers and campus administrators. The findings of this study highlight the need for policymakers and justice reform advocates to continue the discussion of increasing access to higher education for justice-involved and formerly incarcerated persons (see U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, admissions decisions should be made based on a holistic review of applications informed by Yosso's (2005) model and other culturally relevant theories which

focus on unique strengths and avoid the deficit perspective. While JJ is only one person, the insights he provided to this analysis contribute to the argument that postsecondary institutions must recognize previously incarcerated persons as not only a group to be supported, but also as students who possess unique and valuable skills which benefit the campus community.

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Deans of Students: Historical Perspectives and Insights at Small Liberal Arts Colleges

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Abstract

The Dean of Students is a role with deep historical significance and holds a unique place in the administrative structure of higher education. Over the last century the role has evolved and changed to meet the needs of students and it continues to change in the 21st century. At small colleges, the Dean of Students is often the Vice President of Student Affairs, a combined role requiring a multi-faceted set of professional skills. This literature review explores the history of the role as well as considerations for professional practice at small, liberal arts colleges. It is important to note that significant research on this topic has not been conducted for over a decade. The author of this review has conducted multiple studies on Deans of Students including an updated exploration of the role and professional practice. Given the large number of such positions across the country, and the limited staffing that many of them have, it is important to understand the nature of the role so that preparation and professional development opportunities can be better shaped to provide needed support.

Keywords: small liberal arts colleges, Dean of Students, professional practice

The position of Dean of Students has a long history on college campuses and has changed in function over many decades (Barnes, 1963; Hecklinger, 1972; Pierson, 1973; Swank, 1942). A search of the literature on the role of the Dean of Students in the last decade yields few results. It has been almost ten years since research has been published on the Dean of Students at a liberal arts college (LAC). In 2006, a *New Directions for Student Services* monograph dedicated to *The Small College Dean* grappled with the importance of the small college, the role of the Dean of Students, staffing practices, collaborations with faculty, and future challenges (Westfall, 2006). In this monograph, Sarah Westfall, as the editor, made a strong case for studying the Dean of Students role at small colleges. Using the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) definition of small colleges (under 5,000 enrollment), she pointed out that 77 percent of four-year colleges and universities in the United States were small colleges (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). This means that the

majority of senior student affairs officers are in small colleges. At the same time, many student affairs preparation programs are located at research institutions, offering their students very little exposure to the small college environment. Hirt, Amelink, and Schneiter (2004) examined the nature of student affairs work in a liberal arts college and argued that graduate students, new professionals, and faculty need to better understand what it is like to work in this setting.

The role of the Dean of Students at small colleges is unique in its breadth and scope and requires a multi-faceted set of professional skills (Hirt, 2006; Schwartz, 2010; Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001). Flanagan (2006), considering the future of the role, predicted that challenges would include recruiting and retaining students, creating more welcoming living and learning environments for an increasingly diverse student population, working with increased parental involvement, helping students with learning disabilities and mental health issues, assessing programs, understanding new technology, and addressing institutional competition. Others have added to this list of growing challenges to include dealing with external pressures, managing funding concerns, responding to students' identity development, changing reporting structures, and providing opportunities for non-traditional age students (Tederman, 1997; Tull & Kuk, 2012; Zdziarski, 2009). At small colleges, the Dean of Students may be responsible for addressing all of these challenges, whereas at a larger institution these would likely fall to an array of professionals with specific responsibilities. Anecdotally, a review of recent higher education websites reveals more than a dozen stories where the Dean of Students has struggled in their position. Exhaustion in the position can lead to dissatisfaction, disconnection, physical and mental illness, and occasionally a break with the position altogether. A former small college Dean who chose to leave her position described her role as evolving from one that was challenging but rewarding into one that was professionally impossible (Williams, 2015). Over many years, the role became more about managing threats of litigation, media coverage, and students in crisis. The following sections will examine the role from a more general historic perspective and culminate with insights from the small, liberal arts college context.

Evolution of the Dean of Students: The Early Years

The title *Dean* was first used strictly in the academic context in 1816 at Harvard (Gmelch, Nies, Montez & Wolverton, 2001). Senior faculty members who were established scholars filled this position most often. In addition to continuing in their roles as teachers and researchers, these Deans were to be liaisons to the students and assist them in adjusting to student life. As institutions grew, university Presidents realized the need for more assistance with student life issues and appointed a new type of Dean on campus, the Dean of Students (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011; Thelin, 2004; Schwartz, 2010).

The first Dean of Students was LeBaron Russell Briggs, appointed in 1890 at Harvard. He was the first of what would be fewer than a dozen men called upon

to occupy a new role without specific professional guidelines or structure (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011; Thelin, 2004; Schwartz, 2010). The early Deans of Students followed the *in loco parentis* philosophy in working with male students, providing guidance, discipline, and support. A belief that would persist for decades was that Deans (of Men) were born, not made or trained through graduate education (Schwartz, 2010). This belief stood in sharp contrast to the ways in which Deans of Women conceptualized their role.

Just two years after LeBaron Russell Briggs became the Dean of Students at Harvard, Alice Freeman Palmer became the Dean of Women at the University of Chicago (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 1997). The increasing numbers of women on campus necessitated a Dean of Women to respond specifically to their needs. In a culture that was dominated by men, concerns were raised around women's propriety, health, safety, and virtue. Although these concerns may seem sexist by modern standards, the presence of women on campus created great anxiety among college presidents and senior faculty. Like their male counterparts, the Deans of Women were academics by training and all held faculty rank. The Deans of Women were concerned with building the foundations of professional practice which included establishing graduate study, conducting research on students and college environments, and refining guidance and counseling. The journals, research reports, and books that they wrote adhered to strict scholarly practice and established them as professionals (Caple, 1998; Chafe, 1972).

In 1937 the American Council on Education (ACE) published the *Student Personnel Point of View* (*SPPV*). This document defined the role of student personnel work and attempted to define the whole student and argued the importance of learning beyond the intellectual sphere. In addition, the *SPPV* also defined the areas in which services were needed and so began to define functional areas for student personnel work (Caple, 1998). As the role of the Dean of Students continued to evolve, the *SPPV* assisted them in defining their roles on campus.

Navigating Change: The Dean of Students Post WWII to the 1990s

After World War II, significant changes occurred on college campuses reflective of the changes happening in the larger society. The role of the Dean of Women and Dean of Men changed as well, culminating in a radical shift of student affairs philosophy in the 1960s. In the post-World War II years, when the United States did not have to be focused on wartime work, the values and priorities of pre-war society returned. Women were expected to return to traditional roles of wife and mother, and veterans were given more access to education via the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill (Caple, 1998; Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011; Thelin, 2004). College enrollments of men swelled, and institutions had to adjust to new student types – married, veteran, and international (Rentz & Howard-Hamilton, 2011). The *SPPV* was revised in 1949

to reflect expanded roles for higher education and for student personnel (American Council on Education, 1949). These guiding principles affected student personnel practice and the Dean of Students role. A return to traditional roles for women resulted in declining enrollments and a perceived lack of need for the Dean of Women position (Schwartz, 2010). Meanwhile the Dean of Men role expanded to become the Dean of Students or Dean of Student Personnel, and in 1951 the National Association of the Deans of Men changed its name to National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Schwartz, 1997). For the remainder of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the Dean of Students role would expand to include management of multiple student services to address the expanding student population. Although enrollments for women would increase in the 1970s and 80s, the Dean of Students position remained predominantly male.

The 1960s brought widespread societal change marked by turmoil, confrontation, and civil disobedience. Issues of social justice were paramount, and those marginalized in society fought for rights and representation. College campuses were a center of this activity, and students participated widely in protests and demands for equal rights (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Caple, 1998; Thelin, 2004). The Dean of Students was thrust into navigating a role that was part administrator and part advocate for students. This was not a comfortable place to occupy, and it forever changed the relationship of the students to the administration. Historically, college campuses had acted as de facto parents for students, known as *in loco parentis*. This philosophy no longer worked with students who demanded independence. For some students, who had served in the military or lived independently, it seemed especially inappropriate (Geiger, 2011). By the 1970s the Dean of Students had become an administrator focused on student support services, commuter and married students, health and wellness, and mental health care (Caple, 1998). In addition, in 1974, Congress passed the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974). This legislation provided guidelines around what information institutions that receive federal funding could share and who would have access. Students now had control and increased privacy around their educational records, including grades, transcripts, conduct records, and health care records. The Dean of Student's role continued to change in the 1980s as new concerns mounted around retention and accountability. In this more conservative decade, students began to act as consumers, and institutions began to think about college as a business (Caple, 1998; Geiger, 2011; Thelin, 2004). Deans of Students, who were responsible for writing and enforcing institutional policies, had to grapple with an increasingly complex political and legal landscape.

1990s and Beyond

Drawing from his experiences as Dean of Students at multiple small liberal arts colleges, Tederman (1997) identified a series of institutional challenges he had experienced in each position, as well as suggestions for improvement in each

student affairs functional area on campus. He identified several challenges as most important to the role of the Dean of Students: meeting students' basic needs, helping students with developmental problems, addressing student behavioral problems, dealing with life-endangering situations, managing student demonstrations, and responding to campus tragedies (Tederman, 1997).

Two important contributions to the field of student affairs that offered connections between the work and philosophy of Deans of Students were *Involving Colleges* (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991) and the *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994). *Involving Colleges* acknowledged the critical role of student affairs in stimulating student involvement in learning and summarized research documenting the positive impact of the out-of-class experience on student involvement in learning. The *Student Learning Imperative* took this a step further by formally identifying student learning as a mission of student affairs. This represented a critical shift in philosophy for many student affairs professionals, centering responsibility on student learning as part of their work. This would drive a new focus for student affairs on assessment, collaboration with faculty, and the creation of mission statements that reflected student learning and development as central goals (Kuh et al., 1991; Upcraft, & Schuh, 1996).

In the 21st century, the role of the Dean of Students continues to evolve and is intensely focused on student needs, campus needs, and pressures from outside constituencies. Although there is a dearth of literature on current role expectations, a few authors have illuminated pressing challenges. These include finding new sources of funding, maintaining adequate staffing, responding to students' identity development, revising reporting structures, navigating parental involvement, helping students with learning disabilities and mental health issues, and conducting assessment (Hirt, 2006; Oblander, 2006; Tederman, 1997; Tull & Kuk, 2012; Zdziarski, 2009). At small colleges, the norm is tightening fiscal resources leading to a culture that is collaborative and accustomed to condensing programs and combining responsibilities (Tull & Kuk, 2012).

The Dean of Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

The private liberal arts college is the oldest institutional type in U. S. higher education and currently represents 13% of colleges in the United States, around 575 schools (Carnegie Classification, 2019). Many of these institutions enroll fewer than 2,500 students. In addition, these institutions have a similar shared set of values, including a focus on the individual student, direct interaction between students and faculty, and faculty who focus on teaching a traditional curriculum (Hirt, 2006). Students can expect to have personal contact with faculty and administration and forge lasting relationships with their peers.   The campus culture is highly relational and interdependent. LACs are recognized as producing "life-long learners," students who value education and often go on to pursue graduate degrees. In fact, six out of 10 students pursuing a Ph.D. are LAC

graduates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). LACs are often places where faculty and administration develop close relationships with students and each other. The culture is closely tied to the mission of the institution and is typically centered on student learning (Colwell, 2006). This is supported by the fact that on average, teachers at liberal arts colleges spend more than 65% of their time teaching (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). The nature of work at a LAC is collaborative, partly as a function of tradition and partly due to fiscal limitations (Hirt, 2006).

The Dean of Students at a LAC serves an important function, providing leadership and managing a variety of areas (Bass, 2006). Possibly the most generalist position on campus, the Dean of Students often supervises the majority of student services including residence life, campus life, student conduct, career services, health services, Greek affairs, multicultural affairs, first-year experience, recreation, and disability services (Hirt, 2006; Tederman, 1997; Westfall, 2006). Discussing the portfolio of Deans of Students at small colleges, Heida (2006) described the role as influenced by the institutional mission, history, resources, strategic plans, and presidential preferences. Although the role has changed over time, the need for highly skilled and flexible individuals has not.

Moving beyond mere descriptions of the role of the Dean, very little published research exists on the experience or nature of the role at LACs. In a 2004 study on the nature of student affairs work at in this setting, the researchers used paired word selection as a way for student affairs administrators at LACS to describe their work (Hirt, Amelink, & Schneiter, 2004). From their choices, such as "collaborative or competitive," themes were drawn. Although this study did not focus specifically on the role of Dean of Students, the results offer insight into the nature of the work at these colleges. In the study, three themes emerged around the manner in which work is conducted, the work environment, and work habits in relation to students. Administrators reported that their work was conducted in a collaborative fashion, was challenging in a positive way, and balanced with support and recognition. In addition, the work environment revealed that they hold multiple responsibilities, find it difficult to say no to professional requests for their time, and conduct their work in a highly professional manner. Finally, they described their work habits as student-centered, practical, and service-oriented.

