

Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis

ISSN: 2325-1204. Journal homepage: <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/jctp/>

Volume 2, Issue 2, 2014, Article 3, <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-19>

Teach With Me: The Promise of a Raced Politic for Social Justice in College Classrooms

Neivin M. Shalabi, *Delta University for Science and Technology*

Abstract

This article considers the importance of a “raced politic” and students of color when teaching in predominantly White college classrooms. It highlights the ways unchallenged White supremacy limits socially-just practice. The author also discusses the ways student of color voices can serve as a pedagogical tool. Finally, drawing on the work of Freire (1970), the article offers a conceptual framework for understanding and promoting student of color voices in the work of social justice.

Recommended Citation

Shalabi, N. M. (2014). Toward Inclusive Understanding and Practice of Diversity: Directions for Accommodating Muslim and other Religious Minoritized Students on University Campuses. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 2(2), 30-49. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-19>

Copyright and Open Access

© 2014 Neivin M. Shalabi



This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial \(CC BY-NC\) 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits any sharing and adaptation of the article, as long as the original author(s) and source are credited and the article is used for non-commercial purposes.

The *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* is published by the Iowa State University Digital Press (<https://press.lib.iastate.edu>) and the Iowa State University School of Education (<https://www.education.iastate.edu>)

Introduction

The concept of diversity is not easily understood, thus its definition varies greatly among individuals and organizations (Hartnell & Franklin, Robinson, & Bell, 2005). Despite the complexity and multifaceted nature of diversity (Carr, 1993; Thomas, 1992), the term is sometimes conflated with or reduced to race and ethnicity (Chesler, 2004; Iverson, 2012). Several scholars refuted such a narrow conceptualization of the term, stressing the various elements of diversity. For example, Chesler acknowledged that race is probably the greatest discriminatory dividing line in the U.S., yet emphasized that the challenge of diversity includes a broader range of socially constructed differences including gender, economic class, job status, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and religion. I concur with these scholars and argue that diversity work should embrace a wider range of social identities to become a part of larger efforts to advance social justice.

The ultimate goal of this article is to encourage institutions of higher education to embrace multiplicity of religions as a component of diversity such that the university becomes a welcoming space for students with diverse religious preferences. In an effort to achieve this goal, the article calls attention to religion as a less emphasized component of diversity, presents salient examples of discriminatory practices against Muslim students at a U.S. university, discusses the potential consequences of alienating minoritized¹ students on their civic engagement, and offers recommendations for enhancing the campus climate for students with diverse religious orientations. The essay is organized in five sections. The first briefly describes the personal narrative methodology employed in this work, highlighting its definition, approaches, and justifications. The second introduces a personal experience, showing how I was subject to unjust practices because of my religion, Islam. This section elaborates on the context of my experience and portrays how discriminatory practices against my religion—Islam—affected my feelings and put me in a dilemma. The third reports additional examples of discriminatory practices against Muslim students on a university campus, demonstrating the frequency of such practices. The fourth succinctly discusses how institutionalized marginalization of members of minoritized groups may affect their civic engagement as compared with their counterparts from the dominant group. The fifth section offers recommendations for facilitating greater inclusion of students with diverse religious preferences on university campuses.

¹ The term, “minoritized,” unlike “minority” calls attention to the institutional processes through which religious, racial, and cultural groups are rendered into a minority rather than presuming this status based on prior or inherent identity.

Narrative Research

Polkinghorne (2007) defined narrative research as the study of stories. Meier and Stremmel (2010) noted that narrative inquiry in qualitative research is the process of examining and understanding experience through storytelling or narrative writing, highlighting that it is an approach to thinking about and making sense of experience. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) conceptualized narrative inquiry as follows:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

These interpretations, among others, suggest that attending to people's lived experiences is what, in part, distinguishes narrative inquiry from other qualitative methodologies. Now the discussion turns to strategies to conducting narrative inquiry research.

According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), the majority of narrative inquiries begin with requesting the participants to tell their stories either in individual or group settings. In individual interviews, participants are requested to tell their stories in various ways, such as responding to questions, engaging in conversation or dialogue, and by telling stories triggered by various artifacts, including photographs and memory box items. In group settings, two or more participants meet with the inquirer to tell stories of their experience when they have gone through similar situations.

Chase (2005) proposed five approaches to analyzing the text composed from the told stories: psychosocial developmental, identity, sociological, narrative ethnographic, and auto-ethnographic. Discussing these approaches is beyond the purposes of this paper, but it is important to note that there are no clear borders distinguishing one approach from another. Rather, Chase's approaches are meant to convey the diversity of plausible strategies to analyzing texts composed from told stories. In this narrative inquiry, the autoethnographic approach was used to analyze my personal story and ethnographic approach was employed in analyzing the stories told by Muslim female students at a U.S. institution of higher education. Clandinin and Huber (2010) explained that the elements of autobiographical narrative inquiry are also present in narrative inquiries conducted with others, but are often less visible. With this in mind, the section that follows outlines the autobiographical approach.

Autoethnographic Narrative Inquiry

An autoethnographic narrative inquiry is a special type of narrative research (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Bruner (2004) noted that the stories we tell about our lives are our autobiographies, emphasizing that these stories are colored by the culture and language of the storyteller. Given the potential impact of one's cultural heritage on the story he/she tells, it becomes essential to reflect on my demographic background. I am a Muslim woman wearing a veil (head scarf). I was born and raised in Egypt, but pursued part of my graduate studies (master and doctorate degrees) at a U.S. institution of higher education. Although I grew up in a middle socio-economic family, I felt the misery of the poor. As I grow older, I became more aware of the economic discrepancies between the poor and the rich. I was deeply touched by the consequences of these discrepancies. I hated the cruel treatment of the aristocratic class to their children servants. I felt angry at the teachers who discriminated against students based on their economic backgrounds, interacting nicely with rich students while dealing harshly with students from distressed economic backgrounds. I questioned the oppressive system that provided unequal opportunities for people, favoring the privileged individuals over common people.

