COLLEGE STUDENTS' VOLUNTEERING

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to explore how college students' identified when and how their frames of reference are influenced and changed through the experiences they have while in the higher education environment while utilizing Mezirow's transformative learning theory as the theoretical framework. As a phenomenological qualitative study, the research conducted interactive interviews with eight college students ages 18-25 years old who regularly participated in community service. Upon careful data analysis, the researcher discovered four broad themes that included students' relationships between self and others; choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors. Future research could include examining students' motivations regarding the challenges, responsibilities, and experiences they seek; exploring what kinds of experiences are most impactful; examining how role models and mentors influence transformative learning experiences; and exploring students' reflection practices. The researcher suggests that student affairs departments implement programs that encourage students to interact with diverse individuals and groups; encourage collaboration and teamwork; utilize moments for reflection and analysis; enable students to forge connections between previous and new experiences; and encourage students to seek role models and mentors with whom they can identify.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much like their fingerprints, each college student is unique. They arrive on campuses armed with perceptions of who they are, what they value, how they behave, and what they offer to the world in which they live (Keeling, 2004). In short, they come with their own sense of reality, which will continue to evolve throughout their lives as they encounter new experiences that challenge or support their perspectives. When students become active participants in a higher education setting, they often encounter new and potentially unexpected experiences. As the American College Personnel Association (1994), shared that change can bring uncertainty as well as opportunity. Each experience offers an opportunity for them to re-evaluate their perceptions and modify them as needed. These experiences may lead to a transformation of students' understanding of themselves, of others, and of the world around them. In other words, students' frames of reference are transformed. Frames of reference are the assumptions and expectations through which individuals interpret their experiences (Mezirow, 2000). These frames help individuals determine how and what action to take. Thus, when an individual's assumptions and expectations are confronted with opposing ideas, entire meaning structures may be challenged and transformed.

Throughout individuals' lives they will continually confront their, though latent, values and models acquired from family, school, and social life, which will help them, in essence, to more clearly define who they are and what they believe (Fenwick, 2003). This process is transformative learning.

American higher education was founded on the belief that institutions should not only develop students' scholarship abilities and capacities, but their character as well (Komives & Woodward, 2003). As a result, institutions seek to facilitate and support this holistic development from the moment students join campus communities. In fact, studies have shown that experiences during college may play a major role on an individual's development after college (Apte, 2009; Casteñeda, 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cranton, & Wright, 2008; Glisczinksi, 2007; Jacoby & Associates, 1996; Pasquariello, 2009; Sanford, 1962; Strange & Banning, 2001). Thus, personnel in higher education institutions continue to play an important role in providing students with the necessary tools and resources to successfully navigate experiences both during and after college. Each of these newfound skills and abilities contribute to the student's holistic development (Keeling, 2004). Higher education institutions are designed to preserve, transmit, and enrich the important elements of culture, which include the production of scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience (American Council on Education, 1937). Institutions are obligated to consider students as holistic beings, which includes their intellectual capacities and achievements, emotions, physical condition, relationships, vocational aptitudes and skills, moral and religious values, economic resources, and aesthetic appreciations (American Council on Education, 1937). In other words, educators must consider the whole student when facilitating learning experiences in order for comprehensive learning to occur. This holistic approach to student development is integral to transformative learning.

This study is grounded within the framework of the transformative learning theory developed by Mezirow (1978a, 1978b, 2000). This theory focuses on how learners' meaning-

making structures evolve throughout their lives. One launching point for learners' development is participating within higher education as a student. In this study, the researcher sought to discover how learners' frames of reference are transformed through their experiences as college students and how institutions can enhance these experiences. The study is set within the higher education environment because student development is a key goal of higher education in the United States. First, the researcher will explain the study's purpose and the questions that were used to guide the research. Then the researcher will more thoroughly explain the significance of this study. It is important to clarify the meaning of key terms. Finally, the researcher will summarize and clarify what has been discussed.

Purpose of Study

This study's research is conducted within the framework of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which is designed for adult learners. Mezirow's theory is grounded in constructionism, which states that individuals' realities are shaped by their perceptions of their experiences and environments (Piaget, 1932). Mezirow's (1978a; 1978b; 1991; 2000) theory seeks to explain how adults change their interpretations of their surroundings and experiences. This theory was chosen due to its long history in adult education (Mezirow, 2000) and clear connection to predominant student development theories (Glisczinksi, 2007; Nohl, 2007; Tisdell, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to explore how students' frames of reference are influenced and changed through the experiences they have while in the higher education environment. More specifically, the study sought to better understand how students themselves identify when and how their frames of reference changed. Thus far, research regarding transformative learning lacks information regarding when frames of reference become established in a young adult's life and whether those frames can be an indicator of adulthood (E. Taylor, 2000).

By exploring what influences students' frames of references regarding themselves, others, and the world in which they live, this study sought to explore the connections between students'

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experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. By utilizing transformative learning theory as a guiding framework, the researcher sought to understand how students' frames of reference are influenced by experiences within the university setting and if there are common themes throughout those experiences. What situations and learning experiences are more prone to influence and shape students' perspectives? If certain experiences and settings are more inclined to result in transformed learners than others, then it is important for educators to be aware of that and know how to act upon it.

Most importantly, this study sought to understand how students evaluate their transformed frames of reference. In order for transformative learning to occur, learners must critically evaluate and reflect upon new knowledge and experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Higher education institutions seek to develop engaged, reflective citizens (Glisczinksi, 2007). In order for that to happen, students must be aware of what they are learning and why they are learning it (American College Personnel Association, 1994). This exploration of students' perceptions of their own learning transformations will attempt to discover what influenced students' perception transformation. By illuminating students' perspectives of their experiences, the researcher hopes to deepen educators' understanding of students' development and provide educators with insight that will enhance their practice. This study will contribute to the field of transformative learning by providing more depth to educators' understanding of frames of reference.

Research Questions

This study explores college students' perspectives of what their transformative learning experiences were and are while in college. As will be discussed in the review of the literature (Chapter 2), the learner plays a key role in the learning process. If learners do not take responsibility for their learning, learning will not occur. Thus, this study sought to understand how students process their college experiences and whether they identify certain experiences as more influential on their frames of reference than others. The key questions that guiding this study are

1. What kinds of experiences do students consider to be transformative learning experiences?;

2. How did students navigate these experiences?; and

3. How did these experiences influence student perceptions of and behavior toward themselves, others, and society?

What Kinds of Experiences Do Students Consider to be Transformative Learning Experiences?

Underscoring this question is a quest to discover whether college students' transformative learning experiences have common themes. Do students think they have had transformative learning experiences? If so, how do they describe how their perspective changed? What descriptors do they most frequently use when describing how their perspectives were changed through certain kinds of experiences? How do they determine which experiences have been more influential on their perspectives than others? Are there commonalities among the experiences encountered, emotions expressed, beliefs challenged, and support networks involved? In addressing this question, common themes may be identified to better clarify what experiences have most influenced students' frames of reference.

How Did Students Navigate These Experiences?

Closely linked to the previous question is the need to better understand how students navigated the new and disorienting dilemmas that they encountered in transformative learning experiences. As student affairs professionals, it is important to be aware of how students progress or regress through their college experiences. How did they process these experiences? Did they receive support from others as they encountered experiences that challenged their current frames of reference? Who did they dialogue with about their experiences? What feedback did they receive? How did they reflect upon their experiences? Did students implement an action plan? If so, was the plan successful? If not, why do they think it wasn't successful?

How Did These Experiences Influence Their Perceptions of and Behavior Toward

Themselves, Others, and Society?

Perspective transformation is at the core of transformative learning. If learners haven't changed their frames of reference through an experience, then it was not a transformative learning experience. Threaded throughout the other questions asked thus far is an underlying theme of perspective transformation, which is a change in students' assumptions and frames of reference. How did students' experiences influence their perceptions of themselves, others, and the world in which they live? How were their beliefs, attitudes, and judgments influenced? How did their outlook change as a result of their experiences? What did they discover about themselves and others that changed their meaning perspectives? How did these experiences influence their current behavior? How do they think these experiences will shape their future actions?

Significance of Study

The present study has significance for both future practice and research. This study may add more information to the knowledge base on transformative learning and how college students experience it. Findings may be useful for professionals who are in positions that impact students' development in the higher education environment. In terms of professional practice, the outcomes may be useful for student affairs practioners, higher education institutions, and other student educators in the higher education arena.

For student affairs practioners, the knowledge gained from this study may help them improve their practice as they help college students navigate a wide array of transitions and challenging circumstances that frequently occur during university life. Practioners can utilize the findings from this study as they create programs and opportunities for students in higher education. This study's findings will provide more information on what support systems students find most helpful as they experience transformative learning.

This study may benefit higher education institutions by providing findings on how students experience transformative learning and what implications that has for the higher education

environment. Institutions may find this study useful as they create policies and practices that influence students' experiences. They may be more readily able to assess students' progress and determine what improvements they need to make to better aid students' development. Findings from this study may lead to further research that examines how self-concept relates to student learning and perspective transformation. Additional research could be conducted that more deeply explores the relationship between self-concept development and students' success in college.

This study may benefit other higher education student educators including professors. Educators can consider the findings of this study as they create learning experiences for students in their academic curriculum. They can seek to create the kind of learning conditions that foster reflective thinking, community support, and connections between academic and extracurricular experiences. They can consider the findings of this study as they evaluate their teaching practice and students' progress in the classroom.

Key Terms

Cognitive Development

Transformative learning theory is grounded in a cognitive-developmental framework. Cognitive developmental theories focus on how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences (Evans, 2010). Learners' meanings for objects and situations influence how they behave and think about the world in which they live. Cognitive development occurs through two primary avenues: assimilation and accommodation. Individuals encounter new information or experiences that challenge their current assumptions and expectations, which results in cognitive dissonance. In assimilation, learners first try to incorporate new data into their current way of thinking (Evans, 2010). When the new information does not fit into their existing meaning structure, they create a new, more complex structure, which is accommodation (Wadsworth, 1979). As Evans (2010) notes, social interactions are highly influential in cognitive development,

thus they will be considered throughout this study as an important factor in students'

transformative learning experiences.

Constructionism

The concept of transformative learning is grounded in constructionism, which assumes that

people construct their realities through how they interpret experiences (Piaget, 1932). In other

words, learners find meaning through examining their own perceptions, which are then validated

through interactions and dialogue with other learners. Constructionism is based on the

assumption that individuals' perceptions and interpretations determine what reality is and that

they determine what is or is not an appropriate communication of understanding, symbols, and

attitudes (O'Sullivan, 1999). Mezirow explained that our meanings for things direct our actions

toward them (O'Sullivan, 1999). In other words, humans' perceptions of the world shape how

they respond to situations and what actions they take in those situations.

Learners continuously adapt their interpretations, perceptions, and actions to the situations

around them. As a result, each learner's experience is unique and highly unpredictable as

individuals experiment with objects and actions in their environments. Learners engage their

minds, bodies, emotions, and social relations as they build their knowledge bases (Fenwick,

2003). According to Baxter Magolda (1999), "a constructivist-developmental point of view

incorporates two major concepts: (1) that students construct knowledge by organizing and making

meaning of their experiences, and (2) that this construction takes place in the context of their

evolving assumptions about knowledge itself and students' role in creating it" (p. 6). Both of

these core concepts are integral to the transformative learning theory, which emphasizes that

learners are transformed through re-evaluating their experiences and their perceptions of those

experiences. Constructionism also underlies other developmental theories that will be discussed

later, which include cognitive, psychosocial, and transitional theories.

Critical Reflection

For transformative learning to occur, learners must engage in critical reflection. Reflection is an evaluation of how or why one has certain perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions (Mezirow, 1990). True reflection is the thoughtful review of past learning, which may focus on assumptions about the content of problems, the process or procedures used in problem-solving, or the presuppositions on the basis of which the problem has been posed (Mezirow, 1990). Critical reflection occurs when learners reflect on their presuppositions (Mezirow, 1990). In other words, learners reflect on why they believe what they believe. Critical reflection concerns not "the how or the how to of action, but with the why, the reasons for and the consequences of what we do" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13). During critical reflection, learners challenge the validity of their presuppositions in prior learning. Learners frequently check their prior learning to confirm that they have correctly proceeded to solve problems. Becoming critically aware of their own presuppositions involves challenging their established and habitual patterns of expectation, which are the meaning perspectives that they use to make sense of their experiences (Mezirow, 1990). This process can be painful because it reformulates how a learner views and experiences the world. According to Mezirow (1990),

> By far the most significant learning experience in adulthood involves critical self-reflection – reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting (p. 13).

Frames of Reference

A frame of reference is the structure of assumptions and expectations through which one filters sense impressions (Mezirow, 2000). A frame of reference is also called a meaning perspective. It selectively "shapes and delimits perception, cognition, feelings, and disposition by predisposing our intentions, expectations, and purposes" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Frames of reference are the results of how one interprets experiences. This provides a context for making meaning within experiences and observations so as to guide future action. However, a person may not always be aware of his or her personal frames of reference. In fact, many of the most

guarded beliefs about oneself and others are developed through repetitive affective experiences that are outside of one's awareness (Mezirow, 2000).

A frame of reference is composed of two dimensions: a habit of mind and resulting points of view. A habit of mind is a set of assumptions that acts like a filter for interpreting the meaning of experiences. A few of these assumptions include one's political orientation; preference for working alone or in groups; ethnocentricity; problem-solving strategies; patterns of behavior and role-playing; and many other orientations and worldviews (Mezirow, 2000). A habit of mind then becomes expressed as a point of view, which is comprised of immediate expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments (Mezirow, 2000). These components create meaning schemes which direct and shape interpretations and determine how a person judges, typifies objects, and attributes causality (Mezirow, 2000). Meaning schemes typically operate outside of a person's awareness, yet they determine what and how they see objects, people, and ideas in his or her experiences. Unless one critically reflects upon their meaning schemes, they will typically automatically follow a preset line of action, which was determined by their frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). In summary, frames of reference are complex and play a direct role in influencing how learners interpret their experiences. Habits of mind, points of view, and meaning schemes are integral to the creation and sustainability of frames of reference. Throughout this study, frames of reference will be referred to describe the sum of their habits of mind, points of view, and meaning schemes.

Learning

Before progressing further, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "learning." According to Mezirow (2000), learning is "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 5). In other words, learning is not a product or a goal that individuals strive to obtain or reach. Learning is a process that continually shapes individuals' interpretations and understanding of their experiences and determines how they will make decisions and take action.

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This concept of learning is supported by Keeling (2004), Long (1990), and Komives and Woodward (2003). In the higher education setting, learning is a "comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development" (Keeling, 2004, p. 2). Every aspect of the student and his or her environment is engaged in the learning process. In regards to holistic development, learning has been defined as a relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of experience (Long, 1990). In this sense, learning is not only the process of acquiring knowledge, but also the application of that knowledge into real life situations. After examining these two definitions of learning, it is clear that learning is a holistic developmental process that enables students to continuously transform their perspectives, knowledge base, and abilities, which may result in a lifelong pursuit of learning. Komives and Woodward (2003) note that "learning is both a noun and a verb, representing both outcome and process of education" (p. 235). As both definitions indicate, educators must consider that learning is not only obtaining new knowledge and abilities, but it is the process of acquiring them. In summary, Lyn described the concept of learning as a transformation. "It's about seeing yourself in relation to the world differently" (Apte, 2009, p. 170). Each of these definitions and perceptions support Mezirow's assertion that learning is a process that utilizes students' interpretations and experiences to guide their actions. Throughout this research, learning will be considered to be as such.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory was developed by Jack Mezirow to explain how adults changed the ways in which they interpreted their worlds. According to Mezirow (2000), transformative learning is "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference... to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 7). In other words, a transformative learning experience is one in which individuals reevaluate their assumptions and expectations and expand them to include a more

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diverse array of perceptions and understandings of the world. A transformative learning experience should result in perspectives that are more open to challenging ideas and realities. A learner discovers that there is more to the world than they may realize and that their perceptions of the world may not be as complete as they once thought it was.

Mezirow considered learning to be a constructive experience where learners form impressions of their situational contexts, and thus create their own sense of meaning from those situations. These interpretations shape how learners respond to new experiences. Thus, situations do not transform individuals, but their reactions to those situations do. Learners reinterpret old or new experiences from their sets of expectations. In transformative learning, learners experience a remodeling of their expectations, or interpretations, of the world, which then leads them to expand or re-interpret past experiences (Mezirow, 1991). In summary, transformative learning is essentially the reshaping of one's meaning perspectives in such a way that influences learners' future decision-making and actions.