Conclusion

The literature provides a rich history of the Dean of Students position, the nature of the small liberal arts college, and past challenges Deans of Students have faced. If history is a good predictor, and current events a barometer, then it is clear that today's Dean of Students faces myriad challenges. Student affairs professionals continue to be educated in graduate programs at large research institutions where they may not have the opportunity to experience or understand the small liberal arts college environment. In order to provide better education to aspiring or future

Deans of Students, as well as appropriate institutional supports, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what the role involves.

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Graduate Student Mental Health: Examining an Overlooked Concern

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Abstract

The mental health of graduate students represents a critical issue for student affairs practitioners. National data demonstrates increasingly poor mental health outcomes for graduate students across many disciplines, particularly for students from marginalized populations. This review of the literature uses a holistic student development framework to articulate the need for student affairs practitioners to become more involved in supporting the positive mental health of graduate students. Recent trends in graduate student mental health are discussed, highlighting voids in the literature related to the mental health of Students of Color, LGBTQ students, and women students, among others. Potential correlates of negative and positive mental health are explored, focusing on areas where student affairs practitioners may provide interventions and support to promote graduate student mental health. Recommendations for future practice are presented. These include a graduate department's initiative to create a positive climate for mental health, a graduate life center, and a student-parent resource center that responds to the needs of graduate student parents.

Keywords: graduate students, mental health, holistic student development

Graduate student mental health (GSMH) represents a critical issue for institutions of higher education and student affairs practitioners (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018). For the past two decades, public and scholarly attention persistently focused on the mental health crisis among undergraduate students. Many undergraduate students facing mental health challenges transition into graduate studies, yet until very recently, practitioners and researchers neglected to adequately address the needs of the graduate student population. Emerging data demonstrate that scholars and practitioners can no longer overlook GSMH (Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017). They must understand the factors in graduate school that affect mental health and

recognize the role of the student affairs educator in promoting the positive mental health of an increasingly diverse population of graduate students.

This literature review discusses emerging trends revealing negative outcomes in graduate students' mental health. Despite the understudied nature of this issue, we demonstrate that nascent research reveals clues as to the potential correlates of the mental health challenges that graduate students experience. We employ a holistic student development perspective (Torres, DeSawal, & Hernandez, 2012) to contextualize the literature review and apply this perspective to the critical issue of addressing GSMH concerns. Using the holistic student development lens, we provide recommendations for student affairs educators to address the challenges faced by graduate students by examining several promising practices at institutions across the United States.

Importance of Graduate Student Mental Health to Higher Education and Student Affairs

Graduate student mental health remains understudied; nonetheless, this issue requires careful attention. Aside from the moral obligation for educators to care for students (Keeling, 2014; 2020), from a functionalist perspective, graduate students advance the research and teaching missions of universities (Bettinger, Long, & Taylor, 2014; Levecque et al., 2017). To participate in research and teaching effectively, they must maintain positive mental health. The impacts of poor mental health among graduate students—including depression, anxiety, and chronic stress—can lead to lower productivity levels, lower academic performance, increased likelihood of dropping out, low levels of satisfaction, and negative impacts on their personal lives (Levecque et al., 2017; Mackie & Bates, 2018; Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013).

Student affairs educators and administrators may unintentionally overlook the needs of graduate students due to their focus on the needs of undergraduate students (Pontius & Harper, 2006). Extensive literature exists around supporting undergraduate college students, including a call for increased attention and resources allocated to mental health issues (Liu, Stevens, Wong, Yasui, & Chen, 2019). Scholarly literature examining GSMH and the role of student affairs educators in addressing these concerns remains relatively scarce (Evans et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017). Exacerbating these challenges, mental health remains stigmatized in academia and perceptions remain that graduate students "have it all figured out"—and perhaps do not require mental health support. Student affairs educators, however, hold a responsibility to respond to the various components of the student experience, including the demands of graduate school.

Based on the foundational frameworks of the student affairs profession, higher education professionals and student affairs practitioners need to pay attention to the *whole* student, including physical, emotional/psychological, and intellectual health (Patton, Renn, Guido, Quaye, Evans, & Forney, 2016; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2011). This support around psychological well-being includes recognizing the

increasing prevalence of mental health issues among students, including marginalized student populations such as Students of Color (Lipson, Kern, Eisenberg, & Breland-Noble, 2018). Similar to the pioneering student affairs educators of the early 1900s, educators of this century ought to strive to find ways to support students' well-being inside and outside the classroom (Evans & Reason, 2001).

The foundational student affairs philosophical documents (e.g. *The Student Personnel Point of View,* 1937; *A Return to the Academy,* 1972; *A Perspective on Student Affairs*, 1987) articulate the necessity of a holistic perspective, which is critical to student development and learning (Evans & Reason, 2001; Torres et al., 2012). These documents emphasize that the notion of the *whole student* remains central to every educational endeavor. Acknowledging the whole student includes considering "students' intellectual capacity, achievement, emotional make-up, physical condition, social relationships, vocational aptitudes and skills, moral and religious values, and economic resources" (Torres et al., 2012, p. 1). Graduate students may have already achieved developmental and academic milestones during their undergraduate careers, yet many of them balance multiple work-life demands, including managing relationships with partners, children, elderly family members, and employers. Focusing intentionally, therefore, on GSMH appears necessary to create healthier conditions, in which graduate students from diverse populations and disciplines can thrive.

Trends in Graduate Student Mental Health

The mental health needs of graduate students differ from those of undergraduate students. While graduate students may be less likely than undergraduate students to experience a variety of mental health challenges and mental illness—including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Lipson, Zhou, Wagner III, Beck, & Eisenberg, 2016)—they report significantly higher rates of stress than undergraduate students (Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013). Graduate students also report that mental health issues, particularly depression, negatively affect or disrupt their progress toward completion of a thesis or dissertation (Wyatt & Oswalt, 2013).

National survey data from the American College Health Association (ACHA) demonstrate the prevalence of mental health issues and mental illness among graduate students. In the spring of 2019, 23.9% of graduate students reported that stress had impacted their academics (ACHA, 2019). In that same survey, approximately 41% of graduate students had felt so depressed it was difficult to function at some point within the past twelve months. Approximately 63% of students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety within the past twelve months and over 58% reported feeling very lonely (ACHA, 2019).

These trends represent the general population of graduate students. Unfortunately, a major gap in the literature exists regarding disparate mental health outcomes among marginalized student populations. Among undergraduate students,

marginalized populations experience more mental health challenges and mental illnesses than their peers, and the limited data about graduate students parallels these concerns (Evans et al., 2018; Lipson et al., 2018; Woodford et al., 2018). Evans et al. (2018) found that transgender and gender-nonconforming graduate students experience higher rates of anxiety and depression than their peers. Women graduate students also experience higher rates of anxiety and depression than their men peers and report lower levels of well-being (Hargreaves, De Wilde, Juniper, & Walsh, 2017). Undergraduate Students of Color and Indigenous students experience higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation and attempts than their White peers (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013); additional knowledge about graduate Students of Color remains scarce. Further research is needed to better understand the rates of mental health challenges and mental illness among diverse and marginalized graduate student populations.

Students in different academic disciplines experience different mental health issues, and the correlates of those issues tend to vary by discipline (Lipson et al., 2016). For example, graduate students in the humanities and art and design are more likely to experience mental health challenges (Lipson et al., 2016). Researchers must continue to explore the experiences of students with diverse backgrounds, across a variety of disciplines to better understand how to support the unique challenges they face in their fields.

Factors Influencing Graduate Student Mental Health

As previously mentioned, relatively little research exists that explores the mental health of graduate students. Graduate students, like undergraduate students, enroll in a wide variety of program and degree types. They also embody a spectrum of enrollment commitments from part time to full time students, some of them while simultaneously balancing careers and families (e.g., child and elder care). According to Mackie and Bates (2019), practitioners often assume that strategies for supporting undergraduate student mental health will work well for graduate students. Yet, this assumption ignores the possibility that challenges to mental health in graduate school may differ greatly from the challenges of an undergraduate degree program.

The most common factor discussed in relation to GSMH focuses on the supervisory or advisory relationship (Levecque et al., 2017; Mackie & Bates, 2019). Graduate students' academic and research demands may also conflict with their personal and family lives, contributing negatively to mental health. Women graduate students, in particular, encounter messaging throughout the academy that "serious scholars" do not have children (Abetz, 2019, p. 81). Mother-scholars may therefore feel compelled to hide their motherhood status, which leads to stress (Kaler, Fulton, Vang, & Stebleton, in press). Career development and related concerns—particularly uncertainties about securing tenure-track jobs in academia—also contribute to negative mental health of graduate students (Woolston, 2019). Finally, financial concerns, particularly related to funding for

their education, present another challenge to graduate student mental health (Levecque et al., 2017). For example, doctoral students employed through project funding or whose funding source is unknown experience higher levels of psychological distress than doctoral students with secure, non-project-based funding (Levecque et al., 2017).

Implications and Recommendations

The priorities and missions of institutions of higher learning have shifted, often significantly, in previous years (Ostenson, Clegg, & Wiggins, 2017). Currently, many educators in the academy emphasize measurable student learning outcomes and job prospects after graduation for both undergraduate and graduate students. Higher education institutions in general follow larger societal trends toward increased industrialization and bureaucracy. Ostenson et al. (2017) argued that this industrialization of the academy has eroded interpersonal care. While learning outcome measurement and career placement remain important objectives, we contend that a greater emphasis must return to students' emotional and psychological needs, relationships, and overall well-being—and student affairs professionals hold important responsibilities in this regard.

Keeling (2014) argued that higher education professionals need to develop an *ethic of care* towards their students, which includes "paying attention; noticing with empathy others and their circumstances" (p. 143). Moreover, an ethic of care includes *responding* when needed. Not all student affairs professionals are trained therapists, nor should they expect to be. Instead, educators should commit to developing a strong ethic of care towards their students and build a community of care as an institution. Keeling writes: "An ethic of care...is central to responsive, empathic relationships and to the functioning of most human communities" (p. 143). These acts of caring and responding will support students who have mental health challenges.

Promising Practices: Models for Student Affairs

The literature review lends itself to ideas for promising practices that can better support graduate students. Ultimately, student affairs administrators and educators should commit to making mental health prevention efforts an institutional priority. Strange (2001) contended that programs should foster "networks of belonging" for graduate students, where they feel a sense of connection and meaning (p. 60-61). Other scholars frame this objective as fostering inclusion and developing environments for student success (Duranczyk et al, 2015). Creating this sense of meaning and holism can be challenging in graduate school, especially when the emphasis tends to be on hyper-specialization and competition (often between students) within a discipline. Strange (2001) argued that "at the graduate level the authentic, holistic, educational experience may be most in jeopardy" (p. 60). Strange asked: "How can a broader view be restored, and how might faculty, department administrators, and graduate students

contribute to its restoration?" (p. 60). We include several examples of programs that aim to address this question.

Various existing programs can serve as models for supporting graduate students around mental health issues. Administrators, educators, and practitioners need to commit to building a community of care for all students, including graduate students who are often ignored or undermined. For example, the graduate program in Chemistry at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities intentionally incorporates support structures and opportunities for students to openly discuss issues related to mental health (Mousavi et al., 2018). Faculty and staff in the Department of Chemistry work directly with students and mental health providers on campus to make students more aware of resources on campus and create programs to promote positive mental health. Building on the concepts of student involvement and empowerment, the department supports a student-led group as well as other collaborations. Outcomes seem to suggest that efforts positively influence students and provide a sense of collegiality in the department for students and faculty (Mousavi et al., 2018).

Some institutions have implemented specific services and even physical spaces designated to address the needs and issues of graduate students. Virginia Tech created a Graduate Life Center (GLC) to respond to the needs of graduate students. The GLC sponsors programs on mental health and awareness as well as support services for scholar-parents. Other initiatives include walk-in advising, career development services, housing needs, ombudsman services, and support for immigrant students (Graduate Life Center, 2019). This portfolio of student affairs services serves as a model for other institutions that aim to address graduate students' needs and concerns.

Additionally, many graduate students are parents and balance the ongoing demands of school, family, and finances. Many institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offer centers that provide resources for student-parents—including resources related to childcare and financial assistance. As Kaler et al. (in press) noted, many mothers (and fathers) face additional challenges of managing expectations and contextual barriers during their time as graduate students on campus, creating additional demands on managing their mental health. Faculty members, advisors, administrators, and student affairs professionals can create spaces, practices, and policies that support the mental health concerns of scholar-parents in higher education.

A Call for Student Affairs Educators

This literature review contributes to a developing conversation about how to better support students in graduate programs. Graduate students face unique issues and concerns that are often different from undergraduate students. Yet, financial resources tend to be placed primarily towards undergraduate mental health initiatives, including prevention programs. We contend that shifts need to occur, starting with an intentional reallocation of attention and resources towards

graduate students. Although we agree that the mental health needs of undergraduates remain a priority, these efforts should not come at the expense of paying attention to the mental health concerns of graduate students. Furthermore, efforts to de-stigmatize and legitimize mental health issues in the upper echelons of the academy must occur.