Arabic is my native language, but my specialized academic degrees in the English language along with my passion for it enabled me to develop advanced English language skills. I typically receive compliments on my English writing skills. Yet, my accent clearly indicates that I am not a native English language speaker. I did not use to pay much attention to the accent issue, believing that language is a means of communication. Thus, I should not worry about echoing an American native accent as long as I am able to communicate effectively. This belief was supported by several gracious colleagues and professors who said that I should not worry about my accent because native speakers themselves have different accents. However, other individuals did not like my accent, noting that I should try to echo an American accent. The negative reactions to my accent made me sometimes feel "embarrassed," but my frequent interactions with fellow individuals from non-English language speaking countries led me to notice how people's native languages affect their pronunciation of English. Based on this observation, I realized that my accent is part of my identity, and therefore I should not try to alter it because this would mean giving up a genuine part of who I am.

Although I was first attracted to the concept of social justice because of the economic injustices prevalent in Egypt, my commitment to enact social justice became deeper and more inclusive during my tenure as a graduate student in the U.S. Several factors deepened my understanding of, and commitment to, social justice. First, I was subject to alienation and

discriminatory practices on the basis of my religion, language, nation of origin, and race. Second, my life in the U.S. afforded me unique opportunities to interact with many people from diverse backgrounds. I heard many people telling stories about how they were subject to marginalization/oppression because of their race, gender, religion, socio-economic status, age, and nation of origin. Third, my graduate studies focused heavily on diversity in higher education. These factors, among others, deepened my understanding of social justice issues, and commitment to positively contribute to the well being of minoritized groups. During my graduate studies, I appreciated my university's effort to promote social justice, especially by establishing a Center for Multicultural Excellence. But, I noticed that this effort was not inclusive enough in that it did not seriously embrace other dimensions of diversity as compared with race.

In addition to the effect of the language and cultural background of the narrator, the audience to whom the stories are told influences narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). I am addressing the stories included in this paper to U.S. higher education professionals, namely those who aspire to transform their institutions such that they become free of discriminatory practices and celebrate their students irrespective of their demographic backgrounds. I understand that the concerted emphasis on race at U.S. universities can be attributed, in large part, to the unfortunate history of racial injustices against African Americans and other racial minoritized groups in the U.S. Yet, if diversity work is meant to become a part of larger endeavors to promote social justice, it should embrace a wider conceptualization and practice of diversity. Additionally, I am addressing this paper to U.S. higher education constituents for two main reasons. First, the incidents of the stories told in this article took place on a U.S. university campus. Second, "the United States is generally regarded as having the finest postsecondary education system in the world" (Astin & Astin, p. 2). Thus, if the recommendations offered in this article are embraced by U.S. universities, they may be followed as a good practice by other universities across the globe.

Freeman (2007) wrote about autobiographical narrative, noting "the interpretation and writing of the personal past ... is ... a product of the present and the interests, needs, and wishes that attend it. This present, however—along with the self whose present it is—is itself transformed in and through the process" (pp. 137-138). As a Muslim woman, I am interested in enlarging the definition of diversity to include diversity of religions so that individuals from religious minorities may be recognized and treated fairly at their hosting educational institutions. I am sharing stories about the lived experiences of Muslim students, hoping that their needs may be met on university campuses. I hope that this paper will encourage positive changes with respect to how higher education professionals perceive and interact with students from

religious minoritized groups. Like Freeman posited, I was transformed throughout my experience as a member of a religious minoritized group in the U.S. in that I became determined to help provide space for the voiceless and marginalized, and committed to correcting injustices against the disadvantaged.

Justifying Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Huber (2010) noted that narrative inquiry may be justified in three different ways: personal, practical, and social. Personal justification is employed by narrative inquirers who justify their work in the context of their own life experiences, conflicts, and tensions. Practical justification is concerned with the importance of considering the possibility of modifying or changing practices. Social justification is utilized in research addressing the “so what” and “who cares” questions. This narrative inquiry is grounded in the three types of justifications. Specifically, it describes a personal experience and critically reflects on an issue that is important to me as a Muslim student attending a U.S. university. This paper can also be justified practically because I call for modifying the typical thought and practice of diversity that focuses narrowly on race to endorse a wider range of diversity dimensions. Also, I propose recommendations for changing the current practices that discriminate against Muslim students. Finally, this paper has a social justification in that it calls attention to the consequences of alienating students from minoritized groups on their civic engagement. This narrative is addressed specifically to institutions of higher education wanting to cultivate a culture of inclusive excellence on their campuses that acknowledges and celebrates differences among its community members.

Personal Experience

Context

As a result of my academic interest in engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1990, 1996), I enrolled in an elective course on civic engagement during my graduate studies. To satisfy an assignment of this course, I had to observe a civic engagement event and write a reflection paper. Fretz and Longo (2008) asserted that in order for civic engagement in higher education to attain its lofty aims of helping to revitalize democracy, it is critical to involve students deeply in planning and implementing civic engagement initiatives. Similarly, my teaching experience led me to believe that students should be afforded opportunities to be active in their education and communities. Thus, I decided to observe a civic project that highlights student activism.

I observed a workshop entitled, “Community Organizing: From Isolation To Empowerment” presented by four female youth, two of them were undergraduate students at

my institution, the University of X². This workshop was conducted under the auspices of three units at the University—the Center for Multicultural Excellence, the Center for Community Engagement & Service-Learning, and the University’s Engaged Community Initiative—and an external faith-based organization. The workshop took place on campus in the Graduate School of Social Work.

The central theme of the workshop was the importance of building relationships among people. Four main issues were covered based on this key theme. First, the presenters discussed the concept of power defining it as the ability to initiate change by uniting people together around common goals and concerns. The second issue centered on the importance of having the capacity of building relationships among people; the presenters argued that strong relationships among people are necessary for navigating the bureaucracies of everyday life and for achieving a desired goal. The third issue addressed the difference between organizing people and individual efforts with regard to producing change; the presenters argued that collaborative efforts result in systemic and sustainable change whereas individual efforts usually lead to quick, but short-lived change. Finally, the presenters gave examples of how collaboration among people may help address community issues on campus. In particular, the presenters demonstrated how students could work together to address some of their issues, such as loans and financial aid.

