MAKING SENSE OF THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION AND OPPRESSION IN STUDENT AFFAIRS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

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This dissertation entitled
MAKING SENSE OF THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION
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IN THE SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

BY
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has been approved for
the School of Communication Studies
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This study examines the linkages between macro (historical and systemic) aspects of various oppressions (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) in two academic student affairs departments and details how they are dialogically perpetuated via tacit, micro communication practices during everyday, organizational life. In particular, this study unearths aspects of the expression and experience of internalized oppression that are misunderstood and inadequately addressed. Using an interpretive framework, organizational members’ stories were gathered through individual interviews and supplemented by meeting observations and documents. The methodologies of historical-cultural, case study, Sense-Making analysis and member checking are used to examine the data through a variety of lenses and levels of interaction. Auto ethnographic content is interwoven throughout providing a forthright discussion of the circumstances surrounding the creation, implementation and examination of the research idea.

From a macro perspective, the historical-cultural analysis reveals the centuries and layers of unresolved oppression in the region including the indigenous, Spanish, Anglo and various mixed-heritage communities. The case studies of individual institutions reveal how these unresolved injustices compound institutional classism, affecting the current-day operation of two academic organizations. The Sense-Making analysis reveals the linkages between the taken for granted, macro-communication practices of society and organizations and how they influence and are influenced by the micro-communication tactics of various organizational members. The investigation uncovers and examines the types of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational communication practices that help to undo internalized oppression and oppression and empower individuals, and which do not.

The researcher also argues for the acceptance of the respectful, natural expression of emotion in organizational settings as a precursor to constructing work settings that empower individuals. It is proposed that organizational members can assist each other as they reconstruct their lives using a variety of self-directed, “consciousness-raising” communication practices outlined in the final chapter, becoming
more personally and professionally effective in the process. These communication
"inventions" for organizations are democratically based and address various issues in
organizational life such as conflict resolution, problem solving, performance appraisal
and improvement, and program evaluation and planning. These practices help foster
supportive relationships with others, also serving to build and sustain a healthy sense of
community.

Approved: David Descutner
Professor of Communication Studies
Dedication

I dedicate this “really, really long story” to my son Kai, who has literally been there from the beginning, and to my husband Mike for his support: emotionally, financially and as a parenting partner.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the members of the organizations that allowed me to interview them individually and observe them during their staff meetings. Their frankness was appreciated and allowed for a more candid description of their work experiences. I would like to thank the Senior Student Affairs Officers for allowing me access to their departments, and to the individuals who served as member checkers for each case study.
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Chapter 1
Reflections

Roadmap and Overview

The process and written product of my dissertation have evolved somewhat unconventionally, so I thought a roadmap might help readers to navigate through this text. What I realize now that I am almost at the end of this process is that what I have created is as much about the content of my research as it is about my journey to understanding the role of the process of writing in the generation of knowledge, self-discovery, and education as the practice of freedom (hooks, 1994, Richardson, 1994).

The content of my research focuses on stories of oppression and internalized oppression in a particular organizational milieu: student affairs professionals in the higher education setting. This is where I have spent the majority of my professional career up until this point of my life. My view of this research is that it spans several traditional fields of inquiry in the communication discipline including: organizational, interpersonal, and inter-cultural studies of communication, along with the communication and democracy debate within media and cultural studies. This research should also be informative for the practitioners and academicians of higher education administration as well as for the student affairs profession.

My intent is for this dissertation to focus primarily upon the stories of the members of two student affairs organizations that I have studied in-depth through the use of a variety of ethnographic research tools. They include participant observation of meetings, individual interviews, supplemental document analysis, and an historical view of socio-cultural macro-practices of the region in question. My approach to understanding these phenomena is interpretive, cultural, qualitative, and critical in nature. I have analyzed my data through the use of case study analysis and an understanding of the relationship of communication and democracy that is informed by the work of Dervin and Clark (1993) and their “Sense-Making” meta-theory or approach.

Most organizational communication research has focused on macro level issues, and interpersonal scholars occasionally conduct their research in organizational settings from their micro level perspective. Sense-Making as both a theory of how communication happens and an approach to inquiry regarding communication practices attempts to span the traditional micro--macro divide. The communication and democracy perspective as conceptualized by Dervin and Clark (1993) allows for the
examination of both micro and macro-level issues of communication procedures and cultural influences in tandem rather than in isolation, bringing to the fore the micro-issues often ignored in the larger communication and democracy debate in media and cultural studies and most organizational communication research. My aim was to examine the micro-level issues related to the interpersonal communication practices expressed by individuals as a response to oppression and internalized oppression, the impact these interpersonal practices have in organizational settings, and the subsequent use of communication procedures to undo the effects of oppression and internalized oppression on individuals within groups and organizations.

It is my own personal examination qua ongoing consciousness-raising and liberation process, assisted by the focused study and writing required of a Ph.D. student, that has led me down this academically unconventional path towards understanding myself and others, especially our interactions in group and organizational settings. Because I so firmly believe that my personal process is an integral part of the written product you have before you, it behooves me to reveal my own recollections of the effects of oppression in my life and my struggles to undo them in relation to my thinking and theorizing about these same issues in our greater society. For this reason I have included autobiographical information about my childhood, my early professional career, my experience of becoming a mother in relation to my role as a student and scholar, and the results of my decision to commit to a process of consciousness-raising, liberation and empowerment and to understand its effects on my theorizing about these issues. Some call this approach to writing self-reflexive at the very least, or even auto-ethnographic (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I prefer Laurel Richardson’s (1994) conception of writing as a method of inquiry or as a process of understanding or generating knowledge. What writing and qualitative research have allowed me to do is make the connection between others and myself as we mutually explore the same phenomena (Daly, 1997).

What has been interesting for me to notice is that as I am writing I can see how my life has come full circle back to seeking understanding regarding some of the confusing questions of my youth: How do people and institutions hurt or oppress individuals, and how does this process unfold in interpersonal and organizational settings? And how is it that often these messages are communicated to people without even one word being said?
From my experience and from listening to many others, the experience of oppression and internalized oppression centers around not being heard and not speaking up on many different levels. I use the inclusive term oppression to include both individual acts of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping as well as other systematic or institutionalized ways that people are hurt based upon their membership in or identification with a particular group of people (Jackins, 1997). When we accept and act on the stereotypes and other untruths about our heritage or a group we identify with we are preventing ourselves from realizing our fullest potential, a major drawback of internalized oppression (Lipsky, 1987; Freire, 1993, Jackins, 1997). Concurrently, I believe that each of us experiences organizations on a very personal level, even though we have been socialized to think that we can and should divide our personal self from our professional or organizational lives. You will notice that these views of oppression, internalized oppression, and organizing permeate my writing. Finally, my hope is that you will find this piece of writing evocative enough that you will be compelled to continue reading through to the end (Richardson, 1994).

Some Personal Reflections

I have long been intrigued by behavior and communication patterns in organizations. It's interesting to me to consider how global issues such as history, institutionalized systems and organizational norms and values are interrelated and become intertwined with the experiences each individual brings to an organization. In the last few years I have realized that my attraction to these aspects of human life in organizations have their roots in my family history and my experiences of growing up as a working class, mixed-heritage female in the U.S.

My father, born and raised on the island of Kauai in Hawaii and of Okinawan heritage, was a Non-commissioned officer (NCO) with the Air Force. My mother is the oldest daughter of German heritage farmers from rural, northeastern Nebraska. I was born on an Air Force Base in Northern California, lived outside of Washington D.C. until I was ten years old, then moved to rural, southeastern Nebraska where I lived until going to college in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As a naturally inquisitive young person, I took few things for granted. I noticed a lot of things that didn't make sense to me in my family and in the world around me. Why can’t I tell my friends that my grandma is coming to visit me? Why is my brother going to
the doctor all of the time, what’s wrong? Why do some people call me names like chink or jap or slanty eyes?

An experience that profoundly influenced my life is that for most of my childhood my younger brother became increasingly disabled and handicapped by a disease that we did not even know the name of until many years after its mysterious onset. The disease he had is called Batten’s Disease. We watched my brother lose his sight, develop a seizure disorder, lose his ability to speak, and become increasingly mentally and physically devastated until he eventually died. I was 19 years old at the time and in college.

It was incredibly difficult for my family to live with this day in and day out. But what was hardest for me about this experience was that, as a family, we rarely discussed our feelings, fears, and anxieties about what was happening to my brother David, let alone his physical and mental deterioration that was right there in front of our very noses. My parents’ inability to talk candidly about difficult situations with my sister and me was deeply rooted in their own family experiences of dealing with feelings, fears, disappointments, and accentuated in my upbringing because of the situation surrounding by brother’s illness. Looking back, I realize that many of my early hurts with respect to sexism, racism, and classism had somehow become intertwined with the way in which my family dealt with my brother’s illness.

As a result, I had learned not to trust my thinking based upon what I was seeing and experiencing by having my observations discounted, ignored, and even ridiculed and by being kept in the dark about much of what was of real importance in my family. I became very good at deciphering or reading situations based upon nonverbal cues, or what was not being said, usually the only thing I had to go on. I see now that these early experiences honed my skills in interpretive understanding as a way of knowing and deciphering “culture” in a particular setting.

These early experiences are also at the basis of my having a difficult time today noticing when I’m being treated differently because I am female or that I look different, or even noticing I am a working-class woman in the middle-class world of academe. I actually used to notice these things much more often, but I learned to numb out or alternately worked very hard to prove that what others thought about me because I was “__________” wasn’t true. I often realized later what happened, but in the moment could become confused and passive. The overriding message in my family was that if
you don’t talk about or acknowledge the hurt, then it couldn’t exist. Consequently, I decided to work very hard to fit in with everyone and everything around me. This was a difficult task for someone who looks like me living in rural Nebraska! This was the way I had figured out how to deal with oppressive situations where I felt it was unsafe to be who I really was.

After years and years of practicing these responses, I could do them pretty automatically and subconsciously; I had internalized them. Over the past few years I have begun to look at how these coping behaviors or internalized responses have severely limited my sense of myself and the full enjoyment of my life, which has been a pretty painful process.

But something wonderful also happened: I was able to see for the first time that trying simply to ignore these memories was actually keeping me from acting consistently powerfully in my life today. This process of giving voice to my experiences and unearthing long suppressed feelings is freeing me from the past and has allowed me to reevaluate those experiences, to learn from them and to use that knowledge more intelligently. An additional benefit is that this process has helped me to clarify how oppression and internalized oppression work both on a personal level and in our society, which has increased my understanding of how we may communicate and reconstruct oppressive systems in organizational settings.
Chapter 2
Influences & Focused Literature Review

The Flowering of an Idea

One of the things that I have written and thought a lot about is how we all learn to communicate and interact with others through our early family experiences. I consider this ground zero for understanding communication in organizations. Early on I hypothesized that because our families are typically the first organized grouping of people that we are exposed to, our communication with others, for better or worse, will be patterned similarly in similar types of situations.

As I have begun to explore how my early family experiences were influenced by communication, I have been able to think more clearly and ask different questions about similar types of issues in organizational settings. One of the things I am struck by is how old, unresolved feelings or emotions can get in the way of our thinking clearly and rationally about present organizational situations. In organizations we tend to focus on the tasks of developing a better strategic plan or more policies and procedures, thereby skirting the real, human issues that are often at the base of many organizational difficulties, including lack of productivity. Many of us don’t always feel competent in dealing with the emotional issues that touch our personal lives, and I would suggest we feel even less sure about dealing with the emotional in an organizational arena.

Over the years our society has implicitly and sometimes explicitly required that organizational members check their emotions at the door, and not bring their personal selves or lives to work with them (Waldron, 1994). Because we have tacitly accepted that we need to suppress our emotions in organizational settings, talk that does occur with coworkers (usually behind closed doors or during down time or coffee breaks) about certain emotional experiences in the workplace or even in our personal lives can appear to be a hidden, almost obsessive feature of organizational life rather than an experience or process that could substantially make sense of the emotional texture of the organization (Fineman, 1993).

We need to acknowledge, embrace, and reweave the emotional into our work lives and work settings and deal with issues out in the open, proactively and wholly rather than behind closed doors, reactively and segmented. In essence, we have been expecting ourselves to be less than whole human beings while at work, a place where many of us spend a significant portion of our lives. As in our families and our personal
lives, suppressing the emotional in organizations does not make it go away; it simply festers and negatively influences the overall health of the organization and the people within it.

Over the years I have sought clarity and understanding of this seemingly tangled web we organizing humans have woven. What I recognize now is that understanding what helps things go well and what doesn’t in organizational settings requires dipping into the roots of the various forms of oppression in our society and coming to comprehend the process of how we create and communicate culture. When taking into account a fuller understanding of whom oppression affects and how it works in our society, we can notice that each and every one of us has been touched in some way by oppression and are communicating and relating to others based upon some habitual communication behaviors from these past experiences (Dervin, & Clark, 1993).

Other Influences

My current understanding of how oppression affects us in organizational settings has come as a result of a long, personal journey. Both my older sister and I were first generation college students. One way that college was an eye-opener for me was that I was exposed to people who seemed to be handling their lives differently from what I was used to in my family: they were very assertive and proactive, and talked somewhat about feelings and emotions. They listened pretty well.

Near the end of my undergraduate career I became attracted to formally studying communication within groups of people. As the president of a major campus organization, I experienced several ongoing leadership development programs that were communication-based, concerned with such matters as group processing, group dynamics and functional and dysfunctional roles in groups, how to run meetings, how to delegate tasks, and so on.

Towards the end of my undergraduate career I was hired in a student paraprofessional role in the campus activities department to advise student program committees, develop and present leadership training sessions, supervise major campus events, develop budgets, etc. I decided to pursue student affairs work as a career. This meant graduate school. I chose a slightly alternative route: a master’s in communication rather than a master’s in student personnel administration or counseling, coupled with a graduate assistantship in the campus activities area. My interest in organizational communication was piqued.
Organizational culture. When I began my master’s program in communication, I was first exposed to the idea of thinking about organizations as cultures to be interpreted. In other words, instead of an organization being defined by its espoused structure and written policies and procedures, it is interpreted or understood through its deeply embedded, less conscious and often tacit values, norms, behavior patterns, rituals, and traditions that are actually enacted and communicated by organizational members (Schein, 1992).

In my family this meant that what I was noticing because of the absence of talk about certain things was a truer description of our family culture than what one might glean from superficial contact with us. Over the years people have assumed that because I am bi-racial there was a lot of support, understanding, and acceptance about issues of diversity in my family. We were actually very confused about this, and the deeply embedded, unspoken concern of my mother was that my brother must be sick because he was a mixed blood child. Although I found all this out years later, looking back I now recognize how my father wore his hurt about this, and I can easily recall the influence of this underlying assumption in my parents’ relationship and my developing identity as a mixed-heritage person. It was the big white elephant that was standing in the middle of our living room that no one could or would talk about. The underlying assumptions or values inherent in this fear of my mother’s, and how it was communicated, was much more important to understanding the “culture” of our family than many of the things that we actually talked about.

In a work setting, understanding an organization culturally might be illustrated by the experience one might have when interviewing for a job. You might be impressed with the written and verbally espoused goals, mission, and values of the organization supporting care for the environment and humane working conditions for employees, but upon joining the organization you begin to experience some discrepancies between espoused philosophy and actual practice in the areas of quality of work life and the organization’s concern for the environment. Many organizations are still unaware of the deeply embedded values they are enacting through their patterns of communication and which constitute the organization’s norms. An organization might say it is committed to certain values but still be unaware of how it is not enacting its espoused commitment in its everyday practices.
Understanding organizations culturally resonated with my innate way of knowing about the world. It was empowering finally to have this way of knowing validated. Many things began to make more sense to me. I could begin to see how different people could have totally different interpretations of the same situation based upon their past experiences. I began to see more clearly that in my younger life and throughout school I was given the conventionally accepted modernistic point-of-view about the world and the people in it. Because I didn’t totally trust my own thinking anymore, I readily accepted this homogenized point-of-view as the *Truth*, or *reality*.

In my Ph.D. coursework, I later learned that theorists were taking various approaches to defining organizational culture. Some saw culture from a functionalist perspective in that it could be understood, defined, and then manipulated or changed to suit one’s needs, while others saw the cultural perspective as an alternative to the functionalist viewpoint in that a mainly neutral, interpretive understanding of culture could be described. Still others, who took a more critical-cultural approach, focused on political structures and power relationships in their description of culture through the use of an interpretive framework.

*The addictive organization.* After graduating from school in Wisconsin I worked in student activities at one university in Philadelphia and another in Washington D.C., quickly becoming disillusioned with these two organizations and colleges and universities in general. I worked with people who were drinking on the job and *sleeping around* while at work, activities that seemed to consume their workdays. In these two situations, the schools simply applied a Band-Aid solution to the problem or ignored the problem. For some reason, I thought that a higher education setting should or would respond to these situations in a more effective manner.

While working at the school in Washington D.C., I discovered an article in a professional newsletter entitled: *The Dysfunctional Workplace: Frankenstein on Campus or Meeting the Monsters We Create*, (Kyllo, 1990). This article was my introduction to the concepts of *codependency*, as codependency can be played out in an organizational settings, and *dysfunctional behavior*. Much of what was written in the article rang true for me and what I had observed in my current and previous workplaces. This was a completely different framework for me to try to understand what I was experiencing in organizations and what I had experienced in my family.
I began to search for other information about codependency and addiction in the organizational context. I continued to look for understanding from the academic literature. At that time most of what I found was in short articles in management and human resources magazines and journals describing this as an emerging problem. I found several books, articles, and research reports describing addictive behaviors, dysfunctional communication, and psychological illness in organizations (Fried, 1991; Hall, 1991; McMillan & Northern, 1995; Pfeiffer, 1991; Ray; 1993, Schaef & Faessel, 1988; Sheridan, 1993; Wilson, 1997). Most of these writings used family systems theory borrowed from counseling psychology as their framework for understanding the problem. The authors likened the dynamics of dysfunction in organizations or negative organizational outcomes to what happens in families when members aren’t able to interact openly and honestly because of the effects of the addictive process on the family as a whole.

In addition to the life experiences that individuals bring to organizations, some of these articles pointed out how most organizations are set up to be oppressive in that members do not feel free to communicate openly and honestly. The hierarchical, power relationships still accepted in today’s organizations are inherently dysfunctional. In an addictive organization the process of dysfunctionality often entails some combination of both dysfunctional individual behavior and an organizational culture or system that supports closed off communication and dishonesty.

Family Systems Theory sees a dysfunctional family as a closed system that is unaffected by influences from outside of the family because of its dysfunctional nature (Schaef & Faessel, 1988). I tend to disagree with this theoretical account. I see aspects of all of the systems and institutions in our current society as oppressive, continuously influencing and being influenced by each other. These authors also conceptualize addicts or codependents as sick people needing to get well, not bad people needing to become good. I agree that the vast majority of us who exhibit addictive or codependent behavior are good people through and through. Schaef and Faessel still define addiction as a disease, which I view as an arguable proposition also based in the assumptions of modernistic science; I find the diseased/sick--well/better dichotomy very limiting. I would argue that giving up codependent behaviors is a dynamic process that looks more like good people working to free themselves from the pile of hurts heaped on them throughout their lives.
What the *addictive organization* conceptualization of the problem did was validate my experiences and begin to open my eyes about how my own learned communication behaviors and reactions to situations can become a part of the dysfunctional mix in organizations. This in turn helped me to begin to decipher which of my communication practices were helpful to the organization and to me, and which were not. This body of work also helped me to see the link between the somewhat amorphous ways that culture is communicated, and yet still recognize the seemingly concrete way that culture can influence the ways people behave.

For many years after discovering the addictive organization literature, I thought I had found the *explanation* for what *ails* organizations. I even started to notice scholarly communication research, as opposed to popular, professional writing in the area (McMillan & Northern, 1995; Ray, 1993). I spent several years looking for more research in this vein, as I still am not totally satisfied with the conceptualization of the problem offered by this scholarly research.

*Interpretive inquiry.* At this same time in my Ph.D. coursework, I was being exposed again to the idea of understanding organizations as cultures and interpretive or constructivist approaches to understanding reality (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). What was relatively new for me was information on critical theory, cultural studies, and post structural or postmodern thinking. It seemed to me that these three general approaches offered a fuller understanding of the historical and political forces at play in society than the purely interpretive or even the functionalist perspective. What bothered me about the purely interpretive approach is its insistence on not making judgments or evaluations of so-called *reality*, even though, unlike the functionalist approach, it acknowledges that there are multiple interpretations of a single event or situation. To me, the assumed neutrality of the purely interpretive school was just as frustrating as the rigidity of the functionalist school.

What makes sense to me about critical theory is its acknowledgment and analysis of the oppressive nature of the politicized institutionalized systems in our society, and its focus on emancipation. Critical theorists strive to show the interplay of the political and the institutional, and acknowledge the mistreatment inherent in our capitalist, classist society. A limitation I see of some forms of critical theory is a lack of understanding of the effects of the everyday and interpersonal experiences of oppression and how these interplay with institutionalized systems.
Cultural, Feminist, and Ethnic Studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) have opened up whole areas of inquiry for previously disenfranchised groups in academe and allowed us to understand better the lives and perspectives of those outside of mainstream society. What I like about writing by cultural, feminist, and ethnic studies scholars is that it takes risks and comes from the heart, and often focuses on the everyday reality of marginalized people.

I also appreciate how poststructuralist and postmodern thinking and writing suggest that all previous paradigms of inquiry are to be questioned and not considered sacred. I feel that a postmodern sensibility best supports the kind of re-evaluation I must do in order to remember my inherent capacity for clear thinking. This process of writing my life is the way of knowing that works best for me; it supports my education as a liberating instead of a conditioning process, and it connects me to the insights I have gained from the mistakes I have made throughout my life (Richardson, 1994). The process of making a commitment to a Ph.D. program, continuing to search the academic literature on organizing, becoming a mother, exploring my past experiences, and struggling to find the connections among all these different pieces of my life has eventually evolved into a personally and professionally powerful experience for me: a remembering of who I really am and an appreciation of my innate power and intelligence as a human being in this world.

Re-evaluation counseling. For about the past ten years, the theory and practice of Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) has influenced my theorizing about organizing, oppression, and internalized oppression. I was initially exposed to RC while working in Washington D.C. in the late 1980s via a workshop I attended sponsored by the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), a dynamic organization founded by a woman who leads Jewish liberation work in the international RC community and whose work at NCBI is informed by RC theory (Brown, & Mazza, 1997).

This was a one-day “training-the-trainers” style workshop on facilitation techniques and exercises to reduce prejudice. I was immediately struck by how effectively the information, techniques, and exercises that were demonstrated got right to the heart of the issue of unearthing the hurts we have all experienced because of oppression. What was so refreshing about the NCBI approach (and I noticed, much more effective than what I had seen in cultural diversity training up to that point and since) was that we weren’t talked at about the facts of racism or made to feel guilty;
rather, we were asked to speak about our experiences, taught how to listen well and take turns listening to each other, and encouraged to express our feelings and attitudes that were attached to our early experiences, both as oppressors and targets of oppression. I began to incorporate what I had learned at NCBI into my own cultural diversity workshops with college-age students with amazing results. They responded well to sharing their experiences and listening to each other rather than being lectured at by an adult.

A couple of years later, I moved to Athens, Ohio to begin a position at Ohio University coordinating the student leadership development program in the student affairs division. Soon after arriving I met the organizer of a local grass-roots community leadership organization and we agreed to co-lead some community-wide workshops on leadership, community building, and healing the hurts of racism. We discovered that we had both attended NCBI training-the-trainer workshops, and I soon learned from my colleague that RC theory and practice was the foundation of what I had learned at NCBI. It was about this time that I had also began to explore more directly my experience of oppression as an Asian woman, and I eventually decided to take an RC fundamentals or introductory series of classes to learn more fully about RC history and theory and the process of sharing listening with other people.

The practice of RC is a process whereby people of all ages and backgrounds can learn to exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the effects of past, distressing, often oppressive experiences (Jackins, 1994). Because of the attention given to expressing feelings in RC sessions and classes, some people get the impression that RC is just another therapy. Many RC practitioners have argued that co-counseling is an approach to relating to another person that can facilitate the recovery of clearer thinking and feeling in oneself, despite the perception that RC is just another therapy, (Ni, 1992; Sherover-Marcuse, 1986). In fact, this aspect of the practice of RC is similar to Freire’s conscientizing (1993) and to a self-controlled consciousness-raising process advocated by Dervin and Clark (1993) as a necessary beginning step in the process of inventing a truly democratic means for communicating.

It is the attention to the importance of listening--building close, workable relationships with other people, learning how to effectively communicate important ideas to others, and recognizing the necessity of leadership in any situation --that is at the foundation of the practice of RC and that helped me to clarify the very important
connections between communicative micro-practices and the undoing of the effects of oppression and internalized oppression. My experience has also shown me the connections and intersections between the communicative micro-practices of my self-controlled liberation process and the communicative macro-practices of structure, culture, system or institution (Dervin & Clark, 1993). It is because of my continuing conscientizing experiences through RC that I am able to understand the common threads of my early family experiences, my interest in emotion in organizations, my interest in the addictive organization, and my attraction to critical, cultural, and postmodern theorizing.
Chapter 3  
Foci of this Study  
“Making-Sense” of My Life as a Mother and a Graduate Student --Writing this Process  

As a result of my own ongoing consciousness-raising process, I decided to act powerfully around completing my dissertation. The whole process has become a metaphor for my life. Deciding to ask consistently for what I needed in response to the way my life has changed has challenged me to illustrate to members of the academic community how and why it is more empowering for me to take charge of my own learning (hooks, 1994).

