EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN'S CENTER PROFESSIONALS

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Despite the over half-century history of campus-based women's centers, little research has investigated the work experiences of directors of such centers. This qualitative study used narrative analysis to investigate the work experiences of women's center professionals in a director role in a student affairs division. Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* to leadership provided the conceptual framework to explore the experiences of campus-based women's center professionals. Three themes emerged from the participants' stories: program development, student interactions, and staff size. Program development was central to participants' role by offering educational programs and support to women students. Students who identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer), feminist, and student organizations, were overwhelmingly significant to the work experience of women's center professionals. Almost all participants shared a small staff size experience as common. Participants with varying personal demographics and years of student affairs experience in different types of institutions all shared stories of successful, salient, and challenging experiences. Finally, the study found that some but not all participants engaged in positive self-care practices in an effort to establish a sustainable work/life balance.

INDEX WORDS: Women's centers, Women's center professionals, Student affairs, Bolman and Deal, Campus climate, Constructivism, Narrative analysis

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DEDICATION

From the beginning, I have viewed this journey as running a marathon. In a marathon you never succeed alone, it's not unusual to "hit a wall," and you are warned never to start too fast to ensure that you have enough stamina to go all the way. Although my stamina did waver over the course of writing my dissertation, I was never alone on this journey, and I dedicate this dissertation to those whose support enabled me to reach the finish line.

To my husband Scott and daughters Allison and Catherine: this entire journey would not have been possible without you, and this dissertation is for you. Scott, thank you for making sure there were home-cooked meals every night, hot coffee each morning, and an endless supply of moral support throughout this process. Allison, thank for you caring, and for engaging and playing with Catherine so I had time to write. Catherine, thank you for forcing me to take writing breaks to play games with you in the living room and outside, and for being a great late-night writing buddy. I love you all!

This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents. They were instrumental in my decision to attend college, and supported me in attending an out-of-state college 1200 miles from home. Without their advocating for me to continue my education, I would have never found my path in student affairs. At the same time I started the dissertation process my mom was diagnosed with cancer, and while I wrote this dissertation she endured eight long months of treatment. It was an opportunity for me to finally be able to support her, as well as my dad, through something major, as they had always supported

me. We spent many hours in the car driving to various appointments, which gave us an opportunity to share this journey together. She is cancer-free and for that I am eternally grateful.

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Finally, I would like to thank all the women's center professionals at colleges and universities across the world. Your dedication to gender equity on the college campus drove me to solicit these stories. You need the space, resources, and support to be able to continue, and to share, the important and amazing work you do daily.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Campus-based women's centers, which first appeared more than 50 years ago, today thrive on college and university campuses nationwide (Goettsch, J., Holgerson, K., Morrow, R., Rose-Mockry, K., Seasholes, C., & Vlasnik, A, 2015). In 1960, the Carnegie Corporation, seeking to bring greater attention to issues of women's educational equality, took the first step in developing campus resources specifically for women. The organization awarded $110,000 as seed money (and subsequently awarded a supplementary grant of $72,000) to the University of Minnesota to launch its Minnesota Plan for the Continuing Education of Women, this initiative aimed to provide educational opportunities for women following the educational "discontinuities" that resulted from marriage and motherhood (Schletzer, 1967).

What began as the "Minnesota Plan" became the first campus-based women's center, which remained for many decades ahead of centers that were subsequently established at colleges and universities across the country. Student activism played a key role in the founding of many campus-based women's centers (Davie, 2002), an outgrowth of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Agnes, 2010; Clevenger, 1988). "Women were angry at the rigidities of their institutions, eager to see some immediate changes, and at the same time aware that an important first step in effecting change was to raise the consciousness of women" (Miriam, 1988, p. 87). Institutional recognition of the need to create a dedicated space for women's activities and interactions, as well as to

provide resources and support for women's full and equal participation in college life, provided the foundation for both the development and continued evolution of women's centers through the latter half of the twentieth century (Byrne, 2000; Davie, 2002; Boyd et al., 2009).

Gender demographics of students are changing on college and university campuses. Women are outnumbering men in college enrollment (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). This outnumbering raises the question as to whether or not women's centers are still relevant, yet Vlasnik (2011) noted "gender inequity is still a concern despite the women's growing numbers in higher education" (p. 24). "Many of the other inequities that led to the establishment of women's centers decades ago remain" (Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012, p. 1) such as sexual harassment and assault, chilly classroom climate, and underrepresentation in certain disciplines. Boyd et al (2009) noted women's centers advocate for change in areas where traditional sex and gender roles are present. This is important because of the gender inequities that remain in higher education.

Mission of Campus-based Women's Centers

As resources that are established and funded to serve the college or university in which they are housed, women's centers typically frame their mission as one of achieving gender equity as a means of advancing the overall mission of the institution (Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS), 2015). *Gender equity* is defined as equal access for women and men to programs, resources, activities, and opportunities available through the university community, as well as equal treatment under the institution's policies and procedures (Goettsch, J., Holgerson, K., Morrow, R., Rose-Mockry, K., Seasholes, C., &

Vlasnik, A, 2015). Universities seek to establish gender equity through various means including financial support for women students, scholarships, grants, or financial aid; recruitment and retention efforts aimed specifically at women; the provision of campus resources and services that offer academic, career, social, and other forms of support; and advocacy to advance women's rights and expand their opportunities on and off campus (CAS, 2015).

Structure of Campus-based Women's Centers

As of 2015, more than 500 campus-based women's centers were located in institutions of higher education nationwide (National Women Studies Association (NWSA) Women's Center Committee, 2015). These centers are housed either in student affairs, academic affairs, or diversity offices (CAS, 2015). The unit each center is located within, often defines its role, reporting structure, and system of reporting. Women's centers located in divisions of student affairs focus programs and initiatives primarily on students, whereas those housed in academic affairs or offices of institutional diversity may provide additional services for faculty and staff, as well as provide campus-wide initiatives (Davie, 2002).

Staffing and Services

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) guidelines suggest that women's center staff should be "personnel [who] must demonstrate a commitment to the equity and inclusion practices " (2015, p. 496). Further, the guidelines note, "the professional personnel either must hold an earned graduate or professional degree in a field relevant to their position or must possess an appropriate combination of education credentials and related work experience" (CAS, 2015, p. 497). Most campus-based

women's centers employ at least one full-time professional staff member, typically a director or coordinator, with the remaining staff being part-time employees or volunteers (Clevenger, 1988; Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012). The director or coordinator is responsible for heading the women's center, while the part-time or volunteer positions tend to be filled by clerical staff or students (Clevenger, 1988; Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012).

The primary responsibilities of the staff in a campus-based women's center are to provide programs, services, and resources for college students (Davie, 2002). Programs can include salary negotiations, women students' leadership development, or prevention and education on gender based violence. Services can entail advocacy for students who experience sexual violence, birth control information, or academic assistance due to a personal issue such related to mental health. Resources can range from childcare options to advice on job offers. The programs, services, and resources relate specifically to gender on campus, which often differentiates them from other offices on campus such as Career Services, the Health Center, or the Dean of Students Office. In addition, women's center professional staff are expected to "advocate for institutional accountability for assessing and monitoring campus climate in areas of gender bias and discrimination; advocate for the elimination of institutional policies and practices that result in an inequitable impact on students and employees based on their gender identity" (CAS, 2015, p. 494). For example, staff are advocating for affordable and accessible childcare for those in the campus community. Campus-based women's centers also provide a variety of support services, resources and referrals to providers of medical and mental health care, and resources and referrals for members of underrepresented communities to

populations of support (CAS, 2015). Moreover, as a result of their visibility in these roles, campus-based women's center professionals are often among the first individuals, along with women's studies faculty, whom victim-survivors of sexual violence seek out to provide resources, advocacy, and support (Heldman & Brown, 2014).

Problem Statement

Little research has investigated the work experiences of directors of campus-based women's centers, despite the over half-century history of such centers. Yet understanding the role of these higher education professionals is crucial given the changes that have occurred in campus climates in recent years. This exploratory study will investigate the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director role with an eye to understanding their current roles, responsibilities, and challenges. On April 3, 2011, the "Dear Colleague Letter" issued by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights identified guidelines for colleges and universities to follow in addressing campus sexual violence. On March 7, 2013, as part of his reauthorization of the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA), President Obama signed into law the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act, providing a context for administrative decision and policy making on college campuses (ATIXA, 2015). Such legislation has undoubtedly impacted campus-based women's centers, which often provide comprehensive sexual assault advocacy for students utilizing a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach (Harris & Fallot, 2001; TenElshof & Searle, 1974). Consequently, these laws have also significantly influenced the work experiences of center directors.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to elicit work experience narratives from directors of campus-based women's centers. There is a continued growth in the number of women in post-secondary education (Lonnquist & Reesor, 1987; Steinman, 1984), but gender equity has still not been achieved in college and universities (Lonnquist & Reesor, 1987). Therefore, campus-based women's centers and women's center professionals can assist. With the changing role of the director it is important to add their narratives to the current women's center literature.

Legislation on sexual violence advocacy and prevention has undoubtedly affected campus-based women's centers; therefore, it is essential to understand how women's center professionals have navigated the changing campus climate. The specific research question guiding this study was: What are the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director role in a student affairs division? Student affairs, as a division, has been chosen due to the changing campus climate, which historically is more frequently addressed within student life than other parts of the institution.

Research Paradigm

A *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world (Mertens, 2005). Identifying a suitable research paradigm is necessary in order to guide the overall research approach (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010). The research paradigm selected guides all aspects of the research approach, from the development of the research question through the process of data analysis (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010).

Constructivist Paradigm

This study employed a constructivist paradigm, in which the "central purpose is to make sense of human experience and to understand and derive shared meaning within a particular context" (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). This means, as the researcher, the knowledge gained will be through the words shared by individual participants. There will be no preconceived notion about the meaning or understanding of the work experience before the study. In employing this paradigm, I will co-construct meaning with participants, eliciting narratives through semi-structured interviews and listening deeply to each participant's story. Co-constructivism is a term used in education when learners (in this case the researcher) do not passively receive information, but rather genuinely interpret the experiences together with the educator (in this case individual participants) (Creswell, 2014).

Ontology, Axiology, and Epistemology

Ontology is the study of how reality is constructed (Mertens, 2005). It refers to how humans make sense of being or existence in the world. For example, it could be an individuals' understanding of the difference between abstract and concrete objects, such as equity versus equality. *Axiology* refers to the study of value, and ensures that there is a balanced representation of views (Mertens, 2005). It is the values or ethics an individual would employ. For example, it could be ensuring that all voices are represented when conducting a research study. *Epistemology* encompasses the study of knowledge and the "relationship between knower and known" (Mertens, 2005, p. 8). It is how an individual discovers, obtains, or acquires knowledge. For example, it is how an individual knows

the earth is round. The individual knows it is round based on knowledge gained through reading or learning in science class.

The ontology of the constructivist paradigm acknowledges multiple truths. In this study, each participant's story illuminates her own socially constructed truth. The axiology of constructivism emphasizes the importance of highlighting participants' voices; therefore, representing a variety of voices was important in this study (Mertens, 2009). Aligning with my epistemology of a constructivist paradigm, co-construction of these narratives was supported through interviewing participants about their experiences.. This means, the researcher worked alongside with the individual participants to construct the knowledge to answer this research question.

Conceptual Framework

A *conceptual framework* is the theory or model that guides a research question or study (Creswell, 2014). In this study, Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* to leadership provides the conceptual framework that can be used to explore the experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in their roles. Bolman and Deal (2013) identified four institutional frameworks that categorize the assumptions influencing individuals' leadership behaviors and philosophies. Each framework, while distinct and independent, can also influence and intersect with the others.

Bolman and Deal (2013) labeled the four frames as structural, political, human resource, and symbolic. The *structural* frame emphasizes the roles, goals, and policies of an institution. The *political* frame focuses on power, conflict, and competition among various individuals and constituencies within an institution. The *human resource* frame highlights the skills, relationships, and needs of the people who comprise an institution,

while the *symbolic* frame emphasizes the culture and meaning of the institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013). By helping to illuminate the leadership approach to which participants implicitly or explicitly subscribe, this model will assist in understanding and interpreting the individual experiences of campus-based women's center directors.

Significance of the Study

Campus-based women's centers play a vital role both within student affairs and in higher education more broadly. Legislation on sexual violence survivor advocacy and prevention has undoubtedly affected campus-based women's centers, in addition to the influx of women students in higher education. This alone prompts the question about whether campus women's centers are still relevant and their role on campus; therefore, understanding how women's center professionals navigate this work experience is significant. This study will contribute to the current literature and give voice to the experiences of campus-based women's center professionals. The absence of their stories represents a significant gap in the literature, which needs to be addressed.

Conclusion

More than 50 years after the establishment of the first campus-based women's center, there remains much to learn about the roles and work experiences of the higher education professionals responsible for the centers' direction and vision. Employing a constructivist paradigm, this study will seek to elicit narratives of the work experiences of campus-based women's center directors in divisions of student affairs. The *Four Framework Approach* of Bolman and Deal (2013) will provide the conceptual framework through which to examine and analyze the varied experiences of these campus leaders.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature related to campus-based women's centers and the factors that influence the experiences of women's center professionals. Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* to leadership, which is used to understand institutional dynamics and modes of leadership, will also be explored. In addition, this chapter will review the research literature related to campus-based women's center operations and changing campus climates.

Women in Higher Education

In her preface to the pioneering book, *Toward a Balanced Curriculum*, written as a sourcebook for achieving a more gender-balanced college curriculum, Emerson (2008/1984) articulates the need to integrate women more fully into the curriculum. Explaining why such integration is essential in this context, Emerson notes, "Educational institutions have a special social responsibility to be future-oriented and to take the largest possible view" (p. 10). Similarly, Conway (2008/1978) urged colleges and universities to add more women in spaces of higher education in the interest of "creating a balanced educational community" (p. 8).

The literature on women in higher education includes two primary segments, scholarship focusing on either female faculty members or female administrators. This distinction is important to recognize, as each role has both inherent expectations and (un)intended privileges. With this in mind, the roles of female administrators as well as

those of female faculty members continue to evolve in higher education, though the pace and progress of these changes differ based on an individual's position, academic field or administrative unit, the type of higher education institution, and other variables. Women's center directors often hold a full-time administrative role, although some hold dual appointments as faculty in a discipline such as gender studies or women's studies.

Beyond variations among their positions and educational settings, individuals' experiences are also impacted by a multitude of identity categories and means of social stratification, including those of race and social class. In the faculty ranks of many fields, as well as in higher education overall, men have historically outnumbered women (Parker, 2015), resulting in a significant gender imbalance among higher education professionals. Therefore, it is essential that we continue to expand the literature related to women in higher education, particularly women's center directors. However, the current literature on women in higher education lacks information on the directors of women's centers.

Women in Student Affairs

Prior to the 1960s, the predominant philosophy of student affairs offices was an approach referred to as *in loco parentis*, Latin for "in the place of a parent." In that era of higher education, faculty and administrators were expected not only to provide support and guidance, but also to assume parent-like responsibilities for college students (McClellan, Stringer, & Associates, 2009). The practice of *in loco parentis* led to the creation of such positions as Dean of Men and Dean of Women on many college campuses (McClellan et al., 2009; Barr, McClellan, & Sandeen, 2014). The role of Dean of Men, first created in 1890, was the first non-academic staff position to exist on a

college campus (McClellan et al., 2009). The role of Dean of Women was created in the late 1800s as a result of the increasing number of women enrolling in higher education and the resulting recognition of their distinctive health and welfare needs (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011). The University of Chicago was the first institution to appoint a Dean of Women, Alice Freeman Palmer, in 1892 (Schuh et al., 2011). On today's college campus, while *in loco parentis* has all but disappeared, Deans of Students and the student affairs offices they direct, continue to be charged with overseeing student welfare and discipline as well as providing care and compassion for students in crisis (McClellan et al., 2009).

Student affairs positions have evolved significantly since the 1900s, yet one tenet remains unchanged: Students are central to institutions of higher education and to the educational experience itself. Student affairs professionals serve students in innumerable ways in a wide variety of settings, such as residence halls, campuses offices and centers, and study abroad trips worldwide (Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, & Steinke, 2001). Although the role of the student affairs professional has expanded and changed considerably in its more than 100 years of existence, the profession retains its focus on supporting student development and well-being as core responsibilities.

The campus-based women's center is one of the functional areas within student affairs that has undergone significant transformation. Campus-based women's centers were developed as a way to create a space for women on campus and to address inequities in the educational and professional opportunities and resources available to women in higher education (Agness, 2010; Byrne, 2000; Davie, 2002; Lonnquist & Reesor, 1987). Some campus-based women's centers were created in response to student

activism demanding greater services for women, while others were developed as a result of institutions' commitment to greater equity and inclusion (Byrne, 2000).

History of Campus-Based Women's Centers

The first women's center was founded in 1960 at the University of Minnesota (Spikes & Stillabower, 1978). States such as California and New York accounted for over one-third of the campus-based women's centers first developed in the 1970s, while states such as North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Virginia had no specifically identified women's center (Spikes & Stillabower, 1978).

Today there are more than 500 campus-based women's centers across the U.S. (National Women's Studies Association, 2015). Women's centers are often one-person offices, although some centers contain multiple positions (Agness, 2010; Clevenger, 1988). The resources available to these centers vary as much as the campuses themselves (Davie, 2002).

Campus-based women's centers may be housed in a variety of administrative divisions, but most are found within student affairs, academic affairs, or diversity and equity offices (Agness, 2010; Goettsch et al., 2015). Women's centers that are part of student affairs tend to focus their programming and other initiatives primarily on students, while offices housed in academic affairs or offices of institutional diversity may serve faculty and staff as well (Davie, 2002).