Critical Incident

On the day before this event, I e-mailed the person in charge of the workshop and expressed an interest in attending. She e-mailed me back, noting that the workshop was open to everyone. When I arrived at the location of the workshop, one of the presenters greeted me and asked me to write down my contact information at the registration table. Then she handed me a folder containing the materials of the workshop. I took the folder and started reviewing its contents. It struck me to see that the materials included symbols for *only* two religions: Christianity and Judaism. Having seen these exclusive symbols, I felt that I was an outsider as opposed to being part of that group. Although the venue was well attended, I had overwhelming feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many questions came to my mind including the following: Is attending this workshop restricted to Christians and Jews? If yes, why did the person I e-mailed yesterday not clarify this point? Why did she mention that the workshop was open to everyone? Does my Muslim identity prevent me from being one of everyone?! If the workshop is open to the public, why does its materials include symbols for *only* two religions, Christianity and

² The names of all entities and individuals involved were removed for confidentiality purposes.

Judaism? Are these two religions the only religions recognized by my university? If it was a faith-based workshop, why was this information not included on the flyer publicizing the event? After wondering about these questions, I started to think about which decision I should make; should I leave the room? Should I remain seated? Should I ask for a clarification? Before making any decision, the workshop had started.

The presenters started with an ice-breaker and then proceeded with various activities. They interacted with everyone, including me, in a nice and friendly manner. Hence, I suppressed my disappointment and pushed myself to participate in the discussions. As noted earlier, the running theme of all the activities was the importance of building relationships among people in order to bring them together to work on a common goal. As an illustration of this key theme, the presenters provided a model for organizing people (see Appendix A). While introducing the model, the speaker kept emphasizing the importance of including *everyone*, and how it is critical to stress that we *all* relate to each other.

It was very difficult for me to follow what the presenter was stressing. As an international student studying in a context different from that of my native culture, I was already experiencing strangers' feelings, including lack of social and cultural capital. The workshop proceedings intensified my feelings of estrangement and vulnerability. On the intellectual level, there was a paradox between what the presenter was calling for verbally and the model she utilized to convey her ideas. That is, while she was promoting the concept of inclusiveness, the model that she used to illustrate her point was discriminatory as it included symbols—church, Christian Cross, and Jewish Star—for *only* two religions: Christianity and Judaism.

For a while, I felt intimidated to express my concern. I was hesitant to speak because of my international student status in the U.S. Because of this foreign affiliation, I thought that I should act as “polite” guests who do not rock the boat. With Islamophobia spreading in the U.S., I realized that I, as a Muslim woman wearing a veil, was in a more disadvantaged situation than that of fellow international students with other religious orientations. While experiencing a dilemma of whether or not I should voice my opinion and express my concern, I recalled Stephen John Quaye's (2005) questions:

Who will speak out for the public good of higher education if its members do not? Who will speak out for students, like me, if we do not speak out for ourselves? Who will create avenues for students to speak out if we in academe do not invite them to speak?
(p. 306)

Likewise, I asked myself, who will speak out for Muslim students, like me, if I do not speak out for us? Who will speak out for other students whose faiths are neither Christianity nor Judaism?

These thoughts encouraged me to express my viewpoint and get the voice of Muslim students heard on campus. Accordingly, I raised my hand and inquired if this workshop was a faith-based initiative, explaining that I do not mind such initiatives, but I was hoping for integrity and consistency between words and actions. On the one hand, if this workshop was devoted to Christian and Jewish communities, this information should have been publicized. On the other hand, if the workshop was intended for everyone as indicated by the flyer and in the speeches of the presenters, then the materials of the workshop should have reflected inclusiveness either by being free of any religious symbols, or by including symbols for all religions.

It seemed that my argument was so unexpected that neither the student presenters nor the student participants said anything for a while. To stimulate a discussion in the room, I looked at the student presenter whom I had contacted for permission to attend the workshop and asked, "Did you not mention that the workshop was open to everyone?" She answered, "Yes." At this point, two other presenters validated my concern and reassured me that the workshop welcomed people from all religions and that they would discuss these symbols with their affiliated organization. During the break, another student presenter had a private conversation with me. She explained that they change the symbols of the model depending on their targeted religious venues. So, for example, when they hold workshops in churches, they include only Christian symbols. When they go to temples, they include symbols for Judaism.

The fact that the University's Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) was one of the units that supported this workshop deepened my feelings of anguish and disappointment. That is, religion is included among other components of diversity that CME's mission recognizes (see Appendix B for CME: Mission & Goals & Values). That is why I wondered why this incident occurred? I did not know if CME officers were aware of such materials and approved them or they simply did not take the time to review the materials of a workshop they supported. If the first, that would contradict CME's mission statement. If the latter, then honoring diversity of religions on campus is not taken seriously, I thought. Ironically enough, the director of CME attended a portion of this workshop and heard my concern. Yet, she made no comments! I struggled with understanding her silence. I wondered if the director perceived my concern as so trivial that she should not bother addressing or her silence implied consent that it was legitimate to insert such exclusionary symbols in the materials of the workshop. CME being a sponsor of this workshop along with the director's indifference to my concerns left me with lingering questions including the following ones: Does CME really value diversity of religions? Is religion not as salient to the Center's mission as other elements of diversity? If so, is it morally correct to admit religious minoritized students, but deny their religious identity on campus? The incident

I went through urged me to think about the experiences of fellow Muslim students. Specifically, I was curious to know if such a discriminatory practice against Islam was common on campus or it was a notable exception.

Additional Narratives of Muslim Students' Lived Experiences

To investigate the extent to which discriminatory practices against Muslim students on campus are prevalent, I decided to collect³ personal narratives from fellow Muslim students. Six female graduate students, three doctoral and three master-level students participated in the study. I purposively focused this study on Muslim female students who wear the veil because their affiliation with Islam is more visible than that of their fellow Muslim men, and women who do not wear the veil, assuming that the experiences of these students are more likely to get affected by their religious identity than those of other Muslims whose religious identity is less visible. Persons who met the criteria of the study were contacted via e-mail and requested to participate in the study. Informed consent forms were e-mailed to the individuals who agreed to take part in the study. All the participants were international students from five different countries. They spoke English as a foreign language. Participants' average age was 30 years old.