When I started my Ph.D. program in January 1992, I was intent upon gaining a broad background in organizational communication theory and selecting my dissertation topic with a thorough knowledge of the literature. When I began my program part-time, I was working full-time on campus and struggling to find time to study in a job where I often worked evenings and weekends, as well as all day long. I felt like I was walking a tightrope between two worlds, professional employee and graduate student. I straddled the fringes of these identities while continuing to be committed to my further education. I finished my coursework and quickly and successfully wrote and defended my comprehensive exams.

I had this grand plan in place: I was going to write my proposal, do my research, write my dissertation while I was pregnant, graduate, and then look for a job shortly after my baby was born. I did get pregnant according to plan, but that was where the plan fell apart. I had a difficult pregnancy and made little if any progress on my proposal. Luckily, towards the end of my pregnancy, a new world began to open up for me. Being a student at heart, I began to pore over more than 50 books, magazines, and articles about natural pregnancy, childbirth, child development, and parenting. I began to understand more clearly my growing discomfort with the more mainstream resources I had been reading. These mostly alternative resources deconstructed for me how parenting in our society has become likened to controlling children through the commodification of our relationship as parents with them. There was the larger society again sending me more misinformation, and this time it was about what was “normal” in my relationship with my child. Fortunately, this alternative parenting information made more sense to me and eventually led me toward the path of trusting my own intuition and thinking as a parent.
That whole process coupled with the way my everyday reality had changed since becoming Kai’s mother has clarified even more for me. Four months after Kai’s birth, I started anew on my dissertation. For several months I struggled to pick up where I had left off. I felt pulled to go back to the library and see what other people had written in the nine months I was preoccupied with my pregnancy and impending motherhood, mainly to catch up on what I had thought I had missed out on. When I read what I had written before it now seemed like just a bunch of big words on the pages, although I know that what I had initially written was academically sound and very smart.

I decided to start writing about the things I had figured out about myself while becoming a mother and how that made me see many things differently, in particular my dissertation. My interests have remained the same; what changed was that I had begun to recognize that I was not fully satisfied with the process of my learning up to that point. I have always recognized the importance of the means or the way in which things are done, versus simply the goals or the end product. I had come to realize that the only way my dissertation could continue to be a priority in my life as a mother was to change my relationship with it by writing my life into my work. This approach has become a matter of integrity for me, as well as a decision to only spend my limited time in endeavors that are supportive of my learning as a part of my liberation.

The dissertation process now includes writing about me, including my history and my struggles and how they have informed my interests and ideas about the real life issues in organizations that I want to look at more closely. I think one of the saddest things about graduate education is the number of times other graduate students (and some faculty) have advised me not to try to write anything that really mattered or was important, but to just prove I could do the work and get it over with. When faced with the choice of spending time with my son and spending time in a process that did not feel liberating, I opted to change the experience of writing my dissertation to include what I am learning about my life and myself. My main motivation for completing this work is the opportunity to get to study in a systematic, in-depth way something that really matters to me, and I believe other people too.

Then my husband was offered a job far away from Ohio in the southwestern United States. I was nearly finished with my proposal, so it seemed like a good time to move. I told him I could do my research anywhere, and there were a few colleges and universities in the area that might agree to let me come on campus and see what their
organizational lives were like. Consistent with my work history and academic interests, I had wanted to look at communication and organizational culture issues in student affairs departments. My committee had many different feelings about my initial proposal. Having included some autobiographical content, I believe I had challenged their thinking about what a dissertation proposal should look like. They told me to go ahead and begin my research; my study was sound as I had laid it out, but I was told to rewrite the first several pages where I talk about my past experiences and shared opinions about higher education and organizational life.

We left for our new lives the next day. When we got there, I had no idea how much of a change it would be for us. I was excited about moving to a place rich in culture and much more diverse than I had ever experienced before, yet I had not expected to be faced with this region’s many unresolved hurts that showed up each day in our community. The class and race oppression and internalized oppression are palpable and thick, and it seemed they were virtually unnoticed by natives to this region, Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo alike. Since living there it had become even more clear to me that I needed to stick to my new commitment and continue to write into my dissertation my personal experience of my new home while describing the experiences of those who had agreed to participate in this project. 

I did preliminary interviews in organizations where I explored organizational communication issues in some college and university settings. I noticed a couple of things. This region has a long, proud history of isolationism, and consequently there is less adherence to more universal professional values and norms of those who work in student affairs and higher education across the United States. This is somewhat interesting. What I found to be much more intriguing was how the cultural history and politics of the region play out in its higher education/student affairs organizations’ communication practices. Knowing this, I think the most salient issues have to do with how the communicative micro-practices of oppression and internalized oppression play out in these institutional contexts, rather than the professional culture of student affairs organizations in this region.

It appears that I have come full circle back to my younger days when I wanted to look at, talk about, and understand these issues, much to the chagrin of those around me. I am pretty certain that not everyone will embrace what I have to say and what I dare to share about the experiences of some individuals in some organizations in this
region. I think that this information will be very useful and ideally will raise the consciousness of some individuals. My intention is to disseminate this information as widely as possible so that theory and practice will meld in a way that will be helpful to the everyday experiences of people living in this region, both natives and newcomers.

"Making-Sense” of Oppression and Internalized Oppression in Organizational Settings--Collecting Stories

When people find out that I am working on my dissertation for a Ph.D. in human communication and that I am interested in studying how racism, sexism, classism, etc., and the internalized forms of these play out in organizational arenas, they are very often intrigued. I often must give examples of how people might express or communicate their internalized oppression through their actions, or lack of action. I tell them that one piece of this problem is when people in an oppressed group begin to believe the stereotypes about their group, thus judging themselves and others of the same heritage by these false standards (Freire, 1993; Ruth, 1988). For example, I had noticed and have had described to me a definite, class-like hierarchy within the Santa Fe Hispanic community, starting at the top with fourth and fifth generation New Mexican Spanish or Hispano families who identify as white, down through transplanted Californian Latinos, Tejanos, to the perceived bottom, which were the most recent Mexican or Latino immigrants. In fact, one of the most controversial issues for native New Mexican Hispanics was identifying as either white Spanish or a Chicana/o person of color.

One example I gave is the painful expression of internalized oppression within parts of the native New Mexican Hispanic/Spanish community where there exists prejudice towards Mexican immigrants, and I usually pointed to the violence that erupted at an area high school towards some Mexican youths by some native New Mexican Spanish-heritage youths. Most people then shook their heads vigorously and said, “I know exactly what you’re talking about, but I didn’t know that was what it was called.” On the one hand, I sensed some relief on their part that there was a name for this uncomfortable dynamic, coupled with a frustration and embarrassment about what to do about this problem that has become an almost accepted part of the cultural landscape. This phenomenon was especially ironic, as New Mexico has long been touted as a tricultural paradise, which essentially ignores the history of ethnic groups other than Indian, Spanish, and Anglo in the state.
Of course, these types of issues and related ones involving other cultural groups, class groupings, gender issues, and religious influences were also expressed throughout the area’s organizational communication dynamics. In order to do these dynamics justice, it was necessary that I choose a theoretical framework that could capture the interplay between the everyday communicative micro-practices of organizational members and the structural, institutional and cultural macro-practices of the organizations being studied.

I believe that Dervin’s (1983; 1991; 1993) Sense-Making approach or meta-theory has allowed me to do this most fruitfully as it is a coherent set of concepts and methods developed to study how people construct their worlds. The Sense-Making Methodology, so coined as to “distinguish it from the phenomena of sense-making and sense-unmaking that it was developed to study” (Dervin, 1991, p. 1), is a theory of communicating that has been in development and use by Dervin and colleagues for the past 25 years. The Sense-making approach was developed to have applicability across a wide variety of communicating situations, be they intra-personal, interpersonal, mass, cross-cultural, societal, or international. Sense-Making is, in part, an attempt to delineate those aspects of communicating that are core in any context, as well as to explore and ensure consistency in communication’s philosophic and epistemological roots. Sense-Making is also an attempt to meld meta-theoretical underpinnings about how we communicate with the methodology and methods for how we study our communicating.

Dervin and colleagues define the actions of making-sense of our world as behavior that is both internal or cognitive and external or procedural, both of which comprise communicating behavior (Dervin, 1983). Sense-making claims no allegiance to one or another currently accepted research philosophies; it attempts to stand between what it views as these illusionary and restraining polarities. This methodology is influenced by researchers of cognition who have focused on quantitative approaches of how people construct meaning; by critical theorists who have found the concepts and methods of communication developed in the logical positivist model both unuseful and troublesome in their contexts; by communication theorists and researchers who have taken a situational, constructivist approach to studying communication; and by the handful of theorists focusing on psychological therapy who have taken a situational,
constructivist approach to understanding why humans, as a constructing species, sometimes behave like a non-constructing species (Dervin, 1983, p. 4).

The work of Dervin and others in explicating a Sense-Making based meta-theoretic framework for understanding communication as cultural identity, cross-cultural communication issues, and the relationships between communication and democracy is very helpful for conceptualizing this problematic for my study (Dervin, 1991; Dervin & Clark, 1989, 1993). My aim was to explore the dynamics of how oppression and internalized oppression are communicated at the intrapersonal and interpersonal level, and how they interplay with the structural, cultural, and institutional systems in workplace settings.

Central to the communication for democracy meta-theoretic analytic is Dervin’s conception of communication-as-procedure, from which she posits that communication researchers need to verb communication (Dervin, 1993); that is, to theorize about and study communication as processes and dynamics (verbs) rather than as states and entities (nouns) (Dervin, 1991). From this perspective, the intra-personal and interpersonal micro-practices of how oppression and internalized oppression are communicated are examined at a procedural level, while communicative processes are presented as those which bind people together into community or culture. In Dervin’s writing “…culture is presented as the always-in-process-of-being bundle of rules, norms, rituals, structures, institutions, and myths which are created, maintained and transformed via acts of communicating” (Dervin & Clark, 1993 p. 5). In order to effectively study democratic communication processes, the linkages between these micro/macro procedures must be examined in detail.

The link between communication and democracy. Dervin acknowledged that some assumptions of Sense-Making Methodology are in part influenced by Freire’s (1993) work related to oppression, internalized oppression and conscientizing, and this influence comes to the foreground in the development of the previously described analytic for communication and democracy. Several researchers have reported the use of Sense-Making Methodology in whole or in part in their investigations into liberation issues in a variety of communities: the Roman Catholic culture (Coco, 1999), a community television station (Higgins, 1999), a women’s spirituality group (Clark, 1999), Bolivian tin miners radio (Huesca, 1999), and with adolescents interfacing with the healthcare community as a result of chronic illness (Cardillo, 1999).
A central concern of Dervin and Clark’s (1993) theorizing regarding communication and democracy is our need to invent some explicit, communication-based procedures for undoing rigidly or mindlessly applied communication micro-practices, which are typically based upon absolutist world views. In Dervin and Clark’s conceptualization of communicating, if an individual is hampered by these rigidities, then he or she will be less able to assess how to respond to each new situation or moment with an appropriate communication tactic. Thus, a practical goal for democratic communication is increasing communicating capability.

These inventions should assume that communicating is a dynamic, responsive, and flexible behavior, and that human beings “can change how they construct and deal with their worlds depending on the mandates of the situations in which they see themselves.” (Dervin & Clark, 1993, p. 129) The authors defined communication competence as the ability to flexibly respond communicatively to situations, and they assume that this flexibility and responsiveness is requisite for a truly democratic communication. Another important assumption of this analytic is the dialogic nature of communication, which allows us to describe the ways in which micro and macro practices relate to one another, rather than stand in opposition to each other. This assumption supports the idea of systems as not being stand alone entities, but as being made up of the individuals whose communicating behaviors energize the system or culture. In Dervin and Clark’s conception of culture, communication, and democracy, increasing the communicative competence or flexibility of individuals in a system or culture will concurrently alter the reified rituals, norms, values, and belief systems towards more liberating assumptions, philosophies and practices.

Both an increase in awareness of alternatives and a diversification of habits is necessary to undo communicative rigidities. To complicate things further, behavioral routines, especially communication-based ones, are often a site where oppressive or hurtful learning conditions are likely to show their damage (Dervin & Clark, 1993; Freire, 1993). These special cases also require a self-controlled, consciousness-raising process in order to undo these ideologically bound, rigidified behavioral patterns that are almost out-of-consciousness because of the oppressive conditions under which they were learned. This process will then allow one “...to free current communicating habits from their rigidity... so that appropriate communication tactics can be practiced and learned” (Dervin & Clark, 1993, p. 134). Herein lies the link between why sometimes human
beings, as a flexible, constructing species, behave like an inflexible, non-constructing species (Dervin, 1983).

Since Western society has labeled subjective what is viewed by Dervin and Clark as a fundamentally requisite tactic, undoing rigidified, behavioral patterns has been deemed suitable only for the psychiatric couch and out of the mainstream, especially out of the realm of current communication research. In fact, communication scholars could add a much needed perspective to this conscientizing procedure, which these authors view as fundamental to a truly democratic means of communicating. In Deetz’s chapter entitled Participatory Democracy and Communication (1997), he claimed that Freire’s conscientizing process had a meaningful role for intellectuals or scholars whereby “objects can be taught to be subjects who know and act,” and to “produce ways of seeing and thinking and contexts for action in which groups can express themselves and act” (p. 162). He called for a practical consciousness as suggested by Giddens (1979), which was at the core of the communication-as-procedure analytic developed by Dervin and Clark (1993), who apply a practical consciousness in their account of a communication-based consciousness-raising process.

**Emotion in organizations and communication competence.** One emerging area in communication research is emotion. Historically, emotion has been studied from a rhetorical and philosophical perspective (Hyde, 1984). More recently, aspects of emotion have been investigated within the realm of interpersonal and organizational communication (Waldron, 1994; Waldron & Krone, 1991). Planalp has recently attempted to eradicate these illusory boundaries in order to challenge communication scholars to investigate how communication really works in terms of producing healthy patterns of interaction and understanding how unhealthy patterns are produced and can be potentially changed into healthy ones (Planalp, 1993, 1999a, 1999b). These efforts span several traditional foci of communication research: intra-personal (cognition), interpersonal, group and organizational, intercultural, and communication for democracy, to name a few.

I would locate one problematic of emotion within the organizational setting within the context of unlearning rigid communication habits in order to increase communication competence and capability. When we have been hurt by oppression and have not had the opportunity to heal from those experiences, we will very likely continue to use the same, unhelpful, rigid communicative behavioral routines in situations that seem similar
to us, although the similarity between the situations and even our reaction might be subconscious. Oftentimes these rigid communicative behavioral routines will include the expression of a variety of emotions, both apparent and unapparent to the observer and even to the observed. As described previously, behavioral routines are almost out-of-consciousness.

As mentioned in an earlier section, because the general expression of emotion has historically been denied, ignored, or misunderstood in organizations (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989), we are often confused about what are natural emotional reactions to experiences that routinely or even unroutinely occur in the workplace. I assume that without this information or experience as a base, it is difficult for us to notice or respond appropriately when an individual or a system is enacting a rigidified communicative routine, along with its complementary array of emotions. Given that each one of us walks around with a few to a great many rigidified communicative routines, it would be helpful for an individual or an organization to respond in a way that recognizes and supports, rather than denies and hinders, an individual’s need to undo that rigidified behavior. Without this information or experience base, it is also difficult to enact communicatively systems or routines in organizations that are not oppressive or emotionally repressive towards individuals, but rather are flexible, inclusive procedures that embrace the dialogic nature of communicating as a way of making meaning, empowering individuals, building relationships and community, and ultimately transforming society.

Most of us are carrying around some residual, rigid communicative behavioral routines that we could undo given the right conditions. We need to identify which communication inventions, tactics, and procedures support the assumption that it is natural for human beings to express feelings while in the workplace, thus allowing us to undo these rigid communicative routines. In doing this, I believe we are on the right track in understanding how internalized oppression is communicated intrapersonally and interpersonally, and how these micro-practices are linked with the macro-practices of the systems, institutions and cultures in our society. Concurrently, we can begin to understand and invent truly democratic procedures as a way of organizing that are liberating for human beings and ultimately create the just organizations and communities for which we all yearn.
Chapter 4
Approaches and Methods for Collecting Stories

In this chapter I will describe the general approaches and specific methods I used to collect stories about organizational members’ experiences. I will begin with an overall view of the role of a researcher as storyteller and discuss the limitations of qualitative research and ways to increase its validity. I will then describe the specific methods or approaches of qualitative interviewing, observing meetings, and case study analysis. I will describe in my Sense-Making chapter the typology of democratic communication practices used for that piece of my data analysis. I will end this section with the general questions that guided my in-depth interviews and focused my meeting observations.

My Role as a Researcher

My conception of a researcher’s role is aptly described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in that I do believe that research is an interactive process shaped by the personal history, biography, gender, social class, and ethnicity of myself and the people in my research setting. In fact, this is a major focus of my personal reflections that are woven throughout this text and my interpretation of the stories of organizational members.

Further, Daly (1997) describes the influence of postmodern thinking on the enterprise of theorizing and ethnography. He posits that although we are beginning to acknowledge that people are in the field, collecting data and shaping analysis based upon their personal values, assumptions, and experiences, we have yet to acknowledge that people are also a central part of the theorizing that occurs in the academic world and the central role scientists as people have in retelling the story of their research.

In fact, Daly reconceptualizes theorizing as storytelling. He stated, “by acknowledging that theory stories are based on culturally understood experience stories is to have the subjectivity of both the theorist/researcher and the participant accounted for...transforming theory from a singular voice to a multivocal conversation” (1997, p. 9). Then the role of the researcher becomes the telling of second-order stories or theories that are based upon first-order stories or narratives of the lived experiences of the people being studied. In essence, a second order story is a scientific story embedded in the lived and observing experience of the social scientist and includes interpretive commentary on the lived stories of the people being studied. In this way, we have brought scientists as people back into the process of theorizing, connecting us to our
interpretations or second-order stories and the people whose lived experience we are commenting on.

I agree with Daly (1997) and support a moderate postmodern position that rejects anything goes relativism. As described in my case study observations, I do use a framework for understanding the linkages between the micro and macro practices of oppression and internalized oppression in our society. I would not agree that one woman’s experience of oppression is exactly like another woman’s experience of oppression or even another person’s experience of oppression as a person of color, but I do believe that there are some general elements about how oppression and internalized oppression operate and link all oppressions. It is from this place of what is common to all oppressions that we can begin to see what actions need to be taken to unravel the hold oppression has on all of us. This conceptualization of the problem is also supported by Dervin and Clark (1993) in their Sense-Making methodology and will be described further in chapter 8.

In terms of the roles that a case study researcher might adopt, Robert Stake described them at length and claimed that approaches to case study research can vary considerably (1995). One might choose to be the teacher, the advocate, the evaluator, the biographer, the interpreter, or some combination of all these roles. I attempted to emphasize the advocate and interpreter approaches. The advocacy approach acknowledges that interpretations of phenomena are shaped by the mood, experience, and intention of the researcher. The advocate indicates how findings might be extrapolated or how they might accommodate theoretical discourse (Stake, 1995, p. 93). The case study researcher as interpreter finds new connections and ways to make phenomena comprehensible to others; he or she struggles to liberate the reader from simplistic views and illusion.

In his now classic, yet humorous text, Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography, (1988) John Van Maanen invites both veterans and newcomers to the field of ethnography to examine the assumptions we bring to our work. He categorized three main genres to writing up fieldwork or representing a culture: realist, confessional, and impressionistic tales, approaches or voices. He described other emerging narrative conventions, of which the theoretically focused critical tale most closely corresponds with the aims of my work. Critical tales answer the criticisms long lodged against traditional
ethnography in that they attempt to understand the life situation of a particular group within the context of the politics, structures, and institutions of society.

Limitations of qualitative research. Although I am strongly behind using primarily qualitative research methods to illuminate human communication experience, I am also aware of its shortcomings and the challenges posed especially for the novice researcher. Unlike quantitative methods where the researcher is sometimes significantly assisted in the development of his or her analysis and conclusions by scientific tradition and statistical computer programs, as the qualitative researcher, I am the so-called research instrument that has designed my study, collected the data, synthesized and analyzed the data, and drawn conclusions. All of my lack of field experience, biases, time and money constraints, as well as my fresh ideas and personal knowledge gained through focused reflection, are reflected in the study.

Qualitative inquiry is subjective, tedious, time-consuming, costly, and carries substantial ethical risks (Stake, 1995). I have had to be patient while I was waiting for phenomena to become clear along the way, as well as my understanding of them. This might or might not have happened quickly enough given my particular time or money constraints. I have undoubtedly left a mark of greater or lesser intensity on the people and cultures I have studied (Van Maanen, 1988). More questions have been generated than answers found. Subjectivity is thus acknowledged and valued as an essential element of understanding. With that comes a higher potential for misunderstanding between researchers, readers, and coResearchers. Validation is possible through triangulation, but again tedious, with still no widely agreed-upon protocol.

It seems to me, then, that a qualitative researcher has very little to hide behind, for the excellence or mediocrity of his or her work is often glaringly apparent. I think we have truly to believe in ourselves as human beings and the potential of our intelligence to have confidence in qualitative approaches to inquiry.

Increasing the validity of qualitative data. It is important to note that there is no way to establish beyond contention the best view, interpretation, or analysis of qualitative data. In fact, one of the main goals is to represent the multiple perspectives taken toward social phenomena (Stake, 1995, p. 108). That being said, it is still possible for qualitative researchers to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding through the use of triangulation. What we are trying to do in a case study is to establish
meaning, mostly by presenting “...a substantial body of incontestable description...” about the important data and claims we are making in our research (p. 112).

In *The Research Act*, (1984) Norman Denzin described several protocols for triangulating qualitative data: data source, investigator, theory and methodological triangulation, as well as member checking. I used primarily data source, methodological and member checking triangulation protocols. Data source triangulation entailed checking to see if what I was observing and reporting in one instance could be found under different circumstances. Methodological triangulation is using more than one research methodology to collect or analyze data. I used participant observation, individual interviews, focused document analysis and socio-cultural historical analysis in my methodological triangulations. I used member checking to triangulate my data by asking 3-4 organizational members for each case to review my draft accounts of their organization for accuracy and acceptability. It is important to note that the final version of each case report was based on decisions I made as the researcher.

**Methods**

*Collecting stories.* To my knowledge, this study is the first time that Sense-Making Methodology will be used in looking at communication and democracy issues within an administrative workplace setting. I used an open-ended interview protocol for this study in order to gather broad-based data that can serve as baseline information for future studies. I used a variety of qualitative research tools to gather data for my case study analysis and then employed the Sense-Making categories to analyze data and conceptualize the communication issues in my study, as previously described. I will describe the Sense-Making analysis categories in more detail in chapter 8.

Using a variety of ethnographic research tools allowed me to uncover the breadth and depth of organizational voices and cultures. After securing permission of the senior student affairs officer, I interviewed members of the student affairs departments/divisions of two different colleges and universities in northern New Mexico in the southwestern United States. This was my primary means of data collection because the personal interview lends itself best to getting at how individuals experience and make sense of their experiences.

I supplemented the interview data and triangulated it with meeting observations and focused document analysis. I observed several departmental or division-wide meetings in both organizations in order to gain a fuller picture of the organizational
experiences described by members. I used artifact/document analysis to further corroborate data and to look for congruence between espoused and enacted values and norms in the organizations, as well as experiences of oppression and internalized and institutionalized oppression. I reviewed organizational documents and made note of whatever environmental factors appeared to contribute in a noticeable way to the key issues that emerged.

I collected data over a period of several months from two different student affairs divisions or departments, each to be described further in a later section of this chapter. Rather than conduct an in-depth ethnography of a single institution, I chose to do two case studies in order to compare and contrast issues that emerged based upon public vs. private support, small vs. large student population, residential vs. commuter student population, religious affiliation, and regional history.

I worked with a campus contact to find the appropriate types of people to interview and meetings to observe initially; and then, based upon my preliminary data and the recommendations of organizational members, I selected others, some of whom were perceived to have contradictory perspectives. I worked with as broad an array of people as possible, taking into consideration administrator, student, and faculty status; technical, support, entry-level, and managerial employees; and both organizational newcomers and veterans. I sought out a diversity of organizational members based upon race, sex, and native New Mexicans vs. those with non-native status. Because of the sensitive nature of my study, I interviewed people individually rather than in small groups. I have ensured that the interviewees will remain anonymous through the manner in which I have managed and reported my data.

Throughout the data collection process, I made it clear to my co-researchers that I consider our relationship a partnership that will be primarily guided by the direction and insights they provided about the issues that were most meaningful to them when it came to their work. McLaughlin (cited in Tierney, 1989) called this approach bringing the native view of reality to bear in the interpretation of what counts in this culture. For this reason, the format of most of my interviews was open-ended initially, becoming more focused as the natives of the culture showed me what was important to their reality. I saw my role as a ship’s navigator, trying to keep things going on the same general course but also willing to accommodate a change in plans or the unexpected. I attempted to blend into the woodwork as much as possible as I observed meetings and
everyday interactions in the field, calling attention to myself as an investigator only when I was conducting more formal, private interviews.

Formal interviewing was my primary means of data collection. I audiotaped 52 interviews and had 33 of them transcribed verbatim. My secondary means of data collection were my field notes from meeting observations, informal office interaction, and corridor talk (Schwartzman, 1993). This allowed me to cross check my ideas with what organizational members were telling me during interviews. I observed some standing meetings several times each in order to get a sense of the culture and significance of particular meetings and what these meetings meant to the organization as a whole.

Interviews and observations were supplemented by organizational documents such as mission statements and goals, meeting minutes, newsletters, office publications, and office correspondence, when available. I also kept a researcher’s log in order to record my thoughts and feelings about the fieldwork process in order to aid in my analysis, rather than viewing them as a hindrance to my objectivity (Kleinmann & Copp, 1993). I paid particular attention to noting and writing in the expression of emotion that I witnessed during meeting observations and interviews, thereby expanding the integrity of the collection of my data.