More discussions need to occur regularly across college campuses if we are to successfully address the increasing prevalence of mental health challenges faced by graduate students. Leadership needs to originate from the top with key student affairs administrators making mental health initiatives for graduate students a priority on campus. Moreover, student affairs practitioners need to re-embrace the historical tenets and mission of the profession (e.g., a focus on holistic student development), and take intentional and deliberate steps to support graduate students and their mental health needs. Building a community of care remains a priority—and student affairs practitioners and educators are poised and prepared to take the lead moving forward.

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"I Came Here to Heal": Narratives of Graduate Theology Students' Spiritual Identities

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Abstract

Spirituality addresses how inner lives inform individuals' sense of self and their relation to the world. Little research has been conducted on the ways in which graduate divinity students experience their spiritual identity formation. To that end, this constructivist narrative case study expands the existing scholarly literature on spiritual development to explore how graduate theology students make meaning of their spiritual identity development and how their graduate theological preparation informs their sense of spiritual development. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis, then analyzed using McAdams's (2008) work on personal narratives and life stories. Three women students who were enrolled in one Master of Divinity program at one institution in the Western United States shared their narratives as part of this study. Emergent themes, or meta-narratives, include integrating early life religious beliefs and challenging life experiences into current spiritual understandings, a desire to heal during the process of study through deep spiritual engagement, and the impact of contemplative practice on spiritual understanding.

Keywords: spirituality, theology graduate students, narrative inquiry, student development

Spirituality as a phenomenon addresses how individuals' inner lives – their consciousness - impact their sense of self and how they interface with the world. Spirituality is about contextualizing values, how individuals make meaning of lived experiences, and what they believe about their connection to the world by answering questions such as "why are we here?" and "what is my purpose?" It also speaks to the ways in which we address the mysterious, the unknown and the unknowable (Astin, 2004). Spiritual identity development – how humans develop a sense of spirituality and how that becomes part of our identity – and the processes that foster it have received substantial attention in the scholarly community (Poll & Smith, 2003), particularly in the fields of religion, student development, and psychology.

Part of this body of literature addresses the intersection of spiritual identity with other facets of lived identity, such as LGBT identities (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), race (Patton & McClure, 2009; Sanchez & Carter, 2005; Watt, 2003), and gender (Soet & Martin, 2007). Some literature speaks to the ways in which institutions of higher education impact students' spiritual identity development (Astin & Keen, 2006; Bowman & Small, 2010; Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Hartley, 2004), as well as the spiritual identity process of graduate counseling students (Klepper, 2011). However, there appears to be minimal literature pertaining to the lives of graduate theology students (e.g. those pursuing Master of Divinity or Master of Theological Studies degrees). What literature does exist on this particular student population seems to focus on other aspects of their lives, specifically clergy education and vocational discernment (Dahill, Golemon, & Tolentino, 2006) or epistemology (Kaartinen-Koutaniemi & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008). Additionally, much of the literature on spiritual identity development used quantitative survey research methods.

This study sought to address this dearth of scholarly literature by sharing the inner lives of graduate theology students. The purpose of this study was to explore the spiritual identity development of graduate theology students. Specifically, I answer these research questions: (1) how do graduate theology students make meaning of their spiritual identity development? and (2) how does their graduate theological preparation inform their sense of spiritual identity? In answering these questions, this study shares a deeper, more nuanced understanding of spiritual identity and informs the ways that practitioners can support graduate theology students in cultivating their spiritual identities.

Literature Review

There is substantial interest among incoming college students in spirituality and involvement with campus spiritual organizations. In a national study of college students, a majority of students expressed "having an interest in spirituality," "believing in the sacredness of life," and "spirituality [as] a source of joy" (Higher Education Research Institute, 2003, p. 4). However, there is no singular definition of spirituality, which makes the subject challenging to research. Often, spirituality is understood in connection to religion (Friedman, Krippner, Riebel, & Johnson, 2010). However, religiosity is associated with ritual and requirement while spirituality is "an inner process of connectedness with the sacred" (Friedman et al., 2010, p. 80). Lindholm, Goldberg, and Calderone (2006) asserted that while the college years are pivotal for the development of cognitive and social skills, spiritual dimensions of students' lives are often left unaddressed. Spiritual development is often ignored as a factor of student identity and development, which seems to fall short of the holistic aims of the student development profession (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004).

Crisis and Suffering in Spiritual Development

Various researchers have explored spiritual development. Friedman et al. (2010) discussed barriers to spiritual development, such as the "microsocial (as in conformity pressures from other individuals), macrosocial (as in pressures from collective structures such as laws), or individual, as in character flaws" (p. 89). Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), in their respective works on faith development, recognized the importance of challenge and suffering to spiritual development. Decker (1993) discussed the role of trauma in spiritual development. Using alchemy as a metaphor, he asserted that human beings must undergo a breaking down of their personal barriers in order to re-form spiritually. Trauma serves as the catalyst for this change, and results in increased search for more meaningful perspective on existence as well as expansion of notions of existence (Decker, 1993). This notion of trauma could be generalized to major life events that propel or hinder spiritual identity development and may be important to note as students are sharing their spiritual identity narratives.

Spirituality and Spiritual Questing

Lindholm et al. (2006) explored the spirituality of students who aspired to careers in professional fields, such as law or medicine. The authors defined spiritual quest as the means by which individuals tackle transcendent questions of self and of others through intentional existential questioning, religious doubt, and being presented with and engaging in opportunities for change. Spiritual questing is "an active disposition toward existential engagement that includes openness to tackling the perplexing issues that many individuals face when trying to find themselves in the world" (Lindholm et al., 2006, p. 512). This sense of openness to addressing existential questions seems paramount, not just to the spiritual quest but also to how higher education institutions support students in developing that openness. The Higher Education Research Institute's (2003) report on the spiritual lives of college students (*Spirituality in Higher Education*) found that many students who are enmeshed in spiritual quests are more readily able to make meaning out of hardship. Attending divinity school can be seen as a form of spiritual questing, and thus may allow students to engage in meaning-making processes around the hardships experienced in their lives so they can serve in their professional roles those experiencing hardship.

Research Design

Methodology

Narrative inquiry uses both story and storytelling to better understand a phenomenon. Acknowledging that human beings live storied lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), I have chosen narrative inquiry to explore the spiritual lives of graduate theology students. This selection was, in part, due to my own interest in the stories that we all carry that inform how we see and interact with the world.

Additionally, I am curious how the stories we construct about our lives inform how we make meaning of our spiritual identities. It seemed only natural to select narrative inquiry for this analysis. Furthermore, this study is bounded by time, space, and context. I selected participants from one theological program who were all enrolled as students or recently graduated at the time of this study. Thus, this narrative study can also be described as a case study (Merriam, 1998).

This study used a constructivist approach. In constructivism, knowledge is created in the interaction between the researcher and the researched (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach seeks to understand the complexity of lived experience rather than attempt to create a generalizable truth. Individuals make subjective meaning of their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), so the dialogue between the researcher and participant in a constructivist study helps to illuminate and clarify the nature of the phenomenon. Meaning-making occurs in the interplay of the participants' narrative sharing and my own.

Theoretical Framework

While many approaches to narrative research exist, the theoretical perspective that seemed most relevant to this endeavor was McAdams's (2008) work on personal narratives and life story. He posited that the stories we tell about ourselves are a way that we make meaning of lived experience while also trying to "reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, social class, and culture writ large" (McAdams, 2008, pp. 242-243). In this way, we make meaning of how we experience ourselves against what society aspires for us, and we create a narrative identity in the telling of that story. This framework also accounts for the impact that culture, family, and other external factors have on our sense of self and how we construct our narratives to respond to others' sense of who we are.

Data Collection

I recruited participants from one graduate theology program in the Western United States. This program was situated in a small, private institution that grants both bachelor's and master's degrees. While the sole focus of this institution is not theology, the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) program has long been a fixture of the institution. Using convenience sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I selected a gatekeeper, the chair of the academic program that houses the M.Div. degree with whom I had an existing professional relationship, who helped identify participants. Each of the participants was asked to submit a written text which captured some of their reflections on the divinity program, such as an admissions essay, class assignment, or personal reflective writing prior to participating in the interview. Each participant engaged in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview, which was partially informed by the writing sample provided. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. During the interview, participants responded to a

series of questions, including: What does spirituality mean to you? How has that changed over your life? Tell me a story about your experiences with spirituality during your graduate program. How does spirituality impact your life as a graduate theology student? Participants were encouraged to tell stories and engage with me in conversation. This narrative interviewing strategy allowed the participants to share personal anecdotes about their experiences that were more fruitful than simply defining terms or engaging in call-and-response (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Participants also self-identified pseudonyms for use in the study.

The treatment of data as narratives and narratives as data is a central theme of narrative inquiry (Priest, Roberts, & Woods, 2002). I used descriptive narrative analysis, the goal of which is to describe the lived experiences of participants (Polkinghorne, 1988). During analysis, I sought to understand how the narratives follow a narrative form, with identified plots and subplots (comprising a beginning, middle, and end) becoming salient themes for analysis (Priest et al., 2002). Both data in a clear narrative form and data which were less structured were used in analysis to account for different approaches to storytelling. Subplots were identified within the transcripts, following the generally accepted form of a story (exposition, complicating action, climax, resolution, and coda). The subplots of each participant's narrative were entered into a spreadsheet side-by-side, which allowed me to analyze the individual story elements with more ease. Similar themes began emerging from these subplots, which became the results of this study. Trustworthiness criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used to ensure the quality of the study.

Participants

Three women participated in this study. Dorthy is a late-20s, White woman in her second year of graduate study, having switched from a religious studies program her first year to the divinity track her second year. She identifies as Buddhist. A very literal child, Dorthy had a difficult time relating to the spiritual aspects of the church she attended. She also experienced violence during her upbringing which led her to choose nonviolence as a path for her life. Prior to coming to divinity school, Dorthy was a case worker at a domestic violence program.

Dena is a mid-20s, White woman who recently completed the divinity program. She identifies as a BuJew, or Buddhist-Jew, who is learning what it might mean to integrate many different spiritual understandings into her life. She grew up in a secular Jewish home that felt more like a cultural experience than a religious or spiritual one. Prior to coming to divinity school, Dena was trying to make it in the art world of New York City before "hitting a brick wall" that catapulted her into exploring spiritual teachings.

Rebecca is a late-30s, Black and Italian woman who is in her fourth and final year of her divinity program. She identifies as a multiple religious belonger (MRB),

combining Buddhism and Christianity as her theological framework. While she has always had a deeply spiritual and religious outlook, she grew up in a Christian church that led her to rebel. She then experienced a period of spiritual depression. Prior to coming to divinity school, Rebecca was a bartender who always felt her bartending was a form of chaplaincy.

Findings

Participants delved into very personal stories of suffering and overcoming obstacles which led them to their pursuit of a divinity degree. Among these stories, there emerged three poignant themes, or meta-narratives. These themes include (1) the integration of early experiences and beliefs into current spiritual understandings and identity, (2) the desire to heal as a part of the divinity program, and (3) the importance of contemplative practice in deepening spiritual understanding.

Integration of Early Experiences into Present Understanding

Dorthy, Dena, and Rebecca each have profound histories that have informed where they are at in their life stories at the present. Their stories, while different, shared common elements, including that the spiritual understanding of their childhood was not the spiritual understanding that they hold today, and yet their present is deeply informed by their past. Though each started on a very different path, the theology program afforded them a container in which to integrate their life experiences into their current spiritual and religious identities.

Each spoke to a crisis point that escalated their decision to attend divinity school. They also stated that once they arrived at divinity school, they were able to make meaning of their past and integrate it into their present experience. In a course assignment, Rebecca reflected on the passing of her father, where she made connections to loving-kindness practice. She described the pain she experienced as a three-year-old grieving the loss of her father in a letter to her father, specifically integrating that into her exploration of her Buddhist identity:

> Years later the anger in me began to fester. In retrospect I see how restricted and conflicted that I was. I was mad that you had left me behind to cheer up my mother and the rest of the family . . . . And the more that I look at [the Buddha family] colors the more that they are asking me to forgive you. They are asking me to forgive my anger, my pride, my judgment, my pity, my passions, my manipulations, my avoidance, my vengeance, and my need to be right. As I forgive these parts of me, I can't help but to forgive you, they arise simultaneously together.

This exploration took place as part of a course assignment, and it was evident that the particular container of the assignment and the program allowed Rebecca to integrate her pain and anger in a way that was both informed by and informed her contemplative practice. Rebecca also noted that the program allowed her to

integrate her previous Christian identity into an unfolding Buddhist identity, leaving space for her to integrate both worldviews into her current spiritual sense of self.