According to Josselson (2007), researchers must adequately become familiar with the social and cultural world of their participants to be able to engage properly in interaction with them. Being an international Muslim female graduate student, I share several identities with the participants. This, in turn, facilitates my interaction with the participants. Despite the commonalities between me and the participants, I tried to bracket my own experiences from those of the participants to be open and sincere to the phenomenon under study (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). For example, I chose to interview individuals with whom I do not have close relationships. Additionally, while conducting interviews, I was careful not to show reactions—either verbally or in body language—to whatever stories they shared. Also, I avoided giving them explicit responses when they asked if I went through experiences similar to their own.

As an ethical practice of conducting narrative research, researchers must do everything they can to safeguard participants' privacy (Josselson, 2007). Following this ethical practice, I chose pseudonyms for participants although some of them noted that they did not mind including their real names. Additionally, I did not include the names of their countries of origin in an effort to protect their privacy. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants who are arranged according to the order of their appearance in the text.

³ I collected these personal narratives on a small scale to fulfill the requirements of a graduate-level course.

Table 1: Participants Overview

Pseudonyms	Academic Level Pursued
Yomna	Master
Rokaia	Doctorate
Amira	Master
Tasneem	Doctorate
Asmaa	Master
Gana	Doctorate

Many researchers investigating ethical issues in narrative and qualitative research suggest a full disclosure of the nature and purpose of research (Josselson, 2007). However, Holloway and Jefferson (2000), among other researchers, argued that the ethical requirement to disclose the general nature and purpose of the study must be balanced against the need not to unduly focus the participants' attention on the specific phenomenon that the researcher is studying. Consistent with this perspective, Josselson advised narrative researchers to tell the participants what they are generally studying without being too specific. Following this advice, I framed the study as being focused on exploring the lived experiences of Muslim students on campus rather than making explicit that I was looking for discriminatory practices against them, which might have induced the participants to focus solely on negative experiences. As such, participants were asked to respond to two questions: 1) what have you experienced in terms of being a Muslim student at a U.S. institution of higher education? And 2) what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of this phenomenon? One-on-one Interviews were conducted over two weeks. All interviews took place at two libraries on campus. Each individual interview took approximately 45 minutes. Hand-written notes were taken during the interviews and then all of the notes were typed. After that interview transcripts were shared with the participants to ensure their accuracy.

The data of the study was analyzed using Colaizzi's (1987) phenomenological method. In particular, I first read the written transcripts multiple times to get a general feeling for them. I then identified significant phrases and sentences regarding the phenomenon under study. I used these phrases to articulate meanings, which I clustered into themes that are common to all participants' transcripts. After that, I incorporated the results into a detailed description of the phenomenon. Finally, I validated the findings with the participants and I included their final comments in the findings section. A detailed discussion of the findings is beyond the purposes of this paper. For the sake of the discussion, the section that follows provides examples of negative/discriminatory practices against Muslim students based on their religious identity. Because student life typically encompasses experiences inside and outside the classroom, the

following section highlights how these practices may materialize both in academic and non academic situations.

Academic Experiences

All the participants indicated that they had positive interactions with their professors and classmates for the most part. Yet, they narrated stories of discriminatory practices as exceptions to their overall positive experience. For example, Yomna, a master-level student who majored in Science described how she was deeply hurt when she was forbidden to enter a lab in her program; she was surprised when she could not open the door with her key. Later, she realized that the lock of the lab door was changed. She felt offended and disappointed upon knowing that her fellow students were given the new keys. When she went to her faculty advisor complaining why she was singled out, he said that a faculty member in the program would be using that lab to study explosive materials for wars. He further explained that the decision to prevent her from entering the lab was made because she was from a Muslim country that is on top of the terrorism list.

Yomna said that she was even prevented to enter the lab to grab her belongings. As a result, she had to request her colleagues to get her the materials that she needed for conducting her research experiments. She explained that doing so wasted her time as she had to do her research at the convenience of her colleagues, noting that sometimes she had to wait for them much time until they finish their lab work. In addition to wasting time, Yomna did not feel comfortable to see suspicious looks in the eyes of her colleagues while bringing her the materials that she needed.

Rokaia, a doctoral-level student who majored in Humanities narrated a story that occurred while taking a class about stereotypes. During the class session, she said, “the media has a large influence on the way people perceive Islam.” Her professor commented, “Come on, give me a break. Don’t keep blaming the media.” I asked her about her reaction. Rokaia responded, “nothing,” indicating that she did not defend her view.

Amira, a master-level student who majored in Social Sciences explained how common stereotypes claiming that Muslim women are oppressed negatively affected the perceptions of one of her professors who asked her at the beginning of the course, “Do you know that you have to participate in my class?” Amira quickly assured the professor, “I love to participate,” noting that she had to react this way to break this stereotype.

Co-curricular Life

In addition to suffering from discriminatory practices in their academic life because of their religious identity as Muslims, these students provided examples of negative incidents that

they encountered outside of the classroom. For example, Tasneem, a doctoral student who majored in Humanities narrated that while passing by the main student center on campus, she encountered a person who was holding flyers on which anti-Islam statements were written. Tasneem was especially hurt by a hostile statement, which invited the passers-by to learn about the reasons why Muslims would want to kill non-Muslims. Although she reported this action to CME's director, this incident continued to happen on campus. The issue was resolved when she managed to voice her concern to the university senior administrators. After meeting with these executives, Tasneem no longer saw this person on campus.

Asmaa, a master-level student who majored in Social Sciences narrated that she once saw a picture with verses from the holy Qur'an⁴ posted on a wall inside a restroom in her college. She felt that placing the picture in a restroom was inappropriate as it implies disrespect to Islam. Thus, she shared her concern with an administrator who immediately took the portrait off of the wall.

Gana, a doctoral student who majored in Social Sciences noted that she was suffering from alienation because she thought that her religious identity was not represented on campus. As an example, she regretted that CME's website highlights only students from different racial backgrounds, indicating the Center's appreciation for racial diversity. The student thought that CME's website should feature Muslim woman in veil as a sign of acceptance of diversity of religions as well.

Unjust practices and discrimination against these students based on their Muslim identity is a running thread among their stories. From a moral standpoint, I encourage universities to rethink if it is legitimate to admit Muslim students into their campuses, but deny them optimum learning experiences. From a social justice perspective, I call upon institutions of higher education to take responsibility for the success of religious minoritized students seriously such that they enhance the institutional culture and campus climate for students from different religious orientations.