Observing meetings. The approach to participant observation that I selected was primarily meeting observation. In her monograph, *Ethnography in Organizations* (1993), Helen Schwartzman offered a compelling argument for looking directly at meetings in organizations, rather than simply using meetings as tools for studying leadership in groups or the effect of group size on group performance, or even how to fix meetings. Studying meetings anthropologically conceptualizes meetings as significant, embedded, social forms or communication events of an organization, a community, or a society. Meetings can be used to read or see an individual’s place in a particular social system. I found that observing meetings was a focused or concentrated way to get an excellent view of what communication was like outside of meetings, based upon what I observed and what organizational members reported in individual interviews.

Why case studies? As mentioned previously, a criticism of critical organizational research is its focus on macro-level political or structural issues (Schwartzman, 1993) at the expense of everyday, lived experience. Sometimes interpersonal scholars study micro-level or everyday, interpersonal issues within organizational contexts (Ray, 1993), but the links between these two realms are rarely explored. When examining issues of
power (i.e., oppression), it is important to understand both macro and micro issues as well as how they interplay with each other in order to gain some insights about how oppression is perpetuated in society. In this way we can look through a broader lens both to understand how social structures operate and then to examine the contextual or individual experiences in order to gain more comprehensive insights.

My aim in using the case study methodology is *instrumental* in nature in that I want to use these cases to understand something else (how oppression operates in organizational settings) beyond that particular case. This *collective*, carefully coordinated, multi-site approach allowed me to compare and contrast both of the two selected organizations or cases within their contexts, providing both a macro and a contextual perspective. The second phase of my analysis employed the previously described Sense-Making analytical categories to look at communication micro-practices across organizational contexts, which allowed for an examination of possible connections to societal issues.

Along the continuum of research traditions spanning positivism to interpretivism and everything in between, Stake (1995) located his approach as “qualitative inquiry...(with an) ...emphasis on interpretation” (p. 8). There is also a focus on particularization vs. generalization, with the interpreter or researcher in the field recording as objectively as possible what is happening while simultaneously examining its meaning, redirecting observations, and refining or substantiating those meanings. As a case study researcher I tried to preserve and retell the *multiple realities*, or the different and potentially contradictory views of what was happening as reported by organizational members.

*Selection of Cases or Organizations*

The aim of case study research is not to look for generalizations, and collective case studies similarly do not aim to be as representative of the entire population as possible. Most important instead are balance, variety, and opportunity to learn (Stake, 1995). For that and other practical reasons such as travel considerations and economic constraints, I requested and was granted entry into two different institutions of higher education: one in the city where I lived for three and a half years, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and one in the largest city in the state, Albuquerque, a one-hour drive south on the Interstate. In order to protect the anonymity of the institutions and its members, I
used pseudonyms, indicated initially in quotations (“ “) and later simply by their fabricated names and acronyms.

The first case study is of “Flagship University” (FU), a state-supported institution located in Albuquerque, a city with a current population of about 400,000 people. The other case is in Santa Fe, the small city where I lived with approximately 65,000 people. This second case is of the “College of Capital City” (CCC), with its main campus in Santa Fe and a branch campus in Albuquerque. CCC is the oldest institution of higher education in the state, founded in 1859 by the Christian Brothers Catholic Order as a high school for boys. In 1874 the school was chartered by the territory and expanded into a program of higher education. CCC expanded to include women in 1966 and now considers itself an independent, private institution in the Christian Brothers, Lasallian tradition. My research focused primarily on its main campus in Santa Fe.

**Entering the organizations.** As mentioned earlier, I was granted entry into the first two organizations that I selected. What should be noted here is that I had a peripheral relationship with one of the institutions. We moved to Santa Fe because my husband accepted a position with the College of Capital City directing their Residence Life program; we were required to live on-campus as a stipulation of his job responsibilities. What you will notice as a reader is that, because my personal life has continuously and sometimes constantly been in contact with one of the selected organizations, my knowledge and analysis of this organization was deeper and, ideally, more insightful.

I approached the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) of each institution and each agreed to meet with me to discuss my proposal. I had decided that this was the quickest and easiest way to gain entry. I tried to make it clear in writing and verbally once I met with other organizational members that the CSAO and their colleagues would in no way have access to the information they might share with me. At CCC, the CSAO agreed readily enough when I met with her; she had me come to the departmental staff meeting where I told the group what I was planning to do. There was little discussion and no questions. The Dean presented it to the group as a *fait accompli* and there appeared to be no visible concern from the group.

At FU, the CSAO invited me to their next staff meeting and told me “I don’t know how they’re going to react to your request, Gayle.” During my initial meeting with him, this CSAO had indicated that they had just been through some “rough times” as a
division. At the meeting, the Vice President presented my request and I then spoke briefly about my study from a one-page handout that was distributed at the beginning of the meeting. I was asked ‘why their school?’ My response was that I had moved to the state recently and needed to find sites fairly close to home to conduct my research. I was also asked, tongue-in-cheek, if I could guarantee that I wouldn’t recommend to the provost that student affairs be disbanded? I agreed that I would not do that. Seeing no objections, the VP briskly moved on to the next agenda item. I learned later during an individual interview that during my presentation, a different person at the other end of the conference table said under her breath to someone else, “we’d better watch what we say.” The implication was that I was assumed to be a spy for the CSAO, even though I had only met him once for 45 minutes the month before. Interestingly enough, most of the people I interviewed in this organization were fairly forthcoming, including those who were somewhat critical of the CSAO.

At Flagship University, the Student Affairs meetings included all department heads in the division, approximately 24 people who met once a month. I attended six staff meetings at this institution, each of which were approximately one to one and a half (1-1 1/2) hours long. The 14 student affairs staff at CCC met every other week for 1 hour, although one time the meeting was 1/2 hour and a few times it was between 1 and 1 1/2 hours long. At CCC I attended 11 staff meetings and a 2-day staff retreat.

Focused Questions

In formulating my research questions for this project, I thought it made sense initially to cast a somewhat general, wider net. It is not generally easy to get people to talk about difficult experiences and sometimes we have become so numb that we are not aware of having been hurt or oppressed even when we recall these past experiences. Based upon my preliminary experiences in these organizations, I asked about people’s everyday work experiences and interactions with others and asked them to talk about the working relationships in their organizations. Information regarding how oppression and internalized oppression play out naturally emerged during these descriptions. I worked hard to create trust and rapport with interviewees, using good listening as a key skill.

The following questions were used as a general framework for my interview protocol:
1. What are the day-to-day working relationships like in your organization, and how do these affect how you view your work life?

2. How would you describe the written and unwritten communication norms in the organization, and how do these practices help or hurt how work gets done?

3. Can you describe any personal, cultural, organizational, professional or institutional norms and values that guide your everyday activities and influence your view of your work?

4. How does your organization deal with conflict and change? Is change seen as an opportunity or an enemy? Is conflict avoided and downplayed or acknowledged and worked through?

I also used personal interviews as a time to cross-check my observations of the meetings with organizational members. Sometimes I asked their interpretation of something I had observed at a meeting, or even asked what they were thinking or doing themselves during a meeting to double check my observations. Many brought up particular interactions from staff meetings to illustrate their point about some aspect of the organization, validating the use of meetings as a focused entry point into understanding an organization in general (Schwartzman, 1993).

Before I commence with each case study I thought it was important for me as a researcher/storyteller and you as the reader/audience to be exposed to a description of this region’s rich, socio-cultural history. My next chapter is by no means exhaustive, but I believe it is at least very informative about the cultural legacy of this state.
Chapter 5  
Socio-cultural Context

Regional History

Sometimes in the U.S. we forget that our more recent land acquisitions have a vastly different period of settlement and socio-cultural history than the taken for granted standard of our eastern and Midwestern states. I certainly had not given this much in-depth thought before I moved to Santa Fe. Initially, the romanticized, ethereal nature of this history teased me, but since, I have at times felt assaulted by its legacy. The latter experience has compelled me to dig deeper. It reminded me of a discussion I had several years ago with a former colleague who is African-American and had grown up in Chicago. She had started a master’s program in Tennessee and told me shortly after arriving, “Gayle, they’re still fighting the Civil War down here.” Old wounds tend to run long and deep. Therefore, I am including this next section to provide a context for how race, gender, class and ethnicity have shaped the lives of my interviewees in the belief that “knowledge of the social context leads people to understand their own experiences and to gauge their own fates” (C. Wright Mills as cited in Richardson, 1990, p. 64). My hope is to give voice to silenced people, experiences, and history by weaving a tapestry of these collective stories in my case studies.

New Mexico is one such region because of the nature of the Pueblo village based lifestyle of the area’s indigenous people, the American Indians, and its long period as a colonial Spanish settlement and then Mexican province before becoming a U.S. Territory, and eventually a state. This diversity of people has brought a diversity of perspectives to the question of what has actually happened over these last 400-500 years. Consistent with the multiple voices I plan to bring out in each case study, I will also provide multiple perspectives from a variety of sources on the cultural history of this area.

Pueblo Indian, Pre-Colonial Life

It is estimated that prior to Spanish colonization, 53 pueblo communities or villages existed in the Rio Grande Valley (Peshkin, 1997). Many non-Indigenous people in this country are familiar with and may have come into contact with various plains or nomadic Indian tribes and nations of the Pacific Northwest, Midwest and Eastern United States, but the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest are very committed to place, or their ancestral Pueblo lands. In New Mexico the governmentally sanctioned
reservations surround each of the current 19 Pueblo villages and their sacred lands (Peshkin, 1997). The consequence is much less assimilation into the dominant culture as compared to more nomadic Native peoples and sustained, distinct native cultures separate from contemporary mainstream society. Besides the various Pueblos that dot the northwestern and west central parts of the state close to the Arizona border, there are sizable Navajo and Apache reservations in the northern and southern parts of the state.

This lack of assimilation into mainstream New Mexico culture is reflected in the number of potential American Indian organizational members I found to interview in the college and university where I conducted my research. Of the 52 total interviews I conducted at two different institutions, only two individuals identified as primarily Indian, or Pueblo, or Native American. Both were women who also identified themselves as native New Mexicans, or born and raised in New Mexico. Since the preferred term in this part of the country is American Indian, or more specifically Pueblo or Apache or Navajo or Santo Domingo versus Native American, I will use these terms when describing individuals or aspects of those cultures. In New Mexico, one of the main signifiers in identifying people who live here is whether or not they are New Mexico natives or non-natives, which typically refers to anyone of any ethnicity who was born and raised in the state or not. The further significance of this distinction within New Mexico culture will become clearer during the telling of each case study.

Colonization--Spanish Franciscans & Conquistadors

Whereas Europeans seeking religious freedom and a chance to make something of themselves spurred the settling of much of the Eastern and Midwestern United States, Spanish Colonists seeking glory, gold, and god spurred the settlement of New Mexico (Sheehan, 1998). After a painstaking exploration of El Norte by Coronado seeking the Seven Cities of Cibola (Egan, 1998) and the attempted colonization of this area in the mid-1500s, in 1598 the Spanish crown gave the contract to colonize New Mexico to Don Juan de Onate who led a group of colonists and Franciscan Friars into Northern New Mexico, just north of Santa Fe. This expedition of cross and sword was considered typical of the Spanish government of the time. As told by Archbishop Michael Sheehan of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the colonization of New Mexico was viewed first and foremost as a mission to the Indians (1998).
Interestingly enough, one of the most famous feats of Onate occurred within the first year of colonization when the Acoma Pueblo Indians west of Albuquerque refused to submit to his rule. After a bloody battle where 600 Acomans died and a biased trial presided over by Onate where the outcome was a fait accompli, the remaining defeated Acoman men over age 25 were sentenced to twenty years of personal servitude to Spanish soldiers plus having one of their feet cut off. Women also were sentenced to 20 years of slavery, and children under 12 were handed over to the Friars for Christian schooling, some eventually ending up in convents in Mexico.

Shortly after we moved to Santa Fe in 1997, New Mexico was preparing to celebrate the 400-year anniversary of the coming of Onate. In fact, both institutions I studied had buildings named after the man who is considered by many the founding father of New Mexico. Needless to say, the celebration of 1998 was controversial in that many Pueblo Indians and their Chicano/a and Anglo supporters protested the revering of a man who had a history of brutalizing the Pueblo Indians, even after the battle of Acoma. Mysteriously during one night, the foot of Onate was cut off the statue of him that was erected especially for the 400-year anniversary. In his 1998 commemorative publication of the Catholic Church in New Mexico, Archbishop Sheehan acknowledged the failing of the early Spanish conquistadors and Franciscan Friars, calling for forgiveness and reconciliation between the Pueblo Indians, the Spanish, and the Catholic Church.

**Pueblo revolt of 1680.** Colonization continued throughout the 1600s, but it was difficult for all involved because the Spanish Franciscans insisted that the Indians become Europeanized as well as evangelized. There was little regard for the Pueblo way of life and Indian spirituality that existed long before the Spanish came. What followed was the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, where the Indians drove the Spanish out of northern New Mexico. This *Indian Uprising on the Rio Grande* (Folsom, 1973) is considered by some to be the first actual American Revolution in that the Indians were fighting for the same freedoms that were being fought for in 1776: freedom from tyranny, persecution, and unjust taxation by the Spanish colonists. The various Pueblos along the Rio Grande had united around a common enemy.

In 1692 Spanish raiders and soldiers came back to find a disunited Indian people who were easy to reconquer. It was also difficult for a disunited Pueblo people to fight off alone the increasing attacks by the nomadic Comanche. At the urging of the former
city council, there was a law passed that only pure Spanish people could own arms and a means of transportation. The half-Indians, half-blacks, and mulattos had all sided with the Indians against the privileged, Spanish, ruling class. But the Spanish had also learned a lesson: Pueblo people no longer had to practice their traditional spirituality in secrecy (Folsom, 1973). In contrast to this account of life in the area after the reconciliation, Michael Sheehan (1998), who wrote the Archdiocese of Santa Fe’s history of the period after having lived in New Mexico for only 4 or 5 years, stated that the Pueblos still could not practice their traditional ceremonies in public.

Today, you will find that many of the Northern New Mexico Pueblos now bear Spanish names (San Ildefonso, Santa Domingo), boast historic Catholic Churches on the Pueblo, and celebrate their own Saint’s Days with traditional ceremonies and dances that are often open to the public. Many Pueblo Indians also bear Spanish names, such as the famous Santa Clara Pueblo potter Maria Martinez. Some Pueblo villages still bear their traditional names such as Acoma, Taos, and Picuris, and some Pueblo Indians have traditional surnames. The Kiva structures, the places where Indians learn about their religion and culture, are still off-limits to non-Indians and it is virtually impossible to learn the details of any particular Pueblo religion from its members (Peshkin, 1997). Perhaps this is the legacy of struggling to keep a traditional culture alive amidst such oppressive circumstances so many years ago.

**Spanish colonial period & the Catholic Church.** Northern New Mexico developed in virtual isolation from southern New Spain or present day Mexico throughout the 1700s and early 1800s. Albuquerque, 50 miles south of Santa Fe in the Rio Grande Valley, was founded in 1706 (Andres, 2000). Because it was so difficult topographically to reach Santa Fe and points north, settlers and Indians made do and scraped out an existence from the harsh land. What developed after the reconquest was a hybrid culture (language, customs, technology) and religion that blended 1600s colonial Spanish and Pueblo Indian traditions. Time virtually stood still as there was very little word of the progress of the rest of the world and very little communication with it.

It should be noted here that, in the Spanish governing system, there was no separation of church and state. Daily life centered around the Catholic Church and its festivals; families were close-knit and closely related, often working for a patron who was also a close family member. Most Spanish colonials were landowners, as land grants
were bestowed from the beginning through the royal patronage system adopted from Spain (Sanchez, 1967).

Unlike Mexico to the south, which was settled first by the Spanish, the settlement of New Mexico was focused on evangelizing the Indians. The many schools quickly set up by the Catholic Church in Mexico for the Spanish settlers were not repeated initially in New Mexico because all of the Church’s resources were focused on the Indians (Sheehan, 1998). There was little emphasis placed on education or book learning with the Spanish colonials. Children were needed for many tasks around the household; they could not be spared for schooling. Mexico’s independence from Spain (1821-1846) had very little effect on the everyday lives of most northern New Mexicans; little hope was placed in the possible changes politics might bring (Sanchez, 1967). The new Mexican Republic did not see fit to support the missions in New Mexico. The Mexicans also drove out all Spanish citizens of the area, and by 1848 there were no Franciscan Friars left in New Mexico. Since the Franciscans preferred to work with Spanish and Mexican born friars, very few New Mexicans had aspired to the clergy (Sheehan, 1998).

Welcome to the U.S.

Although the Old Santa Fe Trail first brought Anglo traders through the area starting in 1821, it was the American Occupation starting in 1846 that brought more noticeable changes for New Mexicans. Civic matters were in sad disarray towards the end of the Spanish colonial period and through Mexican rule. Although the U.S. pledged to protect the land grants of the Spanish colonial settlers, many of them were lost through illegal means and transferred to Anglo interests (Andres, 2000). For a variety of reasons, the early New Mexico Territory was left relatively defenseless as the United States government tried to figure out what to do with this vast land it had acquired through war with the Republic of Mexico. After the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo with Mexico in 1848, it was still three years until a territorial government was formed (Sanchez, 1967). New Mexico also spent some time under the Confederate flag, although it remained steadfastly loyal to the Union (Andres, 2000; Sanchez, 1967).

Diocese of Santa Fe. Once New Mexico became a part of the United States, the Catholic Church in the U.S. requested that a bishop be designated to oversee the new American Southwest (Sheehan, 1998). A similar request had been made by the Franciscans 200 years before during the Spanish colonial period, but was not fulfilled by the church. One of the most notable Catholics of all time in New Mexico, Archbishop
Jean Baptiste Lamy, was installed in 1850 and served through 1885. Archbishop Lamy had much to do with the civilization of northern New Mexico. The first schools and hospitals, one of which, St. Vincent’s Hospital, still operates today in Santa Fe, were started by successive waves of Christian Brothers and Jesuits and Sisters of Loretto and Charity brought into the region by Lamy (Sheehan, 1998).

It wasn’t until the appointment of Archbishop Robert Fortune Sanchez in 1974 that a New Mexico born priest was named to the post. Archbishop Sanchez served in the post until 1993, resigning in the midst of much questioning of the Catholic leadership as the sexual misconduct of area priests came to the surface (Sheehan, 1998). So, for the most part, the Catholic Church in New Mexico had been led by a succession of Spanish, French, and Anglo-American priests from other parts of the United States. Besides the increasing population of secular clergy from New Mexico, the church has been deeply influenced by European and Anglo-American traditions.

Nuevomexicano identity. Although Nuevomexicanos have referred to this land for centuries as their homeland, identity issues have long been at play within the Nuevomexicano culture. It was during the Spanish colonial and Mexican eras that a hierarchical society developed, based upon the Spanish presiding over the masses of inferior people, including in descending order the Indians, mestizos, coyotes, mulattoes and genizaros. In this Spanish colonial structure, class position often had more to do with racial status than physical markings (Andres, 2000). In effect, these descendents of conquistadors fabricated a fiction of pure Spanish biological lineage, including class as well as race markers (Andres, 2000).

In fact, a census taken during the early 1800s of Albuquerque noted many legal and extralegal sexual unions between Spaniards, Mexicans, Pueblos, Comanche, Navajos, and Apaches, creating an ethnically and culturally mixed population (Andres, 2000). The influx of Anglos into the area after the Civil war supplanted the Spanish colonial social caste system. In their bid for superior status and greater rights and privileges, the Anglos placed themselves above the Spanish by categorizing them as an inferior race who were lazy, superstitious, poor, mixed bloods, and greasers (Kenneson, as cited in Andres, 2000). The Anglos basically lumped all Nuevomexicanos into one group, not understanding the complex social relationships among the people they now deigned to rule. After the American conquest there were many legal and extralegal sexual unions between Nuevomexicanos, Anglos, and more recent Mexican and
European immigrants, which all served to shape attitudes toward ethnic and cultural inclusion (Andres, 2000).

**Bid for statehood.** The biggest changes for the new territory began in 1880 when the railroad came through Albuquerque. With it came many Anglo and European speculators who found a desperately poor territory whose inhabitants were barely eking out an existence. Susan Wallace, wife to then territorial Governor Lew, wrote her son, “My Dear--General Sherman was right. We should have another war with Mexico and make her take back New Mexico” (Hooker, 2000).

But seeing much opportunity to be made with New Mexico as a bonafide part of the U.S., some Anglo entrepreneurs of the time strengthened the territory’s bid for statehood by declaring--for the benefit of bigoted opponents in Washington--that Nuevomexicanos were purely descendents of Spanish dons and conquerors, accentuating their pure European lineage and ignoring the actual cultural hybridity of most New Mexicans of the time (Andres, 2000). In light of the oppression so recently imposed on them by the Anglos, Nuevomexicanos of the elite class saw the advantages of said discourse and played it out to end the drawn-out struggle for statehood. But when interacting within their own culture and in their own language, Nuevomexicanos referred to themselves as Mexicans and the language they spoke as Mexican (Gonzalez-Berry & Maciel, 2000).

**The Legacy**

Unfortunately later generations came to believe that this politically motivated tale was the truth about all of Nuevomexicanos cultural history, rather than simply one thread of a complex tapestry. Also fueling this troublesome practice was that during the Revolution of 1910-1921 most Spanish speakers in New Mexico discarded the term Mexicano because Anglos used the term to disparage them, and some Nuevomexicanos attempted to dissociate themselves from their poor Mexican brother and sisters who were fleeing their homeland in Mexico (Andres, 2000). During and after WWI, Nuevomexicanos countered that they were an ethnic rather than a racial group, and began calling themselves Hispano Americans, seeming to claim within this identity the previously disenfranchised mulattoes, mestizos, coyotes and genizaros of the Spanish colonial pecking order (Andres, 2000).

Hispanos have continued to identify themselves as a distinct people from Tejanos, Californios, or Mexicans because their history shows that they were a
geographically isolated and stable population, held land and livestock, and contributed successful business people and politicians to the local economy, unlike their brothers and sisters in California, Arizona, and Texas where Anglos took control, eliminated competition, and obviously marginalized people of color. Some would argue that Nuevomexicanos have suffered a similar fate since becoming a U.S. territory, which brought an influx of Anglo-American and European settlers. At any rate, New Mexico was finally granted statehood in 1912. What has resulted today is a segment of the population of Nuevomexicanos identifying as white and insisting on being called Hispano or Spanish American while eschewing the label Mexicano, much to the chagrin of their Chicano brothers and sisters in New Mexico and beyond. Essentially, since the post-Chicano movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, Nuevomexicanos have been extremely divided on what to call themselves (Andres, 2000).

Indian life in the 20th century. It should also be noted that WWII brought changes to the reservations and Pueblos as many American Indians served bravely during the war. This was only possible because they were finally declared citizens in 1924 and allowed to vote beginning in 1947 (Sheehan, 1998). Indian soldiers and war workers had increased expectations after seeing the world, and many brought back pickup trucks, radios, and other commercial goods. Life on the reservation would change more in the next 20 years than it had in the previous 200.

Anglo-American emigration. Besides continued immigration from Mexico and now Latin America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New Mexico grew also as a result of many waves of Euro-American migration impelled by the railroads, land graft, expanding cattle empires and WWII, and the expanding military-scientific complex spurred by the creation of the atomic bomb in Los Alamos, just north of Santa Fe. Most recently, affluent Euro-Americans, primarily from California, Texas, and back east, have discovered the so-called mystique of New Mexico and sought its privacy, quality of life, traditional charm, and lower cost of living (Gonzalez-Berry & Maciel, 2000). The effects of the latest wave of Euro-American migration are best illustrated in the rapid increase in housing prices in Santa Fe, displacing and declining the standard of living for many working-class Santa Fe natives. One result is that there has been an out migration of young Nuevomexicanos seeking better employment opportunities and standard of living.

Tri-cultural paradise? New Mexico today is often touted as a tri-cultural paradise with its American Indian, Spanish, and Anglo roots. Unfortunately, this discourse
silences the history of other cultures in the area, from the black slaves who were a part of the Pueblo Uprising in 1680 against the Spanish (Folsom, 1973), to the Jews who settled in the area over 150 years ago (Berkovitch, 2000).

It is through these *layers of hurt* that I listened to and tried to understand what organizational members situated in the New Mexico of today were telling me about their everyday work lives; what did they notice about how they and others operated and communicated within these contexts and why; what worked, what didn’t; what empowered, what oppressed; what strengthened voices; and what silenced. What follows in the next two chapters are the first-order stories or lived experiences described to me by the members of two institutions of higher learning in this region.
“Flagship University”

Of the two schools that I have developed case studies for I will begin with Flagship University. There were several staff members at this institution that could both conceptualize the behaviors and effects of the so-called victim mentality and describe how it manifests itself at their institution, in this region, and in the student affairs profession in general. In their own words, the members of this student affairs division provided a comprehensive description of the ways that oppression and internalized oppression surfaced in their highly diverse setting. Members of this division also revealed their struggles to fully understand the impact of internalized oppression on their organizational lives.

I will begin by describing a particular staff meeting that was representative of the types of issues and tensions that typically surfaced in all of the staff meetings I observed. Subsequently, while interviewing staff members it became clear that there was consistency between my tentative analysis of the organization and their account of their work lives in the department outside of staff meetings.

Opening Vignette: Monthly Staff Meetings

“Let’s get the hell out of here before something sensitive explodes”

Nearly 25 people filled the good-sized conference room, over half crowding around a large, boat-shaped conference table. The others were scattered; some around another much smaller table, some around a loveseat and chairs in conversational grouping, still others in a row of 3-4 chairs at one end of the long conference table. Many were seated in their typical spots; either around the large table or not. Occasionally one’s lateness or earliness dictated that day’s seating assignment. Before the meeting started, one staff member who typically sat around the large table turned to another staff member who typically didn’t and said, somewhat teasingly, “Come sit by me, don’t hide in the back.” The other staff member laughed but sat in the back anyway.