Summary

Over the years countless social scientists have investigated the development that occurs throughout adulthood (Apte, 2009; Baxter-Magolda, 1995; Belenky et al., 1986; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cross, 1991; Evans, 2010; Fenwick, 2003; Freire,1970; Glisczinksi, 2007; Imel, 1998; Jacoby & Associates, 1996; Johnson, 2008; Long, 1990; Longacre, 2009; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Pasquariello, 2009; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Sanford, 1962; Sanford, 1967; Strange & Banning, 2001; Taylor, 2008; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000; Tisdell, 2008). Some researchers have focused on college students (Baxter-Magolda, 1995; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Glisczinksi, 2007; Jacoby & Associates, 1996; Longacre, 2009; Pasquariello, 2009; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Sanford, 1962; Sanford, 1967; Strange & Banning, 2001; Tisdell, 2008), others have developed theories that are applicable to this population, though they were not developed specifically with college students in mind (Imel, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Mezirow, 1991;

Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Taylor, 2008; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000). As the field of student affairs continues to grow, so does the knowledge base regarding adult development. The researcher of this study suggests that practioners ought to investigate what their perceptions of transformative learning are for the students with whom they interact so as to better facilitate the learning process. Increasing their own awareness of how transformative learning is facilitated and encouraged will also help them continually improve their practice (American College Personnel Association, 1994). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is directly applicable to student development both inside and outside of the classroom. This theory connects many developmental theories into a more readily remembered concept and approach to utilize when working with students. Like all theories, transformative learning has flaws and will need to be modified as student populations evolve. However, this theory and approach helps form a frame of reference from which practioners can begin when working with students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Transformative learning engages the whole learner in the learning process. Student affairs professionals continually seek to create learning experiences that help students find connections between their academic learning and extracurricular experiences so as to connect classroom learning with real world living. These practioners seek to provide students with personal development opportunities that will result in lifelong learning. This study sought to better understand how learners' transformative learning experiences reshape their frames of reference while in the higher education environment. This study was developed because transformative learning reinforces the meaning of liberal education through integrating academic learning and student development (Keeling, 2004). Personal growth is a key outcome of transformative learning experiences, which is demonstrated as individuals' progress toward greater maturity and possess a more refined knowledge base (Fenwick, 2003). Transformative learning theory links student affairs' goals with real world applications, which will be discussed throughout the review of the literature.

First, the process of transformative learning will be discussed so as to better explain how learners encounter and experience transformative learning. Then the three key roles in transformative learning will be explored, which include the learner, the educator, and the community. Following this, will be a review of past studies regarding transformative learning and then a discussion of its outcomes. Finally, it is also important to discuss the correlation between this theory and several prominent student development theories, including theories that concern cognitive development, psychosocial development, and navigation of transitions.

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Process of Transformative Learning

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Mezirow initially described transformative learning as a series of stages that were based on his research on the experiences of women entering college in later life. As will be addressed, each stage can be integrated into many student development theories and student affairs practioners frequently utilize them while helping students navigate their college years. In Mezirow's original ten phases, the learner first encounters a disorienting dilemma (phase 1); undergoes self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame (phase 2); critically assesses his or her epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions (phase 3); recognizes that his or her discontent and the process of transformation is shared and that others have negotiated a similar change (phase 4); explores options for new roles, relationships, and actions (phase 5); plans a course of action (phase 6); acquires knowledge and skills for implementing the action plan (phase 7); tries on new roles for a short time period (phase 8) ; builds competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships (phase 9); and reintegrates into one's life based on the conditions dictated by one's perspective (phase 10) (Mezirow, 1978a; Mezirow, 1978b). These ten phases were later condensed by Herbers (1998) into four phases: a disorienting dilemma (phase 1), critical reflection (phase 2), rational dialogue (phase 3), and action (phase 4). Herbers' approach clarified the foundational components of transformative learning. In transformative learning, individuals first experience a disorienting dilemma that challenges their current meaning schemes. They then self-evaluate and critically assess their current assumptions. They explore

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options for new roles, relationships, and actions, then create an action plan (Mezirow &

Associates, 2000). In order to implement the action plan, individuals seek out and acquire the

necessary skills and knowledge to implement it (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). While carrying

out the plan, they try on different roles and begin to integrate the most functional ones into their

lives based on the conditions dictated by their perspectives (Apte, 2009). Throughout the

experience, learners can best progress if they are engaged within a community of care (Fenwick,

2007; Mezirow, 1990). This theory emphasizes the importance of continually reflecting upon

one's frames of reference and dialoguing about them with others.

According to Mezirow (1990), frames of reference can only be changed when learners

critically reflect on their experiences, which results in a perspective transformation. Perspective

transformation and critical reflection work cohesively and are essential for transformative

learning. It is through perspective transformation that one becomes critically aware of their

presuppositions. One then begins to understand why and how they affect his or her perceptions,

feelings, and understandings about the world (Mezirow, 1990). This perspective transformation

affects one's whole life. As Novak writes, "Life is not seen from a new perspective, it is *lived*

from that perspective" (quoted in Paprock, 1992, p. 197, author's italics added).

Learners' perspectives and decision-making abilities are transformed when they critically

evaluate and reflect on their perceptions of the world. They then reformulate their assumptions

into more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives (Atherton, 2010). In

fact, Mezirow (1990) stated that an individual's perspective is developmentally progressive only

if they also possess qualities of being open to alternative perspectives so as to continually

increase their inclusivity, discrimination, and integration. Further research has indicated that a

developmentally advanced meaning perspective must also be free from internal and external

forces; open to other perspectives; accepts others as equal participants in the dialogue; and is

objective and rational when assessing incompatible arguments and evidence (Kasl & Elias, 2000;

Mezirow, 1991). This new perspective enables them to better understand the meanings and

implications of their experiences. Nohl (2007) describes this perspective transformation as part of a biographical reflection phase in which individuals restructure their life stories and assume new roles. This perspective transformation requires the interaction of three key players in the learning environment. These roles include the learner, the educator, and the community. We will now discuss what each player needs to bring to the learning environment for transformative learning to occur.

The Role of the Learner

Learners share in the responsibility of constructing and creating the conditions under which transformative learning may occur (Imel, 1998). It is important to note that perspective transformation does not lead to transformed learners. In order to transform their frames of reference, learners must critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, and then deliberately create and implement plans that redefine their worlds (Imel, 1998). They must choose to be transformed through the learning experience. Educators cannot force a transformation to occur. If learners do not choose to expand and alter their perspectives and actions, then they have not been transformed through the experience (Imel, 1998). In other words, learners must choose to take responsibility for their own education and experiences. Learners can do this by interacting with their community of care (faculty, staff, and peers) and by pursuing opportunities to apply their learning outside of the classroom. Learners must critically reflect on their own dispositions as learners in order to more fully develop through the transformative learning experience (Glisczinksi, 2007). Now it is important to discuss how students' interactions with educators affect the learning process.

The Role of the Educator

A study revealed that educators preferred to expand their focus from the development and enhancement of learners' academic skills to include facilitating the "whole [learner] coming alive" (Cranton, 2008, p. 46). The educators in this study compared the learning process to a journey along a learning path. As they travelled, educators would make observations, point out

obstacles, and challenge the learner to grow in mind and spirit (Cranton, 2008). This approach to learning is an integral component to guiding learners through transformative learning experiences. Educators enhance learning experiences when they demonstrate empathy, care, authenticity, sincerity, and a high degree of integrity (Christopher, 2001). The learning environment and instructional methods used are also beneficial if they promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust through a learner-centered approach that emphasizes student autonomy, participation, reflection, and collaboration (Christopher, 2001). Each of these concepts are regularly evaluated and utilized by student affairs practioners when working with college students within a wide array of settings, which may include but are not limited to the classroom, mentoring relationships, campus events, and ongoing programs.

Southern (2007) evaluated various teaching methods and their application to mentorship and transformative learning in the classroom. She noted that Habermas differentiated communicative learning and instrumental learning. Communicative learning closely resembles transformative learning through its focus on discovering the meaning of learning and on how to incorporate others' perspectives and knowledge (Habermas, 1981/1985). Instrumental learning, on the other hand, focuses on rote delivery of facts and figures without comprehending the meaningfulness of the activity. Southern (2007) observed that students learn most effectively through communicative learning, because this approach brings educators and learners together, whereas instrumental learning creates distance, thus hindering the learning community.

Research has indicated that transformative learning is enhanced when partners bring significantly different personalities, work styles, or worldviews to the community (Franz, 2005). Educators who wish to facilitate transformation are encouraged to promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust; support a learner-centered approach with an emphasis on collaboration; role model positive qualities; discuss and work through emotions before critical reflection; provide feedback; and encourage self-assessment (Fenwick, 2003). As discussed previously, learners

must collaborate for the most effective learning to occur, thus it is important to discuss the dynamics of interactions within the learning community.

The Role of the Community

Learning communities are essential for learner transformation. Mezirow (1991) asserted that a person creates meaning from his or her experiences through dialogue shared with others, which helps him or her understand, evaluate, and confirm or disconfirm their frames of reference. This dialogue often occurs within a community of practice or a community of care. This community can be described as a group of individuals who work together for a period of time and develop patterns of doing things and of discussing what members have learned (Fenwick, 2003). Each learner shares responsibility for constructing and creating the conditions under which transformative learning can occur (Imel, 1998). This community of care supports the diversity of self through creating meaningful relationships; facilitating understanding; and implementing collaborative action (Southern, 2007). Southern's (2007) research on communities of care emphasized that individuals needed a safe and supportive environment for successful transformative learning to occur. Educators are responsible for facilitating these communities of care by encouraging mutual comprehension, shared values, truthfulness, and trust (Southern, 2007). The community's learning process is also enhanced when educators role model a personal willingness to learn about other perspectives and to share their own perspectives (Imel, 1998). Practicing and facilitating these concepts are essential in student affairs practice.

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Past-tested Areas of Transformative Learning

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The transformative learning approach to student development has been utilized in many learning environments, including leadership programs, formal classrooms, mentorships, spontaneous action, and community engagement (Apte, 2009; Johnson, 2008; Nohl, 2007; Southern, 2007). Researchers have investigated how educators foster transformative learning (Cranton, 2008; Apte, 2009); how it is utilized in welfare reform (Christopher, 2001); and how it can be implemented in residential learning communities (Mezirow, 2000). Studies have

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investigated how it is experienced by student exchange participants, displaced homemakers, self-help groups, leaders in community organizations, HIV positive individuals, transplant patients, spouse abuse therapy participants, and female smokers and non-smokers (Taylor, E., 2000). As the research demonstrates, transformative learning has been studied in a diverse range of settings and participants.

Outcomes of Transformative Learning

Transformative learning deeply changes individuals and has a significant impact on learners' future experiences. "Transformative learning shapes people; they're different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize" (Christopher, 2001, p. 134). It has resulted in increased personal awareness and appreciation of perspectives; changed personal dimensions of epistemic, ontological, and psychosocial change; and an increased relationship between learning and action (Pasquariello, 2009). Other documented outcomes of transformative learning include helping learners heighten their holistic and integrative thinking; improve their decision making abilities and problem solving skills; and empower them to take personal action (Franz, 2005). Transformative learning has also enhanced the development of critical media literacy by expanding learners' thinking about marginalized "others" and hegemonic processes (Tisdell, 2008). In a study on the impact of transformative learning of women though the Bible Study Fellowship, Longacre (2009) observed that the experience helped the participating women choose to become more involved within their communities; increased their desire to make a positive difference in others' lives; grow in their Christian faith; and resulted in them spending years in service with the organization. After experiencing transformative learning, learners may choose to continue to pursue challenging experiences that lead them to consciously reflect on how they understand both their own and others' perspectives (Casteñeda, 2008; Longacre, 2009; Taylor, K., 2000; Tisdell, 2008).

Transformative learning has resulted in increased self-confidence in new roles and relationships; an empowered sense of self; significant changes to learners' self-perceptions and

personal assumptions; the creation of more productive strategies and resources for taking action and control over their lives; heightened compassion for others; and a changed sense of community (Christopher, 2001). As a result of learners' beliefs that they have the appropriate competencies and functional strategies to handle new circumstances, they are empowered to pursue new and challenging opportunities. This perspective transformation also results in an empowered sense of self; an enhanced critical understanding of how one's relationships and culture have shaped one's beliefs and feelings; and an ability to create more functional strategies and resources for implementing decisions (Mezirow, 1990). These elements of personal growth may also affect individuals' leadership development.

A study on leadership development revealed that both informational and transformative learning approaches are vital for facilitating personal leadership skills (Johnson, 2008). According to Johnson (2008), the dominant approach to leadership development emphasizes an informational approach founded on the belief that "knowledge creates leaders" (p. 87). However, his research indicates that both informational and transformative learning are needed for holistic leadership development. By encountering a disorienting dilemma, as found in transformative learning, the learner is challenged to create new frames of reference regarding their perceptions of leadership (Johnson, 2008). For learners to create more resilient and integrative frames of reference, they need honest feedback from others; space to critically reflect upon their experience and perceptions; and opportunities to experiment with their new frames of reference (Johnson, 2008). As discussed previously, these are also integral elements to transformative learning theory.

This research study is based in the higher education arena so it is important to examine how this theory fits with other developmental theories related to college students' growth. Student affairs professionals' practice utilizes several different developmental theories that are complementary to and compatible with transformative learning. A few of these theories will now be discussed.

Relationship with Current Student Development Theories

College student development theories and models seek to identify the dimensions and structure of growth and to explain how that growth occurs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Transformative learning theory is developmentally based in its pursuit of explaining and describing how individuals' meaning perspectives develop and evolve through their learning experiences. As a result, it is applicable to several college student development theories. The developmental theories that will be discussed include cognitive developmental theories by Belenky et al., Baxter Magolda, and Perry; Sanford's psychosocial developmental theory; and Schlossberg's transition theory. Each theory was chosen for commonalities that it shared with Mezirow's transformative learning theory. A few of these commonalities include an emphasis on meaning perspectives, disorienting dilemmas, communities of care, and learner transitions.

Cognitive Development Theories

Belenky et al. Transformative learning theory connects well with Belenky et al.'s concepts of knowing and perspectives. In *Women's Ways of Knowing,* Belenky et al. (1986) determined that there are five forms of knowing, which include silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. The theory focuses on how women's level of knowing is transformed through slowly developing their own sense of voice; creating a broader base of knowledge; and incorporating both feelings and thoughts into their learning experiences (Belenky et al., 1986). Belenky et al.'s concept of connected knowing among women is a central concept to transformative learning since participants' differences bring unique and alternate frames of reference to the learning community (Apte, 2009). Most importantly, educators must establish a relationship of trust and discovery within the learner, which is established through connected knowing (Cranton, 2008). A relationship based on connected knowing empowers learners with the tools and support needed in their search to understand and relate to new perspectives, thus transforming their current perspective to encompass a broader, more balanced view of others around them.

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Mezirow's concept of disorienting dilemmas comes to mind after reading one woman's comment in *Women's Ways of Knowing,* "Circumstances change. Our way of looking at things change. Time may have given us what we think are right answers, but it also gives us a different set of problems" (Belenky, 1986, p. 138). This woman indicated that her frames of reference are continuously changing due to a variety of situations, interactions with others, and new experiences. Her views are continuously under construction and transforming as time passes. Her comment illustrates how transformative learning experiences impact individuals by not only challenging and redeveloping their current frames of reference, but also by creating new challenges within their new frames.

Baxter Magolda. Transformative learning is present in Baxter Magolda's cognitive development theory. Much like Belenky et al.'s concept of knowing, Baxter Magolda's stages of absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing are integrally related to perspective transformation. As individuals progress through the learning cycle they become less focused on simply receiving and memorizing information and become more focused on comprehending new information and its implications in their lives. Individuals' progression through the learning cycle may occur in different ways for different learners. Baxter Magolda (1995) discovered that individuals' perspectives are transformed according to their natural learning preferences. For instance, in her longitudinal study she discovered that women were more inclined to approach learning with a relational approach in which they considered others' perspectives and emotions while learning new concepts and ideas (Baxter Magolda, 1995). On the other hand, men approached learning more rationally and impersonally by maintaining an emotional separation from the information (Baxter Magolda, 1995). As Baxter Magolda (1995) discovered, both methods eventually led to transformed ways of knowing, but the paths of getting there were unique for each individual. Within the transformative learning framework, educators must remember that the ways in which learners make meaning of their world also affects their progression, or lack thereof, in potential transformative learning

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experiences. Baxter Magolda's emphasis on learner's stages of meaning-making provides educators with a guide for identifying learners' meaning making structures and for communicating with learners according to those structures.

Perry. Much like the concepts of knowing researched by Belenky et al. and Baxter Magolda, Perry's nine positions illustrates how individuals' perspectives are transformed through disorienting dilemmas and supportive learning environments. Perry reaffirms the necessity of committing to a community of care when he states that commitments form structure; provide learners with a focus on learning; and affirm the inseparable relationship between the knower and the known (Perry, 1970). Mentors are needed to facilitate a community of care in which learners can be vulnerable and honest among their peers and mentors, thus nourishing and strengthening learners, resulting in a more confident sense of knowing (Perry, 1970).

As Tisdell (2008) discovered, learners need to be exposed to a variety of points of view and concepts to better understand diverse perspectives and how one's frames of reference alters one's experiences. Much like Perry's four levels (dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment to relativism), learners who learned how to critically analyze and evaluate media communications became more conscious of how communication relates to power relations of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (Tisdell, 2008). Exposure to and critical reflection of how the media portrays disadvantaged individuals and how this affects society enabled learners to move from seeing the world in polar terms in the dualistic level to eventually moving into a commitment to relativism by affirming themselves and their own responsibilities in the world. Learners not only gained transformed perspectives, they were also empowered to take action, which is a central goal of transformative learning (Tisdell, 2008).