Consequences of Institutionalized Marginalization on Minoritized Groups' Civic Engagement

Many questions have been raised about the relevance and responsibility of higher education toward the contemporary society and its role in preparing students for good citizenship (McCarthy, 2004; Zlotowski & Williams, 2003). In this respect, Chickering and Stamm (2002) asserted that the major aim of higher education is to prepare students for social responsibility in a pluralistic democracy. Similarly, Gould (2004) contended, "the broadest

⁴ Qur'an is the sacred writings of Islam revealed by Almighty God to Prophet Muhammad.

context for the development of knowledge in higher education is its social mission to empower individuals to serve the public good” (p. 453). Additionally, educating students about their future roles in a democratic society is viewed by many scholars as a central goal of institutions of higher learning (Astin, 1996; Levine, 1994). Likewise, Hersh and Scheider (2005) argued that the development of students’ personal and social responsibility should be viewed as an essential outcome of liberal education.

Kiesa, Orlowski, Levine, Both, Kirby, Lopez, and Marcelo (2007) investigated college students’ civic engagement and concluded that students are willing to apply their talents and knowledge in their communities. Significantly, past research indicated that underrepresented and low-income students are less likely to participate in service-learning (Astin & Sax, 1998; Brandenberger, 2013). Beyond academia, a number of scholars contended that individuals’ civic participation is affected by their demographics and issues related to social justice. For example, Barber (1992) noted, “young Americans vote less than old, Americans of color less often than whites, and poor Americans less often than the well off” (p. 244). In a similar vein, Tierney, Campbell, and Sanchez (2004) observed:

American society is increasingly diverse. As the country becomes more diverse, however, inequities remain. Latinos and African Americans are disproportionately poorer than their White counterparts, for example, they are less likely to vote and to participate in the public sphere. A key challenge, then, is to ensure that everyone has the possibility to full participants in the United States of the twenty-first century. (p. 1)

While the above noted quotes suggest that racial minorities and individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds in the United States are less likely to participate in civic life as compared to their White counterparts and those who come from middle- and upper-middle socio-economic classes, I argue that such an attitude can be true among members of religious minorities as well. Members of discriminated against groups suffer from systemic marginalization which paralyzes their optimum participation in public life. The bias against my religion, Islam, as exemplified by the stories included in this paper, among others, enabled me to better understand why members of subordinate groups may not participate actively in public life. I came to realize that minoritized groups may hold such an attitude because their voices are either suppressed or do not count. They feel hurt because their values and what they hold dear are neither recognized nor appreciated by the dominant group. Members of marginalized groups may also be less inclined to engage in civic life because of their feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Like racial minoritized students and those with limited socio-economic backgrounds, religious minoritized students face hurdles to engagement on campus and beyond. The section

that follow offers suggestions for enhancing the campus climate for these students in an attempt to promote their civic agency, create an inclusive excellence environments on university campuses, and advance a broader sense of social justice.

Recommendations for Creating Inclusive Campus Environments for Religious Minoritized Students

Promoting the compositional diversity on campuses is an important step for achieving social justice, but it is not enough. Rather, colleges and universities should be committed to the success of students from various minoritized groups by establishing adequate support mechanisms for them. In this regard, Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) argued that educational institutions should establish a climate for students from subordinate groups in which they can succeed and interact effectively with other students. I concur with these scholars and argue that institutions wanting to promote *all* students' civic engagement should support *all* of them irrespective of their demographic backgrounds. This support should be weaved throughout all the units on campus as opposed to delegating this mission to a specific unit/office on campus. This kind of support is better sustained than fragmented efforts as it helps cultivate a culture of collective responsibility for enhancing the campus climate for its diverse members such that everyone feels included and valued. Specific recommendations for institutions and individuals are presented in the following two sections:

Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Education

- Maintaining institutional integrity such that the institution's rhetoric on valuing diversity is in harmony with its policies and initiatives. Eckman (1985) cautioned against the contradiction between verbal and nonverbal messages, noting that when people on campuses notice an inconsistency between verbal and nonverbal messages, nonverbal messages become more believable (As cited in Strange & Banning, 2000). Therefore, the institutional integrity with regard to promoting diversity is critical to help minoritized students feel valued and welcomed on campus.
- Encouraging authentic dialogues on campus about less emphasized components of diversity, including religious oppression. Obear (2012) advocated for these discussions, but cautioned that they face significant resistance because of the added dimension of terrorism, racism, and national sovereignty, specifically around Islamophobia. Such dialogues could educate the campus community about various religions and eliminate prejudice against Islam.
- Providing students from different religious orientations with safe spaces on campus to voice their opinions, express their concerns, and share their experiences. Offering such

spaces to Muslim students is especially important because most of them come from the Eastern culture where self-advocacy skills are not emphasized. This in turn confines Muslim students' capacity to voice their concerns in public. Allowing Muslim students safe venues on campus could send a powerful message that their religion is recognized by the university and allow them opportunities to correct misconceptions about Islam and change stereotypes about Muslims.

- Forming faith-based student groups thoughtfully so that they encourage students with a particular religious orientation to socialize with their counterparts from different faith traditions. Doing so would help cultivate an ethic of concern about others irrespective of their religious ideology, as well as discourage students from developing negative attitudes, including egoism and prejudice toward others with different religious preferences.
- Encouraging joint activities between the Chaplin Office, diversity, and civic engagement units on campus. Such collaborative initiatives could help create an inclusive campus culture grounded in the ideals of promoting social justice and the public good.
- Paying careful attention to the choice of community-based organizations with which universities partner. Establishing partnerships with faith-based community agencies should be well-planned such that it does not elevate one faith over others. Rather, the institution's partnerships with religious organizations should provide all students with exposure opportunities to different ideologies and schools of thought to help promote their critical thinking abilities.
- Inviting faculty from religious studies departments and/or representatives from the Chaplin's Office to sit on diversity committees. Doing so will help emphasize religion as an integral component of diversity.
- Reflecting the institution's appreciation for diverse religious orientations through intentional efforts to recruit students, faculty, and staff from various religious preferences.
- Designing the physical environment of the university such that it includes artifacts representing various faiths. In this regard, Strange and Banning (2000) noted that the campus physical environment sends significant nonverbal symbolic messages, explaining that "campus art is more than aesthetics. It too gives nonverbal social messages" (p. 8). Examples of the nonverbal symbols that may signify respect for the Islamic culture may include displaying pictures of women in veil and inserting Islamic symbols, such as the crescent, in publicizing religious events and gatherings.