Regardless of their divisional home, women's centers are charged with supporting the overall mission of the institution by addressing issues of gender equity on campus (Goettsch et al., 2015). *Gender equity* refers to providing equal access to resources, opportunities, and services to all members of the campus community, whether through

initiatives addressing affordability, recruitment, retention, support, or advocacy (Goettsch et al., 2015). Gender equity work can involve planning programs and events, providing resources, offering services, and/or establishing policies. For example, attention to gender equity might lead to the appointment of a task force to examine the pay gap between female and male staff or faculty on campus, or to the creation of a lunch and learn program on the topic of salary negotiation aimed at female students approaching graduation.

Women's Center Programming

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015) provides information on best practices for campus-based women's centers and identifies themes to guide women's centers in programming and resource development. These themes range from leadership development and community building to gender equality, discrimination, and social justice. Women's centers draw on such themes, as well as on the identified needs of the students, faculty, and staff at their own institution, to develop programs and services. The division in which a women's center is located often impacts program development as well. For example, women's centers situated within student affairs may place a greater emphasis on student leadership development and community building than centers located in other divisions. Such centers may also be particularly attuned to the social justice issues of concern to college students, such as #blacklivesmatter, #equality, or #gaymarriage.

Campus-based Women's Center Professionals

To date, the research literature on campus-based women's center professionals has been limited to a handful of articles articulating roles and identifying typical staffing

patterns, outlining responsibilities, and enumerating the services these administrators provide. Strout, Amar, and Astwood (2014) characterized women's center professionals as having a "unique role that merges an administrative, institutional perspective with one that is focused on the lives of students" (p. 141). Byrne (2000) investigated the administrative structures and resources related to campus-based women's centers. Byrne's findings suggested that in addition to providing support and offering educational programming, women's centers also play an important role in enhancing learning by linking curricular experiences with co-curricular experiences, feminist pedagogy, and intellectual empowerment (Spikes & Stillabower, 1978). *Feminist pedagogy* refers to a method of generating learning experiences that is grounded in the principle of gender equity.

Kasper (2004) examined the practices of and problems confronting campus-based women's centers. Respondents, who were women's center professionals, overwhelmingly identified key problems as inadequate funding for programs and events; apathy towards women's issues by the campus community as a whole; and a lack of time, support from the administration, and visibility on campus. These findings echo the conclusions of Spikes and Stillabower's (1978) earlier review of the literature on campus-based women's centers. Such literature is beneficial in informing professionals in the field about the shared conditions and challenges they and their colleagues at other institutions may face. However, this research leaves unanswered important questions about the work experiences of the professionals who direct these centers.

A study by Clevenger (1988) provided the most comprehensive and significant research to date on women's center professionals. Now nearly three decades old,

however, this study can provide only limited insight into the staffing models and staff member experiences that characterize 21st century women's centers. Clevenger found that while many women's centers employ at least one full-time professional staff member, others utilize volunteers and/or part-time professionals to run their operations, consistent with Sweeney's (1978) findings a decade earlier. This observation also aligns with Girard, Sorce, and Sweeney's (1980) and Kasper's (2004) more recent, though still dated, finding that among women's center directors or coordinators at public institutions, "67% (34) of the directors/coordinators held a paid, full-time position while 24% were in part-time positions, and three centers (6%) had no paid director" (Kasper, 2004, p. 489).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) provides guidelines and standards for functional units in student affairs, including women's programs and services. According to the CAS standards, women's center staff should be "persons with the credentials and ability to forge gender equity on campus to promote the integrity of the unit" (CAS, 2015, p. 516). Further, "the professional staff should possess the academic preparation, experience, professional interests, and competencies essential for the efficient operation of the office as charged" (CAS, 2015, p. 516).

Campus-based women's center professionals provide student support services ranging from academic assistance to victim support. Students undergo a range of experiences during their time on campus and often seek emotional as well as professional or academic support. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the roles of campus-based women's center professionals, like those of many other student affairs professionals, often go beyond handling normal workplace demands to encompass *care*

work, which refers to tending to the emotional and developmental needs of others (Misra, 2007).

Care Work

Campus-based women's center professionals often must manage the challenging and stressful responsibility of providing care for their student constituents. Care work "is not simply a natural and uncomplicated response to those in need, but actually hard physical, mental, and emotional work, which is often unequally distributed through society" (Misra, 2007, p. 1). Care work can focus on supporting students through any number of difficult situations they may encounter. Within a women's center context, one common reason students seek support is as a result of the trauma of sexual assault. Due to the care work campus-based women's center professionals provide for students, it is important to recognize the potential for vicarious trauma associated with this work. The emotional toll this work can exact, often referred to as *compassion fatigue* (Harrison & Westwood, 2009), is similar to what professional counselors may experience when counseling a trauma victim. Although research on compassion fatigue is limited, the cumulative effects have been noted as having "deleterious effects upon clinicians, who may experience physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms similar to those of their traumatized clients" (Harrison & Westwood, 2009, p. 203).

Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious trauma refers to emotional disturbances that may be experienced by those who provide long-term care for the survivor of a traumatic experience, such as sexual violence, the death of a loved one, or a significant health issue (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). The disturbances experienced by the caretaker may take the form of

irritability, apathy, and/or exhaustion. Vicarious trauma adds an extra layer of stress, above and beyond the already stressful nature of such work as sexual violence victim advocacy (Harrison & Westwood, 2009; Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002).

Campus-based women's center professionals frequently provide advocacy services for students who are victims of sexual violence (Kasper, 2004; Strout, Amar, & Astwood, 2014), and may also tend in other ways to the needs of these students. Whether women's center professionals are responding to a crisis line during the workday or after hours, and whether they are supporting a student in the immediate aftermath of an assault or in the weeks, months, or years that follow, carrying the weight of the victims' stories may result in vicarious traumatization that makes it difficult to balance work with other aspects of their lives (Kasper, 2004; Strout, Amar, & Astwood, 2014). Safeguarding their health and well-being is thus a particular concern for this group of student affairs professionals, and one of the most effective ways to achieve this is through the practice of self-care (Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002).

Self-care

As a result of the care work campus-based women's center professionals provide and their consequent risk of experiencing vicarious trauma, burnout, and an imbalance in work/life responsibilities, it is vital for such professionals to engage in self-care practices. "Self-care refers to the proactive strategies, or routines, that professionals use to offset the negative aspects of working with trauma victims and promote their own well-being" (Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002, p. 734).

Common strategies for self-care include engaging in activities that promote physical health, spirituality, leisure, and relaxation, as well as seeking both emotional and instrumental support (Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002). Schauben and Frazier (1995, p. 60), for example, identified "engag[ing] in activities that promote physical health and well-being, such as exercising, sleeping well, and eating healthy foods" as common means of self-care. However, Wasco, Campbell, and Clark (2002) found that sexual assault counselors and rape victim therapists are more likely than other types of counselors to use escape or avoidance strategies for coping. This is significant because those sexual assault counselors and rape victim therapists who use escape or avoidance strategies might do so because of their relationship with supervisor, organizational structure, or workplace demands (Wasco, Campbell & Clark, 2002). For example, not being able to engage in self-care activities due to understaffing, unusual work hours, serving in an on-call capacity limiting the amount of time someone is able to disengage or by having an unsupportive supervisor. Women's center professionals may experience similar limitations as a result of their relationship with their supervisor, organizational structure, or workplace demands; thus more information is needed on how these professionals cope with the stresses of their role and manage the potential for vicarious trauma.

Work/Life Balance

Care work can frequently affect the balance between individuals' lives at work and their lives outside of work. The expectation that women's center professionals will provide care work for students may lead to a detrimental imbalance between personal and professional life (Kasper, 2004), which is a common problem facing student affairs

professionals. This lack of balance can lead to job dissatisfaction, loss of productivity, and health issues (Voydanoff, 2005). It may also have a direct or indirect impact on colleagues, students, and other members of the campus community, such as alumni, faculty, or parents and family members of students, as well as on the professional's own family and friends. It is thus important to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder work/life balance for these practitioners (Guthrie, Woods, Cusker, & Gregory, 2005). Although the field of women's center work is growing, the community of women's center professionals remains small, and given the prevalence of one-person offices, this work can feel lonely (Kasper, 2004). The demands of care work can exacerbate the pressure on women's center professionals, who are often singlehandedly responsible for maintaining the day-to-day administrative activities of a women's center while also providing advocacy and other support services for students in crisis.

Changing Campus Climate

The culture of any college campus is deeply rooted in that institution's history. Changing a campus culture is not achievable overnight, in a semester, or even over the course of a year. Altering long-entrenched attitudes and behaviors is not possible without engaging in difficult dialogues, often requiring challenge or even confrontation, and involving all members of the campus community. These may include dialogues about gender equity, racial inequality, or religious freedom, among other topics. Beyond discussion, education is necessary to address social justice issues on campus, and the executive leadership of an institution must be at the forefront of those changes, supporting them from the top down.

The last decade has witnessed several notable changes to campus climates across the Unites States. Social movements such as #blacklivesmatter and #gaymarriage have led to changes in campus climates through dialogue, education, and programming. One of the major climate changes on college campuses has been in the area of sexual violence prevention and advocacy, as increased federal support and resources have led to a strengthening of policies regarding these issues. Federal initiatives and legislation including Title IX, the Dear Colleague Letter, the Campus SaVE Act, and a white paper from the Obama administration have resulted in stricter requirements for reporting, prevention, and victim advocacy in relation to incidents of sexual violence on college campuses. Additionally, student activism and protests of sexual violence on college campuses have also contributed to the changing campus climate and facilitated changes in institutional policies. Strout, Amar, and Astwood (2014) noted that women's center professionals possess "distinct insights about the campus climate regarding sexual violence, effective care for survivors of sexual assault, the campus administrative perspective regarding sexual violence, collegiate judicial processes, and survivors' long-term processes of healing" (pp. 139-140).

Student affairs administrators must navigate multiple roles when responding to crises, providing advocacy, education, legal aid, programming, and policy work, among other services. Administrators are expected to be knowledgeable enough about the legal aspects of student crises to represent the institution to students, parents, and faculty in an appropriate and timely manner, while maintaining the student-institution relationship. Given the potential legal issues facing student affairs administrators who address issues of sexual violence, administrators often utilize an assumed duty and facilitator university

model to help navigate their myriad roles and responsibilities in relation to the legal system, the institution, and most importantly the students themselves. The assumed duty and facilitator university model is a philosophical approach to working with students that involves finding a balance between guiding and directing a student by providing students with boundaries for making their own decisions.

Theoretical Framework

Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* to leadership will provide the theoretical foundation for investigating the question, "What are the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director role?" A *framework* or *frame* refers to the lens or basic underlying assumptions through which individuals view the world, and upon which their decisions, attitudes, and actions are based (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Each frame, while independent, can influence and intersect with other frames. Individuals rarely operate exclusively through one frame; however, they may display a preference for a particular frame or frames.

Bolman and Deal (2013) identified four intersecting institutional frameworks: political, structural, human resource, and symbolic. Leaders operating within a *structural frame* focus on the roles, goals, and policies of an institution. Those utilizing a *political frame* focus on power, conflict, and competition. Individuals using a *human resource frame* focus on the skills, relationships, and needs of members of an institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Finally, reliance on a *symbolic frame* yields a focus on the culture and meaning of an institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The Structural Frame

An understanding of the structural frame has emerged primarily from the work of Bolman and Deal (2013), one an industrial analyst focused on maximum efficiency, the other an economist and sociologist. The basic assumptions underlying the structural frame include:

- Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
- Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
- Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
- Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
- Effective structures fit an organization's current circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
- Troubles arise and performance suffers from structural deficits, remedied through problem solving and restructuring. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 45)

Two key issues defining the structural frame are the differentiation and integration of an organization's design; that is, how work is allocated and how efforts are coordinated among individuals with various roles to form a coherent team (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In addition, the structural frame considers concepts of lateral coordination and vertical coordination, referring to the structural arrangements through which decisions are made, information is conveyed, and work is assigned. *Lateral coordination* is characterized by decentralized structures that are typically less formal and more

flexible. “Formal gatherings and informal exchanges are the cornerstone of lateral coordination” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 54). Informal exchanges may take the form of conversations in passing, phone calls, or even email exchanges, while formal gatherings take forms such as a board or committee meeting.

Vertical coordination, in contrast, involves the coordination of lower levels of an organization by those at the higher levels through rules, policies, and the exertion of authority. Vertical coordination produces standard operating procedures that reduce variance in individuals’ actions and approaches. This structure is of particular value for professions in which adherence to rules and polices is vital, such as law enforcement officers or aircraft pilots (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The downside of the structural frame is that it “risks ignoring everything that falls outside the rational scope of tasks, procedures, policies, and organization charts” (Bolman & Deal, 2013 p. 339). Relying too heavily on the structural frame can make an organization more rigid and less nimble, which could hinder innovation. Recognizing both the positives and negatives of the structural frame can assist managers in avoiding potential pitfalls.

The Human Resource Frame

Bolman and Deal (2013) introduce the human resource frame by presenting two contrasting views of the relationship between organizations and people: “Our most important asset is our people,” and “Organizations exploit people—chew them up and spit them out” (p. 113). The essence of the human resource frame is a focus on the relationship between the organization and those who comprise it. The basic assumptions of the human resource frame are:

- Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
- People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
- When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization—or both become victims.
- A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117)

The human resource framework "evolved from early work of pioneers such as Mary Parker Follett (1918) and Elton Mayo (1933, 1945), who questioned a deeply held managerial assumption that workers had no rights beyond a paycheck; that their duty was to work hard and follow orders" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117). These pioneers of the human resource frame believed "that people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise" (p. 117).

A drawback of the human resource frame is a "romanticized view of human nature in which everyone hungers for growth and collaboration" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 339). In addition, it also overlooks the potential power of the political frame in an organization, which emphasizes the importance of harnessing the power of the people who are committed to the organization and jockeying for their own interests.

The Political Frame

The political frame views organizations as arenas of constantly competing individual and group interests. The assumptions of the political frame include:

- Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.

- Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
- Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—deciding who gets what.
- Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, pp. 188-189)

In this frame, organizations are understood as coalitions comprised of individuals, each of whom has a different agenda, which places "power and conflict at the center of organizational decision making" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 204).

While the political frame possesses much power, it also draws too heavily on mistrust and conflict, at the expense of recognizing collaboration (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In addition, it may overlook the employee's yearning to do good work because of its central focus on mistrust and conflict.

The Symbolic Frame

Symbols provide the means to convey powerful, influential messages that can elicit an emotional or intellectual response. Symbols can be as varied as the American flag, McDonald's golden arches, the Coca-Cola trademark, and even the Eiffel Tower. When multiple mass shootings took place in cafés, restaurants, and a music venue in Paris, individuals worldwide felt the impact in various ways. When people across the globe changed their Facebook profile pictures to stand in solidarity with Paris, in most

cases it was not because those individuals had a friend or family member involved in the shootings. Rather, it was due to the symbolic meaning of Paris at that moment, for those who had visited the city and for those who simply wanted to express support for the victims.

The symbolic frame views an organization more serendipitous than linear, whereas the culture is communicated through symbols. The assumptions of the symbolic frame include:

- What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
- Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience situations differently.
- Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
- Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.
- Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, pp. 247-248)

A criticism of the symbolic frame is that "when leaders in a symbolic company are not effective they can be viewed as fanatic and charlatan" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 347). In other words, if all members of the symbolic company do not buy into its symbolism, it may amount to an empty tradition (Bolman & Deal, 2013). All managers

and leaders need to be aware of the positive and negatives of each frame in order to maximize their effectiveness.

Previous research using Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* has focused on studies of business, government, and more recently, higher education (DeLuz, 2013). The largest body of literature using this framework is in dissertations (Bolman, 2016). Most relevant to this study is a recent dissertation by DeLuz (2013) focused on leaders of campus-based women's centers. This study is the only study that uses Bolman and Deal (2013) in a campus-based women's center environment. DeLuz found that Bolman and Deal's (2013) framework did not address the campus culture of institutions of higher education or account for the influence of this culture on individual experiences. Nevertheless, DeLuz found the framework useful because it "has consolidated major schools of thought regarding organizational leadership into four perspectives (or frames) that serve as both windows on the world of organizational leadership and lenses that bring that world into focus" (DeLuz, 2013, p. 32). DeLuz (2013) used this framework to study leaders of campus-based women's centers at colleges and universities in the southeastern United States.

Although studies on campus-based women's centers and the utilization of Bolman and Deal (2013) are limited, there have been other studies that focused on women, women's leadership that have utility. Atterson, Dahle, Nix, Collins, and Abbott (2002) focused on the mentorship of women of color to tenure earning positions at a University in the South. Atterson, et al., (2002) found that Bolman and Deal's (2013) various frameworks provided tacit knowledge to the participants that assisted them in understanding the campus culture, which ultimately resulted in submitting a tenure

portfolio. This significant finding contradicts DeLuz's (2013) limitation of using Bolman and Deal (2013). However, both studies corroborate more diverse points of view emerge when applying Bolman and Deal (2013) to organizational behavior. Further, Edmunds (2007) studied female superintendents and their leadership styles and behaviors. Edmunds (2007), DeLuz (2013) and Atterson et al., (2002) support that Bolman and Deal's framework (2013) is useful and necessary, adding to the knowledge of power differences, organizational theory within educational environments.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) *Four Framework Approach* to leadership provides a useful theoretical framework for making sense of the organizational dynamics women's center professionals encounter in the university setting. This model gives voice to some of the salient work experiences of women's center directors in student affairs, providing a starting point for understanding those experiences. As the researcher, this framework has been influential in making sense of my own personal experiences as a women's center director in student affairs.