Psychosocial Development Theory

Nevitt Sanford. Sanford's psychosocial developmental theory relates to transformative learning theory through its emphasis on challenge and support. According to Sanford (1967), development is a growth process in which individuals learn to increasingly integrate and act on

many different experiences and influences. After progressing through a situation that closely

resembles Mezirow's "disorienting dilemma," individuals move through at least three

developmental trends. First, they experience a freeing of impulse, which is an increased ease in

navigating cultural symbols (Sanford, 1967). They then develop an enlightened conscience,

which is a new way of deciding upon their values and the structure of their value system

(Sanford, 1967). This closely adheres to Mezirow's fourth and fifth phase during which

individuals realize and recognize that others have experienced similar changes, and are thus freed

to begin exploring new roles, relationships, and actions (Mezirow, 1978a; Mezirow, 1978b). In

Sanford's theory, individuals then encounter a differentiation and integration of their ego, which

means that they successfully navigate increasingly difficult situations that enable the growth and

breadth of their perceptions of themselves and others (Sanford, 1967). This final progression is

the sum of Mezirow's ninth and tenth phases during which individuals build their competence

and self-confidence and reintegrate new roles and relationships into their lives based on their

changed frames of reference (Mezirow, 1978a; Mezirow, 1978b). Individuals' growth within the

framework of Sanford's theory is also demonstrated in the developmental outcomes that result

from transformative learning experiences (Nohl, 2007; Tisdell, 2008; Glisczinksi, 2007).

Transition Theory

   Schlossberg. Schlossberg's transition theory connects well with transformative learning

through its emphasis on how learners navigate transitions that challenge their frames of reference.

According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), a transition is any event or non-event

that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Transformative learning

experiences change learners' frames of reference and force learners to reevaluate their

perceptions of the world and reintegrate those new frames into their lives. Transition theory

describes how learners progress or regress through transformative learning experiences and

identifies factors that influence that development. As noted in transformative learning theory,

individuals are unique in their learning and development. Not all learners will be transformed by

experiencing the same situation or learning context. With this in mind, not all transitions will be influential on learners' development. Three key factors affect individuals' movement through transitions, including the type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, nonevent, and relative), the context (the individual's relationship to the transition and the setting in which it occurs), and the impact (how the transition influences the individual's daily life) (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In transformative learning theory, learners' meaning perspectives may be influenced by any of these transitions. In fact, "assessment of a transition's impact on relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles is probably the most important consideration in understanding an individual's reactions" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 39). With this in mind, reflection is an essential element of individual growth, as also demonstrated in transformative learning theory.

How one copes with the transition is influenced by the individual's personal assets and liabilities, which include situation, self, support, and strategies. Each of these factors is important in assisting individuals as they experience transitions. Also, each of these factors has been discussed to varying degrees throughout the transformative learning theory. Situation refers to what is currently happening in the individual's life. In a broad sense, situation refers to the context, including the transition's trigger, timing, duration, concurrent stressors, aspects of controllability, and any associated role changes as a result of it (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Situation considers if the individual has encountered similar transitions in the past and how the individual assess the transition (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In transformative learning, the learner encounters a disorienting dilemma, which is a situation that they have not previously experienced. Self refers to the individual's personal and demographic characteristics; socioeconomic status; gender; age and stage of life; state of health; ethnicity and culture; psychological resources; ego development; outlook; commitments and values; and spirituality and resiliency (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). When educators provide opportunities for transformative learning, they consider the student's whole "self," including the

factors previously listed. Support refers to the types and sources of relationships that individuals

have during transitions. These relationships include intimate relationships, family units, networks

of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the individuals are a part (Goodman,

Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In transformative learning theory, learners need a community

of care that provides a support system for learners as they navigate transformative learning

experiences. Strategies refer to how the individual copes in the situation. Pearlin and Schooler

(1978) identified the three types of coping that individuals utilize, which include responses that

modify the situation; responses that control the meaning of the problem; and responses that

helped manage stress after the transition occurred. These responses are akin to the meaning-

making approaches described in transformative learning theory by Kegan (2000).

Summary

Learning requires a deeper look into students' current knowledge, social identity, values and

behavior patterns, and personal perceptions of how and what they contribute to the world in

which they live (Keeling, 2004). Transformative learning accomplishes this goal by challenging

learners to reevaluate their presuppositions and create new frames of reference. For

transformative learning experiences to occur, the learner, educator, and community must be fully

engaged in the process. Transformative learning has been studied in a wide range of settings and

with a diverse range of participants. As the research indicates, transformative learning

experiences result in personal growth, including, but not limited to, increased personal awareness;

an heightened relationship between learning and action; improved decision-making abilities and

problem-solving skills; increased self-confidence in new roles and relationships; a heightened

compassion for others; and a changed sense of community (Christopher, 2001; Franz, 2005

Pasquariello, 2009). Overarching all of these outcomes are key elements of transformative

learning experiences – an evaluation and modification of one's presuppositions. When learners

change their frames of reference, they are increasingly capable of viewing the world through

more inclusive, integrative, and discriminating lenses (Atherton, 2010; Mezirow, 1990). Student

affairs practioners must consider how transformative learning theory connects with student development theories. As demonstrated throughout the review of the literature, transformative learning is integrated into several developmental theories, including those by Baxter-Magolda, Belenky et al., Perry, Sanford, and Schlossberg.

As the research indicates, transformative learning may be the means to actualize institutions' missions into reality. Higher education institutions are in a unique position to facilitate transformative learning within students, which may help them develop a heightened consciousness of their perceptions and of the world around them (Glisczinksi, 2007). Throughout his study, the researcher hopes to better clarify how transformative learning is utilized in higher education and how it can be integrated more fully into students' learning experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study explores how college students' frames of reference are influenced and changed

through the experiences they have while in the higher education environment. It is grounded

within the framework of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The researcher seeks to

better understand how students identify when and how their frames of reference are changed

throughout college. Research questions include

1. "What kinds of experiences do students consider to be transformative learning

    experiences?;"

2. "How did students navigate these experiences?;" and

3. "How did these experiences influence student perceptions of and behavior toward

    themselves, others, and society?"

These questions are framed with a phenomenological qualitative approach. This type of study

explores the lived experiences of individuals who are directly affected by the phenomenon being

studied (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). When conducting a qualitative study, it is

especially important to clarify the researcher's paradigm, which will now be discussed.

Paradigms

Before discussing a study's methodology, it is important to review the paradigm, or worldview, that will guide the investigator throughout the study. Guba (1990) defines a paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 17). These beliefs will influence what the researcher decides to study, how they conduct the study, and how they interpret the data. By reflecting upon and disclosing the researcher's paradigm, both the researcher and reader will gain richer information and understanding from the study (Gordon, 2005). This paradigm is referred to as the "inquiry paradigm" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 200). An inquiry paradigm's defining beliefs can be clarified by asking three primary questions, which concern ontology (what reality is and what can be known about it), epistemology (what is the relationship between the knowers and what can be known), and methodology (how can the knowers find out what can be known) (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In other words, a researcher needs to discuss how they believe reality is shaped, what information can be found in their vision of reality, and what they believe is the best method for exploring and assessing that information. Qualitative researchers cannot compartmentalize their worldviews from their research; they are integrally related to one another.

Clarifying one's paradigm is essential in identifying one's conscious and unconscious baggage. Bias may come from two primary sources, which include personal experience and professional training (LeCompte, 1987). Scheurich (1995) expands upon these two areas, including one's "disciplinary training, epistemological orientation, social positionality, institutional imperatives, and funding sources and requirements" (p. 249-250). As noted by Scheurich's list, numerous factors may influence the inquirer's paradigm, yet articulating their influence on one's life may be daunting. The researcher has the challenge of succinctly articulating what their paradigm is in such a way that readers can readily understand what is the researcher's theoretical framework. Below are a few questions shaped by Margaret Mead that can help researchers discuss their paradigm.

1. Who did the work?

2. Where did they come from?

3. How were they selected?

4. How were they trained?

5. What was their history?

6. What was their value system?

7. What happened to them once they were out in the community? (Spindler, 1984).

By providing readers with a detailed description of a researcher's professional and personal background, readers can better understand the study's theoretical framework. Researchers need to discuss their educational background, training in the methods used, history regarding the study's content and theoretical framework, and what values played a vital role in the study. Providing readers with this information can prove useful as they determine what may have influenced the study's process and findings.

Reflexivity

Reflecting upon and discussing one's inquiry paradigm is part of reflexivity, or self-reflexivity. This has been defined as "a performance that positions the author in relationship to the field, the act of research, writing and the production of knowledge more generally" (Haggerty, 2003, p. 158). Employing reflexivity is how a researcher evaluates and discusses how they are engaged in their field of study, how they conduct the study, and how they communicate and articulate their data. Researchers are obligated to "come clean 'at the hyphen'" regarding our roles as participant-observer, etc. by interrogating "who we are as we co-produce the narratives that we presume to 'collect'" (Fine & Weiss, 1998, p. 277-278). Schön (1983) suggested that researchers can reflect upon their practice through two angles, which are reflection-in-action (thinking about it while doing it) and reflection-on-action (thinking about it after doing it). By utilizing both approaches, researchers can inform and further develop their practice. As Gordon (2005) notes, "when it comes to reflexivity, all of us have our blind spots, and the irony is that it is these very blind spots that reflexivity is meant to address" (p. 281). Researchers utilize

reflexivity to recognize their own personal and professional limitations and beliefs. Even though researchers may fully believe that their research is useful and emancipatory, they are still 'objectifying' others and speaking *for* them (emphasis added by author), and thus it is important to identify the ways in which researchers may negatively affect the data collection and findings of studies despite their best intentions (Usher & Edwards, 1994). In summary, reflexivity offers both researchers and readers to evaluate and challenge the methods and findings of the study. Both are reminded that the accounts provided in qualitative studies are textual creations (Gordon, 2005) and human constructions, thus subject to human error (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

I recognize that several factors may influence my approach and analysis of this study. My educational background, socio-economic status, race, gender, values, and personal interests may influence how I interacted with and evaluated data collected from interviews. I sought to continually reflect upon the possible influences of these factors by member-checking, writing field notes, and reviewing data. In order to assist the reader in understanding how these factors may have influenced my approach to this study, my background will be briefly discussed.

I am a white, female graduate student in my mid-twenties. I am well-acquainted with the study site (a large Midwestern public university) since I obtained my undergraduate degree and am in the process of obtaining my Master's degree from the institution. Throughout my college years, I was an active member and leader within several campus organizations and off-campus community programs. I partly chose to interview college students who volunteered during college because I was an active volunteer and believe that those experiences impacted my personal development and perspective. As result, my close relationship with the institution and volunteering may have both benefitted and hindered this study. By being aware of campus traditions and culture, I may have more readily connected with some students, yet not related as well to others. My experiences as a campus leader and local volunteer may have helped me forge stronger dialogues with some students but made it more difficult to converse with other students. In an attempt to keep the research as emic as possible (from the participant's point of view), it is

imperative that I sought to keep my personal experiences out of the picture when analyzing

participant responses. I attempted to be vigilant of inadvertently projecting my own biases and

experiences onto participants' voices throughout the data collection process. Along that vein, I

sought to understand and not devalue the viewpoints of participants who had biases and

experiences that were not like mine. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I

attempted to keep myself in check and identify possible preconceived perceptions that might

influence the outcomes of this study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research "represents human beings as whole persons, living in dynamic,

complex social arrangements" (Rogers, 2000, p. 51). Unlike quantitative research, the researcher,

not an instrument, is the primary means through which the study is conducted (Rossman & Rallis,

2003). A few other qualities that characterize this research include using the natural setting as the

direct source of data; approaching and reporting data descriptively; analyzing data inductively;

being concerned with the process rather than just the outcomes or product of the subject under

study; and "meaning" as the primary focus of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Lichtman

(2006) proposed that qualitative research must possess ten critical elements, which include

utilizing description, understanding, and interpretation; being dynamic; using multiple

approaches; thinking inductively; viewing data holistically; using a variety of data in natural

settings; researcher as instrument; in-depth study of subject; emphasizing words, themes, and

writing; and an nonlinear approach. Essentially, qualitative researchers may use multiple

approaches to best understand the context and dynamics at play within the subject under study.

As a result, researchers themselves are the instruments used. They must present the data

descriptively and seek themes and concepts that link the data in such a way that better explains

the subject under study. This collected data can be described as "the basic units or building

blocks of information [that] are images, sounds, words, and numbers" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003,

p. 4). Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of these building blocks by using an

interpretative and naturalistic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Researchers often utilize one primary research paradigm through which they seek data and attempt to find meaning in it. A few of these research paradigms are discussed in-depth by Creswell (2007), which include using narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. In this study, the phenomenological approach will be used.

At its core, phenomenology seeks to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Phenomenologists (or qualitative researchers who use phenomenology as their framework) identify a phenomenon or human experience and collect information from individuals who have experienced that phenomenon. Once the study reaches information saturation, the researcher develops a composite description of "what" all of the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). What differentiates a phenomenological study from a narrative study is the former's focus on describing meaning for several individuals of their experiences with a phenomenon, whereas the latter focuses on the life of a single individual. Phenomenologists carefully select individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon so that they can forge a common understanding among the participants (Creswell, 2007). They explore the perspectives of the participants, which then "illuminates the inner dynamics of situations – dynamics that are often invisible to the outsider" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 32). Phenomenologists want to get to the essence of the phenomenon through exploring it with participants. They also carefully select cases of typicality, particularly those that seem to offer "the opportunity to learn" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 101). In order to understand the phenomenon under study, phenomenologists often conduct in-depth interviews or even multiple interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007). They assume that dialogue and reflection can reveal the underlying meanings found in in a phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Thus, language is the primary symbol system through which meaning is simultaneously constructed and conveyed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). A few

questions that illustrate phenomenologists' approach to their studies are provided by Rossman and Rallis (2003):

> What has this person experienced?
>
> What meaning does the person make of this?
>
> How does the person understand his or her experience?
>
> What do the stories people construct about their lives mean?
>
> How does the articulation of their stories empower them? (p. 94).

After reviewing these questions, it is clear that phenomenology is not only the description of a phenomenon, but it is also the researcher's interpretation of that phenomenon. Researchers must continually reflect upon their research paradigm, interactions with interviewees, and framing of questions. Throughout the data collection process, researchers ask participants two core questions: "What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers want to understand participants' perspectives and unique stories about their experiences with the phenomenon, so they probe participants for rich information. These phenomenological interviews serve two primary purposes: as a means for exploration and gathering of experiential narrative material that may be used as a resource for shaping a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon and as a tool for developing a conversational relationship with a partner about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). Interviews provide researchers with a space and a tool for discussing, understanding, and interpreting a phenomenon. Researchers themselves play a critical role throughout their qualitative research, so their roles will now be discussed.

Role of the Interviewer

In conducting qualitative research, researchers need to understand their roles as interviewers. As Anderson and Jack (1991) note, researchers must remember that they are active participants in qualitative research. Unlike "everyday life actors," social scientists are purposive

and systematic in that they are driven by the desire to understand the relationships that can be found between theoretical questions and human action, interaction, and society (Adler & Adler, 2000, p. 80). One of the challenges for researchers is to not force their theories onto participants' language, stories, and experiences. Thus, researchers must "learn to listen in a new way, to hold in abeyance the theories that [tell us] what to hear and how to interpret" participants' voices (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 18). Anderson and Jack (1991) discussed how her personal experiences as an interviewer highlighted the difficulty of simultaneously interviewing women and needing to make sense of what they told her.

> "In this case, the scholar's search for generalizations undermined the interviewer's need to attend to an individual's experience. Ideally, the process of analysis should be suspended or at least subordinated to the process of listening" (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 15).

How do researchers listen to participants without immediately trying to frame their feedback within our preferred theoretical frameworks? Jack (1984) provides researchers with three ways of listening during an interview that can help them sharpen their awareness of what participants are communicating during an interview. He suggests that interviewers pay close attention to the narrator's moral language, meta-statements, and the logic of the narrative (Jack, 1984). A researcher who is aware of these three areas of interviewees' communication can help alert him or her to those moments when interviewees are saying what they think they ought to say instead of what they actually think. Scheurich (1995) warns researchers that "much of the interaction may be infused with a shift between performed or censured statements and underperformed and uncensored statements" (p. 244), which closely resembles the moral language described by Jack (1984). Participants' moral language is the terminology they use to communicate their relationship between self-concept and cultural norms. Another dimension of listening, observing one's meta-statements, is noticing the sudden breaks and pauses in the conversation, when participants "spontaneously stop, look back, and comment about their own thoughts on something

just said" (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 21). Often, researchers may miss the more subjective

dimensions of participants' lives by ignoring or accepting at face value pauses, words, or

expressions that can invite further, more in-depth discussion. Observing the interviewer's logic

of the narrative refers to the internal consistency or contradictions that are used in statements

about recurring themes (Anderson & Jack, 1991).   When researchers pay close attention to

interviewers' moral language, meta-statements, and logic of the narrative, they can better

understand and evaluate what interviewers are saying, not saying, and why they are saying it.

Also, by using these three concepts, researches may learn to probe more often during interviews.

A recurring theme in the literature of qualitative research interviews is that researchers

often do not probe for more information in the areas where they think that they already know the

answer. Researchers may have the tendency to listen to what fits into their preferred theoretical

framework, yet these may be the very areas that warrant additional exploration. Qualitative

researchers should ask narrators to clarify what they mean by certain words and phrases.

Narrators' meanings for such language may not be the same as that of the researcher. Essentially,

researchers pay attention to what is missing, also known as the "presence of the absence" or the

"hollows, centers, caverns within the work-places where activity that one might expect is

missing… or deceptively coded" (Heilbrun & Stimpson, 1975). Anderson (1991) provides a brief

list of pointers for researchers to remember as they conduct qualitative interviews. A few of these

include seeking to not cut narrators off to steer them to our own concerns; trusting one's hunches,

feelings and responses that arise through listening to others; noticing personal areas of confusion

or too much certainty about what is said; identify one's own personal discomfort, which may

identify discrepancies between what is said and what is actually felt (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Paying attention to these areas of concern can help researchers not neglect the moral dimension of

interviewing.