- Conducting ongoing evaluation employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the institution's efforts to promote diversity on campus and utilizing evaluation outcomes to enhance current practices and plan future ones.

Recommendations for Individuals/Groups

The Institutional effort to enlarge the concept of diversity such that it includes religion and accommodates religious minoritized students on university campuses is an important step to ensure sustainable change. However, such an effort alone is by far not enough. Rather, the role of the individuals and groups—including religious minoritized community—is indispensable to cultivating a bottom-up culture and creating a critical mass on campus that supports religious minoritized groups and calls attention to their rights. Examples of helpful actions are outlined in the following section.

Religious minoritized students.

Religious minoritized students bear a significant share of the responsibility for pushing the university to recognize and honor a diversity of religions on campus. Specifically, they should bare themselves to others and be willing to educate the campus community about their religions. For example, they can publicize their meetings on campus and invite others to their gatherings, meetings, and religious festivals. Holding such outreach and fun activities would enhance the visibility of various religions on campus and familiarize the campus community with the values and rituals of multiple religions. This, in turn, could encourage and facilitate smoother interactions among students from different religious orientations. Also, they could volunteer with offices that administer activities on campus, such as the Center for Multicultural Excellence and the Chaplin's Office. In these volunteer roles, religious minoritized students may check the materials of events and activities to ensure that they are free from discriminatory symbols. They may also cultivate respect for multiplicity of religions on campus by ensuring that the university refers to worship places using various names, such as mosques and temples in addition to churches.

Members of the dominant culture.

Members of the dominant culture enjoy social and cultural capital in addition to legal rights and a wide range of other benefits that are not typically afforded to minoritized groups. That is why they are better positioned to defend minority rights. To help religious minoritized individuals embrace their religious identity and still attain fulfilling learning experiences on campus, members of the dominant culture may take several actions. For example, they could connect with religious minoritized students on a genuine level and show interest in learning about their religious traditions. A common thread of the stories participants told is their complaints that

members of the dominant group on campus are inclined to engage with them on surface-level relationships. Although the students appreciate that the dominant group may prefer this type of relationships for fear of offending them, they wished for genuine ties because this type of relationships would allow them to express themselves freely and reveal aspects of their core values.

Members of the mainstream culture could support religious minoritized students by sharing part of the responsibility for educating the campus community about diversity of religions and refuse injustices on the basis of religion. Advocates/allies do not necessarily have to invest significant time and effort. Rather, small acts and/or gestures could send powerful messages of support to religious minoritized students. For example, one of the participants, Rokaia, narrated that while walking on campus, she was surprised to hear a young Caucasian man calling her, "I am with you." She interpreted it positively as some Americans do not accept negative views of Muslims. When members of the dominant culture become advocates and/or allies, they help alleviate the pressure on religious minoritized individuals as the latter feel that their cause is being supported by fellow campus community members.

Additionally, members of the dominant culture are encouraged to avoid jumping to conclusions based on preconceived notions about religions. Rather, they should consciously challenge these conceptions simply by asking clarifying questions. As an illustrative example, I had often noticed questions in the eyes of members of the dominant group while seeing me doing *wudu*⁵ in preparation for my prayers, but I was never asked to explain what I was doing except once when a fellow international student asked me, "Are you okay?!" It seems that this student thought that I was sick. Similar to the experiences of fellow Muslim students, I wished that members of the mainstream culture had asked me to explain what I was doing and its rationale because this would have helped me avoid feelings of behaving "weird" and provided me with opportunities to familiarize others with the rituals of my religion, Islam.

It would be very helpful if faculty members model respect for diversity of religions. For example, they could accommodate students who need to miss a class in observance of a religious occasion. When professors acknowledge the presence and rights of students from different religious orientations, it is likely that other students in class will accept and respect fellow students from religious minoritized groups.

⁵ Wudu is the Islamic procedures for washing using water in preparation for formal prayers. Basically, Muslims wash their hands, mouths, noses, faces, arms to elbows, front part of the hair, ears, and feet.

It is important to note that the recommendations provided in this paper are not exhaustive in the sense that they offer examples of strategies by which universities and individuals/groups could cultivate a culture that recognizes multiplicity of religions and respect students with different religious orientations. In essence, these suggestions aim to pave the way and stimulate a discussion on how institutions of higher education may celebrate religious diversity on their campuses.

Conclusion

Obear (2012) highlighted the need for significantly more work to address less emphasized components of diversity including religious oppression. This essay addressed this need by offering salient examples of how institutions of higher education may privilege certain religions and discriminate against others. The first part outlined the narrative inquiry methodology employed in this paper. The second part provided an overview of the civic initiative I observed. Through several activities, four female youth stressed the importance of building relationships among people so as to organize them to produce a desired sustainable change in their communities. This part described a critical incident of religious oppression that took place during the workshop. Specifically, it explained how, as a Muslim woman, I felt isolated and excluded in coming to see that the model the presenters suggested to organize people included *only* Christian and Jewish symbols. Although I felt intimidated to share my concern at the beginning, I then was encouraged by a strong sense of moral responsibility for letting the voice of Muslim students be heard on the university campus.

The third part introduces additional stories of discriminatory practices against Muslim students on university campuses. Drawing on the literature, the fourth part showed how institutionalized oppression may have a potential negative effect on the civic engagement of underrepresented students and those with low socio-economic class. It discussed how the incident of religious oppression I went through along with the stories I heard from fellow Muslim students enhanced my understanding of the reasons why members of marginalized groups might be less likely to engage actively in civic life. Specifically, I came to realize that institutional oppression generates feelings of estrangement and isolation within oppressed groups. These emotions may lower their morale, making them less enthusiastic to participate fully in civic life. However, it is important to note that this explanation is based on studying the lived experiences of a few Muslims. Exploring the impact of institutional oppression on the civic engagement of various minoritized students in general and religious minoritized students in particular is a fertile area for future research. More studies with bigger sample size are needed to reveal rates of participation through quantitative research. It is also important to conduct qualitative studies to

develop a more complete picture about this issue; soliciting the voices of religious minoritized students is critical to understanding and addressing this issue effectively.