The Division of Student Affairs (DSA) monthly director’s meeting consisted of a relatively diverse group: almost exactly 1/2 women and 1/2 men, about 1/2 Hispanic, and slightly less than 1/2 native New Mexican. At the time of my visits there were one American Indian and two African American staff members. The university taken as a whole is not as diverse as DSA in its professional ranks at least, being primarily Anglo at
its upper echelons both currently and historically. One interviewee commented that staffing at the University is diverse, “only because of the diversity in student affairs.” One topic on that day’s agenda was Student Success Summit Follow-up. This item was about 3 or 4 on the list of 11 items to be covered in the 1-1 1/2 hours that was already almost 45 minutes gone.

Mark distributed a resolution proposal for DSA directors to consider concerning the University’s student retention efforts. The resolution was a statement created by Mark to be forwarded to The President and Provost from Student Affairs regarding the Division’s views and interest in being a part of the discussion regarding retention planning. He noted that when he drafted it, he tried to be as “non-confrontational as possible” in its wording. “We continue to hemorrhage students at too rapid a rate,” he said. “We just finished celebrating an increase in enrollment when we’ve actually only barely been keeping our head above water.” This is a curious comment in that it was at the urging of Mark two months ago that DSA took the lead in coordinating the Celebrating Excellence in Quality Service reception to recognize university employees for enrolling the largest freshman class in the university’s history. The discussion that ensued shed some light on the true concern.

“I personally commend Mark for putting this report together,” commented Doris. “Student Success was brought up at the Board of Trustees meeting but we got no reports back. It seems the president has a committee but we don’t know about it. I would like to see us progress on this.” The VP commented that he didn’t know of this committee, and assured the group that he’s always looking out for the division’s interests by submitting DSA names for inclusion on committees. He also commented that the old Provost had not passed on the Student Success Summit information to his successor, and suggested that this retention discussion be postponed until the next meeting. Doris said she felt it was so important that a special meeting should be called. The VP interrupted and said, “we’re on top of this, we’re working with Arts & Sciences and Noel-Levitz.” “I’ll keep you informed.” The discussion continued anyway.

The Dean jumped in at this point and said that he was concerned that student affairs and academic affairs “may be passing like two ships in the night.” He urged that DSA find out what else was going on first before voting and sending the resolution out. Mark pointed out that “we need a process that’s inclusive, the fact that we don’t know points this out.” The Dean concurred that there was a need for a “heart point of view.”
“The system does not provide opportunity for dialogue between us and academic affairs.”

The VP, reengaged in the discussion, stated that he saw two options: vote now, or invite the Provost to a meeting. At that point several new people jumped into the discussion:

Brad: “What would we stand to gain by passing this?”
Mark: “We need to say we want a process and want to be included.”
Miguel: “I see the resolution as a jump start.”
Sam: “We need more information.”
Victoria: “The resolution should be??????”
Maria: “We need to rewrite the resolution.”
Brad: “We need to invite the Provost to a meeting to discuss this.”

The VP responded that he would invite the Provost to the next meeting. Brad said that he agreed with Doris that a whole meeting was needed to discuss the issue. The VP said again, “let’s table this, we’re making some progress.” By this time, they were an hour into the meeting with 7 more agenda items to cover. The Dean commented about this being “another Mark project” and there were chuckles all around the room. I had a feeling that this topic had been discussed previous to today’s meeting, at least by some of the members of the group. This hunch was confirmed in a later interview.

_Institutional History and Context_

“...trying very hard to be a top research institution”

In many ways, FU is a typical state-supported flagship university. Yet there are some physical and regional distinctions that are well-articulated by this organizational member:

“...the university started in 1889. We didn’t become a state until 1912. ...it was also partly a high school because there were no high schools. There might have been parochial schools at the Catholic Church....the church was even the schools up through high school in northern New Mexico into the 50s, there were no public schools up there.”
“...the diversity characterizes it...that makes it a more interesting place and even a more exciting place to learn...from the faculty’s point of view, it’s trying very hard to be a top research institution...a lot of people don’t realize it’s primarily an urban, commuter institution. And it has had a nontraditional student population since the 70s really. The average age has gone up, now I think 28-29, it was 27...Architecturally I think it’s unique...it embodies this part of the country. It’s been very successful in taking from this part of the country what was already here. It’s not a series of brick buildings, but of course, students complain that they’re all brown and kind of look alike.” (Laughs)

“...the student population is so diverse...I don’t think the university is meant for everybody...it’s a large place...people who are more assertive do better here. ...for many students in New Mexico who are not from Albuquerque it’s big...it’s a tremendous size for the average rural person...It’s hard for the Native Americans coming off the reservation...It’s a complete culture shock to them. It’s hard for the African American students because there aren’t very many...we’re isolated as a major institution geographically...”

Long-time student affairs staff member

Streets named after Ivy League institutions ring the campus: Dartmouth, Yale, Cornell, Stanford, Columbia, Vassar, Princeton, Tulane, Wellesley, etc. as if to set a particular tone. There are the typical fraternity and sorority houses of most big state universities skirting part of campus, some in the architectural styles of their counterparts throughout the Midwest and East, some more regionally true architecturally, a sort of pueblo revival meets Spanish colonial. The majority of the main campus buildings are pueblo influenced, setting the institution apart from its midwestern land grant cousins.

The railroad brought in the first major wave of new American and European settlers to Albuquerque in 1880 and the founding of the University followed shortly after in 1889. When the post W.W.II boon brought in the next major wave of Anglos immigrating to the Sunbelt, another major campus building push barely supported by the legislature commenced in the 1950s (Hooker, 2000). To date all of the Presidents of the university have been Anglo, some residents of the state, others immigrating to the state upon taking office (Hooker, 2000). Some organizational members claimed that the institution’s upper level administration had never quite figured out or even attempted to understand how things operated in New Mexico. "...the people we have lobbying up there [in Santa Fe] are not native New Mexicans, they really don’t know how it works here, and they tend to alienate legislators, many of whom are Hispanics who come from
rural areas and they don’t want to be talked down to.” Thus, the university had not always done well with the legislature when it came to securing support and funding.

In the fall of 2000 there were 23,545 undergraduate and graduate FTE’s enrolled at Flagship University’s main campus. At that time, there were 28.09% Hispanic students, 4.98% Native Americans, 2.36% African Americans, 3.5% Asian Americans, and 3.18% International students enrolled (data provided by the institution). In comparison, in 2000 the entire state included 1.8 million people, which is by today’s standards a medium sized city. Albuquerque, the largest city in the state was around 448,000 people by year 2000 census data. No other city in the state exceeds 100,000 people. According to 2000 census data, the state was comprised of 42.1% Hispanics and Latinos, 9.5% American Indians, 1.9% African Americans, and 1.2% Asian and Pacific Islanders (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

How student affairs/the university operate. “...the culture is one of decentralization...and fragmentation.” The Division of Student Affairs (DSA) housed roughly 17 departments and approximately 200 full-time employees. DSA was described to me by most as a decentralized bureaucracy with many diverse constituencies, each housed within “silos” or “kingdoms” or “turfdoms.” Each division of the university from Student Affairs to Academic Affairs to Business Affairs was a silo, and departments operated as silos within each division. One member commented,” I think the students see us as very fragmented.” Another interviewee commented, “...it’s a very loosely bound institution...the culture is one of decentralization...and fragmentation.” At one DSA meeting at the beginning of the new school year, I observed several “Associate Directors” representing their department in the absence of the Director. Some of these staff, all of whom had worked at the university for at least a few years, had never met each other.

On the other hand, I spoke with several people who felt that, although a bureaucracy existed, if they really wanted to get things done or they really wanted to find out what was happening then they would go through their informal communication network which was typically based upon long-term professional relationships at the university or even relationships that existed prior to this work setting. Another long-term staff member described how things worked:

“I think there’s a lot of informal communication networks...people know each other and they communicate [informally] or know who the go-
to person is for whatever topics you need...A lot of people have been here a long time, so you establish those networks...there are some things if you jumped over [the chain-of-command] and did something...it depends on what the topic is, who you jumped, and what it was concerning...but on most everyday things you can do that.”

When asked about the operating norms and values of DSA, one member responded:

“...most people care about the students that they work with, and that’s the driving motivation...you kind of have to get out there and do it for yourself...if you want something to happen, you’ve got to make it happen, you’ll get support in most cases, but you are going to be the ball carrier...sometimes we sort of get isolated...everybody takes care of your own business....everybody does their thing and you reach out to who you know and I’ll help you, you help me.”

At the highest levels of the administration there appeared to be a lot of freedom and autonomy to do what you want and decide how you want to do it. I heard again and again that you have to make it happen, typically through your personal relationships with colleagues, although as compared to other similar institutions upper level administrators viewed the university as flexible and surprisingly lacking in structure. One member noted that at FU “you still have that flexibility to do things that at some schools you lose because of all the bureaucracy.”

Professional preparation. “...there’s more to it than just looking after students.” There were also a variety of viewpoints on the necessary professional development or involvement that was needed to do your job well as a DSA employee. One long-time student affairs staff member felt like it was important to get staff involved in professional organizations so that...

“...they could see what it was like on a national level, that we do have a place, we do have a role...there was more to it than just looking after students...If you can see the big picture, you know if you can realize and get excited about it.... of course some people warm up to that stuff and some people don’t...someone described this place here, even when I first came...as sort of parochial.... if it’s not New Mexico how could it possibly be good?” (Laughs)

Another staff member who had worked in a variety of higher education settings commented:

“I couldn’t stand to go to another [professional] conference if you paid me.... It’s all social butterflies and everybody gets an award for
everything, and nobody can show that they’ve done anything...anybody can present, they don’t have to show results, they don’t have to show that it works, it’s just, here’s what we do at this campus.... yet that’s the culture that has a lot of strengths in student affairs, there’s a lot of caring people, a lot of warm people, and I know that counts for a lot.”

Yet another organizational member commented about an experience at a professional workshop:

“...they’re doing these things and I just sat there and I finally got up [in the workshop] and said this is what we’re doing at this ...school in New Mexico...and I named I don’t know how many projects we had and they were shocked. ...these were schools that were big time bucks, big enrollment, big endowments...and they couldn’t believe what we were doing. So, you can tell I’m not much for workshops.”

Over several of the meetings I observed, the DSA staff was discussing an upcoming statewide symposium for student affairs professionals that the VP created and wanted the division to sponsor. He told me he had noticed that student affairs people in the state seemed very isolated from each other institutionally. It was apparent both in the meetings and through interviews that organizational members were interested in participating and being supportive of the symposium by varying degrees. There was a lot of joking about who from the division was going to volunteer this time to coordinate. Over several meetings I had also noticed that there were only a handful of people who typically volunteered or were volunteered to head up division-wide projects. It appeared to me that most of these individuals were generally respected in the division, although one DSA member commented,” ...all of us can almost predict who’s going to be on certain committees...and that’s not healthy...you should never be afraid to bring in a different perspective.”

Key Issues

“Diversity is a big issue, it’s sometimes our greatest strength and our biggest pain.”

My views of the key issues of this case are focused through a conceptual funnel: I see at the top or the broadest part of the funnel the influence of the complex socio-cultural history of this region. This history affects native New Mexicans’ views and experience of the world tremendously, and in a different way noticeably influences the lived experience of non-natives currently living here. The legacy of these socio-cultural politics becomes intertwined with the history of higher education in the U.S. and with this institution in particular. Included in this is the perception the greater university has of the
role of student affairs on this campus. In turn, this perception is coupled with student affairs employees’ self-perceptions and identities within the higher education milieu. Individuals who have worked in other higher education settings in-state, out-of-state, or even outside of higher education might have differing views based upon those experiences. It is important to understand how these various external factors influenced organizational culture and communication in the past and continue to shape and shift how communication happens in this division of student affairs in the present.

In addition we need to understand what experiences various organizational members are bringing to the group based upon their personal, cultural histories. When faced with the same issues in the same organizational context, people can respond very differently based upon the effects of their past experiences, as we have all experienced personally and as observers of others. What is one bringing from his or her experiences outside of this organization into a situation, and what past experiences in this organization and with others influence one’s views and responses to this current situation? What is one’s experience and view of the organization or even particular individuals in it? Do I trust the organization or particular individuals in it, feel supported, feel listened to, and feel empowered? How do trust, support, feeling heard, and empowerment influence one’s response to a situation, or does it? Does one feel respected, and does one treat his or her coworkers with respect? As a researcher, I am interested in understanding what kinds of communication micro-practices help and hinder the fostering of trust, support, feeling heard, and ultimately, empowerment and self-determination in the workplace. I will begin by exploring some aspects at the top of the funnel: university politics that are shaped by the cultural dynamics of this region.

The top of the funnel: Hispanic cultural politics within a dominant Anglo system.

“The politics in the university are as the state: very, very intense, very personal, and there’s a strong cultural dimension.” Many organizational members were eager to explain the impact that the Spanish cultural legacy has had and how this is unique to this region of the United States. A couple of interviewees describe how the Pueblo, Spanish and Anglo ways of doing things have clashed through the years:

“I guess this is a cultural inheritance from Spain...I think it was Napoleon who said, ruling Spain, after he had conquered it, ‘how can a king rule a nation of kings?’...that’s the way Hispanic people are...we level everything...New Mexico is that mentality and I think if people would come here and live well and enjoy the place, and don’t have this resentment
against us and understand that, and it takes a long time to understand it.
You know, maybe understanding it up here is fast (points to head), but
understanding it in your gut is very different because you have to act it
out. You cannot be paternalistic to people or you're asking for trouble,
right?"

“I have a friend, who came here from the [east coast] and he told
me he had been in conversation with some of his [Anglo] friends, and
they figured for somebody coming from anywhere else to New Mexico,
especially an Anglo...We’re talking about 7 years if you have good
intentions, to really learn what was going on and to be viable. I have
another [Anglo] friend who studied political systems and he used to say
‘much of what you have in New Mexico comes out of the traditions of
Spain, and the rest of the country doesn’t understand these kinds of
things. For example, this bullshit you told me about community property
when you get divorced...my ex-wife took me for everything I owned!’
Okay. He was an enlightened guy, right? He said there was a lot of
alienation here also.”

Hispanic, long-time student affairs staff member

“First you get into the land grant issue, how the Spanish managed
their land, then you have the English come and say no you do it this way,
and of course this goes back hundreds of years...Then you’ve got the
Native American element, who resent highly the fact that the Spanish
came in and did what they did...they did some pretty terrible things, like all
conquering people do...I remember starting [to work here] and hearing
[from a Native American], ‘oh we don’t need another Hispanic telling us
what to do here, you know.’"

Anglo, long-time student affair staff member

One of the ways that state politics came into play on the campus was that the
Governor had always appointed the Board of Regents for the University. Although the
majority of the state’s governors had been Anglo Republicans, there also have been
several Democratic Hispanic governors. Many former Governors have served terms as
regents throughout the history of the university (Hooker, 2000).

“The university is just a microcosm of the state....who did I just
have tell me that the politics here were the most intensive and pervasive
that he’d ever seen. This was somebody from Washington D.C....he said
the politics of Washington are nothing like the politics here.... really fierce,
very intense, there’s very thin walls between the university and the
outside community. Just sitting here this morning a state senator just
walked in and started talking to me, and that’s not uncommon.”

A student affairs staff member also mentioned that it was not uncommon for regents to
drop by offices unannounced to find out how policies were being implemented in the
offices across campus. Another student affairs staff member noted: “I would imagine that many, many people within this division can call up the speaker of the house or the president of the senate or even the governor here without any hesitation at all.” When I brought up this issue with other organizational members some concurred and some disagreed, saying, “…the other thing about the politics is you know, yeah, we know so and so and...that is used as a trap. They don’t always have that much clout…you have to kind of gauge that level...how much of that is bluffing and how much is real.”

Another interviewee describes state/campus politics in a nutshell:

“...each group, whether it’s an administrative organization or a cultural group or professional groups, faculty versus staff has its own territory and is extremely defensive and protective about his territory, they don’t accept much from a central authority. Whether it be the university administration or the state government, the politics are taking care of each individual group...every significant group gets what it wants or spends its time trying to get what it wants, and it’s usually pretty narrowly defined....there’s not a great deal of concern...there’s not a great deal of action about the larger whole…it’s very piecemeal.”

Non-native New Mexicans, even those who have lived here over 20 years, are still somewhat mystified by the area’s cultural politics; one even told me that she understood that you were only considered native New Mexican if your family had owned land since the Spanish colonial land grant days, which I found out later was generally an inaccurate assumption. I recall that it took at least a year before I began to understand the complexity of the identity issue in the state; that there were Hispanics in the state who considered themselves *white* rather than *non-white* Hispanic and that this distinction was part of the demographic information kept on students, faculty and staff at the state-supported, public institution I studied. *Hispanic* continues to be the preferred official or government sanctioned identifier. When I asked people during workshops I used to lead across the state how they prefer to be identified, Hispanic was the term most often mentioned. For the 3 1/2 years we lived in New Mexico, each time I talked with someone about this phenomenon I learned something new, adding another piece to the puzzle.

*University presidential search.* “The politics are brutal.” Although there were clear, Anglo roots at the founding of the university, area Hispanics had become increasingly vocal and influential on campus in the past 20-30 years. Nowhere had this
been more apparent than in the selection of administrators, from the president down through the vice presidents and department heads.

Organizational members related stories about both Anglos and Hispanics getting high-level appointments at the university because of political maneuverings and friendships. New Mexico is one of the few places in the U.S. where a minority group has some significant political power. Although I think that this practice is not uncommon at any college or university or within the dominant Anglo culture generally speaking, the added hazard for people of color, even Hispanics in New Mexico, is that they often end up being viewed as token representatives of their culture. Consequently, the judgment of their effectiveness, either positive or negative, casts a shadow over the entire group that is hard to shake off. As one Hispanic organizational member described it:

“And I think what they were trying to do was get more minorities in and so forth, but what they started ending up doing is getting their cronies and pals in, see, which doesn’t mean, well, you know how bad that is, you get your buddies in and so forth and what happens is if they’re not competent it’s a black eye for everybody. You know, ‘all Chicanos are a bunch of idiots.’"

As mentioned previously, to date there have been no Hispanic presidents of the university although there have been a few Anglo native New Mexican presidents (Hooker, 2000). The initial phase of the most recent search for a new president ended in much controversy. As one Hispanic native New Mexican described it:

“several community groups are adamant about getting a native New Mexican....I don’t think that’s going to happen....I’m not sure, I don’t think that that’s necessary either. I’m probably in the minority of the minority there...this is a state of conflicting cultures. Not just ethnic but economic, religious, historical, geographical, ideological, you name it...our last search we have an Hispanic from New York...I can tell you that among New Mexican Hispanics it was not only not acceptable but seen as an insult, a ploy that the regents...it was either a plot or ignorance, I’m not sure....there are some people now saying it needs to be a native New Mexican, some saying it needs to be an Hispanic....[some say] it needs to be an Hispanic New Mexican...some saying it should be somebody from outside state regardless to bring in fresh perspectives, new ideas, etc...and then there are those who as we hoped there would be who would say we just need to get the best person who would be the best match for this institution and best qualified, which is of course my position...the trick is who would best fit in this particular distinctive milieu and organization and we’ve had some terrible mismatches in the past...I’ve had some of my friends and colleagues who are Hispanic say it
would be better to have a non-Hispanic who is simpatico and appreciates Hispanic culture and who understands it, than to have an Hispanic who has no feeling for the culture, the university or the state, so I think that that's probably the problem, you know you construct the ideal candidate then there is no such person."

Another university employee took another view of the process:

“...expectations across the board are low. I mean how are you going to blow a presidential search? Come on, I mean really. The highest level, hiring an executive officer under an institution; all you’ve got to do is just follow the rules. Open it up to the community, that’s big. And even if you have a preselected candidate you can give the person the job, just play the politics right. don’t play them dirty. That’s what I’m talking about when I say dirty politics. You can take politics, politics aren’t everything, I understand that. But at least put it out there on the table. Really, they blew it. That’s an easy one. So, it happens all the time, stuff like that, it’s just silly."

In the early 1980s another presidential search hit a snag and so the regents decided to make the current acting President, who wasn't even a candidate, permanent. “The search committee had recommended six finalists to the board but the regents could not agree on any of them” (Hooker, 2000, p. 269). If it was hard to find a qualified Hispanic Vice President for Student Affairs candidate, then I would guess that it was even more challenging to find a pool of qualified Hispanic candidates who had Vice President or Presidential experience in a large, state-supported university, as one Hispanic administrator pointed out. To complicate matters, there were just as many viewpoints on who qualified to be president in the local Hispanic community as there were across the state. A long time university architect described his experience at the university during the mid-1970s:

“It was my opinion the arena needed a sparkling new image on the interior so I selected Anita Corey, head of the Corey Design and Planning Group in New York City. Her organization had just done the interiors in the renovated Madison Square Garden, as well as many other major projects around the country. Although she was a member of the Osuna family in New Mexico, born in Albuquerque, the daughter of a former [FU] professor, and alumna of [FU], and a woman who did very well in her profession as an interior designer and graphic artist, I received criticism for hiring an out-of-state person.” (Hooker, 2000)

It was sorrowfully easy to find examples of the level of alienation in the state around identity issues, as illustrated by the bitterly contested definition of who was a real
Hispanic by the standards held by some Nuevomexicanos. What had been lost in these hiring debates was a recognition that constructing such narrow definitions of who belong and who doesn’t both sustains and perpetuates the estrangement and divisiveness within the group, creating a vicious cycle and very little progress towards acquiring the desired political clout. What also went unnoticed was that this attitude essentially supported the internalization of the oppressive assumption that some people really are better than others based upon their race or ethnicity.

Related to this issue was the native, non-native New Mexican divide, which I believe was a result of the history of Hispanic/Anglo relations in the area. On the one hand, emigrating Europeans and Americans over the years had forced their customs, attitudes and culture on the people of the area. On the other hand, there had resulted an almost categorical mistrust of non-native New Mexicans by some as illustrated in the attitude non-natives just can’t understand the way we do things around here. The attitudes about who was a real Hispanic and the native, non-native New Mexican divide both pointed to the level of alienation amongst constituencies in the state and reinforced the continued isolation of groups from one another.

Student affairs’ ‘status’ in the university. “We’re all like the scrubs you know.” One of the things that a majority of members interviewed agreed upon was the perceived “stepchild” status of student affairs in the university, a perception unfortunately shared by many student affairs professionals across the country. Still, some in the division realized that if you allowed yourself to feel like a “stepchild,” or not as important, or like a victim, then you would act like and become one.

I mentioned this issue to a long time FU administrator outside of student affairs who commented:

“I understand that...I would be surprised if you didn’t hear that...in the university in which education is the primary mission, the people who educate are going to be at the top...they feel it....in a sense they are secondary, not that they’re worth less, but I can see how those feelings would develop...we have six universities in the state, there’s not enough to go around...some of the faculty kind of look down on student services...they also look down on the vice president for academic affairs....once you’ve gone over to the other side...student services they’re all on the other side.”

To illustrate these points further, another member of the division described the aftermath of a change she had tried to implement that involved her department and
various areas of academic affairs. This account shed light on several things: the faculty/administrator divide, the organizational influence of student affairs in the larger university, and the effects of an institutional culture that was highly decentralized and very fragmented.

“...so I started researching on the Internet and started asking other college campuses, ‘tell me what you’re doing?’ I met with the Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, the Associate Dean of the College of Education, my boss, the [FU] legal department, my staff...we developed a timeline where over one academic year we would phase out the process. I started implementing. There was such an uproar from the faculty that you would not believe...What I learned was that faculty consider administrators to be on the other side. Even their own administrators. (I ask, “Deans and Associate Deans, they weren’t even communicating with the faculty in the college?”) That’s exactly [what happened], and I did not know that. I made the assumption that if I got the approval of the Associate Dean, I don’t have any problems...They [the faculty] were writing letters to me, to the Dean, to the Provost...It is not easy to go into a meeting with the Provost in which you have all of this research...I had a stack of stuff, I felt I had a good case, and him saying, ‘hey, all of that makes sense, don’t do it.’ and I said, ‘hey sounds like a good idea to me. I won’t do it.’”

Another divisional member talked about his experiences working in academic and student affairs:

“There’s more power in the academic area and you know it. You know where the power and authority and the central mission of the university is, in academic affairs...to be able to accomplish things that I can’t accomplish here because I’m in student affairs...I can have the same logic, argument, wording, materials, program and it is the source that is viewed as inferior. It’s a major difference.”

Yet another student affairs administrator noted:

“...there are several of us who have been here a long time and we’ve been through several vice presidents...we’ve been through several crises together...we’ve fought the wars, let’s say, together...I think that with the minority directors there’s also a certain level of cynicism that we share because we know that we’re never going to get the kind of slice of pie that we want.”

The perceived and real inferior status and treatment of student affairs appeared to trickle down within the division too, as illustrated by the previous description of the hierarchy of more important and less important programs/departments within the
division. One of the effects was that many of the directors whose programs served underrepresented student populations felt as if they were constantly fighting, both within and outside of the division, to keep what little resources and power they felt they had, maintaining the status quo. As one of these directors noted, these special population programs were not started proactively by the administration in the first place; rather, beginning in 1969 and up through 1980 they were fought for and won primarily by students, as was the case in many institutions across the country.