An assumption is commonly made that the researcher is entitled to manipulate the

interviewing interaction because the participant "is a relatively low-status person who is not

sophisticated enough to realize what is going on and/or not technically qualified to judge the research" (Platt, 1981). However, interviews may not have this high power dynamic in place. Qualitative research is more like a "friendship than a contract" between the researcher and the interviewee (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992, p. 53). Interviewees have a say regarding what is discussed, how the interaction progresses, and continually make decisions about their participation. Researchers must be aware that they are there "to follow the narrator's lead, to honor her integrity and privacy, not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back" (Anderson, 1991, p. 25). In other words, researchers are seeking participants' feedback and personal viewpoint, which makes them both partners in the research endeavor. Both partners have different reasons for participating in the research, but both are actively concerned with its results. As a result of this partnership, it is important that researchers do not misrepresent their research by deliberately misrepresenting their identity in order to enter a private domain to which they were not otherwise eligible and to deliberately misrepresent the character of the research (Erikson, 1967). As previously discussed, the researcher must be aware of their own research paradigm and how that influences their mindset when conducting and interpreting the interview. Now we will discuss how researchers can create an interview that provides freedom and flexibility for interviewees' voices.

Conducting the Interview

One of the primary differences between qualitative research and quantitative research is the emphasis that is placed on context. Quantitative research attempts to streamline the data collection and analysis process by neatly categorizing information to best fit quantitative measures. While this approach is efficient and makes interpretation of data more objective, it is still lacking regarding the full outcomes and implications of data. As Guba and Lincoln (1998) note, precise quantitative approaches may require the stripping of variables through appropriate controls or randomization. If allowed to exert their effects, these variables, if taken in context, may greatly alter findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In contrast to this, qualitative research

attempts to get a much larger scope for who is involved in the study, how they are involved, what other influences are in place, and how all of these elements interact to create the circumstance under study.

Unlike day-to-day conversations between individuals or groups of people, qualitative research interviews and focus groups are structured and guided by a theoretical question that is seeking to be addressed. Qualitative research interviews have been defined as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation" (Kvale, 1996). In other words, qualitative research interviews are an exploration of individuals' lived experiences and the meanings that they find from those experiences. According to Kvale (1996), a few characteristics of such an interview is a methodological awareness of questions, a focus on the interviewer-interviewee dynamics, and critical attention to what is said. In other words, this can be considered to be a conversation with a purpose. Both interviewees and researchers may benefit from this interview by offering freedom and flexibility for both. For interviewees, they have the opportunity to tell their stories in their own language and terminology (Anderson & Jack, 1991). For researchers who record the interview, they may gain living resources for both present and future use (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

> "…we can rummage through interviews as we do through an old attic – probing, comparing, checking insights, finding new treasures the third time through, then arranging & carefully documenting our results" (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11).

The researcher gains a resource rich in data that may continually provide new information each time they revisit it. One of the challenges for researchers in exploring topics with interviewees is that they must learn to ask interviewees what meanings they make of their experiences and to clarify what they mean in their terminology and choice of words (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Researchers must approach the interview with an attitude of receptivity to learn from interviewees (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Researchers utilize interviews to "find out what is in and

on someone else's mind… to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). This attitude of openness and readiness to learn enables researchers to enter the interview without preset categories of meaning and expectations.

Qualitative researchers do not conduct their interviews with ready-made categories for measuring responses, rather they are free to search for concepts and ideas that appear to be meaningful to interviewees. Kvale (1996) provides researchers with a few key criteria for conducting a quality interview. A few include the scope of answers from the interviewee that are spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant; shorter questions from the interviewer and longer answers from the interviewee; the frequency that the interviewer clarifies the meaning of relevant terms used by the interviewee; the interviewer's attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers; and if the interview is a story contained in itself that does not require much extra description and explanations (Kvale, 1996). To summarize, a successful qualitative interview is one in which the interviewer seeks to understand the interviewee's perspective and to clarify that perspective throughout the interaction.

Design of Study

This study is a phenomenological qualitative study that utilizes case studies for a more in-depth understanding of transformative learning experiences within the college setting. Phenomenological studies require in-depth interviews with individuals whose experiences ought to help address the research question (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Accordingly, I interviewed eight college students who are 18-25 years old in a collective case study format that used interactive interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) as the primary research method. A collective case study extends to several cases which may or may not be known in advance to manifest the common characteristic (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The participants in this study were chosen through a purposive sampling procedure because I believed that understanding them would lead to a better understanding of the larger population of college students (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I sought to identify students who had participated in volunteering experiences to

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help provide a common unifying experience among the participants, thus providing this study with a purposive researcher sampling procedure.

Background of Participants

Participants in this study included five females and three males. Of the five females, there was one freshman, one sophomore, two juniors, and one senior. Of the three males, there was one freshman, one sophomore, and one senior. All but one of the participants were United States citizens. Each of the participants are currently active in a wide range extracurricular activities, including academic organizations, Greek life, intramurals, residential life, religious organizations, social organizations, student government, and service organizations. Six of the eight participants participated in a face-to-face follow-up interview. Of the remaining two, one emailed responses back to follow-up questions and the final participant was not able to schedule a follow-up interview. All of the participants either earned academic credit (if they were enrolled in an education course that offered research study extra credit) and/or service hours for their participation in the study (if they were members of the university's Service-Learning Volunteer Center online database).

An interesting dynamic that merits discussing is the reciprocity of some of the researcher-participant relationships. Following each interview, I offered to help students with identifying volunteer opportunities, future research projects, and anything else the student may need assistance with. As a result, I helped one student get involved with an upcoming volunteer activity, referred another student to a job related to his interests, and provided a couple students with information related to their discussion. This kind of interaction occurred organically through the interaction and dialogue facilitated by the interview. These "outside interview" interactions were not intended to over-value some participants' participation over others' and I sought to maintain a balanced and fair perspective of the data provided by each participant. Now we will begin a discussion of the tools to be used in conducting the research.

Tools

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The tools used in conducting this research study included a Semi-Structured Interview

Guide (see Appendix I), Participant Invitation Forms (see Appendix II), Research Description to

be Posted on Sona (see appendix III), Informed Consent for Participating Students forms (see

Appendix III), Study Research Flyer (see Appendix V), research notes, audio recorder, and data

analysis.

<div align="center">**Procedure**</div>

Recruitment

It is important to discuss how I recruited interviewees, interviewed them, and analyzed

the data. To recruit participants, I used two primary resources, which included the university's

Campus Link (Collegiate Link) system, specifically through the Service-Learning Volunteer

Center (SLVC) and the College of Education's Sona system. A flyer that describes the study,

qualifications for participants, incentives to participate, and contact information was posted on the

Campus Link online bulletin board.

After receiving appropriate access from the Service-Learning Volunteer Center

Coordinator, I sent an invitation to participate in this study via the Campus Link SLVC group

page. This invitation explained that they are not required to participate in this study, but that they

will receive service hours for participating. Their service hours may be recorded through the

Service-Learning Volunteer Center's service hour database, Campus Link (or Collegiate Link).

Students received service hours for participating in this study that correlate with the amount of

time they were engaged in the study (interviewing and member-checking).

I also recruited students through the College of Education's Sona system. Students who

are interested in participating in campus research projects sign up through the Sona system to

receive notifications about studies in which they are qualified to participate. I posted information

about this study on the Sona system, which explained the purpose of the research, why potential

interviewees' participation is valuable, how interviews will be conducted, and how confidentiality

will be protected. This communication explained the necessary qualifications to participate in

this study. This message stated that participation in this study is not required of any potential

interviewees. Students received service hours for participating in this study that correlated with

the amount of time they were engaged in the study (interviewing and member-checking).

Students who participated in this research study signed up for interviews via the Sona system.

Consent Process

After interviewees verbally consented to participate in an interview, they were asked to

read and sign a consent form (see Appendix IV). One oral interview with each participant was

conducted. Before each interview, I reviewed the Informed Consent for Participating Students

form (see Appendix IV). I communicated with potential participants both orally and in written

form that there are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than

those ordinarily encountered in daily life. I reviewed what interviewees can expect to occur

during this study. In addition to explaining the research process and the participant's role in the

process, it was clarified that there is no penalty for refusing to participate and that he or she is free

to withdraw his or her consent and participation in this study at any time, without penalty.

Conducting the Interview

During the interview, questions were asked that focused on experiences that students

identified as being most pivotal in the development of their perspectives of themselves, others,

and the world in which they live. Students were asked about what experiences they have had that

challenged them to reshape their perceptions; if they talked with others to understand what they

were experiencing; if they reflected on the experiences in different ways; and if those experiences

have influenced their behavior after the experience. The Semi-Structured Interview Guide (see

Appendix I) provides a fuller understanding of the questions asked. Initially, warm-up questions

were asked, such as questions about the student's hobbies and interests, to establish rapport and to

learn about what engages them. Interviews with participants were audio recorded. The

interviews took place in a variety of locations on-campus, including lounges, study rooms, and a

foyer. The periods of time for individual interviews were 45-60 minutes and were not intended to

create any discomfort or inconvenience for participants. Member-checking occurred after the interviews were transcribed to verify and confirm my interpretation and understanding of what was discussed. First, I thanked interviewees for their participation and asked if they would like to follow-up via phone, email, or in-person interview. All but two of these member-checks occurred via follow-up interview. One participant preferred to respond via email and another was unable to schedule a follow-up interview.

The content of interviews were loosely shaped by an interview guide (see Appendix I), which is a list of questions or topics to be used with each participant, thus providing focus and consistency to the interviews (Patton, 2002). The use of an interview guide allowed me to explore participants' perspectives by asking follow-up questions appropriate to the topic being discussed (Patton, 2002). This provided a balance between structure and flexibility in the process and content of the interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Throughout the interviews, I restated key points and asked for verification to have a more thorough understanding of what interviewees are sharing with me. After conducting an interview, I transcribed the interview verbatim.

Originally when I began this study, I planned to conduct in-depth discussions with college students about their volunteering experiences. However, as interviews progressed, I discovered that many experiences that most stood out to students were not solely volunteer-related, thus my interviews with students covered a broader range of experiences than expected. This new change in direction allowed our conversations to reveal rich stories about students' experiences in volunteer situations, residential life, student organizations, travels, and interactions with children. As a result of this unexpected development, I discovered a much wider array of experiences that have influenced students' self-perceptions and learning.

Protecting Confidentiality

In order to enhance the experience of interviewees and provide rich data, I sought to protect the confidentiality of participants. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to create a pseudonym to use throughout the interview and for data collected. Acquired

data from interviews were stored on a computer, which was password protected and stored under lock and key. An electronic key was created with participants' names and pseudonyms. This electronic pseudonym list or key was kept in a separate digital file from the other interview data, in order to protect the identity of the participants. Interviewees' actual names and other distinguishing characteristics were not disclosed for the analysis and reporting of this information within the final thesis document. The data was shared with my advisor and committee members, but no one else had access to the raw data. Also, the data will be kept for no more than two calendar years, as the data will be analyzed and reported. Once this study is completed, all of the data collected will be permanently deleted or erased from all electronic devices and any paper copies of transcribed interviews will be shredded.

Analyzing the Data

Once the study reached the point of saturation, I analyzed the interview transcripts for recurring concepts, themes, and patterns. A challenge threading throughout data collection and analysis was making sense of the large amounts of data, reducing the volume of information, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework in this regard. The process was in-depth, comprehensive, and largely guided by my intuitive approach. Much like exploring an attic full of potential treasures, each explorer may discover and identify very different items or concepts as research treasures. In this study, I analyzed the data was based on transcriptions of the eight interviews and six follow-up interviews, notes made during the interviews and summarized afterward, and by my reflection on the data after the interviews. I chose to use a primarily holistic analysis strategy, which involved identifying "connections among the data in the actual context" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 274) because this seemed to be the best fit for a constructive phenomenological study.

After repeating this process for each interview, I printed single-sided versions of each transcript and cut out key quotes and concepts to visually and physically integrate recurring ideas and concepts from all of the interviews. Overall, my approach was to come up with a number of

clusters, patterns, or themes that were linked together and collectively described or analyzed the research arena. Essentially, I followed a multi-layered process in thinking about the data. As Kvale (1996) notes, throughout this process the researcher is open to new and unexpected phenomena and does not use ready-made categories. By using the verbatim transcripts, I conducted a microanalysis – a line-by-line analysis – by labeling key concepts discussed by each participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This analysis was conducted by highlighting "significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomena" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). These labels were used when looking for patterns and themes throughout interviews. This process is referred to as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Following this, I developed clusters of meaning from the identified significant statements into themes.

I used open coding to analyze my data, which consisted of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, I chunked data together and place meaningful codes on them which allowed me to describe the inter-relationships of the data in their given context (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Some of these categories referred to the specific phenomenon under study (transformative learning and frames of reference); others referred to conditions that related to the phenomenon. Still other categories referred to how individuals responded to the phenomenon or the consequences of that interaction with the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These additional subcategories were analyzed through axial coding. Initially, I identified at least fifteen emergent categories that were later condensed to a much smaller number. During this process, I sorted through the chunks of data and identified connections between categories through using conditions that allowed the phenomenon to occur; the context in which it occurred; the action/interactional strategies used to handle, manage, and carry out the phenomenon; and the consequences of those strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, I used selective coding to tell a story about the interconnection of the categories (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

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In addition to chunking and labeling data, I developed theoretical notes and operational notes throughout each transcript. My theoretical notes identified relevant and potentially relevant categories, their dimensions and relationships to other data throughout the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My operational notes were self-directed memos that questioned my research methods, identified possible follow-up questions and areas that needed to be further explored, my potential researcher biases, possible comparisons between interviewees' voices, and so forth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I then reviewed these identified key concepts and the context of the comments thus labeled. This approach to data analysis enabled me to fully immerse myself in the data and better understand and examine details revealed in each selected significant statement and concept.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study explored how college students' frames of reference are influenced and changed through the experiences they have while in the higher education environment. It is grounded within the framework of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. I sought to better understand how students identify when and how their frames of reference are changed throughout college. During my interviews with eight college students, we explored a wide array of experiences that stood out to them. This study utilized a collective case study format that used interactive interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) as the primary research method. As a phenomenologist, I assumed that dialogue and reflection could reveal the underlying meanings found in a phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). After our initial interviews, all but one of the students followed-up with me in either a face-to-face follow-up interview or answered follow-up questions via email. Throughout my research, I sought to approach and report students' reflections (the data) descriptively; analyze the data inductively; and find "meaning" as the primary focus of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I attempted to make sense of the data by using an interpretative and naturalistic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). As a phenomenological researcher, I attempted to develop a composite description of "what" all of the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The findings from this study are the result of my qualitative phenomenological research methods and interpretation of the data (students' experiences and reflections upon those experiences). Students' experiences were examined through the theoretical framework of transformative learning. The data from these interviews revealed four broad themes that include students' relationships between self and others; students' choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors. This chapter introduces an overview of the theoretical lens of transformative learning; presents the data as reflected through the four primary recurring themes; and summarizes the data found from these findings. First, I will briefly review the theoretical lens of transformative learning.

Theoretical Lens: Transformative Learning

In this study, Mezirow's transformative learning theory was used as the guiding theoretical lens. This theory of transformative learning emphasizes that learners' perceptions influence their experiences and learning outcomes (Piaget, 1932; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1991, 2000). According to Mezirow, certain experiences will help learners' perceptions or frames of reference become more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective (Mezirow, 2000). Learners encounter experiences that challenge them to reevaluate their assumptions and expectations and reframe them to become more inclusive and adaptable so they can navigate future experiences more effectively. A vital element of transformative learning is that an experience alone cannot transform learners' frames of reference, learners must critically reflect on their experiences (Mezirow, 1990). Students in this study demonstrated that they had reflected upon their experiences before and during their interviews. Throughout my interviews, I discovered that students emphasized the importance of power, but had varying perceptions of how it ought to be distributed and managed. As a result, this underlying concept influenced four primary recurring themes found in this study. These include students' relationships between self and others; students' choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors. These themes are supported

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by data collected in this study and are reiterated by transformative learning theory. First, I will discuss the students' understanding of their relationship between self and others.

<div align="center">**Self and Others**</div>

Throughout this study, students discussed the importance of forging social connections within their living communities, organizations, academic groups, and campus community. The majority of literature on transformative learning that I have explored emphasizes that learners must be engaged within a learning community in order for transformative learning to occur. This learning community is typically described as an instructor-guided, classroom setting. However, students rarely discussed their classroom experiences, but instead focused on how their social groups helped them become more confident and comfortable in the collegiate setting.

Upon beginning their college careers, a few students said that entering their new environment was more overwhelming than they had anticipated. During our follow-up interview, senior Clay shared how he felt during his first few weeks of college.

> "The most intimidating thing I had in college was when I moved in my freshman year that first week, not knowing anybody. You always think going into that, you know, as soon as you'll leave, you'll feel right at home. 'All right, see you guys at Thanksgiving, see you at Christmas.' But, you know, two weeks in, I was ready to go home."

Upon reflection, Clay revealed that his fraternity and the campus community played a big role in helping him adapt to his new environment. During the summer before beginning his senior year, Clay was an orientation leader for the university. In this position, Clay discovered how the campus sought to keep freshmen involved in university activities. When considering his own first freshman semester, Clay reflected, "I remember being more busy than homesick, but I do remember that home feeling, homesick. So that's what we try to do with the kids, making them more comfortable, keeping them busy." By interacting with his peers, Clay learned how to adapt to his new environment. When offering advice to new college students, Clay said, "Get involved in those leadership opportunities that are out there. Uh, you know, go out, meet people, is

probably the best way that you can change as a person." Clay attributed much of his personal

development to his interactions with others, which is a central element of transformative learning

(Mezirow, 2000).