The last part introduced a conceptualization of institutional and individual efforts to integrate religious minoritized students and enhance the campus climate for them. This conceptualization stresses the importance of weaving a culture of respect for diversity of religions throughout all the units of the institution in order to attain long-term sustainable work aiming to broadening understanding and practice of diversity on university campuses. Examples of the recommendations included maintaining an institutional integrity to ensure consistency between the rhetoric and practice of diversity, providing safe spaces for students with different faiths to voice their concerns, and assessing the institution's initiatives to promote diversity on an ongoing basis.

It should be remembered that the article offers my critical analysis of my stories and the stories of fellow female graduate students on one university campus. Then these reflections could have been colored by my identity as a Muslim woman wearing the veil and as an international scholar. Also, this narrative inquiry might have been affected by the small sample size, the demographic characteristics of the participants, and the setting where the stories occurred. Although these factors should not underestimate the value and richness of the narrative presented in this work, conducting future studies at different types of institutions and including bigger samples with more diverse participants would provide a more complete picture about the lived experiences of religious minoritized students at U.S. institutions of higher education. Additionally, one should be mindful that depending on the students' levels of religiosity⁶, the impact of such incidents would be weaker or stronger. On the one hand, students who do not perceive their religious identity as salient would not necessarily suffer from feelings of isolation and marginalization upon passing through the same or similar experiences to those included in this paper. On the other hand, the impact of such incidents could be profound for students with a high level of religiosity.

The incidents presented in this essay are but a few example of religious oppression. Engaging in dialogues about religious oppression could be difficult for many students, especially Muslims because of Islamophobia, among other reasons pertaining to culture and nation of origin. However, I hope that my critical reflections would encourage students from different religious orientations to share their own experiences as well as offer additional suggestions for cultivating inclusive and welcoming environments for students from diverse religious backgrounds on campus. I also hope that my reflections on religious oppression would

⁶ Religiosity is defined in this paper as the degree of being religious, pious, devout.

stimulate dialogues about other overlooked dimensions of diversity. Encouraging such dialogues would help transform diversity work on university campuses such that it becomes a catalyst for cultivating truly inclusive excellence environments that acknowledge and celebrate differences among people.

Concluding Thoughts

Sharing one's personal experiences in public is not always an easy task. I had been wrestling with the dilemma of whether or not I should report this particular personal experience to the academic community. Having recently read Josselson's (2007) work in which she argued that the main task of social scientists is to enhance understanding of human experience in society because that knowledge will eventually lead to the betterment of human life, I felt encouraged to share this personal experience. Through sharing personal stories about the discriminatory practices against Muslim students on a university campus, I am hoping that such stories will promote understanding of the hurdles religious minoritized students face while pursuing their education. Additionally, I hope that our enhanced understanding of such experiences will affect policy changes that will ultimately better the quality of life and academic experiences for Muslim students and other religious minoritized students studying at U.S. institutions of higher education

It is critically important to stress that our lives as humans are inextricably linked, and thus we hold responsibility for the welfare and dignity of one another. Additionally, we should remember that if there were an excuse to discriminate against religious minoritized groups (such as justifying unjust practices against Muslims by claiming that they are terrorists), then it would not be too difficult to claim excuses to deny other minoritized groups their rights. That is why, we should perceive our effort to defend the rights of religious minoritized populations as a struggle for protecting our *own* freedom and right to access equal opportunities, irrespective of our demographic backgrounds. When we unleash the power of collective action by institutions and individuals, we can better cultivate an inclusive campus culture that recognizes and respects minoritized groups.