For Dorthy, her divinity school experience was more about becoming embodied as a result of both her contemplative practice and how the contemplative ethos of her graduate program has allowed her to integrate her learning with her previous life experiences. She described entering the program distrusting of authority and disappointed in her previous academic experiences. She credited the mentorship of the faculty in the program with her ability to work through those issues to come to a more grounded sense of self. Dena noted that her spirituality and sense of self had been shaped by her current program and those who teach in it. She said that the fact that her faculty are dedicated practitioners modeled for her a way to live that was grounded in practice. She found space to integrate her Jewish upbringing into her current Buddhist practice, particularly under the mentorship of a faculty member who focuses on contemplative approaches to Judaism, similar to Rebecca's experience. It is evident that faculty play a role in helping students make meaning of their previous life experiences and religious identities and integrating those experiences into current spiritual understandings.

Finding Healing in the Program

Across all three stories, participants shared a desire to find healing as part of the divinity program. Each participant had experienced some sort of adversity in their past. Dorthy discussed how her family history of violence led her down a path to nonviolent activism. However, she felt overwhelmed by the volume of issues present in the world and a great deal of anger as a result. Eventually, she came across a documentary about Tibet that prompted her to explore Buddhism and to connect her nonviolent approach to this religious tradition. She felt an expansion of the spirit in that exploration. While she originally came to graduate study wishing to be a Tibetan translator, she soon realized, after spending time as a domestic violence case worker, that her need to heal herself and her desire to be of service was taking her in another direction:

> And there was a lot of crisis in my family, and in my own life, and I was just, like, wanting to give myself to Buddhism. And in the course of the first semester, I realized that the divinity track was perfect for my healing process and to re-establish a relationship with my kind of activist tendencies and my tendencies to want to be in social work, and it has provided me a very constructive and healthy and clear way to relate to others that's a lot healthier than what I was doing before.

Dorthy's story, and her desire to find a healing space in the divinity program, allowed her to not only begin her healing process but to integrate her previous activism into her current field of study. She felt that her career change into theology helped her to find balance and become a healthier individual.

Dorthy's experience is not that dissimilar from Dena's desire to heal through her studies. She had been living in New York City and trying to make it in the art world when she found herself feeling like she was losing her sense of self and her own mind and she began exploring the healing arts. First, she thought she wanted to study acupuncture, and visited an acupuncture school in the same town as the theology program. Since she had an undergraduate professor who had taught at the divinity school, she decided to visit, eventually enrolling in the religious studies master's program before, like Dorthy, changing programs to divinity. While she acknowledged that the divinity program was nurturing, Dena's deep healing happened as a result of her thesis:

> Yeah, the thesis was really healing for me, to just have that much time to devote to thinking about what I had gone through and to make more, make meaning of it . . . . But a lot of people I've talked to, it's been a rite of passage to write the thesis, and it's normally so much harder than it needs to be. Like it's just a forty-page paper and it, like, it was really, really hard for me, because for me it was the culmination of everything I had been through [during] graduate school, and it represented like this gateway into a new chapter.

This rite of passage helped her integrate her own spiritual emergency prior to enrollment into a thesis project designed to help others experiencing spiritual emergencies.

Rebecca's dad passed away when she was young, and this experience, paired with challenging experiences with Christianity as a young person, prompted her to move away from religion and rebel. She sought out spiritual understandings by accompanying a boyfriend to Spain to study Islam and tried various metaphysical practices which she felt were disorienting. She began to feel lost in her journey, describing a sense of "spiritual homelessness." After she returned from Spain, she began bartending, which felt to her like counseling and chaplaincy. So, she decided to explore graduate programs in counseling, but eventually found this theology program:

> I felt like counseling was great, and it could help with like the day-to-day, symptomatic things, but I was really feeling like a whole crisis of faith. Like, I felt like if I got in line with my spiritual side, that would take care of everything, like I could kind of do it in one fell swoop. So I ended up applying, and coming here, and then furthering my studies got deep into the Buddhist practice here, and really fell in love with it, and really felt like that's what I was waiting for and that was what really, really made the most sense to me.

For Rebecca, the answer to her sense of disintegrated spirituality was to study divinity, which simultaneously gave her permission to explore ways to integrate Buddhism and Christianity and also met her desire for vocational fulfillment. She shared that the deepening of these identities, eventually finding herself to be a

multiple religious belonger, was fueled not just by the program itself, but by her deepening sense of practice.

Importance of Contemplative Practice

The particular program in which these three participants enrolled focuses on contemplative practices, loosely defined as approaches to develop insight, awareness, and compassion through focused reflection (Haynes, 2005). Each of the participants spoke to the practice aspect as integral to their spiritual development, both in and out of the classroom. Though the practices varied, including yoga, meditation, and prayer, the experience of engaging in contemplative practice throughout the divinity program seemed to be a common source of spiritual enrichment for the participants.

Dena spoke about how her own spirituality moved from the extraordinary to the ordinary, partially informed by practice:

> I really appreciated this view of integrating life with spirituality because it usually didn't feel disjointed to have a ton of homework and to have my spiritual practice, you know? . . . . Like I more had the view of, I can use this work as fuel and, like, this can be my practice tonight, is writing this paper. I don't know if I would've thought that way if I wasn't in this environment, I think it could feel more disjointed if I were studying something else, and have a ton of work, and also wanted to be on a spiritual path.

She notes the particular environment of her graduate program impacted how she viewed practice and helped her to feel that each of the elements of her study were part of the spiritual practice. She also discussed how the practice of presence helped her when she was an intern chaplain, trying to stay present when a patient was dying. She noted that while she was "a little freaked out" inside, she was able to stay in the room with her own discomfort and provide support in part because of contemplative practice and in part because of her experience with a process lab course (an experiential course focused on small-group discussion about students' journeys in the program) that allowed her to practice being in community with others in the program.

Dorthy originally used her meditation practice as a way to manage the pain of her rheumatoid arthritis. She noted that she felt more mentally clear and less physical pain when she meditated than she did when she was on her medication. She deepened her practice of meditation as part of her graduate study, which allowed her to feel more embodied:

> I was always stuck in my head, and I remember someone told me that I was severed - my heart and my head were severed - and I acted on one or the other and there was no connection there. And actually practicing meditation has really helped me to feel more whole as a human, and not

> just act from my thoughts or from my heart, but to be able to integrate those things.

This sense of embodiment has allowed her to be more open to and aware of her environment. This allowed her to work through the defensiveness she was carrying with her from her life before the program, as did the fact that her professors are practitioners who model effective Buddhist practice as well. She appreciated this integration of the intellectual learning that was taking place in class and the contemplative aspect that allowed her space to reflect on that learning and integrate it into her being.

Rebecca has a strong Buddhist sitting practice and explores other practices as well that allow her to deepen her spiritual connection. For her, regular practice in the environment of the graduate program has allowed her to find the integration that she was seeking:

> And when I say regular [practice], I mean just I make the time personally to seek things out and do these things. . . . . It's usually *shamatha* sitting practice. And I do that because it just keeps me really in tune with myself and keeps me clear. It's like hygiene, almost, like brushing my teeth. And then the Christian aspect of it, I go to that more in times, I would say, in times of need… And so, perhaps, the sitting practice for me is a way to empty myself and then the Christian practice is a way for me to remember that I can also be filled with love.

This ability to integrate multiple practices as an MRB has had an impact on her ability to navigate challenging situations that arise, such as issues pertaining to campus racism that emerged while she was engaged in her academic program.

Conclusion, Implications, and Future Directions

This study sought to answer the question of how graduate theology students make meaning of their spiritual identities and how their graduate theological preparation informs their sense of spiritual development. While this narrative study wrestled with these questions through the experiences of three participants, more research is needed on these phenomena. The study itself, bound by a specific time, place, and context, and representing only those students to whom I had access, only provides insight into a limited portion of the experience of divinity school and its role in the preparation of spiritually developed practitioners. In particular, further research could address more deliberately the ways in which spiritual questing is engaged through and within divinity programs, and how that quest shapes students' identities beyond the spiritual. Knowing that personal crises shape how and why students may matriculate into Master of Divinity programs may inform professional practice in student affairs. Specifically, there may be a need to create unique support structures for this student population to further foster the integration of past trauma with current spiritual identity in a positive way. Additionally, since there appears to be a positive impact on spiritual development

through participation in a Master of Divinity program, the broader profession of student affairs could engage collaboratively with divinity school colleagues on best practices for spiritual development for those students not enrolled in this type of program.

Clearly, the students in this study have spent substantial time and energy exploring their own spiritual quests and seeking spiritual answers. While they each experienced challenging life circumstances, they rooted their understanding and meaning making of those experiences in spirituality. They understood that their spiritual and personal hardships were catalysts for deepening their own understandings of themselves and they then connected those understandings into their theological study. They integrated their religious and spiritual pasts into their spiritual present, finding new ways to label their identities that seemed authentic to their experiences while possibly having that identity called into question. They also used their own spiritual awareness to connect to others, each desiring to pursue a career in chaplaincy so that they can be of spiritual service to others.

The graduate program itself seemed to have a substantive impact on the spiritual lives of these students. Each spoke to the importance of contemplative practice – a key pedagogical feature of this program – to their spiritual journeys. The graduate program augmented that aspect of their lives by combining academic knowledge with personal insight gained through practice. The graduate program also provided a container in which the participants could heal from their previous personal and spiritual hardships, which was the goal that each participant described as they were discerning what they needed out of graduate study. The students still faced adversities, such as they did when it came to how their social identities interacted with their environment and others around them. However, it was clear that the graduate program had a positive impact on their sense of themselves as spiritual beings. Additional research could explore the specific factors in graduate divinity programs that contribute to positive impacts on spiritual development and those that perhaps inhibit growth.

More broadly, these narratives spoke to interconnection, where personal healing aligned with vocational discernment, and the deeply spiritual met the academically rigorous to create a meaningful, educational experience for these students. As meaning and purpose become central to their lives and they are able to connect that purpose to vocation, they can use that seat of power – spiritual power – to impact the lives of others. As Rebecca observed:

> When [power is] used in a humble way, how much of a difference you can make, and to also give just the opportunity for students to take a deeper, broader look, to be a representative of that "bigger thing" I was talking about… And I think [chaplaincy is] something that's so needed that we're thirsty for it, in a sense, and it's the intersection of everything.

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"I Feel Like It Made a Difference": The Experience of Mentoring

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Abstract

While much research focuses on student outcomes in mentoring relationships, little is known regarding the experiences and motivations of mentors in higher education (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006; Haddock et al., 2013). This descriptive qualitative study examines mentor perspectives in a mentoring leadership program for first-year students. Self-Determination Theory provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the meaning(s) mentors assigned to their experiences and what contributes to mentors' perceived satisfaction and personal growth. Data for this study were collected from 20 mentors via four focus groups. Focus group data were organized into five primary themes that captured mentors' experiences: a) motivations for participating, b) relationship building and connection, c) difficulties and areas to overcome, d) sharing of resources, and e) personal and professional development (i.e., what mentors learned). The data also revealed how serving as a mentor provided opportunities for mentors' personal and professional growth and demonstrated how the work of student affairs influences the larger priorities of the university. This study also helps further understanding of the transformative nature of leadership opportunities for university faculty, staff, and systems.

Keywords: mentoring, higher education, leadership, student affairs

Though many mentoring programs exist that match students with faculty/staff (e.g., at universities like the University of Michigan, Penn State, and Texas Christian University), little is known about the perspectives, experiences, and/or motivations of the *mentor* in mentoring relationships between higher education professionals and college students, or if these mentoring relationships have benefits for mentors. Additional scholarly work on the mentors' perspectives is needed in order to fully understand the efficacy of these programs, especially since collegiate mentoring programs are common and cost time and resources, and because research on mentoring in student affairs has mainly focused on student outcomes (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Salinitri, 2005; Sorrentino, 2007) or the relationships between professionals (Calhoun & Taub, 2014; Davis & Cooper, 2017). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and motivations of higher education professionals serving as formal mentors for first-year students. This study was guided by the following research questions: a) What were the experiences of mentors as they interacted with first-year students? b) How did the mentoring experience affect mentors' professional growth?

Literature Review

While the definition of *mentoring* has been ambiguous (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017), undergraduate mentoring is characterized by the structure and development of a relationship within a supportive program (Crisp et al., 2017; Long, Fish, Kuhn, & Sowders, 2010). Undergraduate student mentoring has been identified as a contributor to student persistence and degree completion (Gershenfeld, 2014; Tinto, 2014) as well as reducing first-year student dropout rates (Satyanarayana, Li, & Braneky, 2014). In 2005, Girves, Zepeda, and Gwathmey cited collegiate mentoring as a national priority, providing evidence of an increased number of formal programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. A positive correlation has been found between having a mentor, sustaining enrollment, and completing a university degree (Hurd, Tan, & Loeb, 2016). Further, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2010) tout "meaningful student-faculty interaction through mentor programs" (p. 211) as a contributing factor to student engagement and success. While research focuses on student outcomes in mentoring relationships, little is known regarding the experiences and motivations of mentors (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006; Haddock et al., 2013).