Freshman Rachel shared why she chose to come to this particular institution instead of

attending a nearby medical school. "I felt like once I would transfer to the [Medical Campus], a

lot of that culture and difference would be, a lot of that would not be available to me, because it

would be medicine stuff all the time." Rachel further explained, "I didn't feel like it would be

easy to get involved in a bunch of different activities with a bunch of different people who didn't

think in different ways." Rachel was concerned that she would miss out on interacting with

others with different personalities, interests, and career aspirations if she chose to attend the

Medical Campus. Junior Becky encouraged other students to "make new friends and having not

just one set of friends, but having several groups of people who they can talk to and, um, help

them find what they want to do." By interacting with many different types of people, Becky

expressed the belief that students could have more balanced perspectives of themselves and

others. Becky believed that students need to interact with a wide array of people to introduce

them to a variety of interests and environments. This was a recurring idea shared by the students

in this study, which closely aligns with Mezirow's (2000) conclusion that in order to develop new

frames of reference, learners must dialogue with others to consider alternative perspectives.

A few students seemed to share the belief that merely interacting with a wide array of

individuals was not enough for personal development to occur. During our follow-up

correspondence, I asked Becky how she thought her views needed to be broadened. Becky said,

"I need to know that there are other ways of life other than my own. I sometimes forget that

people are not as fortunate as I am and I need to remember that." Becky believed that she had

had been given advantages that others have not received and that she needs to be aware of that

when interacting with others. When asked what she thought it meant to be a close-minded

person, Becky said, "It means that people are set in their ways without taking a hard look at every

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aspect of the situation. Also, to think that your way is the only way to go about things." Becky came to the conclusion that, though other people may have differing outlooks from hers, their perspectives and experiences were still valid and important.

Junior Laura and senior Marie explored how cross-cultural experiences have played important roles in their personal development. During our follow-up interview, Laura discussed how much her high school graduation trip to India helped her appreciate diversity. When asked how she thought the trip influenced her, Laura shared,

"Just being immersed in the culture, I think, and even knowing a little bit of the language. I don't know. I mean, like that's something to bring up. Like when I met an Indian person and I was taking this tai kwon do karate class and [I was] like 'Hey, I've been to India. I know like…' and you know, and I said one to ten in Hindi, you know, and they're like 'Oh, that's so cool.' They don't expect white people to go to India, I guess."

By being immersed in the Indian culture, Laura discovered a world she had not been exposed to before. "What's weird is, if I had never gone to India, I would never have been friends with a lot of the international students [at the university]," Laura reflected. "I probably wouldn't have had friends that were Indian if I hadn't gone to India, so it's really neat." Laura attributed her experience in India as a contributing factor to her present ability and interest in making friends with international students. Laura did not believe that she would have made friends with Indians if she had not gone abroad and been immersed in their culture, a culture that is unlike her own.

During our follow-up interview, Marie emphasized that international students should also seek exposure to a variety of cultures. When asked what she thought students could do to navigate a new campus, Marie said, "Try not to… like get alone with like, oh, like [the] same minority group." According to Marie, students need to spend time talking with others who are not from their own culture. She also offered the following advice, "Be and make a lot of friends and be a good friend with your roommate, because, I assume that most of their roommates are like American or from other countries, so they have to communicate in English." Marie

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continued to say, "If you be really good friends to your roommate, you can speak uh… in English fluently even in, even in a semester." Marie viewed interactions with others as a key factor in helping international students develop their English-speaking skills. She expressed the belief that by interacting with diverse individuals, students could figure out their new roles and receive feedback on those roles (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Marie believed that by meeting others who are unlike themselves, international students could improve their communication and social skills.

Leadership within one's social groups also provided students with an avenue for understanding and appreciating diversity. In our follow-up interview, sophomore Elizabeth shared that becoming a resident assistant in on-campus housing helped her become more aware of others' needs and desires. Elizabeth said, "As a resident I didn't really pay attention to people that weren't like a part of my, like my group of friends. Um, but as an RA, I realized like how many different groups there are in a community and how a lot of those overlap." Elizabeth's new leadership position helped her become more aware of her neighbors' differing interests, career aspirations, decision-making processes, and experiences. When asked how she thought she has changed since her freshman year of college, Elizabeth said,

> "I've been more… become more conscious of how other people think, how I think, because in high school I used to think that 'Like, okay, if I'm happy, then surely everybody else around me is happy because nothing's wrong.' But in college, I realized that that's definitely not the case. Just because I think that something [is okay, it] doesn't mean everybody else will always agree with you."

Elizabeth's exposure to different perspectives has helped her better understand and value diversity. As discussed thus far, students in this study expressed the belief that interacting with others helped them develop their self-awareness, social competency, and personal skills. Freshman Jake summarized the point of view expressed by the majority of the participants

regarding interpersonal interactions by stating that in order to change yourself, "You have to network. You have to socialize."

Junior Craig also explored the importance of student interactions with diverse individuals and social groups. Unlike most of the students in this study, however, Craig emphasized that students should spend more time "Meeting people that aren't in college, meeting people that aren't, that don't have the money that you have, that don't have the experience that you have, that don't have the education you have, is also very important." Craig believed that students should not only seek out opportunities to interact with their peers, but should also develop relationships with community members outside the campus. Craig encouraged students to seek opportunities to interact with a diverse array of individuals who have different experiences and perspectives from them. "Everything should be like a marble cake mixed in. There's a lot of opposite, there's a lot of positives. You can make a great cake out of it." Craig emphasized that interacting with others is a key element of personal development. "We're going to think the same things unless we actually meet, talk to them, befriend them and we can, we could make an influence and they can make an influence on us." Craig suggested that by interacting with others who are different from them, students can learn more about themselves and about others around them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). When asked how he thought students could develop that understanding, Craig responded, "I don't think a university can structure something because whenever you structure something, you come in predisposed with an opinion. Nothing's really going to change." Craig did not think that universities can design events that will directly influence students' perspectives, but he did believe that universities can create environments that foster developmental learning. He continued to say, "I think an environment can be created that promotes um learning, experiencing, meeting other people… Meeting other people is the best way to learn."

Two of the participants, Clay and Craig, reveal starkly different perspectives on what it means to "meet others." Both Clay and Craig emphasized that meeting others was important for student development, but they emphasized different kinds of interactions with others. Clay's

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primary focus was on interacting with his fellow college students. Craig, on the other hand, believed that students should interact with not only their peers and the campus community, but also with individuals and groups outside of the university. Their different views led me to consider students' motivations behind why they sought to engage in various opportunities, which I will now discuss students' choices and a few challenging circumstances that they have encountered.

Choices and Challenging Circumstances

Students discussed how their decision-making power influenced how they navigated challenging circumstances. Rachel, Laura, and Becky shared how they chose to participate in particular experiences, whereas Marie and Craig explored how they inadvertently found themselves in disconcerting situations. Rachel shared, "I feel like, mostly when I was in high school, really, and at the very beginning of college, I've never been very good at making friends." Rachel did not believe that she was skilled in initiating friendships. Her self-perceptions influenced why she chose to live in on-campus suites instead of traditional dorms. Rachel said, "I actually picked [Suite A] because since I was stuck in my own little room, I would be forced to go out and like make friends with people and get out and do stuff rather than just sitting in my room and having people just being in my room all the time." By choosing to live in the suites, where she would have less community interaction with her neighbors, Rachel thought she would force herself to meet people and make friends, something with which she did not feel fully confident. After critically reflecting upon her current views and habits, Rachel deliberately created and implemented plans that would challenge her to redefine her perspective (Imel, 1998).

Rachel's perspective of Suite A did not change once she moved into the suites. "There is such a lack of community feel in Suite A," she said. "If I wanted to, I could close my door and never see anyone ever, and it would just be… I would be a cavewoman. That'd be terrible." However, Rachel's perspective of her ability to make social connections did change since beginning college. Rachel shared that she does not care as much now about what others think

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about her. "You can be funny, you can be crazy and do whacky things, you can be yourself, really, and that's kind of me," she said. "If other people have a huge like problem, or they think you're weird about it, like… who cares?" After living in Suite A, Rachel said, "I'm comfortable being in a strange social setting where I don't know anyone." Thought Suite A's lack of community interaction may initially seem to be limiting for students to form social relationships, Rachel used that as an opportunity to seek other ways to interact with others.

Other students demonstrated a similar decision to place themselves in potentially challenging situations. As a twin, Becky said that she had learned to depend upon her more outgoing sister to help her make friends. When the girls chose to attend different universities their freshmen year of college, she had to learn to navigate new social situations on her own. "I joined a sorority and for the first month it was hard," Becky said. "I um kind of branched out and forced myself to branch out and make new friends then I had a, I had a great time. I mean, I missed my sister a lot, but it was easier once I got to know people." By placing herself in an environment that provided opportunities to develop relationships with her peers, Becky discovered that she could become comfortable on her own in a new environment. Laura shared a similar reasoning behind her decision to get involved with her college's career fair leadership team.

> "I like to be able to network with people because I am kind of a shy person and that would kind of get me out of the box and I needed to start making connections with future employers. That was one way to do it and I know a lot of people involved with that kind of thing, like the two career fair coordinators for this year and the two for last year, so…. And they wanted me to help so they kind of dragged me along. But it wasn't bad. It was a good thing."

While sharing how she got involved in the career fair planning team, Laura emphasized that, though the experience had elements that may have made it difficult, it was not entirely daunting since she had supportive friends. She said, "I was so anxious when it came, like I had to go with

someone around, like one of my fellow students or classmates, whatever, and we had to talk to [employers] because I was too scared to approach them." Though Laura believed that she is more confident now, she also admitted, "This past [career fair], I still went around with the same person, but I felt more, I kind of got more out of the box and I felt more comfortable speaking with them, and I think next career fair, I'll be able to go by myself." By choosing to get involved with the leadership team, Laura believed that it helped her become more socially adept. The experience offered opportunities for Laura to challenge herself and increase her confidence in social and professional interactions. Rachel, Becky, and Laura chose to place themselves in challenging circumstances, which may have influenced their learning and development. These students expected to successfully navigate these experiences. Other students, including Marie and Craig, described personal experiences that they did not anticipate and were not prepared to navigate.

When asked why she chose to study abroad in the United States, Marie explained, "My high school was a foreign language high school. So… through [the Global Association Certification] program I was knowing, like that is the place where I know… that we can, I can study abroad." When Marie moved into the university's on-campus housing, she encountered an unexpected communication challenge. She was frequently at odds with her three roommates regarding the temperature of their suite.

> "I really don't like to stay in a cold room. So it was… it was October or November and
> they were still using the A/C and then like even in summer, like even in August, they
> were like, the A/C was too high. So it, I had to wear long sleeves in the room, in the
> room I have to wear jumpers, so I told my roommate 'That it's, that I feel so cold, can we
> turn the A/C [down] a little bit?' And they say no. They just simply say no."

In this situation, Marie discovered that communication does not always result in change. Marie attributed their communication challenges to her lack of confidence and her roommates' lack of inclusiveness. While trying to become friends with her roommates, Marie explained, "It was

really hard for me to do so because I was not courageous enough to speak with them first, and then like they're so, they have really strong bonds, the other three roommates, because all of them were African Americans, so I couldn't like get in that bond." Marie encountered an unexpected challenge, akin to Mezirow's disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000), that led her to reevaluate her abilities to assertively communicate with others. This was also an instance in which Marie discovered a power differential. Since her roommates already had established communication patterns and a relationship, they easily excluded her from their social unit. During our follow-up interview, Marie said that when she didn't express her thoughts, "I mess things up a lot. Tons of times." Now when Marie speaks with other international students, she encourages them to assertively state what they want or how they feel. Marie offered the following advice, "Say you need something, just simply say it. It's a simple sentence. 'I need… something.' Like 'I don't like… something.' 'I don't want… something.'" As we continued to explore her perspective on the importance of asserting her opinions, Marie shared, "If you don't express what you want, then the, the other person won't, won't be able to know what you really want to know, what you really want to do, what you really want to have. So for like the better communication, I think, just simply say it." Marie now expects herself and others to do their best to clearly communicate what they feel, think, or want so they will not find themselves in a powerless situation like she did. Marie's disorienting dilemma with her roommates led her to reconsider her point of view and habits regarding how to best communicate with others.

Craig had a series of unsought experiences that helped shape his perspective, he said. Craig listed off several factors that have influenced him, "I was raised in a Mormon household, I was abused a lot by my father, and then I got into a car wreck when I was eleven years old." As a result of the car wreck, Craig had a fractured skull and third degree burns, was in a two month coma, underwent seventeen surgeries, and became uninsurable. "I had to go through, what I guess I would say, a lot of privileged white people don't get to go through," Craig said.

"All of a sudden I started to see myself as a minority, in a weird way, not in a racial or anything like that, but I felt like I was alone, I felt almost to a certain way how they feel, even to the tiniest extent, I felt part of it and uh I think that's when I understood how bad it was, uh how much it, you know, it hurts and that it can be fixed and that you can help people."

Craig experienced what it felt like to be powerless and alone. He did not have the resources that more privileged people had. As a result, Craig has an insider's view of what it means to have limited control and choice in his life. Craig now thinks,

"It's just, uh, people think we all start out with the same starting line that we're all equal, that we all have the same resources but we're not. Not only do we not have the same resources, I have more resources than an African American, um, a Mexican or a [inaudible] person like that. So we have to realize that has to be changed."

Craig believes that his experiences helped change his perspective about himself and society. He attributes his experiences to why he is now passionate about human rights and community activism. The lack of choices that Craig had in those experiences has helped him now care deeply for others who do not have control over their lives and experiences. Marie shared a similar point of view regarding the importance of being placed in uncomfortable situations that one did not choose. When encouraging fellow international students to express themselves to others, Marie said, "They're nodding and they're like understanding what I was trying to convey, but I feel like they need time or experience where they actually like recognize the importance of expressing yourself to others." According to Marie, students must actually experience what it is like to not be heard and understood before they understand how important it is to be assertive and expressive. As she later described, navigating difficult experiences is much easier "once you can visualize [what might happen], then you might have like, you might not worry as much as before." From the data in these interviews, it appears that students experience transformative learning when they encounter challenging circumstances. However, this growth may result in

heightened perspective transformation if students are inadvertently thrust into those situations rather than deliberately placing themselves in those settings. This leads to another key finding in this study that students tend to seek responsibility as a path to power and prestige.

<p align="center">**Seeking Responsibility as a Path to Power and Prestige**</p>

In this study was an underlying exploration of students' motives for pursuing certain kinds of experiences and responsibilities. I discovered that students often sought responsibility as a way to obtain power and prestige. As discussed previously, Laura chose to get involved in her college's career fair to help herself "get out of the box." When asked where she spent most of her volunteer hours, Laura said, "A lot of that was for [the] career fair. We did inventory, we transported everything to the career fair and I worked from like six in the morning 'til six at night for that." Laura invested a large amount of her time in leadership responsibilities with the career fair because she found it to be satisfying work and had an important role to play. Laura shared, "A lot of people have relied on me from StuCo (Student Council) and EWB (Engineers Without Borders) to pull through and make things happen." Others depended on Laura's abilities to successfully coordinate the career fair because Laura had power in this relationship. She further explained, "I just think I put the most effort into StuCo. Like last semester, comparatively, I put, I was like the person with the second highest points out of like 50 or so, 50 or 60 people and that was saying something, because us top two people were like 100 points above everyone else." Laura found herself competing for the most points out of the planning team because she wanted to receive recognition for her efforts, which would also give her power among her peers. Laura sought involvement in organizations in which she felt she belonged and was needed (Kuh & Love, 2000). She found satisfaction in being recognized by her peers for her abilities and knowledge.

Students expressed an interest in becoming leaders in their respective areas of interest through seeking out responsibilities, knowledge, and experiences. Rachel shared, "That's something I enjoy – being the person that someone can come to when they need someone to talk

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to or they need an answer or just need help." As a result, Rachel has shadowed professionals in her field of study (nutrition), pursued research projects with nutrition faculty, and wants to become a resident assistant in the dorms. By seeking opportunities to learn more about her field, Rachel has sought more knowledge, power, and prestige among her peers.

Other students expressed a desire to gain power and prestige through taking on responsibility. As an orientation leader, Clay said, "I always liked the helping people thing, but I never really knew how good I was at it until orientation." Clay said. "Since then, I've been a lot more outgoing, and, I guess, sociable." He said that he enjoyed being in charge of groups and presenting new information to his audiences, but he feels differently when presenting to his peers. "When I see myself on a level field as everyone else, is kind of like the time when I kind of freak out," Clay said. "Whenever I realized I am in charge of these, or this group, is when I'm completely comfortable and can function, I guess." Clay discovered that he felt most at ease when working with others if he had a leadership role and responsibility toward those individuals. Underlying this outlook is the attitude that Clay feels most adept in his roles when he knows that he is in a superior position to others.

When asked how he thought he had changed since beginning college, Clay said, "I've gotten a lot more comfortable, just being here four years. Those leadership roles, I think that's a big source of that, of why I'm comfortable. I see what I can do as an individual." Clay's leadership roles helped him see what strengths he had to share with others and what kind of an impact he could make on others. Originally, Clay had begun volunteering to earn service hours for an honorary graduation award, but he has a different perspective now, he said. Into the Streets and the Big Event, two annual campus-wide days of community service, were most pivotal in Clay's volunteering experiences, he said. In one instance, Clay's group helped an elderly woman with her yard.