Summary

While the existing literature provides some information about campus-based women's centers, little scholarship has explored the experiences of the professionals who direct these important campus resources. Kasper (2004) and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015) offer guidance on the structure and resources necessary for effectively administering campus-based women's centers. However, there remains a need to hear the voices and understand the experiences of women's center directors in student affairs. Providing this platform and achieving such understanding are vital for maintaining the well-being of this group of professionals,

preventing burnout to increase their longevity in the field, strengthening the services they provide, and providing crucial knowledge for new professionals entering the field of campus-based women's center work. The following chapter will present a review of the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director's role. The study utilized narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method that elicited participants' stories of their work experiences. One of the oldest forms of personal storytelling (Merriam, 2009), narrative inquiry originated from a desire to understand individuals' personal experiences, influence their future experiences, and create continuity between those experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

In this study, the participants' stories provided a way of understanding women's center professionals' lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and how their work impacts their lives. The goal of obtaining such insight is to advance our knowledge of how individuals understand the world (Merriam, 2009). "One of the clearest channels of learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7).

Narrative inquiry aligns with the constructivist paradigm guiding this study in that the researcher and participants actively engage in the research process and collaborate in seeking to understand the participants' experiences (Mertens, 2009). As a researcher working in a campus-based women's center in a director's role, it was satisfying for me to engage with other campus-based women's center directors to co-construct this

narrative. Further, the qualitative methods used in the constructivist paradigm, including interviews, observations, and document review, support a narrative inquiry approach (Mertens, 2009).

The participants' individual stories, which contribute to an understanding of the work experiences of campus-based women's center directors, comprised the data for this study. The participants' stories were used to construct a *grand narrative* of women's center professionals in a director's role. A grand narrative, also known as a master narrative, is a comprehensive explanation of individuals' experience or knowledge (Boje, 2001).

Participants

Participants for this study were campus-based women's center professionals in a director's role working in a student affairs division. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. *Purposeful sampling* is a selective, intentional process often used in qualitative research to identify information-rich cases (Mertens, 2009). This sampling method was used to identify women's center directors representing various dimensions of diversity, who were likely to provide rich data for the study.

An initial questionnaire was emailed through a women's center listserv to identify potential participants for the study (Appendix A). Members of the women's center listserv nominated themselves or others to participate. From those nominations, I paid particular attention to selecting participants based on their position in the women's center, years of experience, race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, and additional factors that may influence their work experiences. I selected and interviewed 10

participants, but used the stories of only eight participants, which I explain further in the Limitations section.

I was interested in interviewing women's center professionals who represented a broad range of demographics (Table 1). Each participant shared salient identities in the pre-survey (Table 2). Participants did not receive monetary or other compensation but many requested to receive a final copy of the study. The eight participants (pseudonyms) in this study are: Olivia, Tonia, Fiona, Nina, Tina, Eliza, Sophia, and Sonia. More information about the eight participants is provided in the next chapter (Table 2). The stories of two additional participants, Theresa and Fiora, were not used in this study due to an issue with recording the data.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Profiles

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Age	Marital Status	Years as a Women's Center Director	Race	Sexual Orientation
Olivia*	65	Married	16+	White	Heterosexual
Tonia**	29	Married	5	White	Heterosexual
Fiona**	32	Single	2	White	Heterosexual
Nina*	49	Married	15	White	Heterosexual
Tina*	31	Married	11 months	Black	Heterosexual
Eliza*	45	Single	8.5	White	Heterosexual
Sophia*	32	Married	6	White	Polysexual
Sonia**	45	Divorced	20	White	Heterosexual

All participants self-identified as female.
*denotes four-year public institution
**denotes four-year private institution

Data Collection

Guided by the constructivist paradigm, I used individual interviews to co-construct the experiences of women's center professionals. *Co-constructing* experiences occurs when a learner (in this case the researcher), rather than passively receiving

knowledge, collaborates with the educator (in this case the individual participant) to actively interpret knowledge (Creswell, 2014). I interviewed each participant once; the average length of the interviews was 45 minutes. The interviews explored the individuals' identity and rationale for participation and elicited information about their work experiences, goals, and personal and professional accomplishments. This study was conducted in the spring of 2016 and was completed in July 2016. Because the participants' geographical distance made it impractical to meet with them face to face, seven of the interviews were conducted via the telephone, with the remaining participant interviewed via the online platform Google Hangout.

Eliciting stories through individual interviews enabled me to better understand the participants' lived experiences (Chase, 2005). Interviews are one of the most important ways to gather data using a constructivist paradigm, and these semi-structured interviews provided a rich understanding of what is happening in the lives of women's center directors (Chase, 2005). The interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed.

In these semi-structured interviews, I asked participants a series of questions related to their experiences and institutional frameworks. I also asked follow-up questions as needed to provide greater depth and clarity to my understanding of particular answers (Appendix B). Participants were asked all the questions listed (Appendix B), with the exception of "My women's center experience is like [fill in the blank]." This question was asked only of Olivia, Tonia, and Tina, and was subsequently eliminated because it seemed to confuse the participants. By shifting from a typical question-and-answer interview session to a form of questioning that elicits memories about experiences, with the goal of collecting stories, I placed myself in the position of a listener (Chase, 2005).

Establishing the more informal and "flipped" relationship of listener and narrator, rather than interviewer and interviewee, follows the constructivist paradigm guideline of actively engaging participants in the research process by attempting to better understand their lived experiences (Mertens, 2009).

In the interview I sought to better understand each participant's self-identity/ies and why they chose to participate by asking questions such as, "What are your most salient identities?" and "Why did you consider being a participant in this study?" Additionally, I asked them to complete the following statement: "Provide three words that describe your experience." The purpose of this item was to allow individual participants the creative freedom to articulate words that best represent their experience. As the researcher it was fascinating to see the commonalities and differences among their responses.

Next, I focused on better understanding each participant's work environment. Bolman and Deal (2013) outlined four frameworks of leadership that, while independent, can influence and intersect with one another. These frames provide a means of categorizing positive and negative influences on the participants' professional experiences. With the framework of Bolman and Deal (2013) in mind, the interview included questions such as, "What are some of the organizational challenges you experience as a women's center professional?" and "How have other students, staff and/or faculty been supportive during your time working in a campus-based women's center?"

Data Analysis

Data analysis within narrative inquiry requires the researcher to spend extensive time examining the stories that emerge from the interview process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). While each story represents the experiences of one individual, this study sought to construct a "grand narrative"—a comprehensive overview or explanation—of the experiences of the women's center directors interviewed. Therefore, using a constructivist paradigm, I began data analysis during the interview process itself by listening for commonalities or differences among the participants. In addition, data analysis was conducted through reading and rereading the transcripts (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000), with the goal of developing themes across participants. Participants themselves were involved in the data analysis process through member checks, following the constructivist paradigm guideline of co-constructing understandings of individuals' experiences (Lieblich et al., 1998).

In the next phase of coding, I utilized categorical content analysis to move from the raw data to identifying meaningful concepts (Lieblich et al., 1998). Categorical content analysis was accomplished by reading each transcript and making initial notes of salient ideas in my researcher's journal. I highlighted quotes in each transcript that related to the research question and noted salient ideas or themes in the margins. This round of reading was very fluid and non-regimented, using highlighting and notes to indicate responses that addressed the research question. Through this process I began to identify emerging themes in response to the research question (Lieblich et al., 1998). These emerging themes were used in the next round of reading to further develop broader categories of participant responses.

In the next round of reading, I developed the codes related to the research question into broader categories, creating a codebook that could be applied to all the data (Saldaña, 2009). After this reading, the data were compared and combined into broader categories. The broad categories were: religion, all or nothing mentality, gender identity, cisgender, community impact, learning, reputation, position on campus, diversity, publishing, award, messaging (implicit/explicit), reporting lines, LGBTQ students, self-care, leadership, feminist leadership, feminism, privilege, institutional size/type, student impact, safe space, support, students, teaching, development, endowment, research, alternative service break, communication, dual centers, gender discrimination, mental health, anxiety, healthy relationships, imposter syndrome, and doctorate.

Themes were determined based on how I interpreted the stories, rather than on the narratives themselves. I analyzed the stories' emotional valence as well as their literal meaning, listening for salient details, and identified what actually happened in the participants' work experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). I paid particular attention not only to what was said, but also to what was not said and to potential gaps in the stories, which allowed for follow-up questions at the end of the individual interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

Additionally, I spent time thinking about the interviews to themes and salient ideas that emerged through the participants' stories. Through this process I used the content of the broad categories to help describe the shared experiences of women's center directors. The list of broader categories includes: messaging, advocacy, community, continual learning, development, diversity, faculty, identity, leadership, mental health, mentorship, advisory board, networking, oppression, organizational, passion,

programming, recognition, religion, resources, self-care, students, women's studies, women's centers.

Through my analysis, I attended to both the distinctiveness of and the commonalities among the participants' narratives. In analyzing the data, I worked toward creating a grand narrative of women's center directors, understanding at the same time that a seamless story would be impossible to achieve (Sousanis, 2011). From this analysis, I was able to identify three broad themes that emerged often throughout the interviews. Those three themes are program development, student interaction, and staff size, along with sub-themes of self-care practices and first-generation college students. Student interaction encompassed three distinct student populations: feminist-identified students, LGBTQ-identified students, and student organizations.

Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness, and Credibility

Reliability and validity are essential components of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). *Reliability* refers to whether findings are consistent across researchers and stable over time (Merriam, 2009). All participants were involved with the study for a suitable amount of time to ensure that data analysis and findings would be consistent if the research were conducted again. Further, a solid theoretical framework provided the foundation for this study, and all research was approved by the university's IRB and guided by my dissertation committee.

Validity refers to the degree to which meaningful conclusions can be drawn from an instrument and findings can be considered accurate (Merriam, 2009). Validity in this study was ensured by assessing the design of questions in light of the responses received

throughout the interview process, to determine whether changes needed to be made in subsequent interviews.

Ensuring the *credibility* of a study requires establishing that the study's findings are believable from the perspective of the research participants. In this study, participants were invited to review the transcripts and edit them as necessary (Merriam, 2009). After each interview was transcribed, I sent the transcript to the participant, giving them a chance to review it for accuracy and to ensure that I fully captured the essence of their experience. This process of member checking added credibility as well as trustworthiness to the study and confirmed that I had accurate data with which to move through the analysis process.

In addition to the member check process, *trustworthiness*, which demonstrates that the evidence collected in a study is thorough, was managed through an audit trail and peer review (Merriam, 2009). I managed the audit trail using Evernote for post-interview journaling; Dedoose, a software analysis tool, for analyzing the data; and a collection of hard copy notes I took in each interview as a backup in case the audio recording failed. After each interview, I journaled for 15-20 minutes, recording my thoughts, feelings, and reactions and noting anything that seemed pertinent to the interview or the overall study. This method allowed me to be more reflective about the interview experience (Janesick, 1999). It also enabled me, as the researcher, to identify any potential triggers for work experiences or salient themes that emerged upon completing the interview.

Lastly, I utilized peer review by consulting an expert in the field of women's center work as I articulated the findings and themes. A colleague at a research institution conducted the peer review. The peer reviewer received a hard copy of the list of codes,

coded transcripts, and summary of quotes per code. The peer reviewer reviewed all the documents and provided me with a list of questions that arose for her while reviewing the transcripts and overall recommendations, as well as feedback identifying individual codes that I might consider changing.

Protection of Participants

In any qualitative study, protection of the participants is the utmost ethical concern (Merriam, 2009). The research protocol associated with this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia. Confidentiality was maintained and participants' identities were kept anonymous; neither their names nor any other indicators of their identity were used either in data collection or in reporting the findings, other than making initial contact with them to schedule the interview and subsequently sending them the transcript for review. To help protect privacy: (1) participants' names were not included in the collected data; (2) a pseudonym was assigned to each participant and used in the data collection process; and (3) only the researcher had access to the pseudonyms given, which were password protected via Dropbox.

All interviews were digitally recorded. The digital recordings were stored electronically and password protected on the principal researcher's computer, and were accessible only to the researcher. Each interview was recorded via the free MacBook Pro software Garage Band. Transcriptions were made from the digital recordings and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher and participants. All interviews remained in the researcher's possession and under password protection until transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The researcher uploaded each digital interview via an mp3 file and

received each transcript as a Word document via download from the transcriptionist. The transcriptionist transcribed each audio recording but did not code the interviews. The digital recordings will be destroyed by August 2016.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were free to end their participation at any time without penalty. I obtained informed consent from participants via email (Appendix B). Additionally, after they gave their consent, any new information regarding the study was shared with participants. Each participant received an electronic copy of the consent form to keep.

Positionality

I have worked in a women's center for over a decade, and throughout that time my professional and personal interests have focused on issues of gender equity. As a women's center professional, my goal is to contribute to the body of literature that has begun to emerge focusing on women's center professionals in college settings. Through my work I have been heavily involved in supporting and assisting sexual violence victim-survivors. Working with students who have experienced this degree of trauma and who often encounter triggering events on campus, I recognize the need for professionals in my field to have outlets for non-work activities to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

I was a senior in college when I first clearly identified student affairs as a career interest. I was close to graduation, with no real direction or next steps in mind, when the Dean of Students at my college asked if I was interested in graduate school for student affairs. He recognized how involved I was in Greek life, residence life, and other organizations on campus. He was good friends with the Vice President for Student Affairs at Grand Valley State University and encouraged me to look into their College

Student Affairs Leadership Program. I did and learned there were two vacant assistantships, one in residence life and one in judicial affairs. Because I had spent the majority of my undergraduate years working in housing, I decided to explore something different. In a short period of time I took the GRE, applied to the master's program, and was accepted and offered the judicial affairs assistantship.

Introduction to Student Affairs

Graduate school was my first real introduction to student affairs. I absorbed all I could regarding the field and career path I had chosen, learning about the history of higher education, delving into college student development theory, and mastering the skills necessary to succeed in student affairs administration. Explaining student affairs as a career at family functions was a little more challenging, but I have never regretted choosing this path.

My assistantship supervisor was the first person in the office every day. When I commented one day on how early she arrived, she responded, "I like the quiet time to get stuff done." This stuck with me over the years as I progressed through my career, and for over 12 years I have always been the first person in the office. I appreciate the quiet time to respond to emails and address tactical items before other staff or students arrive and meetings begin. This contributes to my having a solid sense of time management and being able to disconnect at the end of the day.

Survivor

I have been a survivor of sexual assault for over 15 years. However, it was not easy to get to a place of respite, and occasionally there are still factors that trigger me. In order to call myself a survivor, I need to revisit that dreaded day, which changed my

career path, educational bent, and overall philosophy in working with anyone who has been victimized.

As with many people who have experienced victimization, there are gaps in my memory and some specific details of the situation remain fuzzy. However, I remember the evening quite well, as it has played over and over in my head, time and time again. The experience happened the summer between my two years in graduate school. It was a textbook case of acquaintance assault coupled with alcohol.

I had two close friends with whom I did almost everything. We were among the few students in our program who had non-housing assistantships so we found ourselves bonding over that experience, and within a short period of time we became close friends. One of my friends, a woman who worked in Admissions and had found her way into student affairs through a path similar to my own, was in a committed relationship with her partner. The other friend was a White, cisgender male who worked on an alcohol grant on campus. He also worked on some sexual violence initiatives on campus and had been actively involved in these issues during his undergraduate years as well. He is the reason I am skeptical of the motives of White men who get involved in sexual violence work.

After the assault, it took a while before I was able to give voice to what I had experienced. Like many survivors of sexual violence, I remember experiencing the assault and having the feeling that "this didn't seem right," but not being able to name the violence for what it was. It was not until I participated in a new organization on campus, sitting through 40+ hours of training to become a sexual violence peer educator, that I was finally able to *name* being assaulted. I distinctly remember when it hit me that I, too,

was a victim. It was difficult to navigate the next several months with this new identity while continuing to be in contact with the person who perpetrated the assault. I worked in the Dean of Students' Office, where the response to reports of sexual assault was not victim-centered. I felt I had to keep silent because even if I reported the crime I knew nothing would be done about it, and the response would likely be to blame me.

Going through this trauma and feeling unable to tell a soul, neither friends nor administrators, made the rest of my graduate school experience very isolating. The close friendships I had during my first year of graduate school started to fade the following year. I distanced myself from the perpetrator but did not feel comfortable articulating to others in my cohort why. Most of my peers assumed it had to do with a "more than friends" relationship, but for the next year, I kept it completely to myself.

During this period of isolation, becoming a peer educator and working to change the campus culture related to sexual violence became very important to me and provided a way for me to deal with my assault. The next year, as a peer educator, I attended the Safe Schools Coalition Conference and met Brett Sokolow, a sexual assault consultant for colleges and universities. I remember sitting in his session on how college campuses should adjudicate sexual violence, and thinking Grand Valley could do so much more.

Prior to the conference, I had observed a sexual assault panel hearing for another student in which the panel was comprised of faculty and staff with absolutely no training. One staff member asked the victim-survivor what she was wearing the night of her assault. Clearly, change was needed. At the same conference, I also met Katie Koestner, a national speaker on sexual assault on colleges and university campuses. As a young student affairs professional, peer educator, and survivor of sexual violence, I worked with

the Women's Center to bring both speakers to campus. This experience began to ignite my passion for both women's center work and work related to issues of sexual violence.

I had a strong sense of freedom the day my brother and I loaded up two cars after graduation and began the 1200-mile drive towards my first professional job. I remember spending a lot of time during that drive reflecting that I was finally free: I no longer had to see my perpetrator daily or pretend I was not a victim.