An attempt to merge the three ethnic minority student services programs into one multicultural center was fought off successfully by these directors under the previous vice president at least a few years before my involvement with the division. In effect, the process killed a plan to pool the resources of these programs (in an incredibly resource poor environment) in an espoused attempt to better meet the needs of these student populations. Rather than being brought into the conversation initially and empowered to create the change, these directors were dictated to and then fired without notice.

It was unclear to me whether the administration’s intentions were to meet the needs of these student populations more efficiently and effectively by providing programs and services in a collaborative rather than a dispersed environment, or rather to target the programs and/or the staff for elimination. I believe the staff perceived it as the latter. As a result, there was heightened distrust and entrenchment rather than proactive, collaborative planning and use of limited resources. An interesting twist was that, shortly before I came to the organization, the new vice president reassigned one of the staff that was integral in the attempted merger to oversee and supervise these same departments.

Some directors had particular concerns about the current vice president and how effectively he “stands up for the division” in the larger university arena. This was illustrated in the opening vignette of this case where one organizational member voiced her concern that student affairs was not being adequately represented by their vice president in the larger campus discussion on student retention. This theme of adequate representation, or being heard in the larger campus community, was repeated within the division in some department directors’ concerns about the new organizational structure and having another layer of associate VP’s between the directors and the VP. It was also evident in concerns about how the DSA meetings were currently conducted by the
VP and about the directors’ ability to have substantive discussions on division-wide concerns.

Divisional leadership: A view from the outside looking in. “The old guard has seen this happen over and over and over.” It is important to know the history of the division’s leadership in order fully to understand the cultural politics at play within the division. In its relatively young life, FU has had numerous VP’s for Student Affairs, especially in the past 20-25 years. A long-time upper level administrator outside of the division commented about the history of the division and its leadership:

“It’s been very controversial....We’ve experimented..we’ve had student affairs sometimes combined with other positions...it hasn’t ever really made too much of a difference....we continue to have problems with, from the student’s perspective of how supportive the university is...primarily not student affairs administrators...in the cashier’s office and financial affairs, in admissions and registration and records...most of the front line offices...we just never have seemed to be able to get a real good handle on student affairs...we’ve had so many [VP’s of Student Affairs] they’ve always been so criticized.”

“Student affairs people are supposed to be institutional people...they’re not supposed to be more loyal to recruitment or admissions or to records than to [the] University. Academic Affairs is over a dozen colleges and 60-70 departments. [Student Affairs] is one place that should be coordinated and centralized, from a student perspective.”

When I asked what needed to happen to coordinate student affairs efforts better....

“It’s a Herculean task...either make it a very high priority, university-wide...The president is...very concerned about the few resources we have in that [student affairs] area...we need not just a good vice president for academic or student affairs, we need one of these rare individuals who might want to be president some day...they are going to have to have the support of the regents, the president and the provost.”

When commenting about the people who worked in the division:

“They’re good people individually..smart people, competent, professional..I don’t know if it’s the cultural thing...but how do you bring them together? What makes it worse is that we don’t have any resources. [The current VP] is to be congratulated for one thing about him--he has a great feel for students, a great love of students and wants them to be served...maybe we’re on the upswing now. I hope so.”
This person from outside the division had witnessed the comings and goings of various VP’s for Student Affairs and a variety of organizational structures in the division, observing that the tinkering done on the physical reporting structure had had little positive influence on service to students, a major campus concern. Yet I don’t know if there was a recognition of the tide that any VP for Student Affairs is working against in trying to better coordinate programs and services for students in an institutional and faculty culture that so highly prizes its autonomy and freedom. This person also recognized the fragmentation of student affairs staff and wondered if it could possibly be attributed to “the cultural thing,” noting that they were a group of competent professionals who seemed to have trouble getting on the same page and working together in a more coordinated fashion. It may be true that for all of the competence and professionalism of individual staff, unresolved cultural communication issues might impede the effectiveness and future progress of the organization as a whole.

Divisional leadership: The hazards of tokenism. “...anytime they have a minority vice president they’ll use it to insulate themselves...from problems.” Both long-time and short-term organizational members described to me two unsaid organizational norms at the university: that it was the role of a minority vice president to insulate the president from problems related to diversity; and that, historically, there was an understanding that the vice president for student affairs needed to be an Hispanic.

“...with the President there were a number of issues that came up, you know, anytime that they have a minority vice president they’ll use it to insulate themselves if they can from problems...that’s a role that they need to be aware of.”

Hispanic student affairs staff member

“..the student affairs vice presidency has long been seen as the top level position that should go to an Hispanic...the fallout in the community is....well, we don’t have as good of a shot at the other [upper level positions]....but what do you need to know to be a vice president of student affairs?....there aren’t a lot of Hispanics in student affairs...when the university got ready, and of course, unsaid, we all knew it was supposed to be an Hispanic...and I have known ever since I’ve been here that Hispanics from other states don’t count.”

Anglo student affairs staff member

From the information I gathered during interviews it appeared that only the current and the former VP for Student Affairs had been Hispanic (the former was also a woman), and previous to that all permanent VP’s (there had been several periods of
acting VP's) had been Anglo males. So this historical perception was actually relatively short-lived. In fact, it was one hundred years before the university had a Hispanic Provost and VP for Academic Affairs. In the words of one university employee, the institution has been a white ivory tower.

The two permanent VP’s previous to the current one were both notable figures. In the late 70s-early 80s there was an Anglo male VP described as:

“...a unique character ...the closest we ever had to being a sort of boss...he’d just tell people to do things, and of course the personality would get things done....when he interacted with the faculty, he most often upset them, ‘cause you don’t deal with the faculty that way’...he was very forceful... we’ve had so many different styles too.”

Many of the Hispanic student affairs staff spoke fondly of this former VP, while the Anglos noted that his style of leading wouldn’t work well in today’s university. What was appreciated most about him was that he stood up for student affairs within the larger university and that they remembered feeling like the division was headed all in the same direction.

The next VP was a woman who was a native Southern New Mexican who came to the job with little or no previous student affairs experience. The sentiments I heard about her were overwhelmingly negative: she had few supporters and was considered a micro-manager who expected weekly reports from all department heads and was very particular about who could attend DSA meetings.

These were brief descriptions of the operating styles of the most notable divisional leaders that the current VP followed. The current VP described himself as “proud of being Mexican.” He was originally from South Texas and worked for several years as the VP for Student Affairs at a campus that eventually became a part of the A & M system, where he also served for a time as acting president. There was widespread agreement that this VP was “a very nice man, very charming,” yet there were divergent assessments of the job he had done during his tenure.

Putting our leaders on a pedestal. “People have magical thoughts about what a leader can do.” The aftermath from the previous VP was intense: many burned out, “wounded” people who had had several years working in what must have felt like an unsupportive, even a combative work environment. Only certain people were allowed to attend DSA meetings, and if that person was off-campus, no substitute could be sent.
The previous VP was described as “uncommunicative” but required weekly written reports from each area.

After several years of the previous VP, the DSA staff had high hopes and there was huge excitement and expectations for the new VP. One person even commented, “We thought, this is our savior.” Another staff member said,

"I think when he came in he thought that he would be able to please sort of the disaffected...who had quite unrealistically high hopes and high expectations. He couldn’t be everything to everybody. They were more disillusioned than the old guard."

He was very communicative and inclusive initially. Nearly twenty-five people were included in the DSA meetings, which were held on a weekly basis at first. Over the course of about a year, some decisions that the VP made were not fully supported by all the directors, and efforts he made were perceived by some as not as strong. His ability to advocate effectively for student affairs at senior levels of the organizations was increasingly doubted. Consequently, some directors became very disappointed in their leader and critical of his effectiveness. Many also mentioned the need for more support or advocacy from the VP in solving problems. As described by one director, “shit hit the fan” in one of the DSA meetings, and all of this disappointment was targeted primarily at the VP.

At the time of my observations the organization members were split on their support of the VP. He appeared to be well supported by the Anglo staff and some of the Hispanic staff. When talking with the VP, he seemed concerned with the bad feelings that had permeated his tenure, but at the same time unwilling to be mistreated and disrespected or to let the progress he saw being made in the division be stalled. And so one of the ways he responded was to take firm control of the previous opportunities to communicate freely, particularly during the DSA meetings. At first they met weekly, then bi-weekly, and then monthly. The agenda was received at the beginning of the meeting and was typically packed. My observation was that exercising such control was out of character for him and not totally comfortable. I observed numerous occasions during each meeting where the VP truncated the discussion of topics. Some voiced support of this behavior while others were thoroughly frustrated with it. I am not sure that this tactic will forestall future explosions, although there were no such demonstrations during the several meetings I observed.
The end of the funnel: Impact on communication/meeting structure. “I hate them! I’d rather be in a closet somewhere.” Nowhere was the impact of issues of communication and democracy more apparent than in the changes to this organization’s formal communication structure and the resultant emphasis on informal means of communicating. It was in this arena that issues of trust, feeling heard, feeling supported, and being empowered were expressed through the communication tactics or micro practices employed by these members.

After the previous VP and her very controlled style of communicating, student affairs staff members were met with the refreshingly “respectful” and “friendly” style of the current VP. People were clamoring to be heard, and the new VP was giving them the opportunity through his likable demeanor and his inclusion of previously excluded people in the DSA meetings.

As one student affairs staff member described it:

“When the [current] VP came on board we were like, yes, he’s going to really make a big difference, and the [DSA] meetings started out wonderful, a lot of teamwork...it got a little more nasty, then it got even more nasty...we kept telling [the VP] this is what we really appreciate during the [DSA] meetings...I think he had that sincere effort of trying to make it work...”

Another staff member related:

“...right now under [this] VP we have a little bit more freedom to speak, but there’s nothing substantive going on in those meetings. The purpose of them right now is just sort of to fulfill maybe some sort of perceived obligation. We were meeting once a week, and it was just talking heads. People would come in and give us information that we already had or we could get off a pamphlet or a phone call. It was just kind of a waste of time. I think right now there is more substance in that people are reporting about things that are going on and so forth...”

Still another staff member described:

“I believe that the meetings have become perfunctory. It used to be I wanted to be at the [DSA] meetings because there could be something that comes out that I don’t know about that I need to know about.”

Yet another staff member related:

“...one of the things that I suggested to [the VP] myself that we stopped doing is that we used to go around the table, every person was supposed to be saying a brief report, and he’d say okay, two minutes.
Some people gave 15 minute dissertations on every little thing their office was doing...you were just supposed to hit the highlights. Finally a bunch of people started to say ‘pass’, there were others who didn’t catch on...now it’s just, ‘does anybody have anything?’ and some people do and some people don’t, but we got rid of that ‘show and tell’ thing...”

While the formal structure of the DSA meetings was evolving, several things were happening both in and outside of these meetings. Some organizational members said they began to lose trust in the VP because they started comparing stories and perceived that he said different things to please different people. Several observed that he showed favoritism by interacting with certain people and appointing certain people to committees. Some were very critical of his handling of the FU Pact for the division and concerned that as a whole the division did not fare well in the reclassification. A few were critical of his selections of out-of-state people rather than internal candidates for two director’s positions, while others questioned the rationality and fairness of being angry with someone simply because that person didn’t make the decision you wanted. As one organizational member described it:

“...what it really boils down to, ‘if you don’t do everything I want then you’re not living up to what [I think] you should live up to’...[for example] I suppose women sometimes...you get a woman...they’re inclined to think everything that she does is going to be exactly what I as a woman think she ought to do...when she doesn’t, they’re disappointed...we can’t expect that, but people do.”

Although there were informal networks or cliques established prior to this time period, they began to flourish, as some people perceived that they weren’t being heard once again. At some point the VP circulated a memo to all directors, putting a stop to what he viewed as the unauthorized calling of “secret” DSA meetings without his knowledge.

On the other hand, those who felt they weren’t being heard also felt their behavior was misunderstood. One person noted, “I have a group of a few people I can trust,” and another said:

“..we just simply wanted to talk because we’re frustrated by certain things ...and we can’t bring them up at the meetings so we’ve got to do it in another way, off-campus on our own time...but it was misconstrued.”
What the monthly DSA meetings had evolved into was portrayed in the opening vignette and was described by another organizational member:

“...what has resulted is these kinds of meetings we have now, little bullet, next item, next item, next item...no deviation, no discussion...Prior to that it was more open, let's discuss the issues, let's do it the way professionals are supposed to be in an organization.”

One organizational member offered an important insight about the VP’s response to the secret meetings and the outburst in the DSA meetings, “let us release and then we'll talk about it...let's talk about it, let's just not let it fester into something huge and then do damage control, that's not good.” If people don't feel heard in the formal organizational structure they will seek out those that they do trust in an effort to be heard, feel supported and to let off a little steam. It may be that the VP’s behavior of trying to control the flow of communication via “secret” meetings and the concurrent tightened structure of DSA meetings left no alternative for those who felt they weren’t being heard via formal communication channels.

Where to go from here? “It is a hard place to work. There are lots of tensions here.” Again, I heard some wide-ranging opinions on what could be done to improve communication. In particular, one organizational member had this to offer about the content of DSA meetings:

“...but he’s either intimidated by us or afraid of us or uncomfortable with us, and he will take full charge and decide how those meetings go and he'll spend 20 minutes with those Equity Players. It's not like we haven't seen them before...we should have spent more time on those annual reviews, that came and went so fast for me that I turned and looked at someone and said what the hell happened here? Did we already talk about it and I missed it?....I can meet the VP one on one and we can discuss whatever and get decisions made, but those [DSA] meetings are just too frustrating...I want to talk about meat. I don’t want to talk about frivolous crap....I want to see some active...discourse in those meetings.”

Conversely, another director felt that the VP had responded to the past contentious meeting situations just right by praising people for the good work they were doing yet ignoring the terrible things that some were saying about him.

Yet others felt that the VP needed to open up discussions again, but that in order to be fruitful, ground rules should be agreed upon ahead of time. Another person offered the idea of mediation, making sure that the mediator selected was well respected across
the division. “There is hope,” said one director who was relatively new to the group, while another long-term director felt “there’s too many old wounds that won’t heal.”

Observations--The Cyclical Nature of Knowing

As I was writing this case study, it was the December-January holiday season and I was taking breaks from my writing to attend several parties and open houses. During that time I had also been immersed in several texts on New Mexico socio-cultural history. These texts, written from a variety of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences, filled in some of the holes I felt I had in my understanding of how identity politics and oppression had developed and operated in the region.

At each party, I had some wonderful, informative conversations with individuals about identity issues in New Mexico. One conversation was with an Anglo man, recently relocated to Santa Fe, who was trying to find his way in the Santa Fe business community as a vice president in a local branch of a national bank. Another conversation was with a Hispanic native New Mexican, who upon hearing that I had been doing a lot of reading on New Mexico history, started out our conversation by saying, “you know Gayle, there’s this interesting thing that happens in New Mexico, some Hispanics here think they’re white!” I had yet another fascinating conversation with an Anglo priest, born and raised in Santa Fe who had some interesting things to say about what I had read in Archbishop Michael Sheehan’s book on the past 400 years of the Catholic Church in New Mexico. I also talked with my husband’s Anglo aunt and cousins, the cousins being 5th generation native New Mexicans who grew up in Albuquerque, and they related about their knowledge of how the American Indians had been brutalized and oppressed in this region over the years, primarily at the hands of the Spanish colonials and the Catholic Church.

Everyone I spoke with was fascinated by what I told them about my dissertation, and I reciprocated my fascination in what they told me about their related experiences and perspectives. My life before New Mexico, my continuing journey to know myself, the meeting observations, the interviews, my reading of the cultural history of New Mexico, my then every-day life as a student of New Mexico culture and part-time diversity consultant, and my dialogues with people who inhabited the space called “New Mexico” have informed my interests and thinking greatly.

I remember when I was in my twenties and finishing college, and my yearning to live in a place where not everyone was white, not everyone had such conservative views
on life, and not everyone viewed the world from the way growing up in a specific place and continuing to live there as an adult had shaped their perception. What surprised and dismayed me about living in Philadelphia and Washington D.C. was that living in a culturally diverse area did not guarantee being around more open-minded, tolerant people. In many cases, the overt racism and the internalized effects of it were much more visible.

I have also noticed from the times I have had the pleasure of being in the company of many Asians, including the too few times spent with my Hawaiian-born Okinawan heritage extended family, that the nuances of the culture, as well as the effects of the internalized oppression, are crystal clear to me in a way that I don’t think I would be able to recognize if I had grown up in a mostly Okinawan-Japanese or Asian community. What I have come to see from my experiences in New Mexico was that the effects of internalized oppression on native New Mexicans, especially in the Hispanic and American Indian communities, can be harder to distinguish from the inside looking out, because much of it has become as taken for granted as the air we breathe.

I will continue my observations and analysis of the FU case study in Chapter 9, *Theory as Storytelling*. In that chapter I will provide my second order story of the first order stories the interviewees related to me about their organizational experiences at both FU and CCC. The next chapter is Case Study II of the “College of Capital City” (CCC).
Chapter 7
Case Study II

“The College of Capital City”

I selected the College of Capital City (CCC) as my second case study for a variety of reasons. CCC provided a number of demographic contrasts to the FU case study in that it was in Santa Fe and was a small, private liberal arts institution with an arts emphasis and a church-affiliated history. Overall, issues of oppression were muted and the consciousness of organizational members of how internalized oppression manifests itself in their organization was minimal. For this reason, I felt it was a poignant description of the types of self-defeating behaviors that could occur in organizations that many of us recognize as unworkable, but often respond to inadequately. The following vignette was typical of the discussions I observed in this department’s staff meetings and consistent with interview transcript descriptions of the overall culture of the “student affairs” department.

Opening Vignette: Bi-weekly Staff Meetings

Searching for “a Sense of Mission”

It was the middle of the fall semester and I was late for the student affairs staff meeting. The day before I had run into the Dean of Students who told me they would be working on the department mission statement at today’s meeting. They had just started when I arrived.

As usual, the group was seated around four portable tables configured like a hollow square in the classroom/meeting room of the campus fitness center, their typical meeting space. There was no conference room in the building that houses most of the student affairs offices. There were 11 people in attendance that day of the 14 who typically came to the meeting. The department was comprised of approximately 10 different areas: the Dean’s office, student activities, residential life, the counseling center, the fitness center, food service, campus security, career placement, the college health service and campus ministry. I pushed a table in place at the far end of the room, grabbed a chair from the stack, and sat down to begin taking notes. In the background you could hear the dull thud of free weights being dropped in the weight room that was next door.

The Dean was saying to the group that the VP (whom she reports to) wanted student affairs to come up with one overall mission statement for the department,
because he thought that all of the little separate ones “don’t jibe.” A lively discussion ensued. Someone said, “Well, I figure they just want the right ‘buzzwords’.” Several suggestions for changes came up. The Dean said it’s a good thing we have our writers here today. One of the writers commented, “yes, and this is good fiction!” There was lots of laughter around the room. Someone else commented, “it (the mission statement) means absolutely nothing, but it looks like we’re saying something.”

The phrase, “within the Lasallian tradition’ with three exclamation points (!!!) after it” was suggested. Someone else joked, “just put a cross there (+).” More laughter. People were a little giddier than usual today. There was about a five-minute departure from the mission statement discussion as a few of the group discussed the possibility of a baby name contest for a staff member who had recently become a parent. During this time, another member of the group quietly bit his nails. Then someone else said, “is it me, or are we off the subject?” The group got back on track and another staff member commented, “the overall mission of the college is bad. When are they going to change it? How will we know if ours [student affair’s] is consistent with the overall mission?”

The Dean again commented that the VP wanted them to incorporate the concept of the person into their mission statement, and that in 1991 during the last NCA (North Central Association) Accreditation visit the NCA team commented that the offices in student affairs all had different goals and missions and things appeared disjointed to them. She mentioned that at the (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) NASPA conference, one guy said the best thing was to keep it simple with mission statements. She said, “We don’t want some long, philosophical mission statement that no one knows what the hell it means.”

In the self-study there was also a section where each department mentioned what its needs were for making improvements to its programs and services. The Dean mentioned that the VP wanted specific needs of each area, not just “we need more money.” One member said, “I put down that I needed a new file cabinet and computer programs.” The Dean said, “Put it all down, we know we’re not going to get it, but who knows.” The discussion turned to grammatical issues in the mission statement. One member commented about the use of the term enhancement, “isn’t that just like a wax job?” Another said, “It’s all a wax job.” There’s more laughter. One person jokingly commented that they had noticed a particular person parking in the handicapped space again, an issue that had been brought up at previous meetings. A different group
member began to write up the mission statement on the dry-erase board where everyone could see it.

A discussion of the pros and cons of using the term *unique* versus *individual* student ensued. Someone commented that unique was used in the overall college mission statement. Another person noticed that the college mission statement only mentioned the Lasallian tradition once. A different person commented, “That’s because they have to.” The Dean said that it might take them 3-4 meetings to get it the way they wanted it. Someone else noticed that an hour had passed. That’s how long they had agreed to work on it today. Another person joked that the phrase, “as a whole student” sounded like “asshole student.” The meeting was adjourned shortly afterward.

I selected this vignette taken from a department staff meeting because I thought it illustrated several key issues: the confusion that still existed at CCC about their evolving mission, the use of humor that often disintegrated into sarcasm as the group struggled with the assignment of defining who they were and how they did their jobs, and the lack of focus that I observed at several meetings of the group around a variety of issues. Next, I will provide a brief history of CCC in order to supply some important background in this institution’s evolution from a Catholic college operated by the Christian Brothers order to an independent college in the Lasallian, Catholic tradition. 

**Institutional History and Context**

“...he saw the writing on the wall.”

The oldest institution of higher learning in the state, Capital City College (CCC) began in 1859 in the New Mexico Territory as an impoverished high school for boys. At the invitation of the recently appointed French-born Archbishop Lamy, the Christian Brothers Order, also of French origins, started the school which long served as the sole source of education for boys in the territory. By 1874 the school was granted a charter to expand its program to higher education, and although the college program was dropped after WWI the preparatory school continued to flourish.

By 1947, after the purchase of the W.W.II Bruns Army Hospital, the Christian Brothers’ dream of reinstating the collegiate program came to fruition. Working out of 51 converted army barracks, some of which were still in use at the time of my research, the college achieved accreditation in 1965 and grew rapidly. The college began enrolling women in 1966, added the ‘Graduate and Evening College’ (GEC) division in 1980 for working adults, and began offering the MBA in 1985. In 1986 the college expanded into
Albuquerque by assuming the operation of the closed “Duke City University” where today CCC operates two campus sites.

Up until that point the college liberal arts program had strong majors in business, education, nursing, social work, and a seminary. The Santa Fe campus continued to enroll students from the local community, many of who were Catholic and were Hispanic, as well as beginning to draw students from Lasallian and Catholic feeder high schools across the U.S. Campus life revolved around fraternities and basketball games, and many Christian Brothers taught classes, filled all the major administrative roles, and even served as house brothers or proctors in the sleeping barracks and eventually the residence halls.

The 1980s brought many changes and challenges to CCC. With the coming of the new community college in 1983 a major source of prospective students was diverted as many area residents chose instead to attend the first state-supported school in the city, paying initially $11/credit hour. For this and a variety of reasons the Brothers found themselves facing hard financial times once again. They began downsizing, closing academic programs and eliminating intercollegiate athletics while attempting to tap into alternative funding sources. At that point in the school’s history there were many divergent views on the state of the college and its eventual change to lay leadership. A long-term faculty member remembered the years prior to the shift in leadership:

“The board [of trustees] obviously had to make the decision or it would not have happened. I think there was a certain unrest, a different kind of perception with Brothers and faculty and staff members, not being necessarily as involved as they thought they should be in such things as budget, monetary concerns...I think that was kind of the root of the whole thing.”

Yet another long-term employee, also a CCC alum recalled:

“...Brother 'Melton' became president and he was really too nice a guy to be president....he was just more interested in fundraising and that part...when he was doing that, they brought in ‘Franck’ as vice president and about a year later they basically forced Melton to resign and put Franck in as president....It was real questionable. But on some level Brother Melton brought that on himself because the board when he took over was about maybe 12 to 15 people and he had increased it to like 35, for a school this size, and people told him ‘don’t do this because you get people that don’t care about the students or the Brothers’ and it turned out...that the board members agitated to get rid of him, and they brought
Franck in. I don’t know if Franck was a party to it or anything but it was clear from the beginning they were out to get Melton.”

Yet another long-term employee stated:

“...This all happened back when Brother “Larry” was president. What he effected was changing ownership of the college so that it was vested in the Board of Trustees...I think he saw the writing on the wall. I think in terms of numbers of Brothers, and Larry is kind of a visionary person, I think he felt it would help in fund development or fundraising if it was independent, that was the kind of thing that was being discussed by a lot of church-related institutions.”

Yet another interviewee reminded me:

“The Christian Brothers are just like any other group of people that’s comprised of individuals who often have widely diverging opinions and significant differences depending on the degree to which they are conservative or liberal in their thinking. When a Christian Brother president reported to the board, which was comprised then of other Christian Brothers, he probably had a greater degree or sense of control or directive than a lay president. It’s unresolved how the Christian Brothers [as a body] think about this [the move to a lay presidency]. It usually depends on the individual brother.”

The Board of Trustees named the first lay president in 1987. At that point, as one administrator put it:

“There was still no reason...to believe that the college would make it. It just wasn’t doing very well. Low enrollments, really bad physical facilities, deferred maintenance. The whole orientation of the college was right in a critical state of flux and change.”

Yet another noted:

“...Most people on campus really thought this place was going to close...there were a broad array of critical issues that had to be turned around immediately.”

Many noted that the college had changed drastically in the past 10 years.

“The change has been expanding significantly in a variety of arts areas. The nature of the students, in terms of their abilities has changed dramatically, and that maybe is just in the past five years. The school does not seem by many as serving the state of New Mexico as it once did. The school used to fill the role that the community college now fills. We have 50% career faculty. There are significant periods during the day when you can look out on campus and not see a soul, so not be quite sure if you’re in a park or in a college. The science department has been
going through a significant decline, the nursing program has been phased out, social work was dropped.”