"She told a story of how her husband died in the Vietnam War and how she really hasn't done anything to her house since then and cleaning that up just kind of made you feel,

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you know, like, you're helping her out, and since she didn't have the physical ability to

do that. And the neighborhood she lived in kind of looked like, you know, just a bunch

of elderly people, too. Uh so being there kind of, you know, I went from the attitude of 'I

have to be there' to the attitude of 'I want to be here.' It was fun."

Clay liked helping this elderly woman because she did not have the physical strength or resources

to take care of her yard. Clay discovered how powerful he was in comparison to this woman. He

said, "It gives you a more different perspective to look at, you see how… these people aren't even

able to clean up their yard and you can do a lot more than that, so it definitely helps you align a

lot in life." Clay saw that he had abilities that others did not have. When asked why he liked to

volunteer, Clay said, "It's just kind of seeing the end result, I guess, is what motivates me to get

up there and do something." When asked what the "end result" was, Clay said,

"A more positive attitude out of the kids that I have worked with before or with the adults

that I've done through Into the Streets and with Big Event. Um, the attitude and the

gratitude they have after you're done working with them. There's been, there's been this

case last fall? When we did Into the Streets. And the lady thought that we were like the

greatest thing that's ever walked this earth after we got done helping her out. But, yeah,

definitely the attitude after of the people you help out is probably the end result, I see the

most."

Clay saw how he impacted others and how their attitudes changed as a result of his interactions

with them. Clay discovered that he had access to power and resources that others did not have.

As a result, those responsibilities and positions gave Clay self-affirmation because he had power

over others and had their respect.

Elizabeth also shared a strong attraction to power and prestige. During our follow-up

interview, Elizabeth reflected upon why she enjoyed leadership positions.

"In high school it kind of started with taking like the honors classes and the advanced

classes. That's where I really started just being surrounded by people that wanted to be

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like the head of the pack and we wanted to succeed and to do great things and stuff, kind

of where it started in college. It kind of led up to choosing engineering, which is one of

the more difficult majors and time-consuming, so um, doing that and also still being in

the honors college as an engineer. And… now being a resident advisor for an

engineering floor. It just kind of like… it constantly builds on the original experience.

It's always a learning process but learn more and more every day."

Elizabeth sought out experiences that would provide her with opportunities to gain knowledge,

power, and prestige among her peers. This attraction to seeking responsibility for personal power

and prestige may have contributed to her involvement in Concrete Canoe, an intensive

competitive engineering team project. When asked what she enjoyed about the project, Elizabeth

explained that she enjoyed "Taking on a leadership role in Concrete Canoe and really… helping

it, or working with the leaders and making important decisions and things like that. Growing in

leadership skills." Elizabeth emphasized the importance of continually developing her leadership

skills and having responsibility while working with others. She said, "I'm pretty much… going

to be the leader [in upcoming years] because everybody else… will have graduated and they kind

of… like chose me as like as 'you're… possess the leadership qualities that we want and we

really want you to learn it now so you can lead it in 2012.'" Through a team consensus, the

Concrete Canoe team decided that Elizabeth would be an effective leader for the team and offered

to groom her for the role. When asked what kind of leader she wanted to be, Elizabeth said, "I

want to be the one that like, okay, 'You dream it, and I'll make it happen.'" Elizabeth enjoys

having the power and responsibility of creating and completing successful projects. By having

control over the success of the Concrete Canoe team, Elizabeth could also gain prestige among

her peers.

Elizabeth also discovered that she could gain power and prestige at her local elementary

school as a math tutor. "I got to go every Tuesday and Thursday to my old elementary school and

teach like the after-day-care kids, just math and just being like a presence. Like I taught students

in my old school and uh… got them really excited. It was something that I loved to do,"

Elizabeth said. When asked why she enjoyed tutoring, Elizabeth said, "I was able to have an

influence on them and like I impacted somebody. I think… even if it's just one person, that's a

really huge deal." Elizabeth felt that as a tutor she had the ability to influence children's

academic skills and enthusiasm for learning. She had an important role, thus this was a

memorable experience for both her and the students she tutored. Elizabeth discovered that she

could play an influential role in her community and thus expanded her self-perceptions (Mezirow,

2000). Elizabeth discovered that tutoring gave her power and prestige.

     Jake also shared a similar mindset regarding his high school volunteering activities. As a

high school athlete, Jake participated in the Big Eagle Little Eagle program through his local

school as a mentor for three to four children each academic year.

> "On game days, we'd go visit them. And so like we'd just like hang out with them,
>
> usually recess, lunch, just whatever they were doing and we would spend some time and
>
> they, I thought that was awesome. Just really a big deal to, it was always like 'Oh, my
>
> Big Eagle's coming today.' That made me feel like I was important."

As a Big Eagle, Jake felt that he was making a difference in the lives of the children he mentored

and also felt that he had an important role in their lives. Jake found self-affirmation through his

responsibilities as a children's mentor.

     A couple students seemed to demonstrate different motivations behind why they wanted

to volunteer. When asked why she wanted to volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Becky

explained,

> "Growing up, I was very fortunate, but other people out there aren't as fortunate as I am
>
> and so I want to be able to know that growing up, people didn't grow up just the way I
>
> did, so I want to see all these other things and I want to be able to have an impact, a
>
> positive impact on somebody's life, and to me, Big Brothers Big sisters does that"

Becky believed that by interacting with children through Big Brothers Big Sisters, she could positively influence children. Becky said she was concerned about this because "growing up, I had a lot of really positive influences in my life and I think that's how I got to where I am." Becky had reflected upon her childhood years and influences and wanted to provide that kind of support to children who did not have her support system.

Finally, Craig shared a particularly memorable experience that has influenced his perceptions of his ability to influence others. Through Craig's involvement with the Ronald McDonald House, he developed a unique relationship with Ryan, a young boy at the center. "His name was [Ryan]," Craig said. "He had um stunted growth in his spine. And so he was always very small, very weak and he had to go through surgeries every other month and it was just awful for him. He was in so much pain." Craig understood Ryan's pain because when Craig was eleven, he was in a traumatic car accident that led to numerous surgeries. Craig empathized with Ryan. He said, "I understand, you know, how much the mental aspect comes to play." Craig and Ryan spent many hours reading *The Iliad,* which featured Ajax, a strong character who fought to overcome challenges. "[Ryan] wanted to call himself Ajax because Ajax was big and strong and powerful and respected," Craig said. "He made me call him Ajax for the rest of, you know, his time being there." Craig continued, "I would read to him all the time and he uh grew a huge affinity for Greek history just like me and [inaudible] a lot in terms of his recovery, in terms of getting better, getting mentally stronger." For Ryan's 22nd surgery, Craig bought Ryan his own copy of *The Iliad*. On Ryan's way out the door, he spotted Craig's gift and picked it up.

> "He started reading it himself. And what I didn't realize is that he didn't know how to read and I taught him to read by being with him... Then all a sudden, uh his mom started crying. I asked her why and she said he doesn't know how to read. And I was like 'But he's reading right now.'"

While reflecting upon this eye-opening experience, Craig shared,

"It was, you know, one of the coolest moments that I guess, a latent function that I hadn't

realized what's possible. I didn't realize that would become a consequence of my

actions, that I would actually help a kid learn how to read. I just thought I would buy him

presents and make sure that he didn't die uh but there was the latent function of the fact

that [during] the time I spent with him I taught him how to read."

By discovering that he had taught Ryan how to read, Clay realized that he played a powerful role

in Ryan's life. This unexpected development in his relationship with Ryan influenced Craig's

perceptions of his ability to impact others (Mezirow, 1990). Craig chose to befriend Ryan

because he had been in a similar situation and felt Ryan's pain. Craig knew that Ryan needed a

friend who would listen to him and be there for him. The fact that Ryan learned how to read as a

result of their time together was an unexpected development for Craig. Craig's motivations

behind his involvement with Ryan are starkly different from other students' motivations to

volunteer. Many of the students seemed to want to volunteer and lead because it provided them

with a way to gain power and prestige. Craig chose to volunteer because he understood the pain

of others and wanted to empathize with them.

Overall, students expressed the belief that by seeking responsibilities and leadership

positions, students could gain power and prestige. Jake explained, "It's up to the individual to

take initiative and seek out what they want to do." This highlights the overall perspective of the

students that they had access to the power and resources to do what they wanted to do. They

were not limited by a lack of access and ability. When asked if there was any advice that she

would have given herself before beginning college, Rachel expressed thoughts that concurred

with Jake's emphasis on personal initiative. "There's no reason to hold back, so don't," Rachel

said. "Be enthusiastic and pursue those things you want to pursue. Like don't be afraid. Don't be

afraid to go for it, because you can." However, students did not want to take on new

responsibilities in order to merely be more responsible. They saw responsibility as a path to

finding power and prestige. A couple students seemed to have different motivations that were

grounded in empathy and understanding. This empathy and understanding was something that all students sought to find in role models and mentors, which I will now discuss.

Role Models and Mentors

Throughout this study, students discussed how role models and mentors had helped them in their personal growth. A few referenced their parents and other family members as a source of support and encouragement. When asked why philanthropy interests her, Laura explained, "Well, I guess my parents have really instilled that in us." Later, during our interview, Laura shared, "My mom is so involved in like volunteering things and I think that's rubbed off on me a lot." Through her mother's example, Laura learned that philanthropy is important and that she should find ways to give back to her community, which she has demonstrated by getting involved with Engineers Without Borders, her college's annual career fair planning team, and group projects with Habitat for Humanity.

Becky shared that her older sister, Mary Anne, encouraged her to get involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters. "[Mary Anne] is a part of everything, Big Brothers Big Sisters, on the board, on the government, everything like that, and just where she lives, just on these boards, and she loves it and I see how much she loves it. She always, I mean, she's a big advocate for things like that." Becky shared, "She absolutely loves it and she thought that it would really interest me because, I mean, she knows my personality really well." Becky trusted Mary Anne's advice because Becky knew it was grounded in real life experience and an understanding of Becky's interests and abilities.

Rachel said that she is thankful for how her parents have influenced her life. "My parents have always been really supportive of me and they care and they accept me for who I am," Rachel said. Rachel's parents know who she is and believe in her abilities (Southern, 2007). Upon reflection, Rachel said that her mother has always emphasized the importance of communication. "Like we're really open. Communication is really, really important to us. And really, in general it is," Rachel said. "A lot of people don't know that, that communication is the

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cornerstone for any working relationship, and if you don't communicate, it's not going to work."
By openly answering Rachel's questions and creating a safe space in which Rachel can express
her thoughts without criticism, Rachel's mother illustrated the qualities needed by a mentor in
order for transformative learning to occur.

Students also discussed faculty and peers who are their role models and mentors. In our
follow-up interview, Marie shared that one of her middle school teachers encouraged her to
consider studying abroad to develop her foreign language competencies. "One of my English
teacher [was] like 'Uh say that you're really good at like learning languages and I mean, you're
really, you seem real interested in English so you might, how about going to a foreign language
high school and to learn different languages?'" Marie's English teacher served as a mentor for
her by directing her to an opportunity that she might not have previously considered.

Rachel shared that one reason she chose to attend this particular university was because
she admired the university's choral director, the Professor. Since the Professor was friends with
Rachel's high school choral director, he would visit Rachel's high school choral twice a year to
critique and direct the group. Rachel said, "[The Professor] really is good at motivating the
students that he works with." The Professor impressed Rachel with his ability to help students
enjoy developing their skills. When deciding what university to attend, Rachel shared, "I got
accepted into [the Professor's] concert choral, which is a really prestigious honor, so I was like
'All right, cool, decision made for me.' I don't have to worry about it so I just came here."
Rachel's interactions with and observations of the Professor played a key role in helping her
decide which university to attend. When asked what qualities she admired about the Professor,
Rachel said, "He is a composer, as well as a director, as well as an administrator, as well as a
really good teacher. He just has a lot of… He's just kind of, he's a real person, you know?"
Rachel was impressed with the Professor's ability to manage multiple roles successfully and his
positive interactions with students. Upon further reflection, Rachel shared,

"He's a very impressive, very intelligent person. He's a doctor, he has his PhD in music or p-whatever the acronym is for music… and um, he's really nice and funny. He's just a really great person and he's always willing to help students, so that's really cool. He's a great composer, great musician, great teacher, great director, so just a big deal."

Rachel's interactions with the Professor have reinforced her perspective of him. Occasionally Rachel has had multiple activities going on at the same time that conflicted with choral practice, so she emailed the Professor for advice. "He'll email me back within the next day or two always," Rachel said. "He tells me that he's happy that I'm responsible and like taking responsibility for being absent and stuff like that even though I'm just like a freshman." Rachel values the Professor's accessibility and encouragement. The Professor's openness, knowledge, and role modeling embody many of the traits demonstrated by mentors who facilitate transformative learning experiences (Christopher, 2001).

Students referred to their peers as mentors. Most frequently, it seemed that students admired and sought to emulate others who demonstrated success in areas in which they hoped to grow. Elizabeth, Laura, and Rachel discussed how their peers often served as role models and mentors for them. "Upperclassmen have definitely had a big impact on me and like how I can manage my time, which classes to take," Elizabeth said. One upperclassman in particular, Ginger, mentored Elizabeth, and continues to serve as one of her role models.

"[She] kind of took me under her wing in a sense because I was the only freshman that was involved. And she really helped me like set out my classes and like 'Okay, take these teachers and you get involved with this, and here let me show you how to do all this research lab work that I do,' which is huge and was kind of… went over my head and but it was really interesting to get like a first introduction to that especially by her since it was a one-on-one kind of like research introduction."

Elizabeth trusted Ginger's guidance and valued her input because Ginger demonstrated a willingness to spend time with Elizabeth and help her effectively plan her college career (Christopher, 2001).

During our follow-up interview, Laura shared that one of her peers, Jill, is a role model and mentor for her. "She's involved in so much. I don't know how she does it," Laura explained. "She is involved in Engineers Without Borders, she's the president, she's doing great in school, and, you know… she has… I don't know, a good social life and she's a well-rounded person," Laura said. "And that's the way I want to try to be." When asked how she wanted to be a well-rounded person, Laura shared several qualities and highlighted how Jill emulates those characteristics.

> "I'd like to do well in school and still have good friends, good relationships with people, and also… have like a big position, like in different organizations so I can make a bigger difference and not just a member… and then probably like being, being musically inclined and being able to speak different languages. Because [Jill], she's learning Spanish as well as engineering and she plays viola and… it's just crazy. I wish I could do all that."

Laura considers Jill to be a role model because she is a living example of several qualities that Laura would like to develop (Southern, 2007).

Finally, Rachel emphasized how interactions with student staff in on-campus housing have helped her successfully navigate her freshman year of college. "[The university is] definitely on the right track with student staff," Rachel said. "First of all, RAs and Ambassadors and RLs and whoever else belongs in that group. Um, those are always good, they're a good, they're like a good first impression, and because they're like where you see leadership at its finest." When asked how she thought the university was successful with its student staff, Rachel explained, "Having someone who's still in school, like your age, like who knows all the stuff, is always a good thing to have." She continued on,

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"Just approachability, really, is what I guess it boils down to. Because if you feel like you can ask somebody, you're going to be much more inclined to ask them later when you have a real problem or versus like 'Oh my gosh, I don't know where this building is,' but meeting someone who's enthusiastic and always really excited to answer a question and help somebody out, then you're like 'Hey, they actually enjoy having me around, and I'm not a pest, and I'm not a bother, I'm not stupid,' so that impression is a good one to make."

Rachel emphasized that approachability is a key trait that effective student staff members must have (Fenwick, 2003). Throughout our interviews, students emphasized the importance of approachability, communication, trust, honesty, and role modeling of those around them. Purposeful and caring interactions with mentors have made an impression upon these students. Their influence differs according to the relationship. Some students chose to become involved in certain activities as a result of their relationships. Others were encouraged to better understand themselves and how to interact with others. Each of these relationships played an integral role in these students' development.

Gaps in the Findings

When I began my research, I expected to hear students emphasize a variety of concepts and ideas that rarely arose throughout our discussions. I expected students to discuss how their engagement with community non-profits and organizations influenced their perceptions of what it means to "be in need" and the implications that might have for them to take action. A couple students briefly explored why certain social groups are discriminated against through not receiving necessary resources, financial support, societal acceptance, and safe spaces for self-expression. However, most of my interviews with students focused on how the students as individuals impacted others through their own leadership, guidance, knowledge, and accessibility to resources. Some students shared a "we are in this together" attitude, whereas others demonstrated an "I am strong, you are weak" mentality. I had expected to hear more of an

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emphasis on how students had learned to identify with and appreciate the perspectives of individuals and groups who are not like them. This was not a prevalent finding in this study.

Summary

Throughout this study, eight college students and I explored what it means to have a transformative learning experience, how they navigated them, and what were outcomes of those experiences. Students offered rich stories and thoughtful reflection upon their experiences. Students explored their relationships between self and others; choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors. Each student shared unique stories that illustrated how their frames of reference were formed and are continuing to develop. Their expectations and assumptions about themselves, others, and the world have continued to evolve since beginning college. Students shared the belief that the most effective way to learn is through personal experience, because then they can learn how to effectively problem-solve (Mezirow, 1990). During our follow-up interview, Jake explained, "You can't learn something until you learn it yourself through experience because they can tell you a million times… not to do something, but until you actually do it and learn like, 'Hey, these are the consequences of what I've just done,' [you won't learn]." Students in this study concurred with Jake's words. They shared that experiences helped them learn more about themselves, others, and the world. They also expected to continue learning and changing in the future. This point of view is aptly described by Becky, "I'm still learning about myself. I mean, I'm 21 years old. I've still got a lot to learn and a lot of growing up to do, but I'm starting to figure it out, I think." As discussed throughout my findings, students in this study are continuing to learn more about themselves and anticipate many more lessons to come in the future.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

At the core of this study was the goal of discovering whether college students have encountered transformative learning experiences and, if so, illuminating their interpretation of what it means to have experienced such learning. This study supports the assertion that learning is both a process and an outcome that utilizes one's prior interpretations to create a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of experiences in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 2000). As the students in this study shared, they have experienced transformative learning. In this chapter, I will first explore the meaning of my findings. Then I will discuss the limitations of my study. Following this, I will share my recommendations for research regarding transformative learning and student development. I will also share recommendations for student affairs practice with transformative learning in mind. Finally, I will conclude with a brief summary of my study, including its design, findings, and what that means for the field of transformative learning and student development.