Residence Life and Women's Center

I started my first professional job almost a year to the day after my assault. I worked as an Area Coordinator at the University of Tampa, starting the same day as two other new professionals. It was nice to be back in a warmer climate and closer to family. In this position, I had a staff of 16 resident assistants and was responsible for an 8-floor residence hall of primarily first-year students.

In addition to our housing responsibilities, each Area Coordinator had a collateral assignment. With my undergraduate degree in exercise and health science, I was initially assigned to address issues of wellness within residence life. However, I knew this was not really my area of interest, so I approached the Director of Residence Life about creating a Women's Center on campus. My passion, I recognized, was to provide programs and advocacy for survivors of violence.

It is important to note that while my professional experiences helped me to process the assault, there was still a great deal I had suppressed regarding the assault and any potential relationships. I experienced a lot of healing through planning events such as Take Back the Night and *The Vagina Monologues*. I became involved in the community as a crisis counselor, and soon most of the University on-call staff would contact me

directly when issues of sexual assault/violence arose on campus. My passion for sexual violence initiatives continued to flourish. During my three years in Tampa, I ran the Women's Center out of a residence hall study lounge, complete with a library, student staff, and hearty programming schedule. I attended professional conferences and sessions related to sexual violence, and I felt I was finding my niche. I remain genuinely grateful to have had the autonomy to work on the Women's Center while carrying out my residence life duties.

Experience with Burnout

Sustainability and self-care are two concepts that have become particularly salient to me over the past two years, due to pursuing a doctoral degree and having a toddler at home. However, the most salient burnout experience I have had occurred while working at the University of Tampa.

During my time at the University of Tampa, I distinctly remember the Director of Residence Life marching down the hallway at 5 p.m. to send us all home. She was good about making sure we were achieving balance between our professional and personal lives, and I felt very supported if there was a personal issue going on. Nevertheless, my friends were the people with whom I worked on a daily basis. While this helped achieve balance in the day-to-day, I often found we would still be discussing work after hours.

As with many residence life/housing positions that have a live-in requirement, it is difficult to achieve complete separation from work. Between this inability to separate myself from work and the ongoing work of processing the assault, I started to find myself experiencing burnout within my first year of professional work. Fortunately, with the thoughtful guidance of my direct supervisor, I met someone who became a great friend

and confidante in my life. Through our friendship I discovered a love of road races and endurance events, and found someone outside of work to help maintain balance. As a result of this experience, I have always been mindful of having some separation from work and maintaining a good balance between my personal and professional lives.

Transition to Georgia Tech

I was fortunate to have learned very early in my career how to establish a balance between my personal and professional lives, and as a result, have subsequently experienced very few moments of stress or burnout. I attribute this to being assaulted and having my healing process come to a head early in my career. Realizing that I needed to get my life in order, I also understood that only by processing what had happened could I effectively assist others who experienced something similar.

Becoming the Coordinator of the Women's Resource Center at Georgia Tech offered me my first full-time opportunity to work with victim-survivors of sexual violence. Although I had been a crisis counselor in the community previously, listening to and supporting many survivors, working with students ultimately became my niche, the focal point of both my research and my professional experiences. I had the opportunity to develop this new position at Georgia Tech with a focus on sexual violence advocacy and prevention. Through this experience, I was able to fully engage in addressing gender-based violence on a college campus. This experience has further fueled my passion for this issue, and I continue to find opportunities to engage in this work both on campus and within professional organizations.

Involvement in the National Women's Studies Association

Early in my work with the Women's Resource Center, I had the good fortune to learn about the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA). Prior to joining this network, I had been heavily involved in student affairs professional associations. While NWSA focuses on scholarly research in women and gender studies, I have been fortunate to become immersed in a wonderful community of women's center professionals through the organization. During this time I have had the opportunity to lead the Women's Center Committee and work to change the dynamics of the internal relationship between the organization and women's center professionals. At the same time, I have seen many wonderful colleagues retire and others leave the profession prematurely.

In addition to recognizing how my personal and professional experiences have influenced my research focus and approach, identifying how my socially constructed identities impact my research is also essential in understanding the context for this study. The sections below will discuss the most salient identities related to this research topic and how those identities have translated through my personal life and career.

Gender

I identify as a cisgender woman and use *she* and *her* pronouns. Reflecting on the salience and social construction of my gender reminds me of my upbringing and having to do chores that were traditionally gendered. This might not seem like a huge deal, but I hated these tasks because they were tied to my gender. We were a family of five, and I always despised certain chores, mainly because I was made to do them solely because I was a girl. My dad would sternly make me cook dinner and clean the kitchen, and when I

voiced my frustration to my mom, rarely did I receive an empathetic response. She, too, was raised in a patriarchy.

I never understood why my two older brothers did not have the same chores, or as many chores, as I did. I could not articulate to either of my parents the injustice I felt, and I never fully understood why it bothered me so much until much later in life. This background contributes to my interest in helping women center professionals sustain their work in this field. As a scholar-practitioner, I want to make sure we maintain a rich history of women in leadership and a pipeline of women's center professionals on college campuses.

Today my experience of gender is less influenced by my upbringing and more influenced by my career in student affairs and my current institutional context. Working on a predominantly male campus for the past decade, and in a field that is heavily influenced by White male privilege, I have found the relevance of gender to emerge more each day. I have often felt oppressed because of my gender and have been overlooked for opportunities to advance and to represent the division as a result of my gender rather than my qualifications. This experience has further fueled my passion for women's center work and my determination to find ways to effectively support and sustain female professionals in this field. The future of our profession depends on the ability to investigate and identify the differences between women's center professionals who persist in this work and those who transition out of the field.

Race

Reflecting on my childhood growing up in the South, it now feels very White. Not until I visited and eventually lived in other places did I begin to interact with people of

color. In my K-12 years and during college I remained in a small community of individuals who identified as White. It was not until I attended graduate school and began my first professional job that I was truly immersed in a context that included people of diverse races and ethnicities. Living in metropolitan Atlanta and working at Georgia Tech for the past nine years, I have come to recognize the importance of various intersections of identity.

Gender and race are two of the most salient socially constructed identities that must be considered in relation to this research topic. Recognizing the intersection of race and gender and its impact on oppression comprises an important element in the history of women's center work. Understanding the historical oppression of women requires a recognition of other, related forms of oppression, such as racism, heterosexism, and classism.

Insider Perspective

It is vital as a researcher to acknowledge one's own power and privilege. This area of research resonates with me as an insider. I identify as a women's center professional; therefore, I have extensive insight into the work done on a day-to-day basis in this context. This gives me power throughout the research process and an unintended bias. I understand the care work, advocacy, and potential issues that arise in a women's center on a college campus. Additionally, I have connections to and relationships with many professionals in this field on a variety of levels. This could create a power dynamic when interviewing participants, who may not feel as comfortable being transparent with me because of this relationship.

I have privilege as a White, heterosexual, cisgender professional. Some of my colleagues who are oppressed based on race or sexual orientation may have experiences very different from mine. It is important to recognize, in doing this type of research, that despite our shared identification as women's center directors there may be significant differences in our experiences as a result of our differing identities. Moreover, the privilege I experience as a White, heterosexual, cisgender professional could introduce a power differential between the participants from underrepresented groups and me. Although I have felt oppressed as a woman, it might not be appropriate to discuss this with the participants. Sharing my own experience with the intention of creating a safe space could backfire, limiting how much the participant is willing to share.

As a cisgender professional, I have privilege and therefore power over those who are gender non-conforming or androgynous. There are still powerful heteronormative assumptions when it comes to student affairs professionals and specifically women's center professionals. There remains much work to be done regarding "isms" related to gender, race, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

Working in the women's center profession and wanting to advance the literature in this area, I will need to be conscious of my own bias while studying this research topic. In formulating my statement of purpose and research questions I sought to incorporate the ethical sensitivity needed for this topic. Having other professionals review the statement of purpose, methodology, and research questions from an outsider's perspective has helped ensure that I acknowledge any potential ethical concerns.

Limitations

Within the data analysis process, there were several limitations that will be addressed. The first limitation was the inability to use the data of participants Fiora and Theresa. I realized only after their interviews, through the transcription process, that my audio recorder did not record properly. I used the online platform Google Hangout to interview Theresa and Fiora, but because I had my headphones on the recorder picked up only my voice, not the participants' voices. I was very disappointed to have to eliminate these two participants from the study, and I was thus extremely careful to check and double-check the recording for the subsequent interviews.

The second limitation of this study involves the inability to use Google Hangout for all interviews, instead conducting the majority of interviews by telephone. Seven interviews were done via the telephone and one was done via Google Hangout. This is a limitation because different participants were interviewed through different platforms and that could influence the relationship between the participant and research, and as a result the findings.

A final limitation involves the dynamic of the research method itself. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the instrument of analysis. As such, the researcher's frame of reference and positionality influence the process of data analysis. The strategies of member checking, peer review, and an audit trail were utilized to counteract researcher bias.

Conclusion

Women's center directors representing various dimensions of diversity were selected through a pre-interview survey to identify participants who would provide rich

data for this study. Employing a constructivist paradigm and utilizing semi-structured individual interviews, I engaged the participants in co-constructing their experiences as women's center directors. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study and engage participants in the process of co-construction, member checks were used in the data collection process. Further, categorical content analysis, peer review, and research journaling were incorporated into the processes of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to research the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director's role within a student affairs division. Davie (2002) identified the primary responsibilities of campus-based women's center staff as providing programs, services, and resources for college students. However, the work of Davie and others neglected to explore the experiences of women's center professionals as expressed through their own voices. To address this gap in the scholarship on campus-based women's centers, this study utilized narrative inquiry to elicit participants' reflections on their work experiences as women's center professionals.

Working within the framework of the constructivist paradigm, the researcher sought to collect thick, rich stories from the participants. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases (Mertens, 2009). Specifically, the researcher sent two emails to a women's center listserv inviting its members to participate, to ensure that all interested individuals had an opportunity to respond. After responding, interested participants were required to complete a survey. Ten participants were selected, representing a variety of institutional types, years of professional experience, marital statuses, and sexual identities.

Participant Data

All eight (100%) of the women's center professionals who participated in this study identified as female. Seven (87.5%) were White and one (22.5%) was African

American. Seven (87.5%) identified as heterosexual and one (22.5%) as polysexual. The participants ranged in age from 29 to 65 years old. Five were married (62.5%), one was divorced (12.5%), and two were single (25%). Their years of experience in a campus-based women's center director's role ranged from 11 months to 20 years.

All participants were employed by four-year institutions (100%); three of these (37.5%) were private and five (62.5%) were public. When asked to describe their identities, participants referenced such characteristics as able bodied, cisgender, middle class, English speaker, agnostic humanist, and feminist. Four (50%) of the eight participants identified themselves as first-generation college students.

Table 2

Participants' Salient Identities

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Salient Identities
Olivia	Cisgender; middle-class; agnostic humanist
Tonia	Able bodied; English speaker; middle-class; non-Hispanic
Fiona	n/a
Nina	First-generation college student; feminist
Tina	Woman; feminist; Black
Eliza	First-generation college student
Sophia	First-generation college student; learning disability (dysnomia); mental disability (severe anxiety); from rural Midwest; Ph.D. candidate
Sonia	First-generation college student

All participants shared the salient identities during the pre-survey.

The specific research question guiding this study was: What are the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director's role in a student affairs division?

Olivia

Introduction

There are a number of campus-based women's center professionals I admire and Olivia is one of them, so I was delighted when she expressed interest in my study. She was my first interview, so I was a little anxious about the whole process. This is the first research study I have conducted on my own and I wanted to make sure I was well prepared for it. It was important to me to ensure that everything went well, and I gave consideration to how the interview questions would flow.

Olivia had emailed me earlier in the day to let me know that Google Hangout, our planned method of communication, was not working for her, so we decided to conduct the interview via telephone. Olivia and I met approximately 10 years ago at a national conference, and have seen each other annually at the conference since then. During this annual conference, she and I tend to socialize with the same group of people. As a result, I was able to visualize her while we were talking on the phone.

Despite having known Olivia for the past decade, this was our first opportunity to discuss her experience as a women's center professional one-on-one. As the interview progressed, I continued to feel anxious; I could hear my dissertation committee in the back of my head asking, "How will you make sure you don't influence the study?" I thought of many things I wanted to interject during the interview but focused instead on listening, speaking only when I felt it would contribute to the conversation or move the interview process forward. Interestingly, although Olivia is 28 years older than I am, we had many similar experiences. We shared a salient identity of growing up Catholic but no

longer identifying with the religion, and I found myself relating to many of her stories because they so closely reflected my own experiences.

The questions overall seemed to flow well, but when I asked her to complete the statement, "My women's center experience is like . . ." this request did not seem to make sense to her. I was interested to note that her responses reflected the intertwining of her professional and personal experiences; she did not view or report these as separate categories.

Olivia works at a public, four-year institution in the Midwest that offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Including its regional campuses, enrollment is just under 19,000 students. Olivia is a cisgender, female-identified professional with over 30 years of work experience, 16 of which are in a campus-based women's center. Describing her as "kind" or "pleasant" would be a significant understatement; Olivia is an exceptionally warm and engaging person to talk to.

Olivia stated that her cisgender identity is salient because of the close working relationship she has with the LGBTQ community on her campus. To my surprise, she reported that the women's center and the LGBTQ center on her campus fall under different reporting lines, but she believes this will soon change:

> I think we are headed that way . . . so [I'm] taking advantage of the trainings that offices offered in terms of Transgender 101 and Safe Zone training and those kinds of things are certainly heightened my awareness.

Olivia made one of her most powerful statements about her identity when she observed, "I think you almost have to be not paying attention at all anymore if you are not aware of your own gender identity." Both Olivia and the colleague with whom she

works in her center are white, cisgender females. As a result, Olivia believes it is important to make herself knowledgeable as an ally and to develop skills that will enable her to support those in other communities, which she does by attending trainings such as Trans 101. Trans 101 is an educational program designed to provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to support transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender questioning individuals.

Olivia is married and identifies as middle class and heterosexual. I asked Olivia to elaborate on her middle-class identity, as I could tell she was hesitant to identify in this manner. She said, "middle class [long pause]—I guess I am aware of it particularly for a variety of reasons." Olivia explained that she grew up in a family whose socioeconomic status was working class at best. She always had a keen awareness of what other people had, and—Olivia made a point of noting—"what we did not have." Attending college was a significant accomplishment for her and she identified it as a way of "breaking out of" working-class society.

Working at a prestigious institution and seeing how much some students have and how little others have, she is even more attuned now to issues of class. Social class is still salient to Olivia at a personal level. "I am sort of aware again, even though I feel like I have elevated my status from working poor to middle class pretty solidly, [that] my best friends are in a sort of different social class." Moreover, her own socioeconomic background still resonates for her in her professional role.

> I have 30-plus years at an institution that has a lot of wealthy families; still, when you are in the presence of people who have a different socioeconomic experience, yeah, for me, I am very aware of that.

Olivia described an influx of international students on her campus from China, most of whom came from very wealthy backgrounds. She observed, "it's not unusual to see BMWs on the streets," and noted that particularly during fraternity and sorority recruitment season, social class issues and inequities seem to stand out.

Olivia included as one of her salient identities "agnostic humanist." She was the only participant who mentioned religion, faith, or spiritual identity in response to this question. When asked to elaborate on this identity, she told me about her 12 years attending a Catholic school and a long history of her parents and grandparents identifying as Catholic. Catholicism was present in her life until she was "able to get away from it." She stated, "I do not mean to suggest that others who had that growing up experience would feel that way. But for me it was an oppressive sort of experience."

At Olivia's institution she is surrounded by a lot of people, including many students, who identify as Catholic or Christian. Olivia said, "It just did not really take somehow. It just did not stick with me in a way that I wanted to stay with the church." However, there are few other religious organizations for her to align with at her institution because of the strong Catholic and Christian identity on campus. Religious identity has thus become salient because she "feels very different from [others] in some identity-based ways; it draws my own attention to how I identified."

Lived Experience

Throughout our interview, Olivia displayed resiliency even when discussing examples of adversity. In 2009, the women's center went through a significant organizational change when it was forced to shift from a unit of academic affairs to a

student affairs office as a result of budget issues. Olivia faced significant organizational challenges in making this transition, yet she framed it in a positive light:

> We have always been concerned about being in student affairs in that—this sort of implicit message, thankfully, it has never been explicit, you know—in a way that made us really pull back significantly on some things that we have done in support of faculty and staff.

Olivia explained that she was initially concerned about moving from academic affairs to student affairs, particularly because academic affairs serves faculty, staff, and students, whereas student affairs focuses exclusively on addressing the needs of students. However, overall the center pulled back from the audience they served historically. This was important for Olivia because she believed those connections with faculty and staff on campus were important to maintain for the future of the women's center.

Olivia shared multiple stories of how recognition through winning an award or publishing articles had been integral to her experiences as a women's center professional. One example occurred recently at a professional conference. Olivia is member of a statewide consortium of women's center professionals that has written and published several documents on campus-based women's centers. The consortium was honored at the National Women's Studies Association conference last year in recognition of the important publications they had authored. This recognition marked a proud and successful moment for Olivia.

Summary

When asked to list the three words that best described her women's center experience, Olivia's responses were, unsurprisingly, very positive. She reported that her

role in a campus-based women's center has allowed her to do the type of work she feels passionate about on a campus that has, for the most part, been supportive. She noted:

> One word that comes to mind is *fulfilling*. Another word is kind of similar to the first one, but *enriching*. The third word I guess could be *purposeful*. I am sure I could come up with lots of other words; those are the first three that popped into my head. So I guess to expand on that, my work at the women's center has been an opportunity for me to do professionally what I have been passionate about privately, you know, ever since I was in college. So it has given, in a lot of ways, it has given my life purpose. It has allowed me to do something that I think is value added, that does make a difference in a positive way.