In 1991, Jacobi examined empirical research spanning from the mid-1970s through 1990 and found definitional, methodological, and theoretical deficiencies in the body of research on mentors' experiences. The same deficiencies were again found by Crisp and Cruz (2009) and Crisp et al. (2017), 26 years after they were first identified by Jacobi (1991). Despite citing lack of information about mentor's experiences, Crisp et al. (2017) found evidence of some advancement in theoretical foundations for mentoring, as well as support that mentoring in higher education promotes civic engagement, social justice, and equity. Taken together,

the body of research reveals (a) conflicting definitions of mentoring, (b) vagueness in purpose and functions of mentoring programs, (c) a lack of empirical and theoretical support linking mentoring and academic success, and (d) methodological concerns that limit outcome interpretations (Crisp et al., 2017; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991).

Additional research has been conducted regarding peer mentoring (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Skipper & Keup, 2017) and faculty mentoring (Anderson & Shore, 2008; Brodeur, Larose, Tarabulsy, & Feng, 2017; Yaffe, Bender, & Sechrest, 2012). The mentoring of underrepresented groups has also received attention (Amaral & Vala, 2009; Hurd et al., 2016; Kervin, McMahon, O'Shea, & Harwood, 2014), as has the impact of mentoring on at-risk youth (de Anda, 2001; Faith, Fiala, Cavell, & Hughes, 2011; Hughes, Boyd, & Dykstra, 2010). Despite increases in mentoring studies, few studies have focused on mentors' perspectives and experiences, and those that have are specific to a particular group or setting (Dobie, Smith, & Robins, 2010; Lunsford, 2011; Shillingstad, McGlamery, Davis, & Gilles, 2015; Varga & Deutsch, 2016;). In 1995, Anderson, Dey, Grey, & Thomas concluded their study on the impact of mentoring undergraduate college students by calling for more attention to the stories behind mentoring, but little has been done on this topic to date. Davis and Jacobsen (2013) examined faculty perspectives in mentoring relationships with students conducting undergraduate research and concluded that mentoring opportunities should be increased and be incentivized for both faculty (mentors) and students (mentees), suggesting a need for further investigation into the mentors' perspectives. It is important to know more about mentor experiences in order to understand how to best recruit competent mentors, help them be satisfied enough in the experience to want to participate in future years, and be more effective in their mentoring role.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) provides a theoretical foundation for examining the role mentoring undergraduate college students plays in motivation and personal growth of both mentor and mentee. SDT is a broad theory that addresses the study of self-organization, personal growth, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory considers how varying contexts and conditions impact motivation, which in turn impacts self-regulation, satisfaction, personal growth, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Additionally, the theory delineates distinct types of motivation, "each of which has specifiable consequences for learning, performance, personal experience, and well-being" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). While SDT describes a range of different types of motivation, intrinsic motivation is the distinct type of motivation considered in this study.

Intrinsic motivation, defined by Ryan and Deci (2000) as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to

explore, and to learn" (p. 70), was examined as a means of informing the research questions of this study. Cognitive evaluation theory (CET), a sub-theory within SDT, examines and seeks to explain what facilitates, accelerates, and impedes intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Ryan and Deci (2017) posit that in order for humans to remain intrinsically motivated, three needs must be met: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness, according to SDT, thus drive individuals to be actively, willingly, and persistently engaged in activities, which facilitates personal growth, satisfaction, and overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT, specifically related to intrinsic motivation, has the potential to provide a theoretical understanding of what meaning mentors assigned to their experiences and what contributed to mentors' perceived satisfaction and personal growth.

Method

In line with the purpose and appropriate application of descriptive qualitative research, the data in this study were collected in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of mentors serving in a mentoring program for first-year students (Creswell, 2014). Descriptions of the program, participants, sampling, data collection, and findings in this study are reported with sufficient detail to provide context, allow a framework for comparison, and facilitate judgments about transferability (Creswell, 2014; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Program Overview

Data were collected from a semester-long mentoring program based at a large, public land-grant institution in the southern plains. Overseen by the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, the mentoring program was designed to a) pair at-risk students with a faculty or staff member who would provide individual support through conversation and resource referral, and b) expose students to campus programs and facilities through special tours and events. Student participants did not meet the institution's assured admission criteria and enrolled at the university through the alternative or holistic admission process. This group of students was identified by university administrators as having a potentially higher attrition rate than the overall first-year student rate. Students who identified as first-generation college students were not included in this mentoring program, as there was a separate program available for first-generation students specifically. Qualifying students (N=230) were sent letters of invitation prior to the start of the fall semester. The Division of Student Affairs and the Faculty Council recruited mentors from among their membership. In total, 78 students (mentees) and 81 faculty and staff (mentors) volunteered to participate in the program; there was no incentive offered for participation beyond the opportunity for students to have a mentor and participate in programs and events. Mentor-mentee matches were paired based on academic majors, hobbies, hometown,

gender, and ethnicity. The program was successful in terms of student retention and grade point average (GPA), with nearly all students who participated in the program returning to campus the following fall and having higher GPAs than a comparison group of their peers who did not participate in the program.

Participants and Data Collection

Mentors in the program represented a variety of academic colleges and administrative departments on campus and included vice-presidents, deans, tenured and early career faculty, seasoned practitioners in student affairs, executive administrators, and entry-level professionals. Mentors also represented a variety of self-reported races and ethnicities, including Asian American, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Native American, and White. All mentors who participated in the program were sent a satisfaction survey at the end of the program. At the end of the survey, mentors were asked to provide their name and contact information if they were willing to participate in a focus group to further provide their perspectives and experiences. In total, 47 mentors (58%) responded to the survey, and 20 (25%) also participated in one of four focus groups. Focus groups were conducted by two of the researchers (a white, female, executive student affairs administrator and a white, female assistant professor) and lasted approximately one hour. Focus group questions centered around mentors' experiences in the program, special moments they remembered from their interactions, and what they learned from their experience as a mentor. Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Focus group participants were 50% female (n=10) and 50% male (n=10) and represented a variety of races and ethnicities.

Analysis

Responses to focus group conversations were analyzed using Saldaña's (2013) and Creswell's (2014) coding guidelines. Specifically, two members of the research team (a white, male, senior student affairs administrator and a white, female, assistant professor) coded each transcript individually, then met to discuss the codes, categories, and themes that emerged; *in vivo* coding was used when possible in order to maintain the participants' own language (Saldaña, 2013). Researchers reflected on concepts associated with SDT (such as relatedness, motivations, satisfaction, and personal growth) during the analysis process. However, findings were not explicitly organized around SDT terms in order to allow for emergent coding and to honor the participants' language and experiences within context. To strengthen trustworthiness and credibility, the other researchers (two white female doctoral students and a white, female, executive student affairs administrator) served as auditors, reading over the initial codes and highlighting areas they perceived needed further discussion, clarification, and/or categorization. All researchers worked together to advance

how the data would be represented, discussed, and interpreted in the final manuscript (Creswell, 2014).

Limitations

It should be noted that this study is qualitative in nature and therefore not generalizable. However, the results of this study may be transferable to other contexts and groups, and the authors took care to provide sufficient context to allow the reader to make a determination regarding transferability. Further, the results of this study pertain to mentors (i.e., higher education professionals) at one university. As such, the researchers and some (but not all) participants knew each other, and some worked together in the same division. Rather than being a detriment, the researchers felt this helped add rapport, both in the recruitment of participants and the focus group conversations, and participants were encouraged to provide open and honest feedback at all times.

Findings

Analysis of the focus group data revealed that mentors' experiences included five primary themes, each with several sub-themes; the themes and subthemes are summarized in Table 1 and in the supporting paragraphs below.

Table 1
Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Motivations for Participating	The ideal of mentoring
	The opportunity to give what mentors wished they'd had as a student
	Help the university Accomplish Goals
	Provide support
Relationship Building and "Connection"	Building "trust"
	Points of connection and "common interest"
	Negotiating preferred communication styles
	Evidence of "connection"
	"Using connections" and networking
Difficulties and Areas to Overcome	Scheduling
	Transparency and "opening up"
Sharing of Resources	General university services
	Physical spaces
	Tips for academic success
	"Leadership" and getting "plugged in"
	"Time management"

Personal and Professional Development (What Mentors Learned)	Learned about the institution
	Learned about the "student experience"
	Developing more "personal" relationships
	"Making a difference"

Note: Quotation marks represent *in vivo* codes.

Motivation

The reasons for mentors' participation helped shape their experiences in the program. Most notably, mentors were driven by the ideal of mentoring itself, the opportunity to give someone else what they themselves had needed, the ability to help the university meet one of its core goals, and the opportunity to support students in a hands-on way.

The ideal of mentoring. Some of the mentors believed in mentoring regardless of the context. As one mentor said, "I am a big supporter of mentoring, always have been…and I wanted to be a part of it." For those mentors, the specifics of the mentoring program didn't matter as much as the opportunity to be a mentor.

The opportunity to give what they wish they'd had. Other mentors identified needs that they had when transitioning to college and viewed this program as an opportunity to meet those needs for others. One mentor noted, "I wanted to do this because I had trouble adjusting to college when I first went…So I figured that experience and having gotten on the other side was something that might be helpful to someone else." Another mentor felt that it was important to be the role model he did not have: "I didn't have any role models in my family to help me to know what to expect, if I had it would have saved me a lot of pain when I got to [college]." It was clear that for some mentors, using their own experiences to help the next generation of students was an important reason for becoming a mentor.

The ability to help the university accomplish its goals. This program was marketed to mentors as a retention initiative, with retention being a major strategic initiative of the university. Some mentors found that the ability to directly help the institution accomplish one of its goals was a driving factor for their participation. One mentor noted, "I felt like what I was doing was contributing to retention at [the institution] and so I personally feel strongly that that's a good thing." A few mentors also noted that they were participating in this mentoring program in part to determine if a similar program should be created in their academic colleges.

Providing support to students. Finally, several mentors were motivated by the opportunity to build relationships with an individual student and provide hands-on support. Additionally, some mentors also saw this as an opportunity to educate themselves about students in order to be better at their day-to-day jobs:

… the biggest reason [I became a mentor was] I just wanted to figure out ways that I could further engage [with students]. Not only support my mentee but also support other students, because the way I see it, what one student is going through is what the majority of students may be going through.

Relationship Building and Connection

Mentors and students had to work to build trust, search for points of connection, and negotiate preferred communication styles. Once the relationships were established, mentors created milestones that provided evidence of the relationship and then broadened the relationships to include other resources from the mentors' own social networks.

Building trust. Mentors and their students first had to work to build trust with each other. As one noted, "It was a big challenge for them to really open up and trust. Really getting them to open up and understand who you are and how you could help them." In these initial meetings, before trust was established, mentors found themselves evaluating the relationship and trying to understand their own role as it aligned to their student. Most mentors agreed that it was around the second meeting when the relationship began to be established. One mentor noted, "It took a while to find some points of commonality but [when we] got into that second lunch….we found a connection and really enjoyed visiting." This trust-building phase seemed to be a critical part of establishing a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship, not just for the mentees but also for the mentors.

Points of connection and "common interest." Mentor-mentee pairs ended up finding several points of connection that they could use to build a relationship. Sports and athletics came up several times as a key point of commonality. Whether it was actual athletic participation, shared interest in certain sports or teams, including the university's own athletic teams, conversation around sports allowed mentors and mentees to begin to build a relationship, even if they felt like they had nothing else in common. A mentor reflected, "His major was not a common interest major with my background, but we found a common interest in sports and….once we found [that commonality it] made it a lot better."

Other pairs connected around academic interests. Even if the mentor was not involved directly in the student's major, if the mentor had studied something related to that major and/or know faculty who taught in a given field, then the

mentor was able to use that as a connecting point. One said, "He was interested in finance and accounting. I knew people in the school of accounting, so I could connect him with people." Some mentors connected their student's experience to the experience of a family member, enabling them to more closely empathize with their student's perspective and needs. For example: "I have a daughter that's a freshman…I could say, 'My daughter did blah, blah, blah. Did you find that that was a problem?' That did make it easier at first."

Some pairs never found that point of connection but used that to build a relationship. Mentors found that asking questions about aspects of the university with which they were not familiar enabled their students to share the experience through their own eyes:

> ….I'm not Greek and so a lot of [our connection] was him telling me his story and what he was going through as a first-year student. So that was pretty cool because he told me his story, and I think it gave him kind of a safe space to talk about some things and having someone who doesn't know.

Negotiating preferred communication methods. As a part of building trust, mentors and their students had to negotiate their preferred communication styles. Mentors were used to using email to communicate with colleagues and students. Students, though, generally did not check their email and were missing messages about the program and requests from their mentors to meet. One mentor recalled, "She doesn't check her email. So I called [the program coordinator] to get [my mentee's] phone number, and she responded to text messages." Mentors generally were comfortable texting with their students and found that to be the best way to communicate. Some students, though, advocated for using Snapchat or other forms of technology beyond the comfort level of their mentors.