Meaning of Findings

Transformative learning is essentially learning that changes individuals' frames of reference, or their assumptions and expectations. Individuals use their unique frames of reference to interpret their experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Throughout this study, students frequently described themselves with terms that illustrated their self-assumptions and discussed how those assumptions influenced their thoughts and behavior. Students explored how their realities were constructed through their interpretations of their experiences (Piaget, 1932) and the ways in which they believed they have changed and grown through those experiences. Upon careful analysis of the data, I discovered that students' frames of reference were confirmed, reevaluated, and expanded through their different interpretations of their experiences. Four primary recurring themes were discovered through this study, that included students' relationships between self and others; students' choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors. Now I will discuss how my findings relate to and differ from the literature regarding transformative learning.

Self and Others

Overwhelmingly, students emphasized that their relationships with others were important to them. Students shared how their social interactions influenced their personal development (Evans, 2010). In fact, it appeared that many students chose to become involved in certain volunteer activities, student organizations, and group projects so they could find a sense of community. Students wanted to find social groups in which they felt like they belonged (Kuh & Love, 2000). Initially, it seemed that students primarily wanted to get involved with particular groups because they wanted to make friends. However, upon closer examination, it became clear that these students had more expectations than simply meeting others. A few of these expectations included networking, gaining the support of group members, exploring diverse cultures, and impacting others through personal influence.

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Students' perspectives on the importance of interacting with and supporting the development of social communities may be due to their passions for volunteering or it may be due to something else which may need to be studied in future research. Their concept of community closely aligns with the literature's description of communities of care (Apte, 2009; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Franz, 2005; Mezirow, 2000; Southern, 2007). It is important to note that students emphasized developing a supportive community within their current social groups, including the general university student body, major-specific group projects, student organizations, and living communities. Literature on transformative learning usually frames communities of care as a classroom-based, instructor-guided setting (Atherton,2010; Fenwick,2003; Southern, 2007), yet students in this study rarely referred to their classrooms as their most valued communities of care.

Only a couple students explored the importance of forging relationships with others outside of the campus community. However, each of the students highlighted the importance of becoming engaged within active and purposeful social groups. Boyer (1990) challenged higher education institutions to foster this kind of community, one which is purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Students seemed to find satisfaction in being active members of social groups that fostered openness, fairness, care, and recognition. For example, as a new student staff member in residential life, Elizabeth observed that a lot of time "goes into making this [residential hall] community where everybody can walk in and out and just feel comfortable." Before being in this leadership position, Elizabeth had not fully realized what roles each individual plays in creating a community. As Elizabeth shared, she discovered as a community builder (much like the mentors and educators previously discussed) that creating an environment where people can feel safe and supported requires commitment from the community members, but once committed, learning happens (Southern, 2007). Elizabeth's words illustrate a recurring perspective expressed by the students in this study. They believed that it is important for students to take active roles in creating safe, supportive, engaging communities within their social groups.

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Students were passionate about dialoguing and interacting with their peers and campus leadership, which would help them consider different perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). For most of the students, however, this community-building need not go any further than the campus.

A few students explored why it is important to develop relationships with others who have distinctly different cultures from their own. During these discussions, students explored what it means to encounter a core aspect of transformative learning, which is communicative learning (Southern, 2007). According to Southern (2007), "Communicative learning recognizes the importance of another person in the process of reaching new understanding" (p. 331). Laura, Becky, Marie, and Craig discussed why experiencing communicative learning through interacting with others from different cultures is an important aspect of their ongoing development. Laura shared that she probably would not have developed friendships with Indians at the university if she had not visited India before beginning college. Laura's exposure to the Indian culture heightened her awareness of others' ways of experiencing life, which not only expanded her social circle but also increased her appreciation for different perspectives (Casteñeda, 2008; Imel, 1998; Kasl & Elias, 2000; Pasquariello, 2009). Along that vein, Becky believed that she needed to be exposed to different perspectives and ways of life. Becky believed that she needed to spend more time with others who did not have the same outlook and experiences as her. She sought to find a new understanding through participating with others "through language and action and establishing mutual comprehension, shared values, truth, and trust" (Southern, 2007, p. 332). For Marie, interacting with others offered her opportunities to develop her social skills, English speaking abilities, and understanding of the American culture. Marie wanted to interact with others in order to figure out her new role in a different culture and receive feedback on her success in that role (Chickering & Reisser, 1995). Craig believed that students needed to explore and develop relationships with groups and individuals outside of the campus because that would expose them to diverse points of view and needs. For Craig, a learning community is not limited to the campus community. Rather, Craig thought that an effective learning community is

developed by inviting others from multiple social and economic spheres to participate in creating

the conditions for perspective transformation in order to realize the potential for shared

understanding and collaborative action (Southern, 2007). Craig believed that students cannot

really change their perspectives if they only surround themselves with others who are similar to

them in their education, economic backgrounds, social status, and experiences. Craig believed

that by interacting with others who are different from them, students can learn more about

themselves and about others around them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). In this study, students

had varying ideas about how they could go about interacting with others who are different from

them. Some emphasized the importance of deliberately placing themselves in potentially

uncomfortable situations, whereas others shared unexpected challenging circumstances that they

encountered in which they had no power.

Choices and Challenging Circumstances

Students explored how their decision-making power influenced the ways in which they

navigated challenging circumstances. In a few instances, students were attracted to experiences

that would challenge their current self-perceptions, thus implementing plans that might possibly

counteract those assumptions. For other students, they did not have the freedom to choose to play

a role in some of their challenging experiences. Becky, Laura, and Rachel expressed concerns

that their tendencies to be introverted would hinder them in forming relationships with others

while in college. They were concerned that their self-perceptions of how they behaved in certain

situations would negatively influence their actions (O'Sullivan, 1999). Imel (1998) stated that

learners must not only critically reflect upon their current views and habits, but also deliberately

create and implement plans that redefine their worlds. Most of the students in this study

described experiences in which they deliberately placed themselves in situations that might lead

them to redefine their assumptions and expectations. As Tisdell (2008) discussed, a central goal

of transformative learning is that students learn to take action to change, which these students

illustrated through their attraction to challenge and desire for responsibility. Perhaps one reason

that students found challenging experiences to be so attractive was because they thought the process of determining their own goals, values, feelings, and meanings helped them gain greater control over their lives as socially responsible, clear thinking decision-makers (Mezirow, 2000).

Throughout this study students expanded upon the two major concepts defined by Baxter Magolda (1999) that learners build their knowledge by organizing and making meaning of their experiences. They also expressed the perspective that this construction happens through their evolving assumptions about knowledge and their role in creating that knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Rachel, Becky, and Laura chose to place themselves in challenging circumstances, which may have influenced their learning and development. These students expected to successfully navigate these experiences. Other students, including Marie and Craig, described experiences that they did not anticipate and were not prepared to navigate. An interesting aspect to this finding is that some students chose to participate in challenging circumstances, whereas other students did not have the freedom to decide to on their involvement. Rachel, Laura, and Becky deliberately created and implemented plans that would challenge them to redefine their perspectives (Imel, 1998). These students did not encounter Mezirow's disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) that Craig and Marie encountered, which may have influenced how their frames of reference were influenced. These students may have encountered transformative learning, but it seems that they did not critically reflect upon their experiences and perspectives as Craig and Marie did.

This critical reflection is an essential element to transformative learning. In fact, in the research on transformative learning, past researchers have emphasized that transformative learning cannot occur if learners do not reflect upon their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2008; Fenwick, 2003; Herbers, 1998; Ignelzi, 2000; Johnson, 2008; Long, 1990; Longacre, 2009; Mezirow, 1978b, 1990, 2000; Perry, 1970; Pasquariello, 2009; Taylor, 2000). Craig and Marie demonstrated that they had critically reflected upon their more challenging experiences. Craig discussed how his traumatic car accident as an eleven year old helped him empathize with Ryan,

the young boy he taught to read at the Ronald McDonald House. Craig expressed the belief that his experiences and reflection upon those experiences increased his personal awareness and appreciation of others' perspectives (Pasquariello, 2009). Craig reconsidered the consequences of what he had done by reading on a frequent basis with Ryan (Mezirow, 1990). Marie examined how she had thought and behaved when interacting with her first semester roommates, critically assessed her perspective, and decided that she needed to change how she interacted with others (Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Marie said she now feels more confident and competent when interacting with others (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b). She expressed the belief that other students must experience a remodeling of their self-perceptions and understandings in order to create new frames of reference that will increase their confidence and sense of empowerment (Christopher, 2001; Franz, 2005; Mezirow, 1991).

Unlike the other students in this study, Craig and Marie experienced what it feels like to be powerless and unprivileged (Fine & Weiss, 1998; Freire, 1970). After examining their assumptions about their situations and reevaluating their problem-solving strategies (Mezirow, 1990), Craig and Marie discovered new ways of seeing themselves, others, and society. Their frames of reference seem to have become "more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7), which helped guide their future actions. Craig said that his experiences showed him that there is a power imbalance in society and that it needs to be challenged. Craig attributed his changed perspective to his unexpected experiences, encounters with others, and reflection upon his experiences. He suggested that people needed more exposure to disorienting dilemmas. Marie echoed Craig's sentiments that people must experience what it is like to not have power over one's situation. By being in the uncomfortable position of being or feeling powerless, students can develop new frames of reference regarding what it means to be in the minority and to be powerless (Fine & Weiss, 1998; Freire, 1970). Marie suggested that challenging circumstances are not quite so daunting if "you can visualize

[what might happen]." For Marie, being able to visualize the possible outcomes for a situation makes her feel more powerful and in control of her life (Christopher, 2001).

From this study, it is clear that students must seek out challenging experiences that provide them with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and development. As past research on transformative learning indicates, challenging experiences provide opportunities for learners to reevaluate their frames of reference (Apte, 2009; Atherton, 2010; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Fenwick, 2003; Glisczinksi, 2007; Imel, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Mezirow, 1978a; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sanford, 1962). Research has indicated that learners must take responsibility for their learning (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fenwick, 2003; Glisczinksi, 2007; Herbers, 1998; Imel, 1998; Keeling, 2004; Long, 1990; Mezirow, 1978b, 1991, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Perry, 1970; Taylor, 2008). Students' choices regarding their encounters with those challenging circumstances may influence their learning outcomes. It appears that Clay and Marie's disorienting dilemmas may have fostered perspective transformations regarding the way they understand themselves, their perceptions, feelings, and the world (Mezirow, 1990). Their perspective transformation appears to have affected their lifestyles and outlooks more comprehensively (Paprock, 1992) than other students in this study. Students' perceptions of power also play a key role in the next finding in this study, which I will now explore.

Seeking Responsibility as a Path to Power and Prestige

During our interviews, students explored the different roles they have had during college and why those roles were important to them. Initially, it seemed that students had a passion for taking on new responsibilities. However, upon closer examination, I discovered that students sought responsibilities in relation to how much power and prestige they might gain from taking on new tasks. Students did not want to be responsible for activities and people just to be "good" individuals. Rather, they were intrinsically motivated by the expected outcomes of those responsibilities. A few students appeared to have different motivations for why they wanted to

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pursue certain opportunities, but most of them seemed to be driven by a desire for power and prestige.

Students found a sense of self-worth through gaining approval of others in their various leadership and team roles. Laura chose to become involved in her college's career fair because it would offer a clear path for her to develop her networking abilities, gain power over activities and people, and obtain recognition from her peers. Laura enjoyed knowing that others relied on her to make things happen for the career fair. In fact, it appears that she competed for participation points because she knew that she would be recognized for her efforts. It is unclear if her motivations were entirely geared toward obtaining power and prestige, since it also seems that Laura found a place where she belonged and was needed (Kuh & Love, 2000). Laura may have expected to gain not only power and prestige, but also a place to belong.

Rachel and Elizabeth seemed to think that there were clear paths for them regarding how to become leaders and knowledgeable in their respective fields. Rachel has already taken responsibility for her learning and development by shadowing professionals, choosing to participate in research projects with faculty members, and preparing to become a resident assistant in the dorms. Similarly, Elizabeth shared that she has always surrounded herself with others who "wanted to be the head of the pack," individuals who are recognized for their leadership, knowledge, skills, and reputation. Elizabeth found self-affirmation through surrounding herself with ambitious peers, which is also why she wanted to continue her rigorous academics by pursuing engineering and participating in the Concrete Canoe competition. As she noted, her learning constantly builds on the original experience. In addition to gaining leadership skills, it appears that Elizabeth discovered that by taking on these roles and responsibilities, she could also gain the respect of and power over her peers. Both Rachel and Elizabeth saw responsibilities as a clear path to finding recognition and control among their peers in their respective fields.

Along that vein, several students seemed to have become accustomed to having power and prestige. Students were used to having the power to make decisions in their lives and in others, so they sought ways to carve out niches that provided them with similar opportunities to be powerful and respected. Elizabeth had always been part of the group who was at the top of their academics and social circles, so being chosen as the Concrete Canoe's prospective leader was something that Elizabeth may have anticipated. Elizabeth expected to be a leader who has the power to make important decisions and direct the actions of her peers, which would also give her recognition for her initiative and willingness to take on new responsibilities. When Clay helped an elderly resident during Into the Streets, he saw that he had the physical abilities and resources to take care of not only his own needs, but also those of a woman who could not take care of her own yard. As Clay said, "I can see what I can do as an individual." Clay enjoyed how the woman "thought [the volunteers] were the greatest people ever" and he most noticed "the attitude and gratitude" of the people he helped. For Clay, volunteering with Into the Streets was not about meeting the needs of others, but rather served as an opportunity for Clay to find affirmation and respect among others who could not take care of themselves. Clay seems to have been motivated by seeing how others treat him and revere him after he helps them. Both Clay and Elizabeth seem to have been motivated to take on new responsibilities and work because they wanted to feel powerful and recognized for their own efforts. They demonstrated that they wanted to be in charge and direct others' activities. It appears that their leadership positions offered them self-affirmation and respect. They enjoyed challenging work that served others because it provided them with their own edification. In other words, their thinking seems to be akin to "I did this, and it made me feel good."

Students may not be aware of their underlying motivations for power and prestige. I doubt that they consciously sought out responsibilities because they want to have control over others and to find their own sense of self-affirmation. However, their underlying motivations become all the more apparent when exploring why Becky and Craig chose to participate in

certain experiences. These two students seemed to want to take on responsibilities because they empathized with those they were working with and saw those interactions as an opportunity to learn from one another. Becky believed that she had been surrounded with positive influences throughout her childhood and did not believe that other children had that kind of support system. As a result of Becky's acute awareness of children's needs for recognition and support, she wanted to become a support system for children who did not have one. Craig also chose to spend time with Ryan because he empathized with Ryan's pain. He introduced Ryan to Ajax, a character from *The Iliad* who embodied many qualities that Ryan wanted to emulate. Ajax was strong, capable, healthy, powerful, and respected. Ryan felt empowered through spending time with Craig and wanted to be called Ajax to symbolize that sense of empowerment. Craig was shocked when he discovered that he had taught Ryan how to read. Craig did not choose to spend time with Ryan because he wanted to control Ryan, rather he wanted to serve as part of Ryan's support system. As a result of his time with Ryan, Craig has gained a new perspective of his ability to impact others. Becky and Craig seemed to have become more aware of how injustice is created and recognized that they had power to create social change (Freire, 1970), through interacting with children.

By seeking responsibility, students found ways in which they not only had responsibility for activities of those around them, but also discovered responsibility for their own learning in effective management of their new roles. However, students' strong emphasis on the importance of finding responsibility, particularly through leadership roles, was a unique finding in this study in relation to other studies on transformative learning. Clay, Elizabeth, Jake, and Laura shared that their hands-on leadership experiences helped them develop new frames of reference (or Johnson's mental models) that improved their ability to handle new and complex phenomena (Johnson, 2008). However, few (Johnson, 2008) have discussed how seeking responsibility in leadership roles may provide opportunities for learners to reevaluate, disconfirm or reaffirm, and reframe their frames of reference. More research needs to be done that explores how students'

frames of reference are changed if they choose to place themselves in certain situations and roles. Finally, role models and mentors played an integral role in students' evaluation of expectations and assumptions.