Tonia

Introduction

I noticed that my Type A personality emerged in the way I prepared for each interview. I printed out my questions in hard copy, I tested the voice memo app on my iPhone multiple times, and I watched the clock relentlessly until it was time for the interview to begin. I had Google Hangout open on my laptop and ready to go well before the second interview was scheduled to begin. However, Tonia emailed me five minutes before the interview to say she had not brought her laptop, and to ask if we could reschedule. I emailed her back and asked if we could just conduct the interview by telephone instead. So this interview was on the phone as well.

I was disappointed about interviewing Tonia by phone because unlike Olivia I had never met her, and I was looking forward to seeing the person I was talking to. Throughout the interview, Tonia discussed being the only person who works in her

women's center, and this solo status was one she carried strongly in her identity. As a result of working alone, our interview seemed to be her first opportunity to discuss challenges and salient moments with an outside colleague. Also, because she is employed at a small, private, four-year institution, I felt myself recalling my own experience on a similar campus. I could resonate with her responses and the fact that she sounded exhausted.

Tonia has over five years of women's center experience at a private, four-year, Catholic institution with a primarily undergraduate enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. She is 29 years old, White, and identifies as female and heterosexual. Tonia described her salient identities as "able bodied, English speaker, middle-class, and non-Hispanic." When asked why she chose to list these identities as salient, she responded:

> I don't know if there was any specific reason I did that, but I was also thinking that I understand my position as very privileged and so I think it is also important to not just talk about my marginalized identity as a woman but all of my privileged identities.

Lived Experience

When asked to identify the most successful moments in her professional experience, Tonia referenced her one-on-one interactions with students. She noted that she was often not aware of the influence of such interactions until years later, when students returned to share the impact the women's center had on their college experience. Tonia stated that her office has planned large-scale programs such as Take Back the Night, an event in which survivors of sexual assault share their stories, but noted that those experiences do not stand out as salient or successful moments because her planning

and coordinating of these programs take place largely on her own. However, she did highlight the salience of one such event:

> We do The Clothesline Project here and we have to change the model, because anyone was making a T-shirt and so it had kind of lost the value for people who had experienced sexual violence to be telling their stories. So we had people writing just that, "We believe in you." Like very positive but the intent—so when I came here I kind of shifted it, which meant I would have behind closed-door sessions where someone could come in privately and make a shirt. It was anonymous. This was before I had become the responsible employee and the student made the shirt. The student was fine, she's like no, go in your office, it's like 10:00 p.m. at night, go in, do what you need to, I'll be done soon, and you don't want to be in her face about it. But I'm like hovering and she held it in and she literally fell to the ground crying because she had never seen it written before and she was almost like, I can't think of the word, she was writing it down in almost like a daze. And then she saw it and hadn't ever told anyone and it was not the most traumatic story, but it was something that obviously was very traumatic to her and it was amazing to kind of see that. It was finally her story and that she could take ownership of it and started to heal.

The Clothesline Project, inspired by the power of the AIDS quilt, addresses issues of violence. Survivors create t-shirts as a vehicle to convey their stories of violence. Each t-shirt is a different color, representing the various forms of violence. Individuals draw images, write poems, or create graphic messages on the t-shirts as a means of expressing and sharing their story of violence.

Managing a one-person women's center at a Catholic university presents challenges for Tonia, particularly in her mission to fully support students of all identities. Her Jesuit institution does not overtly support LGBTQ students; as a result, she has encountered obstacles in merging her feminist identity into her daily experiences. Tonia described this institution as uniquely positioned and unlike other places she has worked. The challenge for Tonia is trying to merge her feminist activism with the institution's Catholic and Jesuit identity. Tonia did not describe what that Catholic and Jesuit identity looked like in detail, but acknowledged, "often there are times it is great, when they are working on social justice issues such as poverty, homelessness, and issues that affect women broadly." However, Tonia starts to struggle when "I cannot explain to students why we can't do *The Vagina Monologues* or we don't have an LGBT center for them or [we aren't] allowed to do advocacy for the LGBT students." However, when confronted by this institutional barrier, Tonia reported, "I secretly do LGBT advocacy—well, maybe not secret anymore, but probably more than I should focus on. But they don't have anywhere else to go."

Summary

Tonia identified the three words that best characterized her experience as a women's center professional as "exhausting, empowering, and energizing," though she did not elaborate on them extensively. It was interesting to me that Tonia chose *exhausting* as her first word, and I believe this word truly captured her experience, as later in our conversation she articulated how hard it is being a one-person office. She asked, "If I break my leg and cannot come to work, who is making sure the Center is

open?" The burden of shouldering sole responsibility for this vital student resource seemed to underlie much of the work experience of women's center professionals.

Notably, two of Tonia's words, *exhausting* and *energizing*, seem to directly contradict one another. One point that emerged clearly from our interview was the reward Tonia experiences from being able to support students, particularly LGBTQ students who have no identified space on campus because of the institution's religious identity. Given the importance of this role for Tonia, her three words make sense; being the sole support for an underrepresented and underserved population on campus is a role she cherishes, yet at the same time it is undoubtedly a significant and exhausting task to shoulder alone.

Fiona

Introduction

My interview with Fiona went well. I selected this participant specifically because she has two years of experience, but the result was that her responses were more limited than those of more experienced participants. In this interview I noted again that women's center professionals working in one-person offices often have not discussed these issues with others in quite some time, if at all. Perhaps as a result, I observed that those who were more seasoned in the profession and/or who worked in multi-person offices often displayed greater depth in their responses.

Fiona is a 32-year-old, single White woman who identifies as female and heterosexual. Fiona works at a private, four-year institution with an enrollment of approximately 3000 undergraduate students. The undergraduate student body is comprised of 48% males and 52% females, most of whom live on campus. The institution has a large online component and a renowned honors program. Fiona noted, "We are not

an extremely selective school, so we get a lot of students who would probably be going to one of the big schools but wanted the smaller fit and so they come here."

Although Fiona has been in a director's role for only two years she has worked on the same college campus for seven years, initially as a faculty member in the university library. She described getting involved in women's center work through her activism and advocacy for women's issues while working in the library. One day she and some faculty colleagues were discussing the lack of activism and advocacy on campus related to women's issues, and expressed concern about what they perceived as an apathetic student body. Fiona and her colleagues, in contrast, had been very involved on their campuses as undergraduates and had worked on many serious women's issues.

Fiona and some of the other faculty decided to meet with the Provost to discuss this issue and propose developing a women's center on campus, which they thought might be the best way to begin addressing their concerns. Because funding a center would be a significant challenge, they decided to develop a curriculum to create a women's studies minor instead. As they began working on curriculum development, an outside donor was identified through institutional advancement who was willing to fund a women's center with an endowment of $500,000. As a result of Fiona's early involvement with the development of the women's studies minor curriculum, the Dean of Students approached her to see if she wanted to be the first director of the women's center. She accepted, as the opportunity seemed to align with her interests, and transitioned from the library to the women's center.

Lived Experience

As the director of a one-person office, Fiona stated that her most salient moments have occurred when she found students who were truly committed to the mission of a campus-based women's center. Fiona feels most successful in the moments when students genuinely engage with the women's center. Because the center is still such a new resource on campus, Fiona observed:

> I think that sort of aha moments that you see in the students about, "Oh my gosh, this is what the space is for" and this is what this program or department is for. And feeling like they see value added in their lives.

Although Fiona identified engaging with students as a successful work experience for her, she also observed that reaching the entire student population can be a challenge. She noted, "You have a percentage who will always be engaged no matter what, right? And then you have the other end of the spectrum that will never be engaged."

Summary

Fiona remained positive when identifying the three words that best described her women's center experience, choosing *challenging*, *passionate*, and *rewarding*. In response to a previous question, she enumerated the challenges she experienced in starting a new women's center. She described always feeling like an appendage of the institution rather than part of its fabric, and discussed the difficulty of reaching students who were not inclined to attend women's center programs on a campus that has "a lot of noise; there is a lot going on, there is a lot of student involvement." Despite these challenges, however, Fiona ultimately framed her women's center experience in a

positive light, highlighting the rewards of her position and her ability to do the work she is passionate about on her campus.

Sonia

Introduction

My interview with Sonia went well. There were times in the interview where I paused to elicit a response and she was silent, which may have been due to her thinking; however, because we were speaking by phone (which seemed to be working better than Google Hangout), it was difficult to determine why she did not respond. Initially I was not sure whether she fit the criteria because she holds a dual role with residence life, but afterwards I was glad I had included her.

Sonia has been at the same school and in almost the same role for over 16 years. I found this fascinating because student affairs professionals, in my experience, do not usually remain in one role for that long, especially with dual responsibilities in residence life and the women's center. Sonia appears to have a solid group of colleagues and friends who make her feel very supported on campus, which may be why she has stayed in residence life longer than most people do.

Sonia identified budget constraints as a key issue she faces in her position. This surprised me, as she works at a private school and I did not expect funding to be an issue. But with an annual budget of $3000 for her women's center, it is clearly a major concern. Sonia's role includes handling all sexual assault prevention programming on campus; however, she is less involved in sexual assault advocacy than in the student conduct process with the perpetrator. She reported that she was NOT good at self-care, and she discussed the (overt or implicit) expectation that staff members who are unmarried and

do not have children will "do more" and be available more than those with evident family obligations.

Sonia stated that she does want to "do more" in terms of campus advocacy; however, her role focuses primarily on students and does not always align with the campus needs she identifies. She gave the example of faculty and staff wanting more lactation centers on campus; because the student population is mainly traditional-age undergraduates, few students would utilize these centers. This was an "aha" or relatable moment for me, as I too am often asked to "do more" and I constantly strive to balance the needs of various audiences.

Sonia was visibly energized in responding to my question about salient moments in her work, leading me to conclude that I phrased this question better in her interview than in previous interviews and drew a clearer distinction between "successful" and "salient" moments. By asking about "successful" moments I hoped participants would identify accomplishments that were particularly rewarding and significant for them. In asking them to share "salient" moments, in contrast, I hoped to elicit the ways in which their work has had the greatest impact on their campus.

Sonia works at a private four-year institution in the Northeast that grants undergraduate, graduate, and law degrees. She described it as "a pretty small campus for about 4,000 residential students; we have about an additional 500 or so commuters and then about 500 graduate students." Sonia has a dual role in which she is both the Director of Residence Life and the Director of the Women's Center on her campus. She identifies as white, female, and heterosexual. She is in her mid-forties and divorced. Her relationship status became more salient as we discussed her work experience and the

expectations of her colleagues, particularly because she is at a point in her life where she does not have to take care of anyone but herself. Unlike her colleagues, she does not have children, pets, or a partner. This allows her to focus primarily on her career, unlike her colleagues who have family responsibilities, but it also means she must make an extra effort to establish balance by engaging in activities outside of work.

Sonia is one of the first participants I spoke with who identifies as a first-generation college student, meaning neither of her parents obtained an education beyond high school (Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004). Sonia described the evolution and intersection of her identities as a first-generation college student and as a woman:

> My mother was a waitress, my stepfather was a mailman, so neither one of my parents went to college. So it was a big deal for my family that I went to college. It is also a really powerful experience to be a first generation of college student. My identity with my mom is very strong in kind of being raised by a single mother. I think especially with the population of students that I work with here, [I] identify very strongly with my identity as a woman and I was raised to for most of my childhood by a single mom.

Despite her accomplishments, Sonia's background continues to impact her confidence in her professional identity, as she explains:

> I definitely have had many moments in my career, even today still feeling like, you know, "Am I fraud?" Even though I have a doctoral degree and I wrote a dissertation and I've got academic credentials. There are so many moments in my life that I feel I questioned those credentials, so it's pretty significant, I think, for me being a first-generation college student.

Lived Experience

Throughout Sonia's story it was evident that her women's center is making an impact on campus, and her one-person office produces a remarkable number of programs and events. She identified one salient experience as bringing the "Green Dot" program to campus (www.livethegreendot.com). Green Dot is a national violence prevention initiative that seeks to engage the entire campus community. Sonia chairs her institution's Green Dot committee and has succeeded, in less than a year, in rolling out the program to her campus.

Sonia has introduced an additional initiative, the Escalation Workshop, which has taken the Green Dot beyond branding on campus to empower students to respond to acts of violence. Sonia explained:

> I think for our students, the Green Dot is nice image branding, it's very easy for them to understand and recognize, "Oh, I see the Green Dot"; that's something about bystander intervention. But by having these other programs, it keeps it fresh.

The Escalation Workshop is a 90-minute video, based on a true story, that educates the audience on relationship violence and how to enact change. The Escalation Workshop and the Green Dot programs together train and empower members of the campus to create a safer campus.

Summary

Sonia seemed to genuinely open up in responding to the question, "What has been your most salient work experience as a women's center professional?" She became visibly more excited and no longer focused on the challenges of her role. Sonia spoke at

length about an initiative called "Silent Witness" that she was able to introduce and develop on her campus over the previous 12 years. The Silent Witness National Initiative brings to campus "life-sized, red laminated silhouettes of the women, men and children murdered in acts of domestic violence during a specific period of time within each state, county or city" (http://www.silentwitness.net/exhibit.html).

It was largely due to her efforts with the Silent Witness initiative that Sonia chose the words *empowering*, *frustrating*, and *educational* to describe her experience as a women's center professional. She explained:

> We actually helped a high school create the first high school chapter of the Silent Witnesses and so there was a lot mentoring that happened between the [university] students and the high school students that we helped them start their chapter.

She continued:

> I have had students do internships directly related to Silent Witness with me where they've connected to other schools and kind of helped manage our email account with different campuses asking to start chapters. So it just provided so many different opportunities that I think I am still surprised that one program has been that impactful for me.

This experience had such an impact on Sonia's work experience that she now serves on the Board of Directors for Silent Witness. She stated, "This has been one of the most amazing experiences I have had with our Women's Center, both with our students here and the greater community." Sonia's experience highlights the ways in which

creating such programs on campus can be empowering not only for students, but also for women's center professionals themselves.

Sophia

Introduction

Sophia's interview was informative. When asked about herself, Sophia shared a lot of information quickly. She was very open in discussing her sexuality and relationship status, as well as the fact that her previous institution presented an unhealthy work environment. Her openness was a welcome surprise, as I had found it more difficult to elicit information from some of the previous participants.

Sophia is a 32-year-old married White woman who identifies as female and polysexual. Polysexual individuals are attracted to a variety of genders. Sophia was a first-generation college student and is currently a Ph.D. candidate. She has been diagnosed with dysnomia and also with severe anxiety. Anxiety is a mental health disorder that can manifest itself in a variety of ways, all of which can cause distress for the individual. Its symptoms may include panic attacks, social anxiety (fear of social situations), and general anxiety (unrealistic worry or tension), among other manifestations.

Sophia currently works at a four-year public institution comprised of 15,000 students at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. It is a premier metropolitan university in the Midwest with a strong emphasis on the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Sophia's experience at her previous institution seemed similar to my current experience. She had struggled with the constraints of a large state institution as well as with living in the South. She reported that

she constantly had to navigate the politics of her large state institution and that this, coupled with living in a conservative Southern state, posed a challenge for her. This information came out in her interview immediately.

Sophia's current institution appears to be a much better fit for her, and I could hear a change in the tone of her voice when she began talking about her current campus. She sounded drained and tired when referencing her previous university; in contrast, her voice became energetic and filled with enthusiasm and excitement when discussing her present institution. She is also working on her doctorate, and her role as a doctoral student is an important part of her identity. We discussed this a bit and both resonated over what we called "doctoral guilt": Because there is always work to do on your dissertation, it is difficult to ever feel justified in simply sitting on the couch or watching television. She said, "I go home and feel guilty about not working on my dissertation, and I'm like, I am tired and just want to go home and watch a really crappy show."

Sophia's trajectory into campus-based women's center work began when she was an undergraduate student at an institution in Illinois. She became interested in activist work while volunteering at a non-profit organization and went on to get a minor in women's studies. In her first professional role she served as assistant director of a women's resource center for five years at an institution in the South. Because of the toxic environment of this job, Sophia transitioned to being a full-time doctoral student until her "dream job" presented itself:

> I had almost completed my doctoral studies and then I found my next dream job and I had to take it, which was the position here and it was at the [university] and it both functioned as a women's resource center and an LGBT center.

In addition to directing the women's center, Sophia advises a student organization and is the only full-time professional who provides victim support services to students, with assistance from a part-time graduate assistant. Both she and her graduate assistant are certified victim advocates and work in conjunction with their local domestic violence shelter and emergency advocacy organization.

Sophia is the next participant who spoke about being a first-generation college student. Her family is Italian on her mother's side and English on her father's side; her father's side owns a family farm. Her parents are high school graduates and Sophia classified their socioeconomic status as "stable poverty," in that both her parents have low-paying but stable employment. Sophia noted that she never realized the extent to which her family lived in poverty until she was required to do a project for a class. Her mother worked at Burger King for 13 years, and her father was a factory worker who also worked part time on the family farm.

The salience of her family's socioeconomic status and her identity as a first-generation college student did not emerge for Sophia until she was starting her second year of college, when she began to recognize how being a first-generation college student influenced her academic career:

> I didn't know what Pell Grants were; I didn't understand what that was at the time. But the first year of my school I was a Pell Grant recipient, but the interesting thing was—is that I remember my dad being really frustrated my sophomore year of college because he is like, "Oh, we're not getting Pell Grant anymore; it's because I have done so much overtime." And my dad had worked so much overtime at his factory job that he like, to try to get extra money to help

> me, like, have extra groceries, that we were no longer recipients of the Pell Grant; so it was like on the cusp of that grant. It was that awkward space between whether you qualify as a poverty status person or not.