One long-term faculty member described the shift in the faculty as being very professionally focused, more isolated, disintegrated rather than integrated, with stronger departments that tended to think in terms of what we want instead of what the campus needs as a whole, noting that there were pros and cons to having strong departments.

CCC more recently bills itself as an independent, liberal arts college in the Lasallian Catholic tradition, with a strong focus in the arts. The educational theater department shifted into a performance-based program; the Film program enrolled film and video majors and ran a working studio where such films as City Slickers and All the Pretty Horses were shot; the Contemporary Music Program had grown as well as the Creative Writing Program; and more recently the Conservation Studies program had flourished in the sciences. Business, once the largest program on campus, was the largest GEC major but much less popular with the traditional day population; the education major still existed. Instead of intercollegiate athletics there was a fitness center on campus with an intramural program as well as an Outdoor Recreation Program. The fraternities were disbanded. The traditional, day population was mostly from out-of-state and mostly not Catholic by most reports, although I could find no factual evidence. As the attendance of local students had declined so had the number of Hispanic students on campus. The college enrolled approximately 750 students in their traditional day program on the Santa Fe Campus and approximately 1,000 students through GEC both in Santa Fe and its two sites in Albuquerque.

When the campus opened after WWII it was situated at the far edge of the city which was at the time of my research considered about mid-town as Santa Fe had grown and sprawled around its boundaries. The campus was basically self-contained; it didn’t blend in with the surrounding city as some campuses do but the property remained either fenced or walled off around the boundaries it now shares with a couple of strip malls, a junior high school, a public library and swimming pool, and other county government and educational facilities. Although there had been a great surge in improving the physical plant of the campus in the 10 years previous to my time on campus, many of the buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s were still in bad repair. Money worries continued in the present, as they had existed from the founding of the college through the previous closure of the college program and the most recent crisis
that precipitated the shift to a lay president. Students often wondered how their tuition dollars were being spent when they saw the outdated state of the residence halls and the few barracks in the back of the campus that continued to house a cafeteria, some academic department offices, studio space and the human resources department. The campus had managed more recently to garner some sizable donations that led to building a new Visual Arts Center designed by a world renowned architect from Mexico and secured a bond with the city to build new pueblo style apartments for upper-class, undergraduate students living on-campus. There continued to be talk of a Student Union Building, a campus staple that this school has always lacked.

Although much fewer in number, there were still Christian Brothers who taught and/or served as department chairs and some who had staff roles, although much less visible, in the administration of the campus. Behind the back row of barracks still used as classrooms, studio and office space, as mentioned previously, there were a couple of barracks-style residences that housed many retired Brothers and those who were still working on campus, although some Brothers lived off-campus. One person told me he thought the Brothers still had a lot of influence on campus; that while they had lost most of their institutional power they still held a lot of personal power or influence. Another noted that they thought some of the Brothers were quite forward-looking; while another felt that the Brothers had served as a stabilizing influence at CCC through the tumultuous years of the late 20th century.

For the past 10 or so years CCC had shared its campus with NAAC, the Native American Arts College, a federally-funded two-year school established to teach about and sustain the flourishing of Native American art forms. NAAC had been attempting to raise money to build its own campus but had suffered cutbacks in its funding from the U.S. Congress. The school leased buildings from CCC including a residence hall; some barracks studio space and land that housed many portable units, which brought in much-needed income to CCC.

In terms of the make-up or diversity of the student affairs staff, slightly under half were women, 4 were Hispanic, 1 was Jewish, 1 was American Indian, 1 was African-American, and anywhere from 4-5 were native New Mexican. During the period of my interviews and meeting observations there were three staff changes, with the full staff numbering about 14 employees. Of the 40 CCC alumni who worked on campus, 4 were in student affairs.
Key Issues

CCC: “How do we succeed and survive?”

CCC was a small organization, and because of the drastic changes that had been taking place across campus I think it’s important to understand what was happening in the student affairs department within the context of these institution-wide changes. Therefore I will describe this context in detail, focusing on the institution’s identity crisis and developing organizational culture and changing student population while comparing and contrasting these overall points to the issues of work culture, leadership, communication, and approach to dealing with conflict in the student affairs department.

The importance of identity—“we’re straddling the fence.” “It’s like, schizophrenic, we don’t know what it is.” The nature of the college’s current affiliation with the Catholic Church was still unclear to many. Some told me the school was clearly not Catholic anymore, citing the evidence that they had drawn this conclusion from, while most people said that the college was “straddling the fence,” or not saying very clearly if it was or wasn’t a Catholic, Christian Brothers school anymore. There were some who thought the answer to this identity crisis was for the school to reclaim its Christian Brothers roots, reinscribing the practices and values that were in place when the Christian Brothers ran the school.

One organizational member described the oversight under which the school currently operated:

“The ownership of the college has never changed. It’s always been the Board basically is the corporation. It’s the composition of the Board over the years that has changed. Instead of being all Brothers, in the mid-sixties they began bringing lay people on the board...All that really did was change the mix of people who comprise the Board of Trustees and it really didn’t change the legal ownership....I think most of the other [six Christian Brothers institutions in the U.S.] there is a Board which includes lay people, but on major issues, fiscal and others, there’s a Super Board that is Christian Brothers and usually includes provincial [church] leadership who actually have the final say so over institutional policies.”

Another organizational member explained:

“...We’re not run by an order.... there are certain things that are not expected here that would be expected under those circumstances, the order doesn’t own the college with the exception of a tiny little part of
it, the Archbishop doesn’t really have any say about what goes on here and neither do the Brothers.”

Another long-term organizational member, who was an undergraduate at CCC during its Christian Brothers controlled days, stated,

“It was a Christian Brothers school and now it’s like schizophrenic, we don’t know what it is....What I notice is....it’s a Christian Brothers school when it’s a benefit to the administration to be a Christian Brothers school, and it’s a secular school when it’s to their benefit to be a secular school...I think that we should make up our minds...I understand Franck, he’s in the middle, and if it becomes a secular school it’s just really what we are now. It’s got all the alumni going crazy, we could lose a lot of alumni support because they went to this school when it was a Christian Brothers school...So I think they should say, okay, we are still a Christian Brothers school all the time, even if it hurts us to say that at some point.”

Several mentioned that at a recent Board of Trustees meeting the shared mission committee brought to the board for approval a Statement of Identity which said that CCC was “an independent, private college of the liberal arts in the Lasallian Catholic tradition.” One person felt this statement simply established the historical connections of the institution. Yet another person whom I spoke with felt that this statement of identity reaffirmed the school’s Catholic roots and that CCC would now grow and flourish as a true Catholic institution once again. Again, another person acknowledged the hedging still evident in the statement of identity. One person who attended the Board meeting where the statement of identity was affirmed said:

“I think that the college mission statement certainly pays lip service to the church, and I think there’s some sincerity in that. But I think that people see that so differently, like the Brothers see it one way and the administration I think sees it in another way from a different perspective of ‘how do we survive and succeed and still do this kind of stuff’” [the Lasallian tradition].

It seemed that the entire campus was not informed of the work of the shared mission committee; I heard of no campus-wide announcement and/or discussions of what the statement of identity really meant and how it was to be operationalized day-to-day at the school. A few mentioned that the mission development process and strategic planning that had taken place in the past 10 years since the installation of the first lay president had not seemed to trickle down and take hold throughout the campus. The most recent strategic planning process appeared to have had little influence on the day-
to-day operation of the school. Faculty and staff of the early transition years remembered that it was all the college could do to keep afloat. It might be that some combination of too many things to do with too few people, along with some resistance to change, created a push--pull effect in shaping a renewed identity for CCC.

Organizational cultural values in transition. “Another thing that’s important in communication is establishing a sense of institutional culture...which is still in process here.” Everyone I interviewed agreed that CCC had changed drastically in the past 10-12 years; the disagreement seemed to center around what should be done, if anything, in response to that. Some people felt that the school should renew some of the Catholic school oriented practices that had fallen by the wayside in the past ten years, for example, mandatory community service for students in response to the professionally-focused students of today’s CCC. In stark contrast, another person stated:

“I find it funny sometimes the way things are done...I think certain people need to realize this is no longer a Catholic school. You cannot pretend it is, it’s over, done with. It’s very clear to me, just look at the student body...it becomes a real conflict...[Some staff] are trying to hold back when they need to be moving forward. It’s like they [the administration] can’t decide. I know they’ll probably never take a stand until--this is really sad to say, ‘t’il all the Brothers are gone.”

The students I interviewed told me that they hadn’t known CCC was a school in the Catholic, Lasallian tradition until they came onto campus and saw some Brothers in their frocks or saying a prayer at the beginning of their class; the school was not billed as church-related by the admissions office. To further confound the matter, most were not aware that all students were still required to take two religion courses as a part of the liberal arts core curriculum. It was no wonder that there was confusion and vastly different interpretations of what it meant to be an independent, liberal arts school in the Lasallian Catholic tradition.

The question this organization was in the painful process of figuring out was, What had to go and what needed to stay in terms of assumptions, practices, norms, policies, procedures, objectives, cultural values and organizational mission? As illustrated previously, depending on what you individually wanted to see happen with CCC’s mission, you might interpret the Statement of Identity to mean a variety of things. Herein seemed to lie the confusion whose thread wove throughout most aspects of the
organization: the evolving mission of the college did not appear to be fully clarified or uniformly understood or supported by all students, staff, and faculty.

As one might expect, I heard a broad array of experiences in terms of the culture of CCC as an organization or institution. I interviewed student affairs staff who had been undergraduate students at CCC during the Christian Brothers-controlled era, faculty and staff who had worked at the college before and after the naming of the first lay president, and more recently arrived student affairs staff members and students whose experience of CCC started several years after the naming of the first lay president.

From some people who worked outside of the student affairs department I heard these descriptions of the current culture of the institution:

"I think we have a very professional administration currently, I think there’s been a lessening of personal consideration...us getting so sophisticated...about roles of the administrators, we used to do things much more commonly...the Brothers invited us to their place for happy hour every Friday afternoon...it was more of a family community. Now they tend to all go in separate directions. There must be a way that we can combine these more successfully. The community approach plus the professional."

This person was able to articulate what many from the campus community of the Christian Brothers era felt as a loss. Catholicism was no longer the tie that bound the college community together. The majority of students were no longer raised Catholic and there were many fewer Brothers in teaching and key administrative roles, although as mentioned previously there were approximately 40 alumni who worked at the college. As organizational roles and relationships had become more formalized it appeared that the informal, familial-type relationship approach of management that used to bind CCC students, faculty and staff needed to be adapted in order for the community to re-form around evolving organizational values. It seemed that people were at a loss because nothing had been put in place or emerged to replace the core of what used to bring the community together. One interviewee commented:

"I think there’s a real dearth of social interaction outside of people’s official college roles. I don’t even think faculty within the departments socialize very much. I don’t understand why. It’s very difficult to get people to come to things and then everybody complains about the lack of a sense of community....I think if that were happening it would make a stronger communication system in people’s formal positions as well."
Yet another administrator spoke to another key aspect of the continued professionalization of the faculty and staff:

“What the entire institution has been doing is trying to make the adjustment from crisis mode to proactive; more of a planning and objective kind of mode... moving from containment to development.”

Several organizational members mentioned that they felt that CCC was finally becoming a “real college” through these various efforts to solidify its financial footing, improve its facilities and professionalize its operation. Given the financial situation of the institution described by several faculty and staff of the time, it seemed understandable that the college’s administration focused its energies around very practical matters of budget and keeping its doors open. From all accounts this mode of operation seemed to have permeated the school’s history. As the last interviewee stated, it appeared imperative that the institution and its members shed their identity as barely surviving to having won the struggle; moving out of a crisis-response mode into foresight and forethought; and daring to plan and dream what the institution could be beyond simply keeping its doors open as an institution in the Lasallian tradition.

*Lasallian educational values.* “Little by little it’s becoming less one of our schools.” In the CCC College catalog the Lasallian philosophy was summarized as a “caring, personalized education with a strong liberal arts curriculum.” The catalog also characterized the college as “an ecumenically sensitive intellectual and religious environment...with a strong dedication to the education of the less advantaged.” An organizational member commented on the Christian Brothers and education:

“Christian Brothers as an order are first lay members of the church and are not ordained. They are educators, and I haven’t found the Brothers to be involved in any proselytizing in a way that I’m pretty sure would happen in a Jesuit Catholic school, for example. I think they have a strong concern for the individual, there certainly is a concern for the spiritual development of the student body, but historically the Christian Brothers have worked hard to be as much of an ongoing, friendly church government structure as possible. They like to do their own thing and education is the focus of it.”

One organizational member recalled, “I concluded pretty early in the process that if you believed in education and you believed in the value of people as individuals then
it’s pretty easy to begin thinking of yourself as a Lasallian educator.” A faculty member commented:

“Speaking for myself and my department I know very well what the approach is, I would suggest it is Lasallian even though some educators may not even use that terminology. We seem to be able to attract mostly faculty members who are very caring, are interesting and are themselves very professional and are the best. All of those are probably Lasallian, although they may not know how to spell Lasallian.”

Although this faculty member felt confident that his department had enacted a Lasallian educational philosophy, he also observed that the faculty in departments and programs that had started in the last 10-12 years, primarily the arts programs, had not been carefully oriented into the institution, including the Lasallian educational philosophy.

At a student affairs staff meeting that I observed one CCC alum took issue with the school saying in its mission statement that it served the community and the educationally disadvantaged. This person felt that it did not happen today to the extent that it happened when she was an undergraduate at the school. Another in the room disagreed, saying they thought the GEC program did a lot to serve the Santa Fe community. The alum said, “If that’s so then it’s rare.”

The basic foundation of the Lasallian educational philosophy appeared to be still intact on campus, at least in intent, if not always in actualized behaviors. It was when you delved into some of the details of how that was being operationalized, and to what extent, that some CCC alums began to disagree vehemently over what it meant to them for CCC to be a Christian Brothers school.

The changing student population. “...A unique type of student whose a little more on the edge.” I heard varying descriptions of how the students of CCC had changed over the past 10-12 years and the response of faculty and staff to that. A faculty member quoted a long-time brother on campus who said, “Since 1959 the college has striven to love and guide its students to be the best they can.” This long-time faculty member reminisced about the close relationships they were able to develop with CCC students of the Christian Brothers controlled era. They remembered being invited to students’ rooms and being invited to take part in a lot of campus activities. They thought that students seemed to have a lot more confidence in the faculty and did not look upon them as the enemy as they often felt happened with some of today’s CCC students.
This faculty member acknowledged that students were bringing to campus what society had laid on them and that the current student population no longer saw CCC as a kind of “a beautiful oasis in which they can be safe.” Another CCC alum who worked at the college recalled that “it was a much simpler time” even when he was a student and initially an employee of the college.

In contrast, a newer student affairs staff member who had worked on a variety of college campuses saw CCC students as quite inquisitive and interested in being there, taking advantage of all that CCC and Santa Fe had to offer. He saw today’s CCC students as:

“...A little more out there and unique type of student who’s a little more on the edge, a little more willing to take risks...all these options are here...They’re really willing to say what they think. The incoming class are in that transition period so it’s emotionally tough because they’re trying to learn how to study and there are a lot of distractions here. They talk about that a lot. They’re exposed to so many different things, so the people that they’re meeting are as important to them as what they’re studying. Here there’s the whole other dimension of being open to different cultures and ways of thinking--that I see in many, many students, a struggle to figure out how it is I want to think.”

Consistent with what the previous interviewee said, one student commented:

“...You know, we all have to take these religion classes, and that’s bringing up some crazy ideas...and Santa Fe is a crazy place. It’s a crazy, crazy place. There’s a lot of weird stuff goin’ on that you’re not going to see anywhere else.”

Yet another student noted:

“I think it’s really time for us to start reanalyzing our recruitment policies...it still exists that people come to this college because they hear it’s got good weed and good snowboarding. In a sense it’s become a dumping ground for a rich kid because they couldn’t hack it in another school or a bigger college. I think...the overall college needs to start putting restrictions on the type of students who come in. Not to make us an elitist college but to make us a little bit more noteworthy college.”

It was clear to all that the face of the institution had changed dramatically; in particular through the students it now served. The students of the traditional program which the student affairs department primarily served were mostly not raised with Catholic religious values; they were mostly enrolled in professionally-oriented arts
majors, mostly from outside of New Mexico, and very inquisitive about life and eager to venture beyond the confines of the campus. Again, I heard from students and staff both in and outside of student affairs that the college’s curriculum as well as its student life programs needed to be rethought in order to best serve this new CCC student. It would be interesting to see how, or even if, the school could come to agreement on how the needs of the new CCC student could be met through a Lasallian educational framework.

Condoms for students? “In the old days, this wouldn’t even come up...” Another place where issues of the school’s historically Catholic identity and shifting cultural values had come into conflict had to do with lifestyle choices and healthcare for students. In the past 10 years the school had begun to have condoms available in the residence halls and through the campus health services clinic as well as pap and pelvic exams and the morning after pill. One student affairs staff member remembered:

“My predecessors were afraid that because we were an old Catholic school that the Brothers and everybody would get real upset about that and so she never pushed it. Well, I just felt that that was terrible because of AIDS and stuff. When I started working here...I went over to the [VP and] Dean [of the College] and told him that I had a basket full of condoms and I was getting them from New Mexico AIDS Wellness and he said terrific...I went back and told [my boss] and she was quite upset. [She] is Catholic and doesn’t want people who aren’t married having sex. And I said well, having condoms is better than having pregnancies and abortions, and she sort of agreed with that; because the [VP and] Dean [of the College] had already approved it, there wasn’t anything she could do about it.”

A CCC alum commented:

“...Everyone used to know it was a Brothers school. The whole issue right now that keeps coming up is ‘she brought condoms, she put condoms’...and regardless of what people think of them personally...it still comes down to a Christian Brothers school and the church teaches against that so we shouldn’t do it, but they say it’s stupid we need to do it. In the old days that wouldn’t even come up, so now it’s an issue...it’s because of the schizophrenia that the whole school is experiencing, we don’t know what we are and so people are doing what they want to do as opposed to what you know would be the right thing to do in a Christian Brothers school.”

It seemed clear that the school’s shifting yet still unsettled identity and cultural values were major issues when considering the day-to-day operation of the school in both obvious and subtle ways. Interviewees related numerous instances in which the
Catholic-based values of the former CCC clashed with what they saw as the needs and values of today’s CCC students. One interviewee commented that, “I don’t think there’s been any particularly large philosophical change” in the student affairs department since CCC was controlled by the Christian Brothers. Some current student affairs staff saw their role as protecting and maintaining the traditional values of a Catholic-controlled CCC while other staff saw their role as making changes in programs, services, and philosophy that they saw as better meeting the needs of current students.

In subtle ways this conflict played out subconsciously through an in loco parentis type approach reflected in various areas of the school. After the student rights movements permeated college campuses in the 1960s, many institutions shifted their understanding of their role from replacing the parents for their students to a student rights and responsibilities philosophy, a piece of which is a shift from a protecting students and keeping them out of trouble role to promoting self-responsibility and empowerment in students (Manning, 1994). I heard several accounts from students and staff of CCC of faculty and staff treating some students like children in some of the offices on campus through some of the disciplinary policies and procedures, and through the college’s class attendance policy. Some interviewees mentioned that the reason often given for such policies was that they were in keeping with a Lasallian educational philosophy of personalized service. Many organizational members noticed how the school’s identity and values were constantly at issue and a source of frustration as some people tried to push the organization into its future while others tried to pull it back into its past.

Making Sense of Student Affairs’ Culture: Is it Thriving or Surviving?

“...That whole issue ‘are we a Christian Brothers school or not?’... People have to make up their minds, you know...” I observed and was told about the significant influence the greater organization’s identity crisis and shifting cultural values had had on the working environment and programs and services in the student affairs department. One thing that the majority of interviewees from outside of student affairs agreed upon was the need for more visibility of most student affairs staff. Although it was generally described by all that the college had become increasingly fragmented and lacking in community, many felt that student affairs staff were even more isolated from the rest of the campus community. One faculty member commented:
“I’m not sure that the [student affairs] staff feels comfortable all the time with faculty. We seldom have a meeting of the minds. You can go through a lifetime here without even knowing who is in charge of student affairs....I’m sure that many new hires in student affairs don’t know what we’re all about.”

A student commented:

“The Dean of Students and the Assistant Dean of Students’ role should be more participatory and more involved in order to find out what students want instead of just being in their offices and not really coming out. It’s really sad that most students have no idea who the Dean of Students is...There needs to be more of a presence and going up and talking to students, students aren’t going to go up and talk to them. It needs to be the other way around I think.”

A staff member outside of the department commented about the student affairs department:

“People in key positions....need to be out there...with a high level of visibility much more frequently with others on the [student affairs] staff and with other departments on campus...they could take a little stronger student advocacy role and be less reactive and more proactive.”

The previous comments were not surprising considering what some student affairs staff members described to me as their experience of the overall organization. Consider this comment expressed by one student affairs staff member who had been at the college for more than five years:

“The language of the college is called vagueness, keep things vague. We don’t want you to question this; we don’t want clarity here. We feel a lot more comfortable working in the area of vagueness. Don’t question--assertiveness is not good. Just accept what is and do your work. Get on with it. In fact, pretty much I see people being punished for their wanting to get out of the norm. So, keep the old rules. Not a whole lot of change. Some people have talked about---intimidating, that’s the word. It’s intimidating to want to change....We’re still in a stage of development. What is our identity? Nobody really knows. It’s filtered down through the departments, they’re not clear, no one even has job descriptions. How do we know if we’re doing our jobs? There’s no clear picture from the top. It makes us very insular as departments, and as people. I do my work....but I’d actually prefer more.”

In contrast, a long-term student affairs staff member who was also a CCC alum had this to say about his work experience:
"I prefer this, I enjoy a lot of room to stretch and I enjoy being able to make decisions about my area...this kind of format that we have here at the college is more comfortable for me than it would be for me in a more hierarchical or structured environment. The one thing I like about this college is the lack of tight structure and hierarchy. Even though people complain about it at times, I think it's one of our strengths as much as it’s a perceived weakness."

The first person seemed to be describing an experience that was both structurally vague and yet personally stifling all at the same time and referred to several student affairs and organizational norms that kept people within the unspoken strictures of the status quo. The second person seemed to have found his niche; he felt freed by the vagueness and perceived lack of structure and didn’t seem to feel hindered in his work by any of the organizational norms. The first person was dissatisfied and wanted more; the second had figured out how to navigate the culture and was apparently happy.

*Student affairs work culture. “...Walking a tightrope.”* These varying experiences of the culture were also reflected in how student affairs staff members described their experience of working in the student affairs department. One CCC alum noted:

“[Student affairs] is strengthening, exciting, flexible...sometimes strained [when some people in my department aren’t getting along], then I have to really tamp my enthusiasm down so that I don’t make [one person] feel bad because I’m so happy and they’re so miserable, and I don’t want to be commiserating with them and make [the other person] think that I’m taking a shot at them...fortunately, I’m not [around them] very much, but then I have to walk the tightrope very hard. I love this place, I love my job...I love the contact with the students... [Student affairs] has allowed me the freedom to be excited and to share myself...[but] they don’t pay well.” (Laughs)

Another staff member who was a relative newcomer to the department said:

“The dynamics of every semester are not affected by what happened the previous semester (laughs)...It’s like three different jobs that I’ve had...there’s no carryover...there’s no control. I have a sense that there’s no control of our own direction; it does not even exist. [Our direction] is subject to the ebb and flow of the things we have no control over...I’d certainly feel more comfortable looking at goals, objectives, outcomes, strategic planning...and show you’re a little bit more in control of our situation.”

Again, these comments were examples of how the informal structure or norms defined the organization in the absence of a formal or more intentionally defined
structure. In the first case, the student affairs staff member felt very motivated and empowered by his freedom in his job, yet somewhat distressed about how to “walk the tightrope” of conflicting loyalties during a departmental conflict. The second person described some of the downside of having such freedom in the organization. It appeared to them that the crisis of the moment governed the direction of the department in the absence of a more intentionally focused organizational vision and objectives, and the department as a whole seldom seemed to make any real headway on anything. What had also resulted from this sense of identity confusion and freedom were departments and programs that were very personality-driven. One organizational member commented: “If you’re not in the right fiefdom, if you have a tyrant as opposed to a benevolent ruler, you could have a very miserable time here.”

One of the results of this campus-wide fragmentation was an expansive sense of freedom on campus, perhaps even a lack of accountability at times, and informal departmental cultures that were currently stronger than the overall institutional culture. In fact, this sense of freedom was the one thing mentioned by virtually every person I interviewed at the college. I would also posit that this much-coveted freedom was one of the side effects of the institution’s identity confusion and the shifting culture at the college. As one person put it, “We don’t know who we are, so how can they tell us what to do?”

Although many organizational members felt frustrated in making improvements and changes that challenged the historical status quo in their area, an upper level administrator described how she thought the college had responded to change:

“It’s a real mixed bag. Wanting to grow, doing more, coming up with creative, good, solid ideas of how we could do better or what we could add, people are real good at that. But anything that threatens the basic--what they see as ‘their turf,’ there’s a tremendous inertia here. With conflict, there’s a tendency to mute it and try to avoid dealing with it...I don’t think conflict is embraced at the institution. There’s an effort to try to make everybody happy.”

So change could happen to an extent, but then it was either blocked if it appeared to be a challenge to the status quo or someone’s turf or muted in an attempt to make everybody happy. Clearly defining the mission of CCC was a direct challenge to the status quo in some areas of the college; perhaps this was why there had been such overt and covert resistance to doing it. It appeared that figuring out what still needed to
be done to get all organizational members to embrace a fundamentally different CCC mission might have been the key to the organization’s flourishing.