Role Models and Mentors

During my interviews, students discussed how role models and mentors had helped them in their development. They shared stories of individuals who acted as mentors for them by providing them with recognition, support, challenge, and inspiration (Parks, 2000). Throughout the literature on transformative learning, researchers have discussed how classroom educators should facilitate dialogue and opportunities that encourage students to critically reflect on their own thoughts and behavior (Apte, 2009; Atherton, 2010; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Cranton & Wright, 2008; Franz, 2005; Ignelzi, 2000; Kasl & Elias, 2000; Mezirow, 1990; Tisdell, 2008). Of the many mentors and role models discussed, only Marie highlighted a particular classroom teacher who mentored her. Most students referred to family members, peers, supervisors, and organizational leaders who served as role models and mentors for them. Rachel shared her admiration for the Professor, her choral director, who serves the dual roles of classroom instructor and choral director. As Becky explained, her sister, Mary Anne was one of her role models because she knew who Becky was in the context of her life (Southern, 2007). Though not classroom educators, students discussed how their mentors facilitated a culture of openness, trust, safety, and feedback (Fenwick, 2003). It appears that one reason students were drawn to these particular role models and mentors was because those individuals shared the students' interests, demonstrated understanding, and were trustworthy (Southern, 2007). In one instance of peer role modeling, Emma has shown Laura how to develop "worthy dreams" that are "imagined [possibilities] that [orient] meaning, purpose, and aspiration" (Parks, 2000, p. 146). Emma has demonstrated to Laura that her goals are achievable, satisfying, and meaningful. Though students' role models and mentors may not be specifically classroom educators, they have played a critical role in helping students reflect upon and implement new frames of reference. It appears

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that most students identified their role models and mentors as individuals with whom they interacted on a regular, day-to-day basis through living communities, academic organizations, extracurricular activities, work spaces, and other related settings. These settings are often facilitated by student affairs professionals and departments (American Council on Education, 1937; Keeling, 2004; Komives & Woodard, 2003; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The findings from this study indicate that student affairs professionals can play a critical role in serving as role models and mentors for college students. Before discussing recommendations for practice, however, I will first discuss the limitations of this study.

Limitations

A few limitations of this study must be considered. First, the nature of the research questions and study design means that the results cannot be generalizable to the broader population. In this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a limited number of interviewees. The data was analyzed systematically, but the interviewees only represented a small range of perspectives that will not fully account for all college students who have experienced transformative learning. Also, the interviewees were volunteers, which means that they may have particularly strong feelings or other personal motivations for responding to the study invitation. It is not believed that interviewees used this study as an opportunity to promote a personal agenda. It is important to note that all data is entirely self-reported. Interviewees may have chosen to share certain information as a result of their emotions, current life situation, and other subjective influencers. They may have sincerely claimed to behave in certain ways, but their behavior may be perceived differently by an outside observer. Interviewees' unique perspectives are essential for the success of this qualitative study, but they may have negatively influenced the findings due to their subjectivity.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study revealed four primary themes that support the fostering of transformative learning experiences in the university environment. These themes include students' relationships between self and others; students' choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the importance of role models and mentors.. These themes provide a backdrop for future research. Future research could include: exploring students' relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff in the campus community; exploring students' interactions and relationships with individuals and groups outside of the campus body; examining how students navigate situations they choose to play a part in and those that they do not; exploring if and how students reflect upon their experiences; and examining the types of challenges and levels of responsibility that college students seek out. This study opens the door to further research that explores students' motivations for choosing to participate in volunteer and leadership activities. Other avenues for research include examining what kinds of interactions are most impactful for students; examining what roles that role models and mentors played in helping foster transformative learning experiences; and examining what experiences are most impactful for students. Researchers can consider exploring if students did or did not expect to be changed through their experiences and what possible outcomes may have developed as result of those expectations. Students in this study emphasized the importance of influencing others, which offers further opportunities for research. These studies could deepen the knowledge base regarding college students' transformative learning experiences, which may help higher education institutions better foster opportunities for transformative learning to occur. Now I will discuss my recommendations for student affairs practice.

Recommendations for Student Affairs practice

Transformative learning plays a key role in helping student affairs practioners reach their goals of helping college students develop into capable and confident individuals in society. As revealed in this study, students encountered a wide variety of experiences that may foster transformative learning. A few of these experiences included engaging in community service,

mentoring their peers and children, dialoguing with mentors and role models, leading others in both on- and off-campus activities, participating in campus organizations, and more. These experiences were primarily extracurricular activities in student affairs settings. As a result, student affairs divisions, student organizations, and interactions with students provide opportunities for challenging students to change their perspectives and gain a higher level of knowledge. As indicated by the findings in this study, transformative learning experiences may occur in various settings, not just the classroom. I suggest that student affairs departments implement programs that encourage students to interact with individuals with different cultures, encouraging collaboration and teamwork, utilizing moments for reflection and analysis, enabling students to connect their newfound knowledge with past and recent life experiences, and encourage students to seek role models and mentors with whom they can closely identify. Below are a few of my recommendations for student affairs practioners who wish to foster environments in which transformative learning experiences can occur.

It appears that students' most transformative learning experiences occurred when students were not expecting to encounter them. Students encountered disorienting dilemmas that led them to reflect upon their perspectives and new experiences. Student affairs practioners cannot always facilitate this kind of experience, which seems to occur organically and outside of individuals' or groups' control. Instead, I suggested that student affairs departments need to provide students with opportunities to encounter individuals, groups, culture, and ideas that differ from their own frames of reference. These interactions may provide students with a safe space in which they can discover new perspectives, reevaluate their own perspectives, and create more inclusive perspectives. Within these programs, student affairs representatives need to encourage group members to have purposeful interactions that bring group members closer together. It seems that a recurring problem with students in this study is that they had not quite learned how to empathize with others instead of just seeking power over them and recognition from them.

Student affairs departments need to help students learn to humanize, not minimize others, who are unlike them.

As discussed by students in this study, organizations that were most important to them were those that were actively creating new services or knowledge. Student affairs practioners need to encourage students to become involved in groups that are "making a difference" in their respective areas. Along that note, student affairs representatives need to encourage students to seek ways in which they can contribute to their community, whether it be on- or off-campus. Students in this study expressed a deep desire to influence and improve the lives of others. Student affairs departments should provide students with resources and opportunities to utilize their learning and skills in such a way that may contribute to the well-being of others around them.

Reflection is another key element in transformative learning that enhances students' development regarding their psychosocial, cognitive, and social identity. Student affairs staff need to be trained in how to productively facilitate this reflection process for optimum growth. Learning how to facilitate reflection opportunities will also serve as an asset for student affairs staff as they interact with students in various divisions and positions. Reflection of one's experiences and perspectives is a vital component throughout a college student's development.

Student affairs practioners should also seek to create opportunities in which students can apply their newfound knowledge, which may be academic, social, physical, or otherwise, with real life experiences. Students this study expressed the belief that applying their new perspectives and skills helped them become more confident and capable. Universities should seek to foster that kind of learning by connecting students with community organizations, leadership opportunities, and social issues that can engage their bodies and their minds.

Finally, universities should encourage the development of mentoring and role model relationships in students' lives. Universities can do this by creating opportunities in which students can interact with faculty, staff, and their peers in meaningful and purposeful ways. This

can also be done by celebrating close relationships and sharing stories of positive role model and mentor relationships.

As indicated by this study, the field of student affairs has multiple avenues for fostering opportunities for transformative learning to occur. Student affairs practioners can encourage students to develop their frames of reference by facilitating meaningful and purposeful interactions with diverse individuals, offering ways to become engaged within their communities, teach students how to critically reflect upon their learning and experiences, create applied learning experiences, and providing opportunities for students to forge close relationships with campus community members. If student affairs practioners implement these practices, they can create a supportive environment in which students can experience transformative learning.

Summary

During this phenomenological qualitative research study, eight college students and I explored what it means to have a transformative learning experience, how they navigated those experiences, and what were the outcomes of their experiences. In this study, I sought to better understand how students' frames of reference are formed, influenced, and changed through their college experiences. All but two of the students in this study participated in a follow-up face-to-face interview to clarify and further explore concepts discussed during our first interview. Throughout this study, students shared rich stories of their experiences and offered thoughtful reflection upon their experiences. Students discussed their relationships between self and others; their choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and the influence of role models and mentors on their lives. They also emphasized that the most effective way to learn is through personal experience, because then they can learn how to effectively problem-solve (Mezirow, 1990). Jake explained,

> "You can't learn something until you learn it yourself through experience because they can tell you a million times… not to do something, but until you actually do it and learn like, 'Hey, these are the consequences of what I've just done.'"

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Finally, students in this study shared the belief that they had changed as a result of their experiences (Christopher, 2001), yet they expected to continue learning and changing in the future. Much like students' expectations to continue learning and growing throughout their lives, this study has offered rich new understandings into the field of transformative learning and college student development. The data found in this study revealed themes that concur with current research on transformative learning, including the importance of relationships between self and others; choices and challenging circumstances; seeking responsibility as a path to power and prestige; and dialoguing with role models and mentors. However, data also revealed other areas that could be further explored, including students' understanding of how they relate to others, both within and outside the college campus; how choice affects learning outcomes in challenging circumstances; students' motivations behind seeking responsibility and leadership; the role that power and prestige plays in students' learning; and what are other key qualities of students' role models and mentors. Overall, more research needs to be done to better understand how college students experience transformative learning since the majority of research has been on individuals and groups who are not in the higher education setting. This study makes it clear that student affairs professionals and departments have numerous opportunities to provide students with opportunities that may foster transformative learning experiences.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preferred pseudonym: _____

1. What interested you in doing this interview?

2. You mentioned on your profile sheet that you did _____ during high school. Can you tell me more about that?

3. What motivates you to do _____?

4. Where did you get the idea to _____?

5. Has serving others made a difference in your life? How so?

6. What factors in the college context were meaningful to you? Continue to be meaningful?

7. What other experiences have been meaningful to you?

8. Did this experience change your perceptions about anything?

9. What were the learning experiences like?

10. Has it continued to make a difference in your life?

11. How would you describe yourself at the beginning of the experience and how would you describe yourself now?

What do you think college campuses can do to nurture such meaningful experiences?

APPENDIX II

PARTICIPANTS' RESEARCH INVITATION
SENT TO STUDENTS VIA CAMPUS LINK AND SONA

Dear student,

This is an invitation to participate in research being conducted by a graduate student at Oklahoma State University. This study explores how college students develop their perspectives regarding the world and how their perspectives evolve throughout their time as college students.

I would like to explore how your perspective regarding yourself, others, and your environment has changed since becoming a college student. We will discuss how you viewed yourself, others, and your environment before beginning your college education and how your outlook has changed (or not changed) since then.

Participation in the study involves a face-to-face interview with the researcher either in a campus classroom or meeting room or at the researcher's office, whichever is convenient to you. The interview will be recorded either through audio or notes for the purpose of transcribing it afterward. The recording for this study will be kept confidential for a period of two years in 314 Willard Hall.

However, if you wish the interview to not be recorded, your request will be honored. I would also like to request your permission to quote your interview in this research. Any quotes used will not include identifying information. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. It is important that each question be answered as honestly as possible for the research to be of significant value.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time you wish without any negative consequences.

Details about the findings from this research will be available by the end of December 2012.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email the researcher at c.hicks@okstate.edu with "Interested in Volunteer Experiences Study." If you have any questions, feel free to call or email the researcher.

Cortney Hicks
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK
580.461.3501 Cell
c.hicks@okstate.edu

APPENDIX III

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION TO BE POSTED ON SONA

Study Name: College Students' Volunteering Transformative Learning Experiences

Description: This study explores how college students develop their perspectives regarding the world and how their perspectives evolve throughout their time as college students. This research study seeks to more clearly identify what experiences students consider to have most impacted their current perspectives, how those experiences affected their perspectives, how students processed those experiences, and if and/or how students think those experiences will shape their future actions.

Participation in the study involves a face-to-face interview with the researcher either in a campus classroom or meeting room or at the researcher's office. The interview will be recorded either through audio or notes for the purpose of transcribing it afterward. The recording for this study will be kept confidential for a period of two years in 314 Willard Hall.

Eligibility Requirements: Must be 18-25 years of age and volunteered during college.

Compensation: Will receive service hours for participating in this study.

Researchers: Cortney Hicks, Oklahoma State University, c.hicks@okstate.edu; Dr. John Foubert, Oklahoma State University, john.foubert@okstate.edu

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATING STUDENTS
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: College Students' Volunteering Transformative Learning Experiences

INVESTIGATORS: Cortney Hicks, Oklahoma State University; Dr. John Foubert, Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how college students develop their perceptions about themselves, others, and the world in which they live. This research study is grounded in Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which emphasizes that certain experiences are more likely to encourage a change in perspective than others. This research study seeks to explore what experiences and environments have most impacted and changed students' perspectives. You have been invited to participate in this research study because you are currently or recently were a college student. Your experiences and thoughts on how those experiences have impacted you are valuable to this research. This research study seeks to more clearly identify what experiences students consider to have most impacted their current perspectives, how those experiences affected their perspectives, how students processed those experiences, and if and/or how students think those experiences will shape their future actions.

PROCEDURES:

You are invited to participate in this qualitative research study through a one-on-one, face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. This interview can take place in a quiet specified location on campus or elsewhere, wherever you prefer. You will be asked for your permission for the researcher to audio-tape and transcribe the interview afterward, in case you do not give your permission to audio-tape and/or transcribe the interview you will be asked nevertheless for your permission for the researcher to take notes during the interview. You also will be asked for permission to quote you in this research. If permission is given, the interview will be recorded on the researcher's phone. During the interview, you will be welcomed and reminded of potential harms and benefits of your participation and also about your right to withdraw from the research study at any time you wish without any negative consequences. Your interactions with the researcher in regards to this research study will be minimal. The expected points of contact include: arranging the interview and conducting the interview. If needed, the researcher may contact you via phone or email after the interview to clarify what was discussed during the interview. No additional interviews are expected.

The research process will follow the following order:

Step one: You will be interviewed.
Step two: I will transcribe your interview.
Step three: I will analyze the results and determine findings.

RECORDING:

Do you allow the researcher to record the interview?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Note: If you do not agree to the recording of the interview, do you allow the researchers to take notes during the interview?
☐ Yes ☐ No

QUOTES:

Do you allow the researcher to use quotes from the interview in this research study?
☐ Yes ☐ No

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

The risks of participation in this research study are very low. Participants will not encounter the possibility of stress or psychological, social, physical, or legal risks that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life, nor will subjects be deceived or misled in any way, nor presented with materials that might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

It is believed that this research will shed light on the way college students create and adapt their frames of reference (perceptions of the world) through their participation in the higher education environment.

COMPENSATION:

You will receive service hours for participating in this study.

CONTACTS:

You understand that you may contact the researcher at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the research study and/or request information about the results of the research study:

Cortney Hicks   Dr. John Foubert
Oklahoma State University   Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK   314 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK
580.461.3501 Cell   405.744.1480 Work
c.hicks@okstate.edu   john.foubert@okstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may also contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Shelia Kennison, 219 Cordell North, OSU, (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information about you will be kept confidential and will not be released. Interview transcripts will be identified by subject number only, rather than names on them. All information (recordings, transcripts, and consent forms) will be kept in a secure place that is open only to the researcher. Results from this research study may be presented at professional meetings or in publications. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by

research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research. Data will be stored in 314 Willard Hall for two years from the start of data collection until December 2013. Data will be reported in a research paper.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

Participation is voluntary, there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw from this project at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____
Signature of Researcher   Date

**RESEARCH STUDY FLYER
POSTED ON CAMPUS LINK**

Volunteer Experiences Study
Be a part of an important College Experience Research Study*

Are you between 18-25 years of age?

Have you volunteered during college?

Would you like to share your stories of volunteering?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a study that explores students' college experiences.

The purpose of this research study is to explore what experiences have influenced students' perceptions about themselves, others, & the world in which they live.

Benefits will include earning service hours & refreshments for their participation. These service hours may go toward the CORD program through the OSU Service-Learning Volunteer Center.

Please call Cortney Hicks at 580.461.3501 or email c.hicks@okstate.edu for more information.

*This study is conducted by a graduate student through Oklahoma State University.

APPENDIX VI

INSTIUTTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPROVAL LETTER

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, January 05, 2012

IRB Application No: ED11208

Proposal Title: College Students Volunteering Transformative Learning Experiences

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 1/4/2013

Principal Investigator(s):

Cortney Hicks
1920 E. Virginia Ave. Apt. 400
Stillwater, OK 74074

John Foubert
314 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.
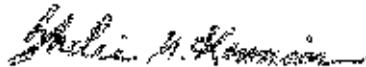
☑ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact: Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu)

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Cortney Kay Hicks

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: COLLEGE STUDENTS' TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Major Field: Educational Leadership Studies in College Student Development

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Leadership Studies in College Student Development at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in September, 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Broadcasting: Public Relations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2009.

Experience:
  Fitness Instructor, Stillwater Family YMCA, OSU Campus Recreation, Gym One, Body Works, June 2009 – Present
  Academic Services for Student Athletes Facilitator, ASSA, OSU, October 2010 – Present
  Service-Learning Volunteer Center, SLVC, OSU, Graduate Assistant & Ambassador Advisor, OSU, July 2009 – June 2011
  ASSA Intern, OSU, July 2010 – February 2011
  Volunteer and Service Learning Center Intern, VSLC, University of Central Oklahoma, June 2010 – November 2010
  Communications Networking Expo Founder and Student Coordinator, OSU, November 2008- March 2012
  Campus Ministry Intern, Stillwater Church of Christ University Center, August 2008 – May 2009
  Operation Weight Loss Founder and Coordinator, Stillwater Family YMCA, December 2006 – June 2010

Professional Memberships:
American College Personnel Association, Wellness Commission, Coordinator of Sponsored Programs, April 2010 – Present; Member, May 2012 – Present;
American Council on Education, Certified Fitness Instructor, January 2012 – Present
Oklahoma College Student Personnel Association, Conference Co-Coordinator; Member, August 2011 – Present, May 2010 – Present
Exercise Safety Association, Certified Fitness Instructor, January 2009 – Present