For first-generation college students, financing college can often be a particular challenge (Sanez, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Sophia stated, "There were a lot of things going through my college education that I was surprised, that I wish people would not have been matter-of-fact about." For example:

> My advisor, who was kind of an [expletive]—for lack of better term—white guy, older, kind of expected me to know these things. "You need to drop this class." My response was, "No, I can't drop this class." Because . . . I as a first-gen student was like, that means I'm going fail my class and I am going to have an F on my transcript, like, that is not a thing I can do. I was maintaining like a 3.6 grade point average because once again I think that first-gen attitude was that I got one shot at this and that is it.

Lived Experience

The subject of student impact was woven through Sophia's narrative of her work experience. She noted, "My successful moment is seeing young students become feminists and understand[ing] what that means for them." Sophia described the fulfillment of "watching them evolve and being able [to] confidently use their voices that you can tell that they haven't felt comfortable using in a very long time; and when they challenge things in very wonderful and complicated ways." Reflecting on her work experiences prompted Sophia to recall her own experiences as a student, as well as the influence other women's center professionals have had on her development. She

explains, “it took the love and care and pushing of fellow colleagues, and students for that matter, to get me to a space of where I am confident in my own complications.”

Summary

Sophia is a fascinating person with a multitude of identities. She had a difficult experience at her previous institution that continues to influence her in her current campus role. When asked to list three words that describe her experience, she chose *compassion*, *pain*, and *educator*. To provide context for her choice of the word “pain,” she described her relationship with her previous institution:

> It was, it was mentally—and I speak about this and I don’t speak about it lightly. I felt like I was in a DV [domestic violence] relationship with my university; that I, like, when I heard the phone ring, depending on the person calling, I would have severe anxiety until I picked up the phone. If I saw an email that was kind of ambiguous, like severe anxiety, I would have . . . panic attacks; I was on a daily medication. I had really that anxiety; I couldn’t sleep, I had to take some medication for that. And then the next day and knowing that this person was very genuine and like no passive aggressive anything—I’m having to relearn how a healthy environment is supposed to look.

As professionals, it is easy for us to lose sight of the personal impact of our day-to-day work. Sophia’s narrative helps to give voice to this deep and enduring impact.

Sophia also elaborated on her choice of the word “educator,” elatedly describing how the first drag show held on campus became integral to Homecoming in the last academic year. She explained that it was important not just to hold the drag show, but also to get back to drag’s true purpose: to challenge gender stereotypes. Sophia was able

to guide Women's Resource Center students and students on the Homecoming planning committee to ensure that all students who were interested in participating in the drag show had a space to do so. In addition, she made sure the audience was respectful to the performers by documenting any incidents of bias or hate, and penalizing student organizations whose members were disrespectful by withholding Homecoming participation points.

Eliza

Introduction

Eliza works at a public, four-year institution in the Midwest. With three domestic campuses and one abroad, the institution has an undergraduate population just under 20,000 students. Eliza is white, in her mid-forties, and single, and identifies as female and heterosexual.

Eliza was concise and articulate in her interview. Although her answers to my questions were very direct, I was hoping for more of a conversation, and often felt as though I was trying to extract more details from her. I think that while she has thought about her experience, her work experience was different from that of other participants. For example, she stated that it had taken three months to get a newly funded position in her office, viewing this as a lengthy process. Given my experience in public institutions, where gaining approval for a new position takes many months if not years, I could not help gasping audibly in surprise during the interview.

> Interviewer: Okay. And how long would you say that process took from when you are like, I wanted to do this until it was implemented?
>
> Interviewee: Well, I have [asked for additional positions] two different times.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And I would say the first time I did was probably like three months.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Interviewee: Yeah. Is that long or what?

Interviewer: No, no, that is like, sure, I feel like it would take three months for someone just to think about it.

Interviewee: And then the second time it was longer, say, probably like six months

In the experience of the other participants, it is rare for additional staff to be added so quickly, and almost unheard of to obtain approval to add more than one new position.

Eliza has a background in social work, which may contribute to her calm, soft-spoken tone—which led me to fear that my audio recorder was not picking up her voice. Because she works at an institution that sponsors a high-profile media event, I was surprised that there was very little discussion about this event and how it impacts her work. This may mean that despite the event's visibility, its influence on her work has been minimal.

Although Eliza's institution is located in a politically conservative state, she noted that she has not let this inhibit her from doing the programs and events she is interested in. Although the administration has expressed some concerns, these have usually related to managing the response to the events, and have not prevented her from planning or implementing the events themselves.

Eliza began her professional life as a social worker but transitioned to a university role approximately eight and a half years ago. She previously worked in the non-profit

sector on issues of reproductive health care education and sexuality education, and I was interested in learning about her move from a community non-profit to higher education. I asked Eliza what this transition was like.

Eliza described the different pace she encountered when moving to the college context, and noted that she found the university calendar difficult to manage. For example, whereas in the community business is relatively consistent, at the university there are notable busy cycles and lulls, making the workload harder to manage. Moreover, one of the biggest challenges Eliza faced was navigating the university bureaucracy, as she confronted the impact of "more layers of bureaucracy with more like political worries, in terms of what you do, what you say, all that stuff."

Eliza's transition into higher education also marked the first time she identified as a first-generation college student:

> Well, I just think I had never really—before I came to the university, I never really thought about that identity and actually never really knew what I missed out on in my university experience, and I did definitely attribute that to being a first-generation college student.

Eliza noted that working for the university and beginning to identify as a first-generation college student initiated her understanding of the challenges college students face. Yet despite identifying as a first-generation student, she acknowledged her lack of knowledge surrounding many issues that pertain to this population.

Lived Experience

It became evident throughout Eliza's narrative that her ability to increase the staff resources in her office represented a salient work experience. Twice Eliza was successful

in developing and submitting proposals to increase the number of staff positions supporting advocacy initiatives related to sexual violence. Eliza directs a campus-based women's center that coordinates a 24/7 crisis line to support students who experience gender-based violence. Additionally, this women's center coordinates prevention and awareness programming. To make these initiatives successful, Eliza requested additional staffing, which the institution's administration approved.

Eliza also identified the development of a safe space and support services for LGBT students as a successful and salient work experience. In particular, Eliza was instrumental in helping to create an LGBT lounge on campus. Although her campus is religiously affiliated, Eliza was able to assemble enough student and administrative support to accomplish the goal of creating this designated safe space on campus.

Summary

The three words Eliza chose to describe her experience as a women's center professional were *challenging*, *inner driving*, and *assimilating*. After I read, listened to, and coded all the transcripts, the word *challenge* emerged as a common way in which these women described their work experiences. Granted, I specifically asked participants to identify challenging situations. Nevertheless, they would often choose this word as an adjective to describe an encounter or situation.

For example, Eliza stated:

> I would say our department is technically student life and so I think another challenge is we are in a department where people are used to doing fun programming like orientation camps, and so there is often a lack of understanding separate from the advocacy piece. Like, okay, we are doing education about

sexual violence and that is not fun and people do not like to come to that. And so it was like making sure people in my department as well as like the division understand that, because it's so different than what they do.

Eliza identified an issue that is challenging not only for her, but also for other women's center professionals. We went on to discuss the challenges involved when your job entails, in one moment, sitting with a student who has just disclosed their assault for the first time, and in the next moment attending a celebratory recognition party for a colleague. How can one rapidly shift and adjust to wear both "hats," as we call them in student affairs, to effectively fulfill our multiple and varied roles?

Eliza's third word, *assimilating*, also has special meaning because she transitioned into higher education from a community, non-profit background and describes herself as a social worker by trade. So she faced a particular challenge in assimilating to the higher education environment, with its unique pace, demands, and politics. Eliza had to adapt to a new work environment. Yet despite her awareness of the difficulties inherent in her role, Eliza's overall evaluation and outlook remain positive. "So, I mean, I have never felt like I cannot do something, so that is great, but there is often some pushback, but not that prevents us from doing what we want to do."

Nina

Introduction

As with some previous participants, Nina and I have known each other for at least 10 years, having spent time together at professional conferences and even co-presenting at a national conference. With those conferences came many shared social outings, and at one conference we attended on the West Coast, we walked almost eight miles together

one afternoon. She is also my tech-savvy friend, who always has the latest gadget and knows the trendiest software to use for work and personal tasks. Nevertheless, although we had known each other for so long I still learned new things about her through our interview. For example, I thought she had completed her Ph.D. in the early 2000s, but I learned she had finished it only seven years ago.

Nina works at a public, four-year institution in the Midwest. The institution grants bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees and has an enrollment of approximately 16,000 students. Nina identifies as white, female, cisgender, heterosexual, and feminist. She has been married for over 15 years.

Nina has over 15 years of experience in campus-based women centers, with a career trajectory into women's center work that is a little different from most. She has worked at two different women's centers, one in the Southwest and another in the Midwest. She went to graduate school and earned a Ph.D. with the intention of becoming a faculty member. Through her graduate studies, she realized she liked teaching but had no interest in research. She felt she was not fast enough at conducting the research and had little desire to obtain a tenure track faculty job. Throughout this experience, she consistently heard from other faculty members that she was effective at administration.

During this exploration process, she married another faculty member. At this juncture she and her husband faced the issue of both having academic careers, or what she called "the two-jobs-in-one-place problem." Her husband had a job at the university while she was completing her dissertation. She wanted to work while finishing her dissertation, so she emailed the Women's Studies Department at her current institution in the Southwest to ask if there were classes she could teach. She received the following

response: “No, but we are opening this women’s center so maybe you would be interested in that.” Prior to that, Nina had never considered doing this kind of work. She noted, “I had never even thought about working in a women’s center, although it should have been obvious since I had a background in administrative stuff. And so I applied and got the job.”

Nina is my last participant who identifies as a first-generation college student. Neither her grandparents nor her parents attended college. Nina was the first on both sides of her family to attend college; her sister completed a fair amount of an associate’s degree but never graduated. Nina was also the first of a handful of extended family members to graduate from college. Most of the people in her circle growing up either had working class jobs or were stay-at-home parents.

Nina’s background became very salient for her when she entered academia. She noted:

> Academia is this weird space, if you are working class or if you are from the working class. I don’t know what I am anymore. And you kind of, you are not really like your family anymore either, but you are not really one of the elite academics. So it is a weird space sometimes.

Nina’s discomfort in entering academia was only exacerbated when she married another faculty member. She stated:

> For me when the class thing really came to the forefront, I had to actually really struggle with a lot, that was when I got married because my husband is from a much more privileged background . . . somehow going for the Ph.D. didn’t do it, but being with [my husband] and marrying [my husband] was like that definitive

moment when I realized that I really was leaving my people, and it was kind of freaky.

Lived Experiences

Throughout Nina's story, she expressed a dual identity in relation to her roles as both faculty and staff, each with its challenges and successes. In particular, the opportunity to establish a new women's center on a campus in the Southwest while working on her doctorate allowed Nina to merge her interest in academia with her administrative skills. This became a very successful and salient experience for Nina. Moreover, on a different campus, Nina planned a year-long monumental celebration for the 40-year anniversary of that institution's women's center. Thus she had the rare opportunity to see two ends of the spectrum in relation to a campus-based women's center trajectory: one center just starting out, the other celebrating a long and rich history.

Nina identified some of the high points of the 40th anniversary celebration: "We made our own coffee, we had a big art exhibit, we made a quilt, and we had a song written." This women's center worked with a local coffee shop to develop its own original blend for the celebration. In a uniquely designed bag, it was sold as part of the fundraising efforts. Nina went on to highlight the center's success in raising over $50,000 through this year-long celebration. Fundraising is a very salient part of the work experience of most women's center professionals. Nina noted, "We raised enough money that we paid for all the programs, and we did five big programs over the year."

Nina continued to reference themes of fundraising and development in discussing her experience with the U.S. Department of Justice Violence against Women Act (VAWA) grant. This grant provides $300,000 to $500,000 over the course of three years

to implement anti-violence initiatives on a college campus. Nina was instrumental in writing and securing this grant for her institution for three cycles, including renewal applications, for a total of nine years of funding. As a result, the programming initiatives of the grant have now been elevated to an institutional level, which means the institution will now fund these efforts and manage the grant through an office that is no longer linked to the women's center. Nina observed, "I suppose the fact that it has been elevated to the Vice Chancellor's office is a sign of success, even though we were not involved in the conversations."

Summary

Nina identified only two words to describe her experience as a women's center professional: *exhilarating* and *frustrating*. When asked to complete the sentence, "My women's center experience is like . . ." she responded, "a roller coaster," a description that aligns well with her experiences of both exhilaration and frustration. Nina was very honest about her frustrations with the institutional leadership on her campus.

For the greater part of her career at her university, Nina reported, she has struggled with issues related to communication:

> The main thing that we deal with is lack of communication . . . and not being consulted. So the VAWA, the VPR decision was kind of forecast vaguely [pause] and obliquely. But we were not actually part of the decision making process and no one talked to me about it or asked me what I thought or what the impact was going to be, and how did things work over here. And instead we were called to a meeting—I am not kidding, we got the meeting notification on Thursday for a 2

p.m. meeting Friday before the semester starts, meeting to say by the way, this is what we are doing. So that was nice.

Nina had written the initial grant as well as the reapplications for the university, and she and the other staff member in her office had been responsible for much of the work articulated in the grant. So it was particularly frustrating for her to hear suddenly that she was being removed from that process.

Tina

Introduction

Tina and I finally had an opportunity meet after several failed attempts. I had to reschedule our first interview because I was ill; for our next scheduled interview time, Tina came down with the flu. So I was glad we were both finally healthy and able to connect over the phone. It was bittersweet, because this would be my last interview.

Perhaps because I had conducted nine previous interviews (seven of which provided usable data), in this interview I definitely heard more echoes of the content and themes that emerged from conversations with previous participants. Tina was another participant who had transitioned to higher education from non-profit work, so I made sure to ask about that experience and transition. Tina was the only woman of color in my study, which is reflective of the broader demographics of women's center directors, the vast majority of whom are White.

Tina works at a public, four-year institution in one of the nation's largest cities. It is a leading research institution in the Southwest with over 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students, with a 50/50 male/female split. Tina is a 31-year-old African American woman who identifies as female, heterosexual, and feminist.

Tina spoke about her black identity as being very salient to her work experience. She noted that there is little diversity among the senior leadership in her university:

> Being a woman and being black, right now, in my work I have the opportunity to be in an institution that has a lot of diversity in different ways, which is good. But I still think as it relates to being someone who is considered in a senior leadership position it is still challenging.

Our discussion about Tina's identity was timely, as she recalled a recent experience in which she was asked to participate on a panel to discuss the movie *Suffragette*. Despite being one of several women on the panel, she found that she was the only one to whom questions about women of color were directed. She shared:

> I thought it was interesting that when it came to people asking, people in the audience asking questions relating to why was the perspective and experiences of women of color left out of the movie and that kind of thing, I mean I was sitting there on the stage with women who were faculty members, who were scholars regarding women's studies and feminist theory and feminist research, but then those questions I just felt were automatically directed to me. I had to serve as that voice for all women of color or for all black women, which was really troubling and difficult to do, and so I think those identities are salient and really play out in the work that I do here.

In addition to the salience of her identity as an African American woman, Tina also strongly identified as a feminist, describing how this identity had influenced her professional journey. She earned her master's degree in student affairs at a large institution in the South in 2010. Prior to earning this degree she worked for a non-profit

organization that provided support services to ex-offenders and their families after they left the prison system. This agency offered educational assistance and a variety of other services to help ex-offenders re-enter the workforce, as well as providing housing and financial assistance to their families while they were incarcerated. In this role Tina interacted with community colleges and worked with academic advisors and other staff members in various transition programs, including first-year and adult education programs. As a result of this experience, Tina decided to pursue a master's degree in higher education.

Tina has been in the field of student affairs since 2010. She has worked in a variety of functional areas including residence life, student conduct, orientation, first-year experience, and student success programs. It was through her work in student conduct that Tina first developed an interest in women and gender equity. During this time, she worked on numerous cases related to sexual misconduct. Through these cases, Tina identified a lack of understanding regarding what healthy relationships and healthy sexuality look like as a key issue resulting in students' sexual misconduct.

Tina went on to focus her dissertation research on how women in student affairs progress from entry-level positions to executive-level or senior administrative positions. Her research demonstrated the persistence of discrepancies and issues of gender equity for women in student affairs. This research topic and her student affairs experience led to her current position. She has now served as director of the Women and Gender Resource Center for 11 months.

Lived Experiences

Throughout Tina's interview, she often mentioned the fact that she was new to her role and referenced her professional transition from a community non-profit agency to a higher education environment. When the institution hired Tina she became the first full-time professional staff member in the women's center. She identified her work in expanding and developing the center as her most successful and salient professional experience. She shared, "I would definitely say successful moments I've had thus far are expanding on current programs that were already done." As with other women's centers that originated with student organizations or activism and only later became official administrative units, Tina shared that when she arrived, "the center had been in existence for 10 years already, but there was not any full-time staff."

Tina identified fundraising as an unexpected success of her first 11 months in the director role. She shared:

> I did not expect that there would be a fundraiser, though I've done fundraising before in the non-profit world. But I was able to secure some funding as well as to start an endowment through our center, which will be able to award some scholarships to students in a few years and then also to get a program and grant too.