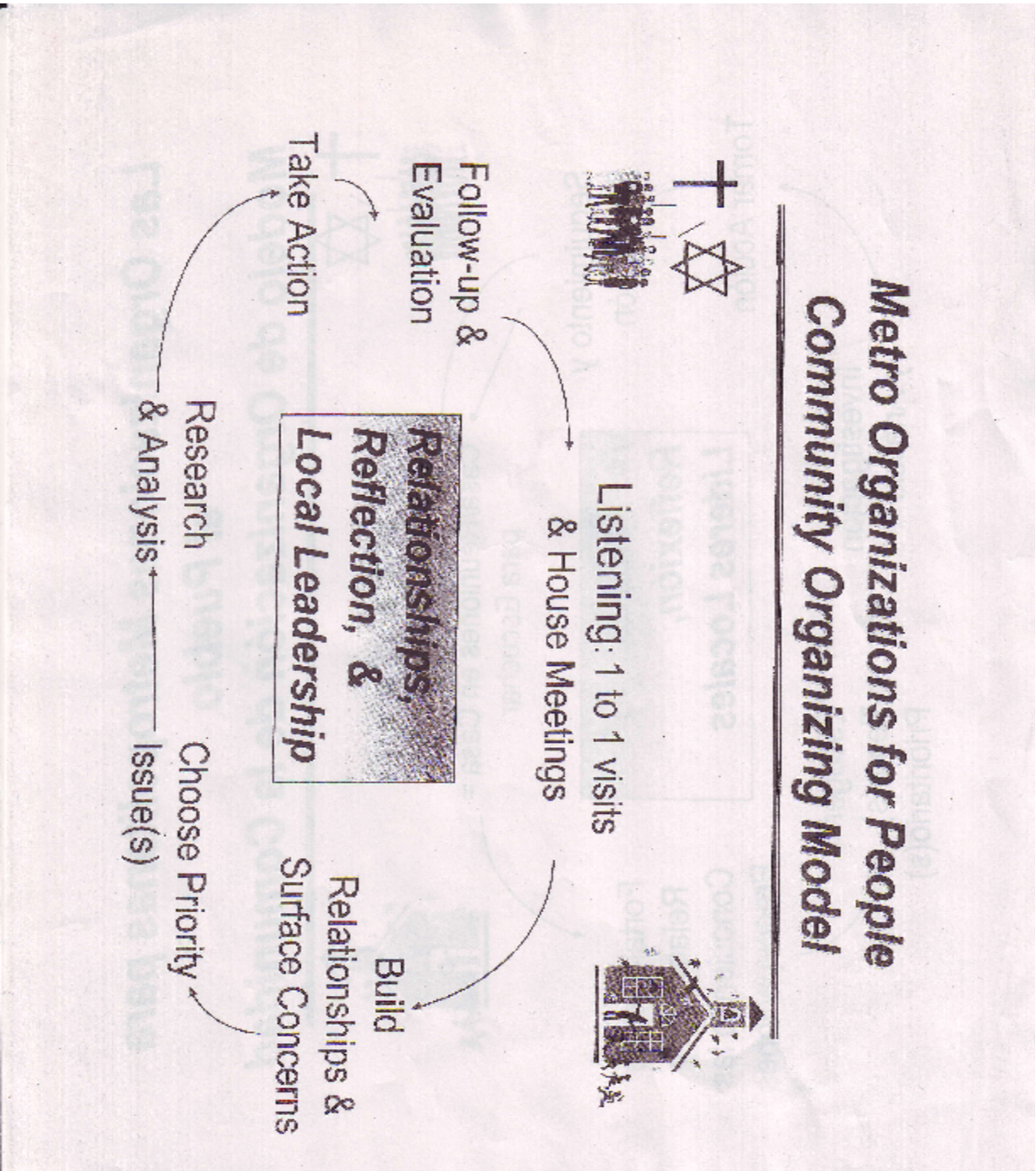
References

- Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. (2000). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher education in social change*. Battle Creek, MI: Kellogg Foundation.
- Astin, A. W., & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *The Journal of College Student Development*, 39(3)251-263.
- Barber, B. (1992). *An aristocracy for everyone: The politics of education and the future of America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Boyer, E. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1, 11-20.
- Brandenberger, W. J. (2013). Investigating personal development outcomes in service learning theory and research. In P. H. Clayton, R. G. Bringle, & J. A. Hatcher (Eds.), *Research on service learning: Conceptual frameworks and assessment* (pp.133-156). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 71(3), 691-710.
- Carr, C. (1993). Diversity and performance: A shotgun marriage. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 6,115-120.
- Chase, S. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. (3rd ed, pp. 651-679). Thousand Oaks, London, & New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Chesler, M. (2004). Planned confronting the myths and dealing with the realities of diversity and multiculturalism on campus. *Group Insights*, 12(3), 1-9.
- Chickering, A. W., & Stamm, L. (2002). Making our purpose clear. *About Campus*, 7(2), 30-32.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P. P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed.). New York: Elsevier.
- Colaizzi, P. E. (1987). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives in psychology*. (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative Inquiry a methodology for studying lived experiences. In Green J, Camilli, G., & Elmore, P (Eds.), *Handbook in contemporary methods in education research* (pp. 375-385). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Freeman, M. (2007). Autobiographical understanding and narrative inquiry. In D. J. Clandinin, (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 120-145). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Fretz, E., & Longo, N. (2008). Students co-creating an engaged academy. In H. Fitzgerald, D. L. Zimmerman, C. Burach & S. D. Seifer (Eds.), *Handbook of engaged scholarship: Contemporary landscapes, future directions* (pp. 313-330). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Gould, E. (2004). The university and purposeful ethics. *Higher Education in Europe*, XXIX (4), 451-460.
- Hartnell, C., Franklin, G., Robinson, R. & Bell, J. (January, 2005). *Diversity in small and large work environments: Why the semantic ambiguity?* Paper presented at the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship and the Small Business Institute. Indian Wells: California, USA.
- Hersh, R. H., & Schneider, C. G. (2005). Fostering personal and social responsibility on

- college and university campus. *Liberal Education*, 91(3), 6-11.
- Holloway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing qualitative research differently*. London Sage.
- Iverson, V. S. (2012). Multicultural competence for doing social justice: Expanding our awareness, knowledge, and skills. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 1(1), 62-87.
- Josselson, R. (2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kiesa, A., et al. (2007). *Millennials talk politics: A study of college student political engagement*. Center for Research and Information on Civic Learning and Engagement." http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=250.
- Levine, A. (1994). Service on campus. *Change*, 26(4), 4-5.
- Majaji, L. S. (2000). Arab-Americans and the meaning of race. In A. Singh & P. Schmidt (Eds.), *Postcolonial theory and the United States: Race, ethnicity, and literature* (pp. 320-337). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Meier, D. R., & Stremmel, A. J. (2010). Reflection through narrative: The power of narrative inquiry in early childhood teacher education. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 31(3), 249-257.
- McCarthy, F. E. (2004). Service-learning as community engagement among colleges and universities in Asia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(2), 1-11.
- Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005). *Making diversity work: A researched based perspective*. Washington, DC: Association American Colleges and Universities.
- Obear, K. (2012). Reflections on our practice as social justice educators: How far we have come, how far we need to go. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 1(1), 30-52.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4) 471-486.
- Quaye, S. J. (2005). Let us speak: Including students' voices in the public good of higher education. In A. Kezar, T. Chambers. & J. Burkhardt (Eds.), *Higher education for the public Good: Emerging voices from a national movement* (pp. 293-307). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Strange, C. & Banning, J. (2000). *Educating by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Streubert, H., J., & Carpenter, D. R. (1999). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative* (2nd ed.). New York: Lippincott.
- Thomas, R. (1992). Managing diversity: A conceptual framework. In S. E. Jackson's & Associates (Eds.) *Diversity in the workplace: Human resources initiatives* (pp. 306-317). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Tierney, W. G., Campbell, C. D., & Sanchez. (Eds.). (2004). *The road ahead: Improving diversity in graduate education*. Los Angeles: Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.
- Zlotowski, E., & Williams, D. (2003). The faculty role in civic engagement. *Peer Review*, 5(3), 9-11.

Appendix A

Community Organizing Model



Appendix B

The Center for Multicultural Excellence: Mission & Goals & Values

Mission Statement

To promote excellence through diversity and positive intergroup relations

Goals & Values

The Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) works with students, faculty, staff and alumni to ensure that the University of Denver (DU) remains an exceptional private institution that achieves excellence through diversity.

To accomplish this goal, the center values a positive campus climate for diversity. This can only be achieved if students, faculty, staff and alumni value and respect both the similarities and differences between and among the major salient social identities found at DU including race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, gender, nationality, religion and other social dimensions.