Evidence of connection. Mentors found themselves looking for evidence that the relationship was progressing. Some mentors indicated feeling a sense of pride when their student followed their advice, took initiative, or succeeded in their own work: "So I was really proud of her for that even though she didn't get it, she stuck her neck out." For other mentors, that evidence of connection came when the student displayed ownership of or excitement about the relationship. One mentor noted, "[my mentee]…gave me a hug [when he saw me at an event]. And I am kind of a huggy guy anyway so I thought that was a big moment that we had made a connection." Many mentors noted a sense that a bond had been formed between the pair as evidence of success. For example, one mentor shared:

> With my student, I got the perception that when we would meet and have our discussions, it was almost like it was a relief for him to be able to talk to someone outside of his classes, outside of his fraternity, and to

not only get an older individual's perspective, an employee's perspective, but just to have that adult perspective.

Using connections and networking. Finally, many mentors felt that the pairing was successful when they were able to connect their student to others in their networks who could help them achieve their goals. Many times, this connection was linked to the mentor's personal responsibilities or role on campus. One mentor explained:

He had an interest in potentially finding a job that he was interested in in the sports arena. So that was a win in being able to introduce him to the staff, and in turn, to encourage him to make that connection as a growth opportunity for him was, I think, a big win because he seemed to really perk up his interest when he realized that there was an opportunity, not only to get paid, but to do something that he was genuinely interested in.

Other mentors, though, went beyond the professional and used their personal social networks to benefit their students. One mentor shared:

My mentee was interested in an internship at NASA and it just happened that I had a friend that works at NASA who had gone through that internship, so I was really proud of myself that I was able to connect. ….It made me feel useful to make that connection.

Difficulties/Areas to Overcome

While the mentors overall reported having a positive experience, there were some difficulties they faced in developing a connection with students. Some difficulties were procedural, such as scheduling, while others were more relational, requiring mentors to probe and make meaning out of students' vague comments.

Scheduling. Finding a mutually agreeable time to meet up was a common challenge. Sometimes, the issue seemed to be due to the students' schedules; for example, one mentor noted how his mentee "was overly committed...so connecting was sometimes difficult." Other times, the mentor's schedule was the problem. In particular, several mentors shared that the nature of their jobs require them to schedule events and meetings well in advance, and that does not always match students' way of life. One mentor lamented, "between their schedule and my schedule, I had a lot of [things] booked way ahead of time, so trying to get us to connect and get that when we could both do that was hard."

Transparency and opening up. Mentors shared that getting students to open up to them was sometimes difficult. Occasionally, this difficulty was because the student was shy, reserved, or unsure:

> My mentee was very introverted. I remember in the opening ceremony he wouldn't even look at me. I mean, he would answer my questions but he wouldn't ask any questions, so I felt like I was bombarding him with questions trying to find something to hang onto.

At other times, it was the mentor's role at the university that created awkwardness:

> Something came up about a conduct case and I had to write him up for that, and it was kind of awkward. I don't think that necessarily put a strain on our relationship, but getting him to open up from the beginning was tough.

When students did open up, what they said and what was actually happening didn't always match up. One mentor shared:

> I really had to probe my student because if we would go to lunch and I would say 'So, how are things going?' he would be like 'Everything is great, I have this all figured out.' And so then you drill down and you would find that there were things he was working through, but he had this façade that he had to put up that was to overcompensate for maybe his feelings of not having it figured out. So, we really had to….probe to get him to really talk about ways I could help him. Because if I had just asked him how things are going, he said 'Fine.'

Several mentors shared that they believed students did not want to or know how to appear vulnerable. This impediment was especially true when mentors tried to discuss academic issues. One mentor recalled:

> I had checked in with [my mentee] several times early [in the semester] and asked him about classes and everything....and his answers were always vague. Then he decided to declare our school as his major, and I found out that his GPA wasn't going to be high enough and that he was actually struggling in a couple of classes. If I could have been able to identify that earlier, that might have been helpful...maybe I should have been better at asking the right questions early on and not accepting the vague 'Oh everything is great, I am enjoying it.'

Mentors agreed that once they were able to "peel back the layers," they were better able to understand their mentees' experiences and needs, and thus better understand how they could be helpful as a mentor.

Sharing of Resources

Almost all mentors in this study talked at length about the resources they shared with their students. Mentors agreed that most resource referrals came from conversations with students, so discussions about helpful resources "were contextual with what the student was experiencing" and talking with their mentors about. Table 2 shows common resources that mentors shared with their students.

Table 2
Resources Shared

Category	Resources
General university services	University stress management center
	Counseling services
	Office of Financial Aid
	Career services
	Academic Advisors
Physical spaces	Student Union
	Campus coffee shops
Academic success tips	Departmental academic services
	Math success center
	Quiet locations for studying
	How to study
Leadership opportunities and getting "plugged in"	Co-curricular activities
	Student organizations
	On-campus employment
Time management	What a typical day looks like
	Transitioning from high school to college
	Saying no
	Setting priorities

Personal/Professional Development

The final theme that emerged from the data regarding the mentor experience centered on the personal and professional development of the mentor. Data in this theme was often coded as "what they (the mentors) learned." Four subthemes stood out in this area; most prominently, mentors seemed to learn about the institution itself and the student experience. They also reported growth in developing more personal relationships and feeling as if they made a difference.

Learning about the institution. When reflecting on their experience, some mentors highlighted that they learned things about the university that they would not have known otherwise. One mentor, in his first year working at the institution, said, "this interacting helped me to understand some of the unique qualities of [the institution] and the culture and the different things that students can do here."

Learning about the student experience. Another very common lesson learned for mentors was that of "the student experience." Some mentors shared that they learned about things they never would have thought of, like students having a difficult time meeting dietary needs for religious or medical purposes in on-campus facilities, one noting, "that would not [have otherwise] crossed my mind!" Another mentor reflected on his time in a residence hall, noting, "It was

my first time in the [residence halls] in 15 years, at least. It was interesting…there was a lot going on. It was a nice reminder of what that experience was like."

Many mentors often recalled learning that their students were stressed out, under pressure to succeed, sleep-deprived, and sometimes over-committed. One mentor noted that she felt her mentee was under a great "amount of stress and burden" and that she hadn't reflected on that aspect of student life in a while: "I guess I am just sometimes far removed from that and so it wasn't a shock to me, but I had just maybe forgotten about [the stress]. He was very, very stressed, [and I think this is true for] a lot of our students."

> **Developing more "personal" relationships**. Mentors reflected on their experience as a time of personal and professional growth as well. Several mentors mentioned that they enjoyed interacting with students outside of their more traditional role. This was especially true for faculty members, with one noting, "When I have undergraduates, they're taking a statistics course and so I tend to be the bad guy and so it was nice to not be the bad guy." Mentors seemed to enjoy this shift in the normal context of their relationships with students, and many appreciated being "invited into [the students'] personal life and not just [their] school life."

Making a difference. Finally, many mentors reflected on the importance of their mentor work in making a difference in students' lives. For many mentors, this is why they joined the program in the first place, so evidence that they made a difference was both professionally and personally fulfilling. One mentor noted:

> "I felt that having just a bit of support or….safety net to help them or guide them was definitely instrumental in having the first few weeks of their campus life as a positive experience or more positive than it would have otherwise been."

Another mentor agreed, sharing that hearing her mentee "express that [I] really made a difference in her life" was fulfilling for her as a mentor.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

This study sought to better understand the experiences of mentors in a mentoring relationship involving higher education professionals and first-year college students. The study makes a unique contribution to the literature by providing an in-depth look at mentors' experiences and motivations working with first-year undergraduates. The findings of this study have several implications for future research as well as for student affairs professionals who oversee mentoring programs; namely, understanding the *motivations* of mentors helps to recruit mentors, understanding the *experiences* of mentors helps to prepare mentors, and understanding the *impact on the mentors and the institution* helps tie the work of student affairs to the larger priorities of the university. This study also helps

further understanding of the transformative nature of leadership opportunities for *leaders and systems.*

Understanding Motivations of the Mentors

Mentors in this study were motivated to serve as a mentor because they liked the ideal of mentoring, appreciated the opportunity to give what they wish they had been provided, wanted to help the university accomplish its goals, enjoyed the chance to provide hands-on support for students, and felt as though they made a difference. These motivations for being a mentor can be attributed to the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which according to SDT, must be met in order to thrive and continue in a behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Mentors feeling as though they had made a difference, for example, aligns with the need to feel competent. Wanting to help the university accomplish its goals addresses the need for autonomy, and enjoying the hands-on support for students addresses the need for connection or relatedness. The motivations to mentor align with the tenets of SDT, which suggests that when individuals are actively, willingly, and persistently engaged in activities that meet specific needs (in this case, mentoring) personal growth, satisfaction, and over-all well-being are nurtured (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

   Implications. Understanding these motivations helps those professionals who oversee mentoring programs to better recruit and retain mentors. Many calls for mentors are blanket requests for help with little attention paid to the reasons people mentor. More explicitly linking participation requests to the motivations outlined in this study (and understanding the general underpinnings of SDT), may help potential mentors get excited about and see themselves acting as mentors. For example, a well-crafted invitation to mentor could connect the program to the larger goals of the university or stories of how previous mentors in the program provided direct support to their students. Understanding what motivates people to serve as mentors helps to better recruit and retain mentors.

Understanding the Experiences of Mentors

Mentors in this study, built trust by finding common interests, figuring out the best ways to communicate with their mentees, and working to discern happenings in the students' lives beyond the surface-level conversations they were having. Once mentors were able to find points of commonality, they saw evidence of a connection with their mentees and could then help them open up and thus broaden the relationship. This is consistent with findings outside the higher education context that attunement, authenticity, collaboration, companionship, empathy, and trust are important factors contributing to the successful mentor-mentee relationship (Dobie et al., 2014; Shillingstad et al., 2015). Additionally, this

finding is aligned with SDT, which emphasizes the fundamental psychological need for relatedness in elective relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Implications. Anticipating the needs and concerns of mentors helps to prepare those mentors before they find themselves facing difficult situations. In this study, mentors struggled with scheduling, getting students to open up, transparency, and communication. Thus, it is important that the training for mentors addresses these topics in the future so that mentors are not surprised when these issues arise and are equipped with strategies to address them. Future research should also focus specifically on mentors' experiences to further understand their part of the leader-follower dyad.

Tying the Work of Student Affairs to the Larger Priorities of the University

As a program overseen by Student Affairs that incorporated faculty and staff from across the institution, a mentoring program is a good example of how student affairs professionals' training and abilities tie-in to an academic function of the university. Mentors in this program worked directly in support of the institution's academic missions, helping students figure out majors, learn study skills, and navigate institutional structures. Because this was a program overseen by Student Affairs professionals who utilized their training and capacity to help students and faculty develop meaningful relationships, it further speaks to the vital functions and role student affairs divisions and staff members play within universities.

Further, this study also demonstrates how a student affairs program was able to help university faculty and staff better understand the students with whom they work. Mentors in this study specifically learned about two important areas: 1) the experience of being a first-year college student, and 2) being a first-year student *at their own institution specifically*, which then translated into helping mentors be better higher education professionals. This is clearly of value to the institution— serving as a mentor helped faculty and staff develop as professionals, which in turn can improve the university systemically. Further, mentoring programs such as this one, are low-cost yet have important implications for student success and faculty/staff connection to students and the university as a whole.

Mentoring Transforms People and Systems

The data in this study demonstrate that leadership endeavors (in this case, serving as a mentor) provided support for students and helped the university achieve its goals (such as retention), while also providing opportunities for leaders' personal and professional growth (e.g., feeling as though they made a difference, learning about the student experience, and better understanding the university culture). The data in this study support future research using grounded theory such as transformational leadership to understand the experience of those involved in mentoring relationships. For example, the findings of this study support the transformational leadership idea that leadership is bidirectional (Burns, 1978;

Dugan, 2017) and positively influences systems and organizations (Dugan, 2017, Geier, 2016; Sun, Chen, & Zhang, 2017); these ideas could help future researchers design studies and questions that help better understand the mentor experience. Specifically, for student affairs professionals, the results of this study provide further evidence that student affairs work in overseeing leadership opportunities such as mentoring programs can be transformative, helping participants become better higher education professionals in addition to improving student outcomes.

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The Impact of Social Media Usage on Students' Mental Health

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Abstract

Although social media usage has become increasingly pervasive among students in college in the last decade, it was not known if these platforms are positively or negatively related to students' perception of their mental well-being. The purpose of this correlational study was to measure the relationship between social media usage and the mental health of college students in order to improve student affairs practice. In spring 2019, simple random sampling was used to invite 5,000 undergraduate students from a large, public, professional doctoral institution in the Midwestern region of the United States--to complete a survey measuring their frequency and type of engagement on social media and the participants perceived experiences with depression, anxiety, and suicidality (experience of suicidal thoughts or attempts). Results indicated correlations exist between the frequency and types of social media usage and the perceived mental health of students. It is believed the findings of this study will enhance student affairs professionals' understanding of how social media usage impacts students' mental health using Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000).