Summary

When asked to list three words that describe her women's center experience, Tina chose positive words and examples. She said:

> I would say *meaningful* would be one, because everything that we try to do, all the services and programs that we try to provide or that we do provide, are done

> in a meaningful way or in a way that we want to make a great impact on campus and to really help people on campus. So meaningful would be one. I would say *challenging* would be another one, just because I'm still learning how this system works that I'm in and how things work this campus, and learning the culture of the campus as it relates to students, but then also as it relates to the work that I'm trying to do. . . . The third one would be . . . *impactful*, because I think we are making some good strides to make a larger impact and a positive impact on the campus community. And since we have a holistic vision for diversity and inclusion and a big focus on that, what we're doing through our center is helping to impact that in a meaningful way, in a good way.

Grand Narrative

The purpose of this study was to understand the work experiences of campus-based women's center directors in a student affairs division. The researcher elicited the stories of eight participants to understand their personal experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). By employing the narrative analysis procedures outlined in Chapter Three, the following themes emerged: program development, student interaction, and staff size. Further, a subset of the student interaction theme related to feminist-identified students, LGBTQ students, and student organizations. Additionally, self-care practices; support from students, faculty, and staff; and the impact of being a first-generation college student (for four participants) emerged as subthemes. In the sections below each of these themes will be discussed in greater depth, along with the ways these themes emerged through the participants' interviews.

Program Development

Campus-based women's center professionals in divisions of student affairs are responsible for planning a multitude of programs. The programming discussed by the participants was geared primarily toward students; however, some centers provided services for faculty and staff as well. The programs intended for students included Operation Beautiful, which focuses on promoting a positive body image, and Silent Witness, The Clothesline Project, and Green Dot, all of which emphasize awareness of gender-based violence.

Sonia, Nina, and Tonia all identified program development, along with gender-based violence awareness, as core responsibilities of their roles. Nina's role in promoting awareness of gender-based violence encompasses only programming, whereas both Sonia and Tonia provide advocacy services as well. Nina and Sonia discussed both challenges and successes related to program development. Nina described her center's 40th anniversary celebration as "one of our biggest successes." Similarly, Sonia identified bringing the Silent Witness program to her campus as a profound and successful experience for her both personal and professionally.

Further, many of the participants shared stories of sponsoring initiatives for LGBTQ students. Eliza and Sophia both identified such program development as a positive element of their work experience. Eliza stated, "My successful moments probably related to developing new programs, so developing LGBTQ programs for our university." Sophia reported, "Our two-hour drag show was really well received."

Lastly, collaborative programs developed through partnerships with Offices of Academic Affairs and programs in Women and Gender Studies offered such

opportunities as a study abroad trip, an alternative service break trip, and in-class discussions on gender-related topics. Nina highlighted a study abroad trip to Senegal, West Africa, sponsored by the Women's Center and Women and Gender Studies Program and offered in partnership with several other university departments, as a challenging yet a successful moment in her work experience. Similarly, Fiona discussed an alternative break trip in which she took a group of female students to Miami, noting, "Developing the trip and taking the group of students to Miami was one of those really amazing experiences."

Student Interaction

The theme of student interaction was tremendously evident in the stories shared by the eight participants. Among those narratives, a significant subset referenced feminist-identified students, LGBTQ students, or student organizations. Tonia shared that in her work, a successful moment "might be two years later, when they come back and say the several hour-long conversations we had in the women's center helped frame how they viewed the world." Fiona referenced a similar indicator of success, in which students newly engaged in the women's center experience an "aha" moment that enables them to clearly understand the purpose of the women's center.

Sonia likewise described instances in which students who were previously unaware of the women's center's existence become aware of its programs and services as a result of outreach and tabling activities. From awareness of the center's existence, students then continued to engage with the center through its intentional programming. Similarly, Tina noted that many students learn about her women's center through its tabling efforts on campus and through guest lectures about the women's center she

presents to various classes. Tina shared, "I had a lot of students who would come in just to talk about things that they were learning in their sociology classes and introductory gender classes."

Feminist-identified students. The participants referenced feminist-identified students as one of the specific groups with whom they experienced successful and salient interactions. Sophia observed, "my successful moment is seeing young students become feminists and understand[ing] what that means for them." Tina shared, "We have gotten many more volunteers than we have had in the past, students who helped with our programs and who have really taken ownership of that piece." Along with Olivia, who shared stores of collaboration with the feminist student organization.

LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students comprised another group who provided the participants with salient professional experiences. Olivia noted, "We are pretty highly regarded by our LGBTQ students." Eliza stated:

> We opened an LGBTQ community lounge last semester; I felt really proud of my role in that whole process and what a difference it makes for our students to have the space that they can be who they are . . . and it's welcoming and all that stuff.

Tonia also described rewarding work experiences with LGBTQ students. Tonia related, "We have a lot of students who are passionate about social justice issues; our LGBTQ organization is doing a lot more on campus." This impacts the work experience for Tonia as both the women's center and LGTBQ organization work towards social justice on campus.

Student organizations. The participants described a variety of ways in which student organizations support campus-based women's centers. Olivia observed, "We

have a good relationship and a close relationship with our primary feminist student organization on campus." Further, Sophia related, "We do get a lot of support from the Greek community and from our Greek life staff." Eliza likewise referenced the role of Greek Life on her campus in supporting the first annual drag show during Homecoming week.

Staff Size

Based on the stories elicited from these eight women's center professionals, campus-based women's centers are understaffed. As Olivia observed, a small staff "is probably more the rule than an exception." One of the most direct consequences of such understaffing is the inability to effectively carry out the center's mission. Tonia likewise reported that "being a one-person office is a real struggle" not only in attempting to fulfill the expectations of one's role, but also in limiting the ability to practice self-care by taking necessary time away from work.

Additionally, in some offices staffed by one or two professionals the director had a dual responsibility on campus, inhibiting her from fully focusing on women's center initiatives. Sonia, who has a dual role in the women's center and residence life, noted, "I'm the only full-time staff member dedicated to our women's center and . . . most of my time is spent dealing with residence life." Nina, too, has a joint appointment between the women's center and as chair of the Women and Gender Studies Program. Yet, she notes, "I am the only director in Student Affairs who does not have an administrative assistant." In contrast, although the size of her staff was initially small, Eliza has gradually been able to increase the number of full-time professionals in her women's center from one to three, through two successful proposals to the upper-level administration.

Throughout the participants' narratives it became apparent that the small staff size of these offices creates a longing for community, which led Fiona to participate in this study. Fiona explained, "A one-person office is difficult at times. I crave community; I am a solo department." While Fiona is seeking out community, Sophia was fortunate to find an already established community on campus. Sophia, who has been in her role less than a year, reported, "the situation I walked into is really good for sustaining my sanity; there were so many people on this campus doing this work as 'other duties as assigned' and they are still absolutely 100% invested in continuing."

Self-care

Each of the eight participants was asked the following question, "What are your strategies for taking care of yourself?" Of the eight participants, only three individuals shared a response that actively acknowledged engaging in self-care practices. The other five participants responded initially with a statements such as, "I am not good at that," "That is a good question," "Part of my New Year's resolution is be better at self-care," or "I'll be honest, I'm not very good at self-care at all."

Olivia and Nina were two participants who offered a positive initial response to this question. Olivia reported that she often has lunch with a friend or plays a game on her iPad to relax. Nina noted that she made the decision three years ago to stop working on weekends. She added, "I pretty much do not even check my email on the weekends and I cut back on night stuff too. If it does not get done in my 40-45 hours, then it does not get done."

With some additional prompting, Tonia, Sophia, Fiona, and Sonia, who initially were unable to identify any strategies for self-care, eventually identified some tactics in

the course of the conversation. Tonia noted, "I teach in the Sociology Department, which makes me happy on a different level than working in the women's center." Likewise, Fiona shared, "[I] take a couple days off to reboot [and] take time for me, whether it is a day off or going for a run." Similarly, Sophia related, "my dogs and my spouse at home" help her practice self-care.

First-Generation College Student

Four of the eight participants described being a first-generation college student as salient to their identity. The four participants gained awareness of this salient identity at varying times in their lives. Sonia and Sophia recognized the impact of their first-generation status when they attended college, and they described the ways this identity shaped their college experience. The first-generation college student identity came later for both Nina and Eliza. Nina observed that surprisingly this identity did not emerge strongly when she completed her Ph.D.; it only became truly significant for her when she married a man who came from a more affluent background. Similarly, Eliza shared

> Well, I just think I had never really thought of [my first-generation identity] before I came to the university . . . I never really knew what I missed out on in my university experience, and I did definitely attribute that to being a first-generation college student.

While all four participants shared the identity of a first-generation college student, its impact varied based on their experiences and the stage of life at which the identity became salient for them.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the study's findings as a result of interviews with eight women's center directors in student affairs divisions. The work experiences of women's center professionals in a director's role were shared through a description of the interview process, an introduction to each participant, and a summary of the participants' lived experiences as they emerged through narratives recounting successful, salient, and challenging moments in their professional lives. Lastly, three themes and two subthemes were identified as emerging from these interviews to create a grand narrative of the experiences of these women's center professionals.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents findings regarding the work experiences of campus-based women's center directors in a student affairs division. These findings highlight the work experiences reported by the eight participants in this study, focusing on challenges, successes, and salient moments in their professional roles. While these eight stories are individual to the participants, they contribute to an enhanced understanding of women's center professionals and their experiences. The chapter begins with my researcher's reflective experience statement describing the impact this study had on me. Next, Bolman and Deal's (2013) Four Framework Approach will be used to share the participants' stories through an organizational lens, while allowing for flexible transferring between experiences and frames. Lastly, implications and suggestions for future research will be presented.

Researcher Reflection

Conducting this research represents a point of pride in my doctoral career. I was humbled by the opportunity to listen to, interpret, and share the narratives of these eight women's center professionals. As a women's center professional myself, I resonated with many of the participants' stories and the challenges and successes they identified. In some ways this project represented a kind of homecoming for me, as I was able to hear in the voices of the participants experiences so similar to my own.

Having encountered my own challenges and celebrated my own successes in my career trajectory—some even while writing this dissertation—this project was undeniably a transformative experience for me. Hearing familiar challenges identified both by very seasoned women's center professionals and by those new to the profession gave me confidence that this study will make a valuable contribution to the profession and promote a better understanding of the work experiences of women's center professionals.

Summary and Interpretation of Findings

This summary and interpretation of the study's findings align with the research methodology outlined in Chapter 3. I elicited responses from eight women's center professionals through semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions to prompt discussion of their challenges, successes, and salient moments, as well as the support they received from students, faculty, and staff. Three themes emerged from their responses: (a) program development, (b) student interaction, and (c) staff size. Further, a subset of the student interaction theme related to feminist-identified students, LGBTQ students, and student organizations. Additionally, subthemes of self-care practices and support from students, faculty, and staff emerged, with four participants also emphasizing the impact of being a first-generation college student. The sections below will discuss each theme in greater depth, illuminating its significance for women's center professionals.

Program Development

Program development emerged as a prominent theme in the stories shared by the eight participants. Further, program development, and the impact on students, and at a religiously affiliated institution will be explained Additionally, one participant discussed

the impact of changing institutional divisions on program development and on the breadth of access to administrators and staff in other campus units.

The primary responsibilities of a campus-based women's center housed in a student affairs division are to provide programs, services, and resources for college students (Davie, 2002). Participants shared an array of stories that emphasized the program development work central to their roles. Eliza observed that in her professional experience, "Successful moments relate to developing new programs." Tina agreed, noting, "I would definitely say some successful moments I've had thus far have been expanding the programs that were already done."

These comments align with Byrne's (2000) assertion that a key role of women's center professionals is to offer educational programs and provide support for women students. The program development initiatives the participants discussed included starting a women's center, increasing programming for and outreach to students on campus, and creating safe spaces and relevant programs for students who identify as LGBTQ. Some participants characterized their programming experiences as challenging or frustrating; as Fiona noted, "Starting a new department from scratch on a very busy campus can be a challenge." In contrast, other participants described their programming work as empowering. Tina shared, "Having the opportunity to be the first full-time director...and expand the programs...so we have more participants then ever." Although it was rare for participants to describe their programming initiatives as both challenging and empowering, Nina highlighted the challenges she faced in implementing body empowerment programs on campus while also emphasizing the importance of this type of student programming.

Given the growing numbers of women in higher education (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014; Parker, 2015), programming is a vital function of women's centers and a significant responsibility for women's center professionals. Additionally, program development related to issues of gender-based violence will continue to be essential with the changing campus climate related to Title IX (Strout, Amar, & Astwood, 2014). Because women's center professionals are often the first touchpoint for these changes on their respective campuses, they are often primarily if not solely responsible for promoting awareness, education, and advocacy related to gender-based violence through campus programming (Heldman & Brown, 2014).

Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames—political, structural, symbolic, and human resource—help illuminate how a leader's particular perspective shapes the way she views her work and makes sense of her organization. Bolman and Deal's Four Framework Approach to leadership provides insight into the various lenses individuals use to organize and assign meaning to experiences they encounter in their work lives. Overlaying these four frames on the participants' narratives and the broader themes that emerged from this study thus provides a means through which to interpret these themes and explore their implications.

Some participants struggled with working for a religiously-affiliated university or for an institution located in a conservative state. This perspective aligns with the political frame because although student affairs professionals are responsible for supporting the development of all students (Evans & Reason, 2001; McClellan, Stringer, & Associates, 2009), it was clear at these institutions that a student's sexual identity affected the level of support they could receive and the resources these professionals could provide. For

example, Tonia reported having to "secretly" support LGBTQ students who had no other source of support on her religiously-affiliated campus. Yet despite the limitations imposed by such political constraints, participants were able to find ways to support LGBTQ students and create safe spaces and programs designed to meet their needs (Broido, 2004). A commitment to meeting the needs of all students (Broido, 2004), regardless of sexual identity, lies at the heart of being a women's center professional and contributes to the participants' work experience in positive way.

Some participants transitioned to student affairs after working either for a different division on campus or in the non-profit sector. For those transitioning from another campus division, with the change in their unit and reporting line came a shift in the intended audience for program development (CAS, 2015; Davie, 2002; Goettsch et al., 2015). For example, one women's center was formerly housed within academic affairs before it was moved to the division of student affairs. This switch created structural challenges in that the mission of academic affairs is broadly defined to encompass service to students, faculty, and staff, whereas divisions of student affairs are limited to serving the needs of students.

These dynamics can be viewed through Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame, in which a deficit, in this case driven by budget concerns, leads to changes to the structural elements of an organization. The impact of this type of change on a participant varied; however, most identified a more circumscribed mission with a focus primarily on students, rather than incorporating faculty and staff concerns. Another consequence of this type of change was the impact on the women's center budget, as serving a smaller campus constituency led to budget reductions. This outcome aligns with the findings of

Kasper (2004) and Spikes and Stillabower (1978) that women's center professionals identified a lack of funding for programs and events as a key problem they faced.

Lastly, in some instances the shift from one division to another created unintended structural barriers that prevented the women's center director from participating in meetings she had attended in the past and reduced her opportunities to interact with other administrators. For example, Olivia had previously participated in the Provost's breakfast meetings but is now no longer invited to that event, and thus has lost a valuable opportunity to connect directly with department chairs. Additionally, Olivia articulated that being able to network and collaborate with staff, faculty, and units outside of student affairs is important. For women's center professionals seeking to create successful programs and elevate the visibility and status of the women's center on campus, regardless of the structural division in which they are housed, access to both sufficient resources and campus-wide connections is essential to carrying out the center's mission and achieving its goals.

The theme of program development emerged prominently through the stories shared by the study participants. In particular, the participants discussed the impact of program development on students and the challenges of offering programming for LGBTQ students at a religiously-affiliated institution or in a conservative state. Lastly, participants reflected on the advantages and drawbacks that ensue when a women's center transitions from one university division to another.

Student Interaction

Student interaction was another prominent theme that emerged from the participants' stories. Three subthemes were also identified: (a) feminist students, (b)

LGBTQ students, and (c) student organizations. In addition, a focus on student development, individual conversations, and campus inclusion characterized the participants' comments related to student interaction.

Overwhelmingly, participants identified student interaction as vital to their work as women's center professionals. When asked to describe challenges, successes, and salient moments in their professional lives, all participants referenced some type of student impact or interaction as important. Most often, when women's center professionals were asked to share an example of a successful or salient moment in their work, students were at the center of those stories. For example, Sophia discussed the rewards of "watching [students] evolve and being able to confidently use their voices, that you can tell that they have not felt comfortable using in a very long time, and when [students] challenge things in very wonderful and complicated ways." Tonia shared that her successful moments occurred "one-on-one with students." Similarly, Fiona described taking a group of students to Miami as "one of those really amazing experiences."

Student affairs professionals serve students in innumerable ways and in a wide variety of settings (Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, & Steinke, 2001). The women's center professionals in this study unanimously reported benefitting from their interactions with students, which contributed to a positive work experience. Additionally, from the participants' numerous narratives about student interaction, three subthemes emerged: interactions with (a) feminist students, (b) LGBTQ students, and (c) student organizations.

Feminist students. The participants noted that being a women's center professional is as much about student interaction as it is about program development. In

particular, interaction with feminist-identified students contributed to the successful and salient experiences of women's center professionals. Such experiences can have intrinsic benefits for women's center professionals while also contributing to the student's sense of belonging, which has been found to positively influence college student development (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012).

Sophia identified a successful moment as witnessing students awakening to an understanding of feminism and recognizing its significance for their lives. She noted, "my successful moment is seeing young students become feminists and understand what that means for them." Other participants also valued the knowledge that they were influential in encouraging students' transformative experiences through one-on-one interaction. Tonia noted that while her office plans an annual Take Back the Night event, which is an evening to raise awareness of sexual violence, she finds the rewards of her one-on-one interactions with students to be as significant as, if not greater than, the satisfaction she feels as the result of coordinating a successful campus event.