Although there seemed to be freedom and opportunity for people in their roles to make lots of decisions and take a lot of initiative to do things differently, some of the long-term staff seemed to have become ambivalent about creating their own opportunities for growth and change in their work. One long-term student affairs staff member commented:

“You want to be sensitive to people and their insecurities. A lot of people come here and they’re going to change everything and they’re going to overhaul everything but what they end up doing is alienating so many people that they just don’t last too long. I think you have to be sensitive. People come and go and all of the work they’ve done and big plans become memos and files that are stuck—and all these programs that never worked and are forgotten. I’ve seen it happen over and over again.”

It also seemed that all too often good ideas had gone into limbo; sometimes from a lack of funding, sometimes from a lack of initiative or knowledge of how to make it happen, and sometimes from a lack of support or resistance to a particular change by key people in the organization. Change in student affairs and across the larger campus community was uneven and often hindered by the high turnover in staff, the uneven funding found across campus, the lack of a workable departmental planning and decision-making process and resistance from turf wars or conflicting values.

One interviewee also noted that the school had changed a lot and would need to change a lot more in order to solidify its new identity. Another organizational member commented:

“I think there’s some external forces that forced the college into the direction it’s taken, like the community college and their practically free education in New Mexico. That really undercuts that whole—at least the basis of what the Lasallian mission was when they came to New Mexico—to reach out to impoverished people. Why would anybody come over here? It doesn’t make any sense unless they have the money to do it. I don’t think you can blame the administration for that, for taking a different tact. I think that you can sell that you’re student-centered and that you want to live up to the educational mission, that Lasallian basis or background or foundation. Well, people just define that in different ways. You know, people hate change.” (Laughs)
As illustrated in many of the comments, there was a general sense of the college community not having fully worked through or mourned the sense of loss brought about by the shift in administration over 12 years ago. It’s as if the school was stuck in *purgatory*, not willing to let go and not willing to move on. One interviewee commented that she thought of this *growing and changing* era of the college as the “black period” when the college moved away from its Catholic roots. A formalized effort to assist the campus community in resolving these residual feelings once and for all could be critical to the college moving ahead into their future.

A key issue in CCC’s evolving organizational culture was balancing freedom with a sense of purpose. The confusion about *who we are now* pointed to the need for an inclusive process of clarifying purpose, mission and values at the institution. If organizational members weren’t a part of these discussions from the outset the institution would have missed a perfect opportunity to gather input from students, faculty and staff. This type of process could also be a key way to inform and transform organizational members’ understanding of their role. The looseness of the organization’s structure and historical crisis approach to management had allowed some organizational members to continue to work from their old set of assumptions of what CCC was about, creating inertia that inhibited the full growth and development of the institution. This may have meant that the freedom experienced by most would be perceived to be curtailed in some ways as the campus became more focused on its renewed purpose of educating students for the 21st century.

*Meetings.* “..It’s sort of a free for all.” The responses by the student affairs staff concerning satisfaction with meetings in their department was mixed. Some enjoyed and looked forward to getting together every other week with their colleagues to hear what was going on because that was the only way they ever found out what was happening on campus. Some said they hated meetings in general; they tried mostly to keep quiet during meetings so they would end sooner and complained how some people could go on and on at meetings, dragging them out longer then they needed to be. Some wished that the focus of the meeting be less of a *dog and pony show* of things they could read off a memo and more focused on problem-solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, and long-range planning and evaluation of programs. Others saw the student affairs staff meetings as simply a time when you could communicate as little or
as much as you wanted to regarding your work or even what was going on in your personal life.

My observation of the staff meetings as reflected in the opening vignette was a general feeling of informality and congeniality. The primary task was reporting what was going on in your area, with the expectation that you would be interrupted or asked questions throughout. Certain people in the group often functioned as gatekeepers attempting to get the meeting refocused and back on track. Some people were typically quiet, a few others were typically vocal, and there was a lot of joking around, sometimes the joking disintegrating into personally-focused humor and many times into sarcasm and bitching, moaning and whining about particular college employees, things that were tried in the past that had failed, or something else at the college that would never change.

As described in the opening vignette, there were a few meetings where the group worked on revising their departmental mission statement for the upcoming NCA self-study. This appeared to be a real struggle for the staff; some responded with lots of joking and complaining and sarcasm about the process, not seeing it as an opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue about what sense of purpose guides their work. It was more like a homework assignment from the VP that they were grudgingly completing. During these discussions, some in the group were generally quiet, occasionally trying to make a point and having to say the same thing several times before anyone acknowledged their suggestions. Occasionally during these discussions someone would disagree with someone else and present evidence to the contrary, but some people would often freely complain without any redirection into a more productive type of discussion.

During several other meetings and a two-day planning retreat I attended, I observed the group continuing to struggle with how to accomplish in-depth long-range planning as a whole, although several people during meetings and interviews mentioned the need for the department to be doing more of this. Overall the staff meetings centered on area updates and otherwise were not very goal-oriented unless there was a crisis or a directive for a problem to be addressed or a decision to be made.

An upper-level administrator commented about meetings across campus:

“I think many of the groups on this campus turn into little more than information sharing sessions, which I think people sometimes find
less than fulfilling...We should try to work harder at making them decision-making, or at least into recommending bodies, but that’s a grievance on campus. There’s a shift there that would improve people’s sense of communication.”

It was clear to me that the Dean of Students and the rest of the staff saw the purpose of their bi-weekly meetings as information-sharing although several members during interviews spoke of wanting or needing the meetings to be more than that. I don’t know if there had ever been any attempts in the past by the Dean or suggestions from the staff to the Dean to refocus the purpose of their staff meetings. Again, here was a place where the freedom people enjoyed within the organization came into conflict with their desire also to figure out how to work in a more connected fashion to develop a better sense of direction or purpose for what they’re doing as a department.

*Departmental leadership. “...Settling the work environment.”* As with most everything at CCC, there were differing assessments of the current Dean of Students’ leadership style. One long-term department member commented:

“[The Dean of Students] is just basically a very rare individual...I think her energy diffuses the department. If she wasn’t there it would change the entire department. She’s supportive and she’s nurturing as a leader...a valuable part of her work is settling the work environment...In student [affairs] we’re supposed to deal with people on a personal level so being a bureaucrat in here would be a mistake.”

Another long-term department member commented:

“..She’s a real cool supervisor...very loosely structured...The [Dean of Students’] door is always open...we have a really tight relationship...she’s not hard to deal with and she’s pretty straightforward...She’s a supervisor who really believes in the philosophy of hiring a person you believe can do the job and letting them do it. She’s going to let you do your job. Now that can get people in trouble because she’s not looking over your shoulder and you have so much freedom sometimes you go further than what she thinks you should go. She doesn’t always tell you how far you should go you know, so that can be difficult. I’m very much aware after a short time working with her that you just go to her and get the okay before you do something.”

Yet another long-term department member noted:

“Although sometimes I have problems with the lack of guidance and direction that [the Dean of Students] has, she is very inclusive and very supportive...so here I have an awful lot of freedom and the [Dean]
sort of let’s me take off in a direction that I think we need to go...Now sometimes I think that her way of managing is just to say, well, you know what you need, go to it. And go do it. Maybe because she doesn’t understand [my] stuff. But there are other times when she questions why I’m doing things the way I am and she does pay attention, but she’s usually not real active in the decision-making process."

A relative newcomer to the department commented:

“[The Dean of Students] is very relaxed about things. If you have a good idea and she thinks it will work, she’ll go for it and she gives you a lot of freedom that way as an employee where you can really voice what you think.”

Yet another newer student affairs staff member commented:

“I really like the way things operate in the student affairs area, but one of the things I really like about this job is you know [the Dean of Students’] approach, that team approach, it has some really good things about it...I like the way we all work together. I like the management style that sort of --you get out of people’s way and let them do their thing whatever it is unless there’s a problem that comes up...everybody’s on the same level...so for me it works. I think it brings out the best possibilities.”

It was clear that the culture of freedom was valued and was alive and well within the student affairs department. Virtually everyone I interviewed in student affairs noted that the freedom their jobs afforded was a major reason they enjoyed working at the college. As with any singular approach to management it has its pluses as well as its minuses. Some of the problems which were recognized by these organizational members included lack of direction, not knowing the rules until you broke them, and the lack of an overall, cohesive philosophy that guided the group as each area of student affairs does its own thing. One major area of concern mentioned about the team approach was how the leader and/or the group handle conflict.

*Dealing with conflict in student affairs.* “…Make this go away.” Getting people in the department to talk in interviews about what caused conflict and how it was dealt with was consistent with what I observed during meetings and again reflected the wide array of opinions and experiences of the group. Some would have me believe that conflict at CCC happened out there in other departments, and student affairs was basically just one big happy family most of the time. Others were willing to speak generally yet somewhat evasively about conflict, which reflected the ways I observed the group in action deal with it. A handful were willing to speak openly with me about what they had
experienced personally in the organization and how they had observed the group as a whole handle it. For the most part, major conflicts were not acknowledged in the group setting. One departmental member commented:

"Change or conflict is handled within the parameters of the people involved in the conflict or change...There’s not a lot of taking sides or allies or that type of thing. It’s basically handled within a small parameter of the situation, at least by myself..."

The organizational member who liked the team approach to management had the following insights about the downside of this style related to how the Dean and the department as a whole dealt with conflict and change:

"I think most of the conflict that there is in [student affairs]—there’s not a lot—is pretty open and straightforward and that can be ignored or whatever (laughs) but it seems to be sort of on the table if there is any conflict...

I think that people who fail to perceive the organizational system that’s in place or try to institute other styles of management cause conflict. (Laughs) And so there’s not a good method of integrating people into the system. If you come in and you’re comfortable with it, you accept it then that’s great, but if you’re a person who’s not accustomed to this organizational style then you’re really a fish out of water. If you don’t understand the organizational style that can cause problems that don’t really get dealt with in a very positive way. I don’t even see that there’s much effort to deal with it unless a problem occurs. So there’s a lot of avoidance in that respect. If you come and you fit in, it’s okay.

But if you’re a person like I am, if you come in and express your opinion and feel comfortable with that and not care if they agree with me or not. You know, just align and that fits right into what’s already happening. But if you’re not, there’s no effort to really communicate that. ‘That’s just the way it is and these are the ways you’ll fit, or that’s what you are.’ (Laughs) You know, I don’t know what happens it’s yet to be seen for me what happens with that...

And every kind of conflict that we have just sort of is like a family dinner type of a discussion, and that’s okay. But if it’s anything serious I don’t think anybody handles that very well. Not just from a management point of view but even up to dealing with that problem within the administration. It’s like nobody knows really how to handle the differences or how to talk about that in a constructive way so it just sort of sits there and becomes part of the family lifestyle, but it remains unresolved. It may be griped about, but it never gets resolved...

Like in families, if there are serious problems then they never get talked about. They get alluded to and there may be some passive aggressive comment but it never gets trotted out, okay, let’s put this on the table and talk about what are our options and how do you solve this problem..."
Things that can be talked about that's okay. Now if there’s some serious issues, I think the [Dean of Students] attempts to [deal with] it in her way, but it doesn’t— it’s sort of like she’s saying ‘make this go away’ you know rather than ‘let’s find a solution or what do we need to learn from this?’...And that’s probably one of the weaknesses of the family, team approach. If you fit in the team, if you can play, then you know you’ve got it. And if you kind of don’t know how to play...or if you do things behind the scene that don’t fit with the team approach...”

I chose the previous lengthy quote to illustrate the intricacies and nuances that shaped conflict in this organization. Conflict was often complex when you attempted to understand how history and the various experiences individuals brought to a situation affected how issues and tensions played out. Also thrown into the mix in this situation were the layers and layers of unresolved differences and disappointments that festered and got kicked up time and time again and were expressed by organizational members as sarcasm, griping, avoidance, or even just continuing to respond in a powerless way to conflict. Of course, the biggest unresolved conflicts on campus were the organization’s identity confusion and evolving organizational values, which served as potent factors that kept the entire campus from confronting the need to define who are we now? and what do we really want to be about?

Again, this organizational member had recognized that, although on the surface there was very little structure to this organization, the unwritten organizational norms dealing with roles, and specifically how they related to one another and what were their ‘sacred cows’ or values, powerfully enforced a hidden and perhaps mostly subconscious structure that defined how organizational members were to behave. This staff member also likened the team approach or management style that was in place in the student affairs department to an informal, family style of relating to one another, an analogy echoed by several other organizational members about CCC historically as a whole.

What follows is another description of the management style of the Dean of Students and how conflict played out in the student affairs department. This organizational member described what she saw happening within a group dynamics analogy that closely mirrored the family or team management analogy used by the previous staff member. Initially, she described how she saw conflict being handled in the organization in relation to departmental staff meetings:

“...What’s the focus? (Of what we do now in staff meetings?) If you wanted to you could have a meeting every week that could be
focusing on something that needs to be resolved, conflict for example.
Now, these are not conflict driven meetings...show and tell reports, what
they’re doing, what they’ve done, what they expect to do, it’s kind of nice,
it’s non-confrontational, not that I like confrontation...you really could be
looking at some issues that could be addressed in 45 minutes.

Then when the real conflicts happen, I mean, there’s a real denial.
People could iron it out, hammer it out, or resolve or process some kind of
a recent crisis or conflict, because you know they exist. The mentality
here is that there are no conflicts, and I say ‘oh really, that’s funny.’
That’s why my reluctance to get too involved, what am I going to do, point
something out and say something that ‘rocks the boat’, that doesn’t fit and
they’re saying ‘what are you bringing that crap up for?’

The key word is you don’t fit. If you bring something up, you know
you really don’t fit, that’s the kind of attitude or perception...there is a real
feeling here that if you do bring up something you’re especially
vulnerable, your institutional fit might be brought up under scrutiny.

I think it goes back to [the] leadership [style of the Dean of
Students], degrees, experience and personality characteristics...you get a
bunker mentality, isolation, withdrawal, defensiveness--all these crazy
things pop up.”

So it appeared from this person’s experience that there were very effective
unwritten organizational norms to deny that conflict even existed. So if you did try to
acknowledge or address the conflicts that existed in the departments then your
acceptance or fit in the organization was threatened. This individual also expressed her
experience of the family lifestyle in terms of in-groups and out-groups, as described in
the following:

“I see a repeating cycle or pattern of in-group out-group
phenomenon...the interpersonal perception is based on whatever the
prevailing conflict is or the denial of conflict that doesn’t get resolved and
causes in-groups and out-groups and changes the perception of how the
institution views you..It varies, it’s capricious, it’s not reliable or steady.

If you’re on the in-group or out-group it has been depending on
the dynamics of people coming and going [from the department] and
other kinds of denied kinds of conflicts that exist, so that at any given
moment it changes, and I think everybody in the department is affected at
their own subjective level.

[To be in the in-group] I think it boils down to simple compliance or
a perception of compliance, that’s important. There’s a certain loyalty
factor that its this underlying, unspoken kind of unconscious agreement
that you enter when you sign on here--loyalty to the [Dean of Students].
‘There is no conflict,’ even displayed verbalizations of any empirical
reports that really is not screwed up or dysfunctional that there are
positive things and that it’s important to stress the positive things. There’s
a real fear [to not bring up things that need work on]. I feel it [the fear]...I
feel it like a deep wound..
[In terms of the Dean of Students’ leadership style] there’s not enough vision and strength and articulation of who we are, what we’re about, and where we’re going as a group.

I think [the student affairs staff] are expected to be more laid back; enthusiastic in terms of posture that people carry to work, but laid back when it comes to what they do. [The appearance of enthusiasm] is expected; it’s denial, no conflict, no pain, things are going really well."

Here again was another description of what it took to be considered a part of the family: denial of any conflict or problems, and stressing the positive; enthusiastic appearance when coming to work yet laid-back productivity while at work; and compliance and/or loyalty to the Dean of Students. This individual had experienced and had observed others being shuffled from the in-group or out-group in the department based upon a variety of factors: the changing group dynamics because of the comings and goings of staff, the latest conflict and its aftermath, and one’s level of perceived loyalty to the Dean.

In organizations that are run like families and are heavily based upon the ebb and flow of interpersonal relationships, there are increased opportunities for the attention and efforts of the group to be more heavily influenced by the dynamics of these relationships than by the purpose and mission of the work of the group, which often adversely affects productivity, effectiveness and communication. The other organizational norms experienced at student affairs were clock-punching, blurred boundaries, and expressing your loyalty by not going outside of the department to get information about what’s happening on campus. Blurred boundary issues surfaced in a number of arenas: problems with confidentiality, unclear job expectations, and unclear decision-making authority. Several people mentioned being brought into meetings that they felt were inappropriate considering their role in the organization.

Only two or three people in this department were willing to talk frankly about the difficult and sensitive issues of conflict and leadership. I do not know how much this is a reflection of the fact that my spouse was one of their colleagues or how accurately this portrayed the varying levels of understanding people had of these issues in this department. If it was true, as the above analysis suggests, that there was a strong norm of pretending that serious conflict didn’t exist in the organization, then it would be safe to assume that the members of this department were stuck in a dysfunctional pattern of communicating and relating with each other that at its base pointed to a fear of conflict, a helplessness and hopelessness about resolving issues, and a lack of trust and honesty.
with self and others. Even those who had acknowledged privately that there were significant problems in the organization had rationalized their silence rather than to try to figure out how as a member of this work group to give voice to these concerns to improve the situation for the good of all. Bringing their concerns into the group’s public dialogue might have actually given them all a chance to learn and change; continuing not to say or do anything would more than likely continue this downward spiral. Next I will provide some initial observations of how this department’s struggles relate to how oppression and internalized oppression can affect communication and organizational effectiveness.

Observations

We affect the environment and the environment affects us

The main reason I chose this case and the previous case was to show the variety of both implicit and explicit ways that the effects of oppression and internalized oppression show themselves in organizational settings. At Flagship University [FU] there was a sizable population of organizational members who were aware of the dynamics of how oppression and internalized oppression played out in New Mexico and to a certain extent in their work setting. AT FU, several interviewees actually brought up the topic as a major communication issue in their organization. True to the design of inductive, qualitative research, I followed the lead of these interviewees as they showed me what was significant in their work setting.

What I noticed almost immediately was that virtually no one at CCC voiced an understanding of how these dynamics might be playing out on his or her campus. One person within student affairs spoke about the self-fulfilling prophecy of viewing yourself as a victim and the negative impact this identity and its subsequent behaviors had had within the student affairs department. When prompted, another person from outside of the department spoke at length about how the self-fulfilling prophecy of the victim identity had played out in the larger campus community. Yet another person discussed group dynamics in relation to conflict, leadership, and loyalty. It wasn’t until I had completed my later interviews at CCC and juxtaposed them against the many student affairs staff meetings I had observed that I could see how clearly some in the department had begun to believe that they were the victims, the underdogs, the “soft underbelly” in this emerging CCC organization. With few exceptions, there was a generalized lack of consciousness that they as individuals or as a collective staff had a choice between
reacting powerlessly and responding to situations from a flexible, thoughtful, empowered perspective.

These more subtle communication practices I observed at CCC were confusing at first; then I remembered this area’s socio-cultural history and my conversations with people about the regional nuances of northern New Mexico versus Albuquerque, New Mexico. Northern New Mexico, where CCC is located, had until more recently not been as affected by the changes and challenges brought on by waves of emigration and migration. The socio-cultural landscape centered around generations of old colonial families, and the work of the Catholic Church was still a strong traditional force in the area.

In contrast, Albuquerque became the home of Flagship University and a thriving railroad crossroads on the way west. The majority of northern New Mexicans are Hispanic; the cultural identities of Albuquerque residents are more evenly split between Anglos and Hispanics. My experience is that Northern New Mexicans are much more accepting of the traditional social and political structures in their region; the timeline and opportunity for racial struggles and general consciousness-raising of Albuquerque residents had accelerated as that city grew by leaps and bounds in the post-W.W.II era. These features, coupled with this institution’s long history and relationship with the French-born Christian Brothers order have created an organizational and regional sub-culture distinctive from the state supported, non-sectarian Flagship University.

What I began to see was that the struggles at CCC related to oppression and internalized oppression were much more subtle and easier to attribute to other causes if simply taken at face value. In many ways CCC historically had been and is currently much less culturally diverse in its student, faculty and staff populations than its Santa Fe home base. Issues of oppression and internalized oppression in this organization tend to be understated and easy to overlook because on the surface they do not show themselves as overt racism, sexism, classism or ageism.

I think the most significantly enlightening aspect of CCC’s student affairs department was how the organization as a whole and many individuals within it exhibited several classic symptoms or expressions of having internalized a variety of oppressions, resulting in a generalized lack of empowerment in how they approached their work at the college. I think it was significant that the well-liked leader of the student affairs department is a devoutly Catholic, African-American woman who was also an alumni of
From several reports, it had been challenging for the virtually all-Anglo (and male) administration to determine how to best support this long-time organizational member in making the needed shifts in her thinking about how she led her department and viewed her role on campus. It was also reported by those handful of student affairs staff who were willing to divulge their struggles that figuring out a way to get full understanding and support from the Dean for implementing new ideas and approaches to significantly improve programs and services for students, without being viewed as disloyal, was a major impediment to positive, necessary change in the department.

Internalized oppression also had a significant influence on how the institution as a whole and the student affairs department in relation to the larger campus community identified themselves and related to one another. I will discuss these issues more in Chapter 9 where I will provide a detailed framework for understanding how oppression and internalized oppression operate in our society by using illustrations from both case studies.

"Making-Sense" of These Experiences

New Mexico had proven to be a fruitful place to explore both the explicit and implicit nature of internalized oppression and oppression in our society. Because of its diversity it provided many examples of individuals and ethnic groups at various stages of struggling towards their personal empowerment and liberation, sometimes supported by and at other times in spite of their environment. The College of Capital City provided many eloquent examples of how the threads of internalized oppression can bind us to communication practices that are disempowering and have intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational implications. This institution also provided an opportunity to explore, at least theoretically, the practical application of democratically derived communication tactics in a group or organizational setting, providing hope in a situation that has appeared to be hopeless to many. These tactics will be described more fully in Chapter 10.

In chapter eight I will analyze the experiences of organizational members from both case studies as a whole using the situation movement states described in Sense-Making’s programmatic literature (Dervin, 1983) as well as a typology of communicative strategies for democratic communication (Dervin & Clark, 1993). These Sense-Making analysis tools were selected to examine in detail the linkages between the macro-cultural issues described in the case study of each organization and organizational
members’ communication micro-practices or choices within these contexts. Careful examination should reveal more specific information about the types of communicative strategies that appear effective given a variety of situations, many of which we have all found ourselves in at various times in our organizational lives.
Chapter 8
Sense-Making Analysis

The Oppression--Liberation Cycle and Democratic Communication Tactics

In Ruth’s (1988) treatment of the oppression--liberation cycle he illustrated how oppression operates in a society through varying levels of micro and macro procedures and processes that can cause physical, economic and psychological harm to individuals, eventually becoming internalized. For example, the oppression of particular groups is macro or systemic in that the mistreatment has become a part of a social system, such as the educational, judicial and economic processes. Oppression operates through a micro-procedural level when an individual’s prejudiced, subconscious behavior or automatic response to a situation is targeted towards others. These prejudices have been molded by macro-level stereotypes developed via hundreds and thousands of both subtle and overt messages we humans experience from birth that are unfortunately based upon misinformation about others. If a targeted individual has come to think of these stereotypes about herself as reality and acts accordingly, then she has internalized the oppression. The cycle continues as targeted individuals and groups begin to police themselves, acting within the prejudiced boundaries of their identity as reinforced by the larger society.

For example, we might have gotten the idea early on that girls shouldn’t be strong and smart or that boys dare not show their feelings or ability to care. We might have noticed in the world around us that people with lighter skin are thought about and treated differently than people with darker skin, or that the younger or older you are the less self-determined your life may be. We are shown early on from these varying levels of micro and macro communications what our role is and how others should behave too. We unconsciously begin to police ourselves and eventually our children to not act too differently from how society dictates someone like us should be in the world. We have internalized our roles, and all seems well as long as we stay within them.

In this manner, an infinite series of unthinking micro and macro processes and procedures increases the likelihood for oppression and internalized oppression to take hold in a society. If we aim to understand the relationship between communication and liberation, then we can begin by examining the responses to the question, What are the consequences of oppression and internalized oppression on our current communicative micro and macro-practices? as well as the converse question, What aspects of our...
current communicative micro and macro practices are oppressive in their effect on individuals? During this process, it is equally important to unearth the basic assumptions, which often reside below consciousness, that we hold about the nature of human beings as we construct and make sense of our lives and our relationships with others. With this information, we can then carefully examine the unthinking, taken for granted, “procedure-less procedures” (Dervin & Clark, 1993) or tactics that we have adopted as a culture in approaching our relationships with others and the way we organize to accomplish things, and the consequences of both. We can then decide with full knowledge and awareness which procedures are supportive of democratically based, empowering communication practices and which ones actually hinder them, preventing the full realization of human potential.

The same can be said about the practices of humans in organizational settings in which through the twentieth century we have adopted many taken for granted, procedure-less procedures. The assumptions that inform our standard agenda-setting practices, the approaches we take to the relationships between organizational members and organizational leaders, and the goals of our performance appraisal routines could all be examined as a start. These unspoken assumptions coupled with the influence of personal, organizational, and regional histories provide a complex context for making-sense of oppression and internalized oppression in organizational settings.