Keywords: social media, mental health, college student

Author's Note

In 2014, a study found 11.3% of 170,000 individuals aged 12 to 17, had a major depressive episode within the past year (Mojtabai, Olfson, & Han, 2016). Approximately 75% of mental health disorders develop by 24 years old, (Kessler et al., 2005) while the traditional aged college student is between 18 and 23 years old (Spitzer, 2000). Members of Generation Z do not remember a time without screens (Turner, 2015) and individuals aged eight to 18 use social media up to seven hours a day (Rideout, 2015). Although previous research indicated that

social media can have both a positive and negative effect on mental health (Johnston, Tanner, Lalla & Kawalski, 2013; Radovic, Gmelin, Stein, & Miller, 2017; Virden, Trujillo & Predeger, 2014; Zhang, 2017), it was not known if and to what degree there is a relationship between social media usage and mental health among college students.

Results from this study could be used to understand the causes of adverse mental health symptoms, which could help higher education institutions intervene and better support students (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007). There are few studies that provide practical insight into how social media usage impacts students' mental health through the application of a sociological theory. This study addresses these deficiencies in literature by exploring the impact of social media usage on mental health through the original Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and an updated version of the theory, The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000).

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to measure the relationship between social media usage and the mental health of college students at a large, public, professional doctoral institution in the mid-western region of the United States. The following research questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data in this study: (1) What are the patterns of social media usage among students? and (2) What is the relationship between frequency of social media usage and perceived mental health issues among students in terms of (a) depression, (b) anxiety, and (c), suicidality? The alternative hypotheses tested in the study to answer the second research question are: H_{2a}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and depression. H_{2b}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and anxiety. H_{2c}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and suicidality.

Review of Literature

Research regarding the impact of social media on mental health has produced mixed results. Included in this review of literature are findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2001 and 2018. The primary keywords used to conduct the search included, *college student and social media use*, *college student and mental health*, *social media and mental health*, and *college student identity development*. Findings from the literature review suggested three main topics of discussion: (a) positive impacts of social media on mental health, (b) negative impacts of social media on mental health, and (c) social media and identity expression. This study is grounded in Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000), to understand how a college student's mental health is impacted by comparison to others on social media.

Social Media's Positive Impact on Mental Health

Two quantitative correlational articles discussed similar findings that social media, specifically Facebook, can be beneficial to improve one's mental health (Johnston et al., 2013; Zhang 2017). For instance, posting a status update on Facebook about the difficulties in one's life can lead to perceived social support, in turn improving mental health (Johnston, et al., 2013; Zhang, 2017). Facebook usage is attributed with improved self-esteem and improved mental health because of the perceived support system that is developed through social capital relationships (Johnston, et al., 2013). Both studies used surveys to collect their data. The largest difference between the two studies is the focus of their research. Zhang (2017) sought to find the correlation between self-disclosure of stressful life events on Facebook, life satisfaction, and depression. Johnston et al. (2013), placed emphasis on the correlation of Facebook use and maintenance of social relationships. Overall, the quantitative articles provided evidence that social media can potentially improve or be beneficial to mental health.

Even though both studies produced useful background information for future research, there are limitations. One critique of Johnston et al. (2013) is it mentioned a use and gratification theory in the literature review, stating how an individual's purpose for interaction determines the outcome of the conversation. However, the theory was not tied to the study's findings of social media having a positive impact on mental health. A limitation not discussed by the author, but applicable to the current study, is that Zhang (2017) was conducted in China, making results difficult to generalize to students in the United States.

Social Media's Negative Impact on Mental Health

In contrast to the first two articles, two qualitative studies found results that social media negatively impacts mental health (Radovic et al., 2017; Virden et al., 2014). Radovic et al. (2017) conducted a phenomenological study to document social media experiences by interviewing 23 individuals diagnosed with depression. Findings indicate that individuals frequently compare themselves to what they see on social media and seek approval leading to depression and lower life-satisfaction (Radovic et al., 2017). Virden et al. (2014) also conducted a phenomenological study using focus groups to understand the perception of high-risk social media behaviors. Consequently, results found a relationship between social media use and psychological distress when an individual did not calculate the repercussions of what was posted online (Virden et al., 2014). Limitations of Radovic et al. (2017) include: not disclosing where the research was conducted, leaving it open to question as to whether the participants' environment impacted the study. Neither Radovic et al. (2017), nor Virden et al. (2014) reference a theory to ground their research.

Social Media and Identity Expression

Two studies, one quantitative and one mixed-method, identified the use of social media to create an online identity that the individuals felt was more favorable than the person they are offline (Hanna et al., 2017; Reich, 2010). Through the survey, attitudes toward self-esteem, comparison, self-objectification, depression, and anxiety were assessed. Results indicated that Facebook users seek to promote a desirable version of themselves (Hanna, et al., 2017). Similarly, through two focus groups and a survey, results indicated social media users, particularly on MySpace and Facebook, created an attractive, unauthentic representation of who they are offline (Reich, 2010). Overall, both studies suggest that social media provides an opportunity for individuals to portray themselves in any manner that they wish, subjecting the individual to objectification and comparison (Festinger, 1954; Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000). Because college students can be impressionable and rely on external validation (Baxter Magolda, 2008), social media can impact their mental health.

Limitations exist in both Hanna et al. (2017) and Reich (2010). For instance, Hanna et al. focused on psychological well-being through asking questions pertaining to self-esteem, mental health, and body shame. Further research needs to be done to assess other facets of psychological well-being, such as: suicidal ideation because of the studies noted limitations (Hanna et al., 2017). Also, Reich's assessment was conducted in 2010, when MySpace was an active social media site. Applying results discovered from MySpace users may be inapplicable to apply to modern students because MySpace is no longer the most popular social media site. Further research is needed to assess the how current social media platforms impact perceived mental health.

Festinger's Social Comparison Theory and The Interpretation Comparison Model

The framework used to guide the development of this study was Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) which concluded that individuals evaluate oneself against others they interact with. Both Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) state self-evaluation occurs based upon the perception of others success. This theory and model are related to the current study through the connection between social media and comparison because social media allows for students to put themselves on a platform, open to criticism and approval, potentially influencing perceived mental health.

A limitation related to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) is that it was developed based upon the comparison of individuals in the workplace, prior to the invention of the internet. To reduce this limitation, a more recent version of the theory, The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen,

2000), was used to strengthen the validity of this paper. It has been studied that social media creates an environment that is conducive to social comparison (Strickland, 2014). Festinger's (1954) theory and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) stated that individuals either compare themselves to other individuals in a positive or negative way, through either upward or downward comparison (Garcia & Halldorsson, 2018). Depending upon the direction of comparison, individuals could feel gratitude or motivation from a positive comparison, or feel disapproval or envy from a negative comparison (Garcia & Halldorsson, 2018).

The evolution of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) to the Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) increases the validity of this study. While Festinger's (1954) theory focused upon comparison through interactions in the work place, The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) analyzes the development of self-evaluation through knowledge. Knowledge and information are gathered during social comparison (Stapel, 2007). Essentially, individuals make comparison and are influenced by their surroundings (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) including social media.

To elaborate, a study conducted by Chou and Edge (2012) found that the more time a student spends on Facebook, the more likely the student feels as though others are doing better than themselves. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat have all been noted as social media platforms that increase anxiety and depression (MacMillan, 2017). The perception that others are doing consistently better can be challenging to one's mental state (Chou & Edge, 2012). Hence, while the students are seeking gratification from social media, the students are also subjecting their mental health, either positively or negatively, because of a larger circle of peer approval than students who attended college prior to social media.

Methods

The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to measure the relationship between social media usage and perceived mental health issues among college students and was accomplished by conducting an electronic survey distributed to students during the spring of 2019. The following research questions were used to guide the collection and analysis of data in this study: (1) What are the patterns of social media usage among students? and (2) What is the relationship between frequency of social media usage and perceived mental health issues among students in terms of (a) depression, (b) anxiety, and (c), suicidality? The alternative hypotheses tested in the study to answer the second research question are: H_{2a}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and depression. H_{2b}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and anxiety. H_{2c}: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of social media usage and suicidality.

Participants & Setting

The sample in this study included students who attended a professional doctoral institution with 15,363 full-time undergraduate students in the mid-western region of the United States (Bear Stats, 2017). The university is 59% female and 41% male, with an average age of 22 years old (Bear Stats, 2017). The Dean of Students provided the researcher with access to participants through the office of the registrar. Probability, simple random sampling was used to identify individuals to participate in the study. In the 2019 spring semester, 5,000 randomly-selected students, who met the sampling frame criteria, were emailed and invited to participate in an electronic survey regarding their social media usage and mental health perceptions. The following sampling frame criteria was used to identify participants: undergraduate, full-time students (taking a minimum of 12 credit hours). Of the participants who completed the survey, 77% were female, 20% male, and 3% self-identified. A majority of students who participated were in their third or fourth year of college (72%) and between the ages of 21-24 (58%).

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, participants were provided with an electronic copy of the study's IRB approval. To protect the anonymity of the participants and encourage responses, a waiver of consent was solicited by the researcher and completion of the survey represented the participants' informed consent. There were no incentives offered.

Surveys were distributed during a two-week period during spring of 2019; to encourage participation, one follow-up email was sent one week after the initial invitation. A modified survey instrument—referred to as the Social Media and Mental Health Perception Survey (SMMHPS)—was used to collect responses. The survey was developed from the Healthy Minds Study (HMS) questionnaire (Healthy Minds Network, 2018) and collected information related to participants' demographics, social media usage behaviors, and self-reported perception mental health related to depression, anxiety, and suicidality. For the purpose of this study, social media was defined as a website that individuals use to make or maintain connections with others by interacting with user-generated content (Boyd & Ellison, 2010; Obar & Wildman, 2015). This study examines the social media platforms: Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube because of the sites popularity with college aged students (Knight-McCord, et al., 2016). Mental health was defined by a participant's level of depression, anxiety, and suicidality because these conditions are "some of the most prevalent in college populations," (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009, p. 493). The SMMHPS consisted of 25-33 questions, divided into five sections (demographics, frequency and reasons for social media use, depression, anxiety, and suicidality) and participants generally completed the survey in 15-20 minutes.

The development of the SMMHPS was modified from HMS because the instrument was previously used to assess only a student's mental health. For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought to discover if there is a correlation between the amount of time a student spends on social media and perceived mental health. By including questions from the HMS regarding mental health assessment and adding questions regarding a student's social media usage, the researcher was able to answer the research questions. To enhance the credibility of the SMMHPS instrument, it was pilot tested by professional staff members from the university Counseling Center, Housing and Residence Life department, and a sample of undergraduate students who meet the sampling frame criteria, but who do not attend the university and were not invited to participate in the study. During the pilot test, feedback was requested about the clarity and appropriateness of the survey questions with regard to the purpose of this study.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the survey distribution window, the researcher utilized Campus Labs Baseline, JASP (statistical analysis software), and RSTATS (university research, statistical training and technical support team) to score and analyze the responses and generate descriptive statistics using Pearson's r, Spearmans' correlation, and Kendal Tau correlation. A correlation coefficient (r) (Hennings & Roberts, 2016) was computed to measure the relationship between the variables related to the study's research questions. Axial coding was utilized to find dominant themes among the open-ended responses. Descriptive statistics were presented and explained with a narrative description of results, accompanied by tables and figures, illustrating frequencies and mean scores.

Limitations

A limitation of this study related to the external validity of the findings, is the participants were only selected from undergraduate students. Similarly, it is unknown how social media usage of undergraduate students at other institutions would impact those student's mental health. Participants self-reported the time they spent on social media, thus, a limitation was the potential for participants to not accurately self-disclose. Another limitation was related to the timing of the questionnaire's release, prior to midterm exams. Students' mental health could be compromised for reasons not relating to social media usage; therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution.

Results

The purpose of this quantitative, correlational study was to measure the relationship between social media usage and the perceived mental health of college students at a large, public, professional doctoral institution in the mid-western region of the United States, as well as analyze the students' social media usage patterns. There were 378 completed responses (7.56%) collected from

participants. Of the completed responses, 97% stated using some form of social media. Participants disclosed both positive and negative mental health implications because of social media usage. Statistical results from the study indicate that there was a weak positive correlation between social media usage and both anxiety and depression, as well as a non-significant positive relationship between suicidality and social media usage.

What are the Patterns of Social Media Usage Among Students?