LGBTQ students. On several of the participants' campuses there had been either no women's center at all or no full-time professional in the women's center prior to their arrival, reflecting a staffing structure discussed by Davie (2002). Thus LGBTQ students at those universities often had no previous institutional support. Through the creation of an LGBTQ student lounge on one campus and the integration of a drag show into the Homecoming week events on another, women's center professionals demonstrated their commitment to engaging and supporting students of all sexual identities (Broido, 2004). Such work aligns with the findings of Broido (2004) that the growing number of college students who identify as LGBTQ have a need for identity-based support and services.

Student organizations. Eliza, Fiona, and Olivia identified their interaction with campus student organizations as significant to their work as women's center professionals. Eliza reported that as a result of the center's engagement with student organizations, as well as Greek Life and Residence Life, "We have about 40 student volunteers on our crisis line." Greek life also provided support on Sophia's campus by partnering with her at Homecoming. Often interaction with student organizations provided a way to extend women's center resources to address capacity issues (Clevenger, 1988; Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012). Where small staff size was an obstacle, student organizations were able to assist many women's center professionals with program development, peer education, or violence prevention initiatives. This represents a significant contribution and a means of ameliorating the problems resulting from understaffing, as reported by many of the women's center professionals in this study.

Sexual violence prevention. Campus-based women's center professionals, along with women's studies faculty, are often among the first individuals whom victim-survivors of sexual violence seek out to provide resources, advocacy, and support (Heldman & Brown, 2014). Thus it is perhaps surprising that only three of the eight women's center professionals interviewed had in their job description a primary focus on sexual violence prevention. Among the women's center professionals responsible for sexual violence prevention programs and advocacy, five utilized students, staff, and/or faculty volunteers to support these initiatives. For example, Eliza has a volunteer base of over 40 individuals who assist in staffing the 24/7 crisis line. Such an arrangement has a number of benefits, including fostering student interaction and expanding the number of

individuals on campus trained to support victim-survivors of sexual violence. This is particularly important in light of the changing campus climate resulting from increased national attention to Title IX issues on campus (Strout, Amar, & Astwood, 2014).

Staff Size

Previous research has found that most campus-based women's centers employ at least one full-time professional staff member, typically a director or coordinator, with the rest of the staff often comprised of part-time employees, volunteers, or students (Clevenger, 1988; Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012). Six of the eight participants (75%) identified the challenges of having a small staff, while one participant (12.5%) was able to increase the size of her staff from one to three full-time professionals through the success of two different proposals. Eliza shared, "It required lots of proposals, conversations, and data showing the growth of our programs and services but I have [increased staff] two different times." The remaining participant, who had been in her position for less than a year, did not discuss staffing issues.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the human resource frame highlights the skills, relationships, and needs of the people who comprise an institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Inadequate staffing, in this frame, neglects the needs of women's center directors, creating unnecessary stress and exacerbating work/life imbalances (Clark, 2000, 2002; Keener 1990; Palmer, Murphy, Parrott, & Steinke, 2001). More specifically, women's center directors with inadequate staffing are denied the benefits that derive from developing relationships with fellow staff members, including the ability to be supported by a colleague in the same office regarding personal and professional goals, challenges,

and accomplishments. A women's center director may also feel alone with no one else in the office to strategize or goal-plan with regularly.

Such isolation was evident in the interviews with Sonia and Tonia, who lacked access to colleagues with whom to have such conversations. Further, the productivity and creativity of the director may be impacted due to an overwhelming feeling of having to *do it all*. This was evident in Tonia question: "If I break my leg, who is still making sure the women's center is open?" Likewise, Fiona remarked, "I am a solo department; I sort of crave community." Understaffing also risks encouraging or perpetuating a workaholic style among these leaders (Wiggers, Forney, & Wallace-Shutzman, 1982), which will be discussed below in connection with the theme of self-care practices.

From the perspective of the structural frame, inadequate staff size hinders the ability of women's center directors to achieve their units' goals. The structural view seeks organizational designs that promote maximum efficiency in organizing work and delegating it to staff (Bolman & Deal, 2013). However, as the participants' stories vividly convey, the staff shortages that plague many women's centers undermine such efficiency in an office tasked with numerous responsibilities.

For example, multiple participants spoke of wanting to do more, but being limited in their capacity due to their small (or non-existent) staff. Sonia shared, "Even if I had a little extra time, I'm sure that I could mentor more students or take on more interns or do other things that would both benefit the Women's Center and also the student experience, as well." This lack of personnel clearly impedes these professionals' ability to meet the goals of the unit, the division, and the larger organization.

Nevertheless, it was evident from the participants' stories that despite this lack of personnel, they were resourceful in their efforts to fulfill both the specific mission of the women's center and the broader missions of the division and the institution (Goettsch et al., 2015). Tina shared, "We've gotten a lot of volunteers that we have had in the past, student volunteers who helped with our program." Many of these professionals relied on assistance from members of the campus community—women's studies faculty, an advisory board, supportive colleagues in other offices or departments, and other volunteers—to manage this ongoing challenge.

Sonia and Tina shared extensive stories of collaborating with campus partners. Sonia stated, "One of the nice things about our campus is that even though everybody is very busy . . . I feel like people are pretty free to try to offer support and collaboration, which is very exciting." She continued, "I'm pretty fortunate that when I ask people to co-sponsor things, they will do it so we are able to do things bigger than anticipated." Tina also found that "there is always great potential for collaborations." Similarly, Fiona noted gratefully, "I have an advisory board and they are wonderful."

Reliance on collaboration with allies from the campus and local community relates to both the human resource and structural frameworks. While distinct, these two frameworks influence and intersect with one another through the staff size theme. Moving forward, the human resource and structural frameworks provide means for assessing whether the mission and vision of each women's center should be adapted based on its staff size. If the staff size is unlikely to grow, directors may need to consider decreasing the breadth of their mission to correspond more closely to the number of personnel available to carry it out. Additionally, understaffing also contributed to the

challenges these directors faced in engaging in self-care, as it often impeded their ability to take part in activities promoting their physical and emotional well-being (Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002).

Self-care

Self-care practices emerged as a recurrent theme in the stories of the women's center directors, as participants reported both successful and unsuccessful efforts. The theme of self-care is influenced by issues related to staff size and has implications for sustaining one's career as a women's center professional.

Participants offered varied responses to an interview question related to strategies for self-care. Five participants shared challenges with practicing self-care, whereas only three expressed confidence in their ability to balance their personal lives with their professional responsibilities. Sophia, Tonia, Tina, Sonia, and Fiona all acknowledged their inability to practice self-care, whereas Nina, Eliza, and Olivia were able to articulate ways they balance work with other aspects of their lives. In response to the question about her approach to self-care, Tonia responded, "I'm not good at it." Likewise, Sonia shared, "I'll be honest, I'm not very good at self-care at all."

Participants who did not report successful self-care strategies attributed their inability to balance work and life responsibilities to understaffing and/or the challenges of running a one-person office. With an office of only one or two staff members, they found it difficult to carry out the mission and goals of the women's center without working long hours. Participants articulated a sense that there was always more they could be doing for students and the campus, and they were troubled that they lacked the capacity to do more.

This reported struggle to establish and maintain self-care strategies has significant implications for women's center professionals, who may experience burnout and/or leave the profession prematurely as a result. This risks harming the directors themselves, both personally and professionally, as well as hampering the work of the women's centers they leave, which may be subject to high levels of turnover and a resulting loss of valuable experience and institutional memory (Kasper, 2004).

Some participants, however, reported greater success in establishing a work/life balance and engaging in intentional self-care practices. Nina reported, "I made a really conscious decision to stop working on weekends." Likewise, Olivia shared, "I never had children and so I do not have that sort of that as challenge with sorting out work/life integration." Nina, Olivia, and Eliza all conveyed their ability to practice self-care through decisions and activities that promote their physical and emotional well-being (Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002). Notably, both participants have another staff member in their women's center and have worked in a campus-based women's center for more than 10 years, suggesting a possible correlation between self-care and longevity as a women's center professional, as well as between staff support and the ability to engage in self-care.

The eight participants shared a variety of perspectives and stories related to self-care practices. These stories highlight the need for additional research into the self-care practices of women's center professionals and further investigation into the reasons self-care practices often are difficult to establish and sustain. Eliciting the narratives of women's center professionals and better understanding the impact of staff size on self-

care practices are essential to supporting the work of these professionals and safeguarding the future of campus women's centers.

Implications

The participants in this study represent a variety of identities, institutional types, ages, and years of experience. A number of implications follow from the study's findings. Women's center professionals unquestionably play a significant role in program development on college campuses (Davie, 2002). However, the understaffing of such centers presents an ongoing challenge in accomplishing unit goals and providing the resources and services essential to supporting all students. Future research investigating the specific staffing configurations of women's centers and their impact on the centers' ability to carry out their responsibilities would support the call to increase resource allocations to these vital campus units while illuminating their unmet staffing needs.

While Heldman and Brown (2014) reported that the roles of many women's center professionals focus on leading sexual violence initiatives, in this sample only three of the eight participants had job descriptions in which sexual violence prevention was a primary focus. Thus it is important to recognize the diverse and varied responsibilities of women's center directors and the multiple groups of students whose needs they may serve, including feminist and LGBTQ students. Fulfilling the structural mission of the women's center requires accounting for students' multiple and intersecting identities and the ways in which students with differing identities may experience college differently, and thus require various means of support (CAS, 2015).

Women's center directors need a professional home in which they are able to connect with one another and discuss the challenges, successes, and salient moments that

characterize their work (CAS, 2015). For some of the participants in a one-person office, this study provided their first opportunity to engage in conversations of this kind. This finding highlights the vital importance of establishing an infrastructure at the regional and national levels, through professional organizations, to counter the isolation often experienced by women's center directors and to provide the acknowledgment, validation, and support for their work that is often lacking on individual campuses (Flaherty, 2015). Further, it is essential to create mechanisms that support new women's center professionals and those in one-person offices by providing opportunities to connect with others outside the walls of the campus-based women's center. As women's center professionals, we must do everything possible to insure the continuity of campus-based women's centers and to safeguard the health and well-being of the professionals who lead them.

Currently, the representation of women's center professionals at the national level is in disarray, following the recent resignation of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Women's Center Committee co-chairs. The co-chairs resigned due to what they perceived as the marginalization of women's center professionals within the organization and the removal of women's center representation from the governing board. Historically, the women's studies faculty who comprise the majority of NWSA members have often minimized or dismissed the work of women's center professionals (Flaherty, 2015). This marginalization within a national organization that should offer a primary source of support reinforces the isolation and lack of validation experienced by many women's center professionals.

In addition to requiring greater support from their professional organizations and from colleagues, faculty, administrators, and students on campus, women's center professionals must do a better job of caring for themselves (Harrison & Westwood, 2009; Misra, 2007). While some participants were able to list a multitude of self-care practices in which they engage, others acknowledged the difficulty of caring for themselves when so much of their time and attention is given to caring for others (Harrison & Westwood, 2009). Yet self-care practices are crucial for women's center professionals, whose work will continue to involve powerful student interactions and advocacy around often painful and emotional issues (Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Wasco, Campbell, & Clark, 2002). Unlike professional counselors who have extensive training in these areas, women's center professionals come to this work from various backgrounds and disciplines and may have to learn many of the skills for managing such situations on the job. Further, the interactions between women's center professionals and students in crisis can often extend beyond the confines of a counselor-patient relationship; for example, they may provide assistance with academic accommodations or be called on to provide regular, even daily interaction and support.

Suggestions for Further Study

This study focused on the work experiences of women's center professionals in a director's role in divisions of student affairs. While the study seeks to contribute in a meaningful way to understanding the work experiences of women's center professionals, it represents only a first step in fully understanding the experiences of this diverse group. Future research that incorporates the perspectives of women representing additional forms of diversity—for example, women of other races, ethnicities, and sexual

orientations—would contribute to a fuller picture of the experiences of women's center directors. The participant pool for this study was not as diverse as it could have been, and thus presented only a limited view of the multitude of experiences and narratives of the broader spectrum of women's center professionals.

Investigating the work experiences of women's center professionals across institutional divisions would also allow for a fuller representation of experiences. Researching women's center directors housed in academic affairs, offices of institutional diversity, and other campus units would illuminate additional perspectives on the challenges, successes, and salient experiences of these professionals. This research could offer comparisons to the present data analysis and findings regarding women's center professionals in divisions of student affairs.

Further, interviewing women's center directors who have left the profession, either as a result of retirement, resignation, career advancement, or family obligations, would offer alternative views of the work experiences of women's center professionals. Utilizing other qualitative and/or quantitative methods to elicit their experiences could also provide a broader understanding of those experiences. Additionally, future research should explore how women's center professionals can learn from those who lead other identity-based offices, such as those that serve LGBTQ students, multicultural students, or student veterans. Such information may enhance or change the function of the campus-based women's center, support a more comprehensive view of the work experiences of these professionals, and foster more collaborative and intersectional approaches to program offerings. In addition, identifying the ways women's center professionals can

benefit from partnerships with other identity-based offices may enable them to provide a more holistic experience for women students.

As a changing campus culture influences our approach to Title IX concerns and gender-based violence, it is vital to understand how these issues impact the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals and how the entities charged with addressing these issues intersect with women's centers. Additionally, we must develop a better understanding of self-care practices and work/life integration, particularly in relation to issues of Title IX and gender-based violence, to more fully understanding the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals.

As women's center professionals reach the director level, understanding how to support them by encouraging self-care practices will be essential to the success of the center. Additionally, we must develop a better understanding of self-care practices for new women's center professionals and those with a small staff. This may be facilitated by establishing mentorship programs or new professional networks for women's center professionals. Providing opportunities for community building and initiating conversations about strategy and goal planning could also be beneficial ways to support new women's center professionals. Finally, incorporating quantitative methods to investigate the work experiences of women's center professionals across the other 500 campuses that house women's centers in the U.S. will provide a more comprehensive view of the identities and professional experiences of women's center directors.

Conclusion

With over half a century of history, women's centers are no longer a new phenomenon on college campuses. Yet to date, little research has investigated the work

experiences of the campus-based professionals responsible for carrying out these centers' vital programs and services. This study takes the first step in addressing this omission by eliciting and analyzing the narratives of eight women's center directors working within a student affairs division. In the context of campus climate changes that have occurred in recent years—in relation to gender equity, racial inequality, and religious freedom, among other topics—understanding the role of these higher education professionals is more crucial than ever before. These campus changes make the work of women's centers, which have historically been associated with social justice advocacy and student activism, even more vital, urgent, and timely.

The findings of this study indicate that despite confronting a rapidly changing campus climate, problems of inadequate staffing, and resulting overwork and isolation, women's center directors continue to find their work not only challenging but also fulfilling. The participants cited the opportunity to support students in significant ways and to develop meaningful programming with demonstrated student impact as two of the primary rewards of their work. Not only did the women's center professionals interact with and support students on an individual level, but many were also able to create safe spaces and programming on campus for underrepresented and underserved populations, such as LGBTQ and feminist students.

This study sought to establish a foundation upon which future research can build and to encourage other researchers to turn their attention to this vital group, in the hope that they will gather qualitative and quantitative data from many more women's center professionals to create a grand narrative encompassing their work experience. Finally, and most urgently, this work issues a call to action to universities and professional

organizations to address the material and human resource needs—in terms of staffing, funding, and other resources, as well as professional support, validation, and acknowledgment—to insure the continuation of the critical work of women's centers and the vital contributions of women's center professionals.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate

Hello WRAC-L,

I am seeking participants for a research study I am conducting. This study will explore the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director role.

The guiding research question is as follows:

What are the work experiences of campus-based women's center professionals in a director role?

The criteria for participation are women's center professionals in a director role in a student affairs division. Participants will be asked to participate in three 60- to 90-minute, semi-structured interviews at their convenience.

If you or someone you know fit the criteria and would be a good participant for my study, please send me their name and email address. I will contact those professionals nominated directly.

This study has been approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board and is under the guidance of Dr. Cooper, Professor, University of Georgia.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Survey

Name:

Email:

Gender:

Race:

Sexual Orientation:

Age:

Relationship Status:

Additional Identities:

Institution Type:

Years working at a campus-based women's center:

Position/Title

Appendix B

Interview Questions

The following questions will be used in each interview:

1. Tell me about yourself: Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity, Religion, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Years in Student Affairs
2. What are your most salient identities?
3. Why did you consider being a participant in this study?
4. My women's center experience is like (fill in the blank)
5. Tell me about your experience as a women's center professional.
    a. *What have been successful moments?*
    b. *What has caused you challenges?*
    c. *Provide three words that describe your experience.*
6. Since becoming a women's center professional, what kept you doing the work?
    a. *Have there been department initiatives or policies that have contributed?*
7. Since becoming a women's center professional, have you ever considered leaving the profession?
    a. If so, why?
    b. *Have there been department initiatives or policies that have contributed?*
8. What is it like being a women's center professional on a college campus?
    a. What are your strategies for taking care of yourself?
    b. *(If needed) Tell me more about your response.*
9. How have other students, staff, and/or faculty been supportive during your time working in a campus-based women's center?

10. Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experiences as a campus-based women's center professional?

Appendix C

List of Codes

Advisory Board
Advocacy
Community
Continual Learning
Development
Diversity
Faculty
Identity
Leadership
Mental Health
Mentorship
Messaging
Networking
Oppression
Organizational
Passion
Programming
Recognition
Religion
Resources
Self-care
Students
Women's Centers
Women's studies