The amount of time participants disclosed utilizing each social media platform varied from zero to 15 minutes per day up to four hours or more per day, with an average minimum of 41 minutes per day to a maximum of 70 minutes per day. The most utilized social media platform was Facebook. The preferred social media platforms utilized by participants, from most number of users to least number of users, was as follows: Facebook (89%), Snapchat (83%), Instagram (77%), YouTube (72%), and Twitter (51%). The most popular reasons that social media platforms were used include: *entertainment* (90%), *pass time* (87%), *social interaction* (80%), *seek information* (70%), *relaxation* (56%), and *other* (6%).

An open-ended question was asked to assess how social media usage impacted perceived mental health. Results indicated that participants experienced both positive and negative mental health implications after social media usage. Axial coding revealed the pattern *Maintaining Connections with Family and Friends* as a reason for social media usage creating a perceived positive mental health. Out of 366 responses, 30% mention how social media is used for reasons such as: "interacting with my friends and family," "keeping in contact with long distance friends and family," and "social media sometimes has a positive impact because friends can contact me that I do not get to see very often." Similarly, axial coding of responses to perceived negative mental health implications from social media usage revealed a pattern of *Comparison to Others* (34%). Quotes to support participants perception of comparison included: "It can be easy to compare the life of myself to the life of others, which can sometimes cause feelings of inadequacy," "social media sometimes encourages me to compare myself to others which in turn may stress me out, or make me feel like I'm not good enough," and "I see people and I constantly compare myself to them and I get anxious and depressed because I don't feel up to par."

What is the Relationship Between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Perceived Mental Health Issues Among Students in Terms of Depression?

A weak positive correlation was found between social media usage and depression. Because of the violation of normality assumption (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012), a Spearman's correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between these two variables. Results revealed that there was a 2% variation between the relationship of depression and social media usage. As shown in Table

1, a weak positive correlation indicated a somewhat linear relationship ($r= .145$, $p=.005$). Results indicated that 39% of participants felt *no depression*, 28% felt *mild depression,* 15% felt *moderate depression*, 11% felt *moderately severe depression*, and 7% felt *severe depression*.

Table 1
Correlation Between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Prevalence of Depression and Anxiety

		Frequency_Total	Depression_Total	Anxiety_Total
Frequency_Total	Pearson's r	—		
	p-value	—		
	Spearman's rho	—		
	p-value	—		
Depression_Total	Pearson's r	0.115	—	
	p-value	0.026	—	
	Spearman's rho	0.145	—	
	p-value	0.005	—	
Anxiety_Total	Pearson's r	0.099	0.753	—
	p-value	0.055	< .001	—
	Spearman's rho	0.107	0.779	—
	p-value	0.038	< .001	—

What is the Relationship Between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Perceived Mental Health Issues Among Students in Terms of Anxiety?

A weak positive correlation was found between social media usage and anxiety. A Spearman's correlation was used to find the relationship between social media usage and anxiety. It was found that anxiety explained 1% of the variation of social media usage ($r= .107$, $p=.038$), as demonstrated in Table 1. Results revealed that 52% of participants felt *minimal anxiety*, 22% felt *mild anxiety*, 17% felt *moderate anxiety*, and 8% felt *severe anxiety*.

What is the Relationship Between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Perceived Mental Health Issues Among Students in Terms of Suicidality?

To determine the correlation between suicidality and social media usage, data was analyzed using the Kendall's Tau correlation because of the violation of the normality assumption and little variability between responses (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Results from this study indicated that the relationship between suicidality and social media usage was a non-significant positive relationship.

Suicidality explained .09% of the variation of social media usage ($r= .032$, $p=.448$) with Kendall's Tau and Pearson's *r* demonstrated in Table 2. Though not statistically significant, results from the questions pertaining to suicidality

indicated that 26% had thought about attempting suicide in the past year. Also 7% have made a plan for attempting suicide and seven participants (1.85%) disclosed having attempted suicide in the past year.

Table 2

Correlation Between Frequency of Social Media Usage and Prevalence of Suicidality

		Frequency_Total	Suicide_Total
Frequency_Total	Pearson's r	—	
	p-value	—	
	Kendall's tau B	—	
	p-value	—	
Suicide_Total	Pearson's r	0.047	—
	p-value	0.365	—
	Kendall's tau B	0.032	—
	p-value	0.448	—

Conclusion

Although existing research documented that social media can influence an individual's mental health, it was not known if and to what degree there is a relationship between social media usage and mental health among college students. Results from this study indicated that there was a weak positive correlation between the relationship of social media usage and both depression and anxiety among undergraduate students, as well as a non-significant positive relationship between social media usage and suicidality. It was also discovered that the top reason that participants use social media was for entertainment, and participants utilized the social media platform Facebook the most. Participants suggested that their social media usage both positively and negatively influenced their mental health because they used it to maintain connections with family and friends, while also comparing themselves to others.

Results from this study affirm previous research findings that social media can positively and negatively impact mental health. Previous studies found that social media platforms have developed an easier method of maintaining connections with family and friends who live far away and increased social support (Zhang, 2017), yet, social media has also created a space that promotes the comparison of lives, seeking approval, and perpetuates unrealistic expectations (Radovic, Gmelin, Stein, & Miller, 2017; Virden, Trujillo & Predeger, 2014).

There was a weak positive correlation found between both anxiety and depression and social media usage. The researcher speculates that the correlation between social media usage and adverse mental health symptoms is caused by the constant

comparison and perception that others are doing better than oneself because of social media posts. Social media usage may play a more significant role in a college students' mental health than previously realized. While correlation does not equal causation, it is concerning how many participants are experiencing the previously mentioned mental health symptoms.

There were numerous comments about social media promoting comparison among participants, which validated the application of Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000) to this study. Based off of the qualitative data pertaining to how social media negatively impacts perceived mental health, from this study and previous research (Hanna et al., 2017), it may be difficult for individuals to recognize that social media is often edited or altered to display the best aspects of one's life, depicting an unrealistic reality. To emphasize, this supports the application of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000), to this study because social media creates standards that students feel they must compare themselves to. Viewing how other students or peers are portraying successes leads to increased self-evaluation (Stapel & Koomen, 2000), as seen within this study. The researcher speculates that social media's pervasive presence in college students' lives perpetuates unrealistic expectations and fosters constant comparison as noted by The Interpretation Comparison Model (Stapel, 2007; Stapel & Koomen, 2000).

Implications for Practice

For many college students, social media is consistently used daily. The relationship between social media usage and perceived mental health is important in understanding the complexities of the needs of college students. On-campus counselors could further explore the nature of the relationship between social media usage and perceived mental health by asking students if they attribute any of their distress to something observed on social media. Further understanding of the potential causes of students' mental health symptoms can help create individualized coping methods when experiencing distress.

Along with the previously mentioned implication for practice, it would be beneficial for student affairs practitioners to analyze how the university's social media accounts are utilized when marketing to current and future students. Presenting information about resources available on campus should a student be experiencing mental distress is equally as important as providing information about opportunities for student engagement and employment to students while attending the university. Similarly, student affairs practitioners should develop content that destigmatizes mental health concerns. While a student may be aware that there are resources available, the student may be afraid to utilize resources because of a lack of normalization around discussing mental health concerns. Creating social media campaigns that destigmatize mental health concerns could

reach the students and promote accessing mental health services. Moreover, with an understanding that social media usage can increase comparison, increasing programming and opportunities that encourage appreciation, gratitude, and self-care can help students cultivate self-worth both with and without a social media presence.

Directions for Future Research

Because this was a quantitative study, there are limitations to the depth that the results could provide. To strengthen the findings of this study, future research should be gathered to explore the relationship between social media usage and mental health to include qualitative procedures to understand participants' in-depth experiences. Similarly, research that requires participants to maintain a social media journal with the following information: which social media platform is utilized, how long the participant is on the platform, what was observed, and what feelings were evoked. This would provide clarity as to what types of content cause mental distress and give a more accurate understanding of how participants are engaging on social media.

Another direction for future research includes repeating the current study and increasing the number of social media platforms that a student could utilize. This study focused on five social media platforms, excluding online dating platforms. Future research could include online dating platforms and other social media platforms to assess whether different social media platforms perpetuate or reduce negative mental health symptoms.

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In Memory of Keith Miser

From the archives, the *Journal of Student Affairs* reintroduces a piece from 1998 by Dr. Keith Miser in celebration of his service and dedication to the field of student affairs. In *A Final Thought*, Dr. Miser discusses changes within student affairs influenced by cultural and legal shifts. This article acts as a time-capsule reminding its readers of both the progress and stagnation within the U.S. higher education system. Namely, Dr. Miser predicted that the next decade, 2000 - 2010, would be characterized by changes in technology, politics, economics, and the cost of higher education - issues still hotly debated more than 20 years later. In addition, these issues, along with the foundations of the field, have been insidiously constructed with a racist and anti-Black lens, a topic that has gained recent widespread traction but has been pervasive throughout history. With rapid changes and development, a question arises: how does the field of student affairs grow and adapt to meet the needs of future generations of students? Dr. Miser advises that we lead with optimism and creativity to not repeat the past, but rather to reimagine a better future. We are grateful to have inherited a piece of Dr. Miser's legacy, and may he forever be remembered in the pages of our publication. Thank you and rest in peace.

Tanisha Muquit

A Final Thought

Dr. Keith M. Miser

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you 'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a changin '
Bob Dylan, 1963

This classic song by Bob Dylan in many ways was the mantra of the 1960s, a period of significant change in America. This era saw a transformation in values, youth culture, law, and social institutions. Of course, the 1960s also are heralded as a time of significant change in institutions of higher education. Student Affairs as a profession changed dramatically in response to societal changes and to different legal interpretations. Changing our role so quickly from predominantly behavior controllers under the legal doctrine of *in loco parentis* to the philosophy and practice of being student development educators was a tremendous challenge. However, we did become more concerned about students' personal and educational development, rather than about controlling their behavior. An entire new professional foundation was developed. Among the former deans of men and deans of women of this era, some became leaders, advancing revolutionary concepts and philosophical directions that indeed changed the entire profession. Some of these deans could not or would not change and retired, resigned, or resigned themselves to work in a profession grounded in a different set of beliefs that they could not support and in which they did not believe.

Since the 1960s, little has changed in our profession with regard to its fundamental philosophy and operating understandings. For over 30 years, we have maintained a rather consistent direction with only minor adjustments, even with the recent call to emphasize student learning and interaction with faculty partners as a primary role of student development.

Now, 35 years later, "The times they are a changin' again." Higher education will look dramatically different and will rapidly change, particularly over the next decade. Distance learning, virtual universities, privatized training institutes managed by business, new advances in the technology of teaching and learning,

and the actual delivery of education profoundly alter our profession as we enter the next century.

Driven by new technologies, political forces, and the exorbitant costs of higher education, America is creating new approaches and systems to allow an increasing number of citizens to be educated. Student Affairs professionals again will be challenged as we reshape the process and delivery of education and services in response to this different environment. As student development educators, we must find new ways to meet students' needs, while incorporating new approaches, techniques, and technologies. We must not be idle by duplicating our predecessors' approach when they declared that the new approaches (in the 1960s) would destroy higher education, thus excusing themselves from responding to those changes.

Some of the questions raised about the delivery of higher education and student personnel education are daunting. Can the use of virtual reality techniques be used to enhance counseling and career advising? How can we link with students taking classes by a television or other forms of distance education? What are the essential student personnel services and educational programs that must be preserved and maintained with their delivery to students via new technologies? How can student affairs professionals be a powerful active force by responding as partners with faculty in new virtual universities? How can we use new technologies to link people together rather than isolate them? What opportunities do we have to link internationally via the new educational delivery systems to truly internationalize our profession? Will these new advances become a "social leveler," allowing economically disadvantaged individuals to share in higher education, or will it isolate them even more by creating an educational technologically elite class? What is our role as student personnel professional leaders to become active partners in this period of rapid change?

As student development leaders, we soon will be facing these issues, and they *will* reshape our profession and our lives much more dramatically than the changes we saw in the late 1960s.

This is a time of excitement, opportunities. and challenges for our profession and each one of us as student affairs leaders. We must respond with optimism, creativity, and leadership. As Bob Dylan said, "then you better start swimmin' or you will sink like a stone, for the times they are a changin'."

The challenge is great, but the rewards for each of us as individual leaders and professional educators are great. And, the benefits for our students will be significant and will transform the quality of their life forever.

Class of 2020 Graduates

Chris Amerman
Mustafa Anwar
Reine Atrach
Malik Burton
Kami Clairmont
Lindsey Coulson
Orlando Cruz
Alejandra Dominguez
Hannah Elliott
Amber Everett
Sonia Garcia
Shay Harris
Claudia Hernandez
Lorenda Holston
Cozy Huggins
Kaitie Lathrop
Ryan Mahan
Maria J. Matta Moreno
Andrew Mayer
Tanisha Muquit
Gabriel Navarro
Camila Ozores Silva
Jessica Ramirez
Aura Renn
Vanessa Sandoval
Sydney Shackelford
Holly Vanhouten
Shaill Vasavada
Kathryn Walters
Steve Willich