Methodological Rationale

As described in chapters three and four, I had framed this study of communication and democracy using Sense-Making Methodology or meta-theory (Dervin, 1983; 1991; 1993). Sense-Making theory provided a communication-based method for understanding the intra-personal and interpersonal micro-practices of empowering or democraticizing forms of communication at a procedural level. In addition, Sense-Making theory conceptualized both communicative micro and macro-processes as those which bind people together into community or culture, which are “always-in-process-of-being” via acts of communicating (Dervin & Clark, 1993 p. 5). The foci of chapters six and seven was to provide a cultural description of two organizations in their contexts, with chapter five providing a broader socio-cultural history of the region in which these two organizations exist.

Dervin and Clark (1993) argue that in order to effectively study democratic communication processes, the linkages between these micro/macro procedures must be
examined in detail. Similarly, in order to understand how oppression and internalized oppression are communicated at a procedural level and constituted and reconstituted in our cultural systems we must examine both the micro and macro procedures by which this occurs. The examination of these linkages with special attention on the effects and expression of internalized oppression is the purpose of this chapter.

In chapters five and six I used a variety of qualitative, ethnographic research tools to gather my data for each case study in order to explore members’ experiences in context. In this chapter I will focus primarily on the interview transcripts of organizational participants. I analyzed their accounts of their experiences from many angles as well as a number of levels of understanding using the situation movement states described in Sense-Making’s programmatic literature (Dervin, 1983) and the typology of communicative strategies posited by Dervin & Clark in their conceptualization of the link between micro and macro communication tactics of democratic communication (Dervin & Clark, 1993). Additional levels of analyses included the primary focus of each individual as they were relating their communication experiences (i.e. collectivity, others, or self) and, finally, an in-depth look at a particular situation movement state where participants were focusing on the collectivity.

Focus of this Analysis

College and university settings tend to be fairly hierarchical and tradition-bound, if not explicitly then implicitly, in their enacted organizational culture. When difficulties arise in response the situation can result in a “breakdown in communication between people at different positions in the political structure” (Coco, 1999, p. 3). Additionally, in both personal and organizational settings we have all experienced the discomfort, fear, conflict and confusion that both unplanned and planned change can bring. However, people may grasp or understand these dissonant situations differently, producing a variety of responses, which are illustrated by the narratives from this study.

The data that informed this analysis included the recollections and constructions of organizational members as they described both the critical incidents and ongoing situations of conflict or dissonance in their respective organizations. I will focus on individuals’ communicative strategies as they were faced with these difficult situations in their workplace. What steps did they take in response? My aim is to provide tentative answers to the questions: Did individuals engage and connect with others in an effort to bridge these gaps or did they disconnect from others as a result, and with what
consequences? Which communicative practices or responses to situations provided opportunity for connection, liberation or empowerment for oneself or others, and which ones impeded or oppressed, or divided?

Sense-Making Methodology allows for the potential to analyze the in process sense-makings of a diverse group of individuals and to generate data from the cognitive, affective and spiritual domains. This assumes a worldview where it is recognized that human beings, because of our nature, require theories and approaches to inquiry that take into account our ability to move from one meaning place to another, within all domains. It is hoped that becoming aware of all of these areas of meaning will assist change agents in pinpointing just where an intervention needs to be positioned, or what forms an educative process might take (Coco, 1999). In order to obtain a deep, materially anchored, procedurally connected, and interpretively rich account of situation facing, I used each respondent as my unit of analysis.

Situation Movement States

In Sense-Making’s programmatic literature eleven (11) situation movement states are identified: decision, problematic, spin-out, washout, barrier, being led, waiting, passing time, out to lunch, observing, and moving (Dervin, 1983). Coco (1999) added three new possible categories for her study: effete, drifting, and tightrope. I considered focus, emotional tone, and type of barrier when categorizing situations. I found it necessary to add and delete categories as they were somewhat driven by the particular experiences of the participants and the purpose of the study. The categories selected for this study and their definitions are included in the table below.

As mentioned previously, I have used the interview transcript data to ground this portion of my analysis, using my participant observation notes, the socio-cultural historical review (chapter 5), and organizational documents to both give a broader viewpoint and clarify my picture of this data.
Table 1. Descriptions of situation movement states with definitions, illustrative quotes, and number out of 33 persons interviewed whose narratives were identified with each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation Movement States with Definitions</th>
<th>Sample Quotes</th>
<th>Number of Persons*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washout</td>
<td>They pay lip service to the Lasallian tradition, but I don’t believe it exists, and I don’t believe that it’s ever going to exist again on this campus. (Mark)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>It’s the craziest thing. Especially in the Student Affairs Division that’s made up of...this particular division is pretty well-rounded in terms of ethnicity...But those issues for some reason are just so sensitive, I never understood it. (Monica)</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waiting</td>
<td>If you come and fit in it’s okay, but if you’re a person like I am, [I] can come in and express my opinions and feel comfortable with that and not care if they agree with me or not....I don’t know what happens, it’s yet to be seen for me. (Loretta)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tightrope</td>
<td>(laughs) Right now? I’m rolling, I’m really cruising along fine. Like I said before like the semesters--there was no threat of continuity, like every semester is like a new job, it gets back to that kind of mentality, that kind of dynamic that flows...I think it boils down to a perception of compliance. (Ron)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing Time</td>
<td>It’s not bad working here. I wish we had more resources and a little bit more support sometimes. But other than that, things are going pretty well. I wouldn’t still be here if I didn’t like it, I’d be long gone. But I enjoy the community, I enjoy the campus, and there are times that I’m frustrated. I’m not saying everything’s rosy because it’s not. (Barbara)</td>
<td>1</td>
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Table 1: continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Out to Lunch</th>
<th>Tuning out</th>
<th>Effete</th>
<th>Effete</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I see this, I do what I do and I don’t take it home with me...if you invest too much emotional baggage and personal energy here and you don’t find it repaid in kind, you tend to burn out very quickly. I do what I need to do for the time I’m here and then I do my other things and then it doesn’t get to you. (Bill)</td>
<td></td>
<td>It’s no longer an issue for me. Whatever you want to call me, go ahead...I call myself Tejana. Just because that’s not what a majority of people call themselves doesn’t mean that I don’t have that right. (Laura)</td>
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*Number of persons out of 33 interviewed

Typology of Communicative Strategies

Once this level of analysis was completed, I analyzed each grouped situation movement state using the typology of communicative strategies proposed by Dervin and Clark (1993). The researchers theorized that while moving through situations people might employ a variety of communicative strategies in order to acquire information and develop understanding of the situation. These moves included: attending, creating ideas, expressing, finding direction, finding connectedness, confronting, opposing, mediating and recalling. Again, the data required that a category be added. I adapted the category symbolic re/aligning from Coco’s (1999) study of the Roman Catholic culture for my purposes. Symbolic re/aligning, in a cultural or organizational sense, was related to changing one’s concept of the culture and values of the institution and lining up concepts of self and others within this new symbolic cosmos. In the case of this study communicative strategies centered on individuals’ responses to dissonance and conflict in their respective organizational settings. The following table provides descriptions of communicative strategies accompanied by illustrative examples.
Table 2. The communicative strategies, with definitions and sample quotes gleaned from participant narratives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Strategies with Definitions</th>
<th>Sample Quotes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attending</strong></td>
<td>I have a low profile because it’s better that way with this kind of leadership style...then when the real conflicts...I mean there’s a real denial—you know they exist. The mentality here...is that there are no conflicts. I’m saying, ‘oh really, that’s funny.’ That’s why my reluctance to get too involved, what am I going to do, point something out and say something that rocks the boat, that doesn’t fit and they’re saying ‘what are you bringing that crap up for.’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Creating Ideas</strong></td>
<td>There’s a dynamic I want to touch on, the New Mexican or the Hispanic that has been here for some generations...has assimilated to the U.S...and in certain places their relationship with Mexicans is very condescending, you know, that whole ‘wetback’ mentality...They have adapted alright...Now the Chicano, that’s a different story, they are a group who have been assimilated and have mastered ‘the way,’ they [the Hispanic New Mexican] are very condescending to this group of newcomers...But the American education system, the economic system, and the social system by design are not created to support their (Chicanos) way of living, so they challenged that system, which is appropriate but is also very threatening to the status quo the [New Mexican] Hispanic has accepted. That’s where the Chicano doesn’t fit. But it reminds the Hispanic New Mexican that there is something...that there is a part of them that they’re neglecting...the internalized oppression. It’s very uncomfortable for the [Hispanic] New Mexican. So there’s big factions...You can see why it’s so deep. ‘Cause [New Mexico] is an isolated area of the country... But it’s up to us to break that cycle...The way to understand the cycle is to expose it. Sometimes just to be treated bad isn’t enough to know that you’re being treated bad. You have to have something to compare it to, you know.</td>
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### Table 2: continued.

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<tr>
<th><strong>Finding Direction</strong>&lt;br&gt;Determining possible directions in which to move, alone or together</th>
<th>Just the whole planning process could be a little more creative. [They could] look at some options, sort of open themselves up to what’s going on in other places...I think if I were running this organization I’d really be pushing people here who are overall a pretty good bunch of people, I would really push the creative ideas and do something totally different, something we’ve never done before...we got bogged down on a couple of things...we’ve got some really talented people, who can be trusted; their ideas can be trusted. I’d really be pushing the staff.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Expressing</strong>&lt;br&gt;Giving symbolic expression to individually or collectively created ideas</td>
<td>I saw myself at that time as sort of a savior, &quot;I'm going to help these victims'...If you’re a savior, then only people who need saving will come to you. I think there’s a short-sightedness in terms of what sort of program approach is necessary in terms of it being advocacy, okay, but what else besides advocacy?...I'm saving the poor, huddled masses'...It’s something that I had to unlearn. What you want to do is create a healthy environment...you have to work with your colleagues to do that, you can’t do that by your--you have to do a program, you can’t just be it. That’s not sufficient.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Finding Connectedness</strong>&lt;br&gt;Getting connected to others -- allies, comrades, interest groups, sources of ideas</td>
<td>It’s hard to find something that’s really common to everyone...That’s where a lot of times those cliques sort of fly because everybody--you have to be in one, when it gets to those modes, to protect yourself, you’ve got to get enough people on your team you know to defend yourselves...We have such different views and such different personalities, I don’t know if we’d ever get to a consensus.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Confronting, Opposing</strong>&lt;br&gt;Focus is one entity contesting against another</td>
<td>When 'shit hit the fan' in one of those [DS] meetings and it occurred at the very end of the meeting, I was the instigator in that, but she [the VP] was very quick to say okay, thanks everybody for coming, see you later. And I went ‘no, I don’t think so. I’m real concerned about this and I am tired of this, and I’m afraid of what can happen and I’m not reassured’...I confronted her in the group and I admit 100% it was done totally inappropriate [ly], but what I said came from the gut and came with 100% sincerity.</td>
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</table>
| **Mediating**  
Compromising, or otherwise resolving disagreements | I wanted to put on (a flyer) that we did pelvic exams and pap smears and be as graphic as possible...I wanted to put in there the ‘morning after pill’...I took it over to [the VP] and he didn’t think that I ought to say that I was providing the morning after pill because he thinks it’s abortion...he said well you’re going to have to have the president...approve it...He [the president] said ‘if we’re providing it, say it’...I think like so many people, every time I say penis or vagina or emergency contraception or something like that it gets a little easier for [the VP] to hear it so it’s not so startling to hear, and eventually he might be able to say it himself. (laughs) |
| --- | --- |
| **Recalling**  
Creating memory of own, others’, or collective past and bringing memory to bear on the present | He was a very dynamic character, and I call him a character and that’s not meant negatively. He had a very clear concept of what he wanted to do for students, what the division should be doing for students...if you have a strong leader and a strong personality that individual can hold a group together and fend off other political kinds of decisions...On the other hand, I would also say that the [Toby McGuire] days are long gone in any institution...It was a different time, a different style. I’m not sure that style would work in any institution again. |
| **Symbolic re/aligning**  
In an organizational sense, changing one’s concept of the culture and values of the institution and lining up concepts of self and others within the new symbolic cosmos | I was frequently invited by students to visit them in their dorms, and I have not been in a dorm for probably the last five years...A typical student of that era ...had much more confidence in us...they actually wanted to have us participate in their academic lives...There’s an unspoken creed that sort of incriminates the institution currently...I don’t think all students see us as their friends or their allies...as Brother [Frank] said “Since 1859 the college has striven to love and guide its students to be the best they can.” I don’t think the students see us as loving and guiding them. I think some see us in very adversarial positions....They’re bringing with them that which society has laid on them...I don’t think they necessarily see this place as a kind of beautiful oasis in which they can be safe...I think we have a very professional administration currently, and I’m concerned about professional welfare. I think there’s been a lessening of personal consideration...it was more of a family community...there must be a way that you can combine these more successfully--the community approach plus the professional. |
Focus of Attention

Dervin and Clark (1993) also argued that our communicative strategies will vary according to our focus of attention. For example, one might choose a particular communication strategy in attempting to understand conflict within a group setting and a different one if attempting to understand conflict personally. Thus, an additional level of analysis included categorizing participants’ experiences within situation movement states and their foci of attention, such as *the collectivity, other people, or the self.*

The *collectivity* referred to situations where the person’s focus was on her or his experiences with participating in a collectivity that could be seen to move as one. (Coco, 1999) In this study the collectivity referred to the college or university as a whole and its representatives in their organizational roles. This also included experiences with institutional hierarchy, authority, structure and rules, as well as organizational culture, customs and norms of communicating. Given the nature and development of ethnic cultures in this society, I have also included references to experiences with ethnic and regional groups in this category.

Individual people relating to *other people* referred to one’s relationships with other people either in or outside of the organization including learning about and comparing oneself to others and connecting/disconnecting from others for example. While individuals in their organizational roles have been categorized as the *collectivity,* the process of getting to know others as human beings was considered relating to *other people.* This included interpersonal experiences with individuals in one’s department or another, or one’s cultural group or another that had specifically contributed to one’s blocking situations.

*Individuals relating to self* were mainly concerned with arriving at a personal sense and understanding of self through thinking, creating, and observing. This included weighing the personal costs and benefits of being affiliated with one’s department, institution, or identity group(s). In this study, participants who were focusing on self were weighing the impact of organizational or cultural group conflict or dissonance on the self.

What follows in Table 3 are the Sense-Making definitions of the primary foci with illustrative quotations from the student affairs study. This seemed to be a useful way to organize data as it revealed which communicative strategies are held within and amongst situation movement states, as well as where they differ.
Table 3. Primary foci, with definitions, illustrative quotes from participant narratives, and number out of 33 persons interviewed whose narratives were identified with each primary focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Foci With Definitions</th>
<th>Sample Quotes</th>
<th>Number of Persons*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual relating to collectivity</strong>&lt;br&gt;Communicating activity where the individual is focusing on participating in a collectivity which can be seen to move as one</td>
<td>...Another one [communication rule] that is unspoken. That you don’t go outside your department to get information, you get it here first. It’s like you’re unfaithful to your department if you go out asking questions and it gets back.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual relating to others</strong>&lt;br&gt;Communicating activity where the individual is relating to other individuals, learning about others, comparing self to other, connecting or disconnecting from others</td>
<td>...It’s strained and I have to really tamp my enthusiasm down so that I don’t make [Sarah] feel bad because I’m so happy and she’s so miserable, and I don’t want to be commiserating with her and making [Barbara] think that I’m taking a shot at her...I walk that tightrope very hard.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual relating to self</strong>&lt;br&gt;The individual is thinking, creating, observing, arriving at personal sense and understanding of self</td>
<td>I feel like I do what I can do. I love the state, I love the people, I love the work that I do. I used to think that I [had to] do it all and I would try to do it all, and it was a very unhealthy thing for me to try to do. Now, I do what I can.</td>
<td>4</td>
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[*] Number of persons out of 33 informants interviewed

Over two-thirds of the informants interviewed focused on their blocking situations within a collectivity, which is not surprising considering the aim of this analysis was to understand responses to oppression in-group or organizational settings. As they form the largest cohort and the focus for this study, I have chosen to examine in detail the procedural strategies participants adopted as they responded to blocking situations within their overall organizational setting and where this may overlap with their own and other cultural groups.
For this aspect of my study I followed Coco’s (1999) adaptation of the Sense-Making approach, where as a researcher my analytical lens encompassed not only the cognitive but also the emotional and spiritual aspects of action, taking into account movement in one’s outer and inner reality. Hence, the creation of categories such as tightrope and effete which describe a movement in one’s thinking, feeling and spiritual self; one a place of indecision and inner felt tension and the other a place of self-resolution and acceptance of circumstances beyond one’s control.

The addition of these categories signified the recognition that, experientially, sometimes “invisible and seemingly passive phenomena have consequences for social relations” (Coco, 1999, p. 7). For example, “self-feelings” as described by Denzin (1984b) such as “feeling let down” could give rise to feelings of anger and resentment, but instead of these feelings arising procedurally in this case they could arise in a non-willful way. This conceptualization of movement is more comprehensive than Dervin and Clark’s (1993) which tends to be more strategic and instrumental. In fact, the conditions for movement sometimes simply happen or emerge (Smith & Pope, 1992). So as I proceeded with these analyses I kept one eye on what is not done, or the absence of action or a response, and another on the levels and types of emotional effects. I believe this broadened description of movement took into account the reality of the situations we are faced with as human beings and the actions we take or don’t take as we come to understand both the doing and undoing of oppression and internalized oppression in our society.

In the sections that follow I will analyze the group of situation movement states for which the main focus was the group, institution or collectivity. These were barrier, effete, washout, tightrope, and waiting. In this next section I will use the tightrope situation as an illustrative example mainly because it was one of the smaller groups (4) yet varied enough to make an interesting piece of writing. I will provide an in-depth reading of the tightrope situation, identifying the key procedural moves used by these participants. In the section that follows I will discuss the themes and related strategies common to all five situations that focused on the collectivity as a final comparison and conclude with my thoughts on the usefulness of Sense-Making Methodology in understanding the oppression–liberation cycle.
Analyzing the Tightrope Situation Movement State

Coco defined the tightrope situation movement state as one in which people experience “a tension filled waiting, while being conscious that one could fall from one’s position within the system at any time” (Coco, 1999, p. 4). Participants who described tightrope situations focused on the collectivity had been experiencing them from several months to several decades and were at various levels of acceptance of their situation. “Ron” was a student affairs staff member who had been working in his department for about a year at the time of our interview. He discussed at length the instability of his workplace situation, where his “position” in the organization appeared to change from semester to semester. “Bob” was a student who described his feelings about sharing campus facilities and space with another institution, which happened to be predominantly Native American. “Pablo” was an upper level administrator and being non-native to the region he discussed the constant tensions between himself and some of his fellow Hispanic colleagues that played out in the organizational arena. Finally, “John” was an upper level administrator and long-time faculty member; a Hispanic native New Mexican who recognized the expectations, obligations and perceptions he must consider as he discharged his work responsibilities in the institutional arena. Because of the varied nature of each context, I will first describe separately each person’s situation and the moves each made, and then identify overall themes or patterns in these moves across the four situations.

Ron: “Right now? I’m rolling, I’m really cruising along fine.” Ron was a relative newcomer to his student affairs department at the time of our interview; he had worked there for just over a year. He was Anglo and not native to the area yet had had varied experiences working both in and outside of student affairs settings at a variety of colleges and universities around the U.S. He had also worked in the private sector. In his current working situation he noticed a group dynamic that was not uncommon to him in that the group’s perception of him was “capricious” and seemed to vary according to whether he was perceived to be in the “in-group” or the “out-group.” In his mind, these groups were based upon where an individual appeared to stand vis a vis the conflict du jour. At this workplace, the conflicts seemed to vary “depending on the dynamics of people coming and going” and “other kinds of denied conflicts that exist” in the organization.
Ron noticed deficiencies in his immediate supervisor's leadership abilities, stating there was a need for more "vision, strength, and articulation of who we are, what we're about, and where we're going as a group." Tied to this issue was that entry into the "in-group" appeared to be based upon a "perception of compliance," if not a "certain loyalty factor [to this supervisor]...an unconscious agreement that you enter when you sign on here...that there is no conflict...that it's very important to stress the positive things."

So Ron was in a situation where it was very important to "stress the positive things," yet during his interview he mentioned several denied conflicts. He said, "there's a real fear, [to bring up conflict] ...I feel it like a deep wound." With one, he talked about a similar experience he had in another work situation; a similar leadership style in his department and dynamics across the campus as a whole. He said 'The way I survived in the other position is by keeping an extremely low profile and very low interaction, and now in his current situation he said, "I have a low profile because it's better that way with this kind of leadership style. I would be that way anyway, I don't think I can change...I'm at my best when I'm working with somebody who is more solution focused...and more on paper and less interaction, less meaningless stuff."

Ron talked more about denied conflict in terms of the departmental staff meetings, which instead of being primarily "show and tell reports" by various staff could actually focus on resolving whatever the current conflict was. Ron related,

"..You know they exist...and the mentality here as it was over there is that there are no conflicts. And I'm saying, 'oh really? That's funny', that's why my reluctance to get too involved, what am I going to do, point something out and say something that rocks the boat, that doesn't fit, and they're saying 'what are you bringing that crap up for?'...There is a real feeling here that if you do bring up something you're especially vulnerable, your institutional fit might be brought up under scrutiny."

Another issue that became a tightrope situation for Ron centered around the denial of the serious drug and alcohol problem with students and some faculty on campus. He said,

"There's this phenomenon called institutional codependency where the institution literally enables the use and that is rampant here, this is like an incredibly sensitive issue that I don't, that I think a lot of people aren't really conscious of, but understand at some level is a problem, but are really overwhelmed by it...yeh, it's a really bad problem...the one thing that's been consistent in my three semesters here is aggravated alcohol and drug use, in fact serious drugs, crack cocaine, heroin, acid; it
happens in cycles and patterns of availability but they exist. It’s a tough nut on any campus...I’ve brought it up, I’ve broached it in very subtle ways and non-controversial ways, and decided the best approach would be to try to do some programming.”

What was important to note was that although earlier in his interview Ron cited some research from a particular school that showed that alcohol prevention programming actually correlated with a reported increased use of and experimentation with alcohol by students, he chose the same response, “programming,” as his best option in a situation where denial of conflict was an organizational norm and “keeping a low profile” a typical response for him in such situations. When I asked Ron if he felt he was part of the in-group or out-group, he joked, “Right now? I’m rolling, I’m really cruising along fine.”

Bob: “...it’s a very tense situation. I think by just letting people do their own thing eases that tension. It doesn’t present any problems.” Bob was an Anglo student in his senior year, originally from back east as many of the students were at The College of Capital City (CCC) in more recent years. During his interview he talked about the very different pace of the Southwest and his frustrations with that;

“I really want to just scream to people, ‘get off your ass and move!’...here it’s like, ‘eh yo bro, I’ll get to it when I get to it.’ It’s like ‘chop, chop, come on people’, and I think a lot of students bring that energy and attitude with them and then lose it when they get here, the land of manana feeling sucks them in and they’re just like, ‘I’ll get to that term paper when I get to that term paper,’ you know, if it’s the night before it’s like, ‘oh, I’ve still got 6 hours before class, I’ll get to it.’ In that sense “Capital City” really frustrates me like that, because with the energy that they’re lacking they could make up for it. The city of “Capital City” would not have the problems of development, of pollution, of population control, of that sort of thing, of gang violence, if they didn’t just take a little more energetic attack towards it, in the sense that they just lay back and let it develop and then deal with it.”

Bob expressed the feeling that the college’s administration “flies in the face of this prevailing attitude of the city of Santa Fe.” He also thought that the administration was basically “color blind,” in that they saw CCC students primarily as paying customers whether they were “black, white, yellow, red...,” and he didn’t feel that racism, such as it was, existed within the CCC campus. He brought up the relationship between CCC and its so-called tenant, the Native American Arts College (NAAC). He thought that “…having NAAC on campus is a hindrance to developing a more complete CCC
identity,” and that “it’s a real us and them type attitude, with everyone hoping that they leave campus real soon because CCC needs back the space now. CCC had begun leasing space to NAAC in the early 80s when they were facing bankruptcy and student enrollment had plummeted. “It just feels weird having two colleges on the same campus,” he said. “It feels like I’m trespassing on my own campus” when he walks through or by the NAAC buildings.

As Bob further described the way he saw the relationship between the two institutions, he also reflected on how he thought NAAC might be feeling about the situation. He surmised that NAAC students might feel like trespassers too, and could be thinking,

“‘Geez look at us, we have to rely on some other college for us to get our education, that makes no sense, don’t we think for ourselves, aren’t we human beings, aren’t we entitled to our own college, not to just be riding, piggybacking on another college and paying them rent.’ I would hope they would have that attitude because I think that’s what they’re doing...I think they’re being taken advantage of, I think they’re being used for rent and then being pissed on by everybody else and I don’t think it’s fair.”

Bob acutely recognized some of the nuances of a very tense situation, and felt that what’s being done (or not done) allowed for the easing of tensions. He offered,

“We’re in such a tense sociological relationship, by letting each other alone it helps ease that tension, by just, cause you’re doing your own thing. I’m not calling it institutionalized racism, I’m calling it a theory of non-intervention. Don’t do anything; don’t get involved with us, we don’t get involved with you and everybody’s happy. In a sense it’s more of an ignorance...”

On one level Bob recognized and appeared to struggle himself with understanding the tense relationship between his school and NAAC. It was questionable whether or not everybody was actually happy with this situation as described by Bob or simply resigned to it, as it seemed to echo the ethnic isolation across the greater Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo communities of the region.

Pablo: “So...I’m friendly to everybody but not close to anybody.” Pablo was an administrator who was originally from outside of New Mexico, a newcomer in the student affairs department at Flagship University (FU). Since he’d been in the state he had noticed many nuances of the regional Hispanic culture, such as the fact that,
There is some confusion as to what their culture really is. Is it Spanish? Is it Mexican? It seems that some people are ashamed to be considered Mexican, like Mexican is lesser than Spanish. ‘Spanish is a white people, they’re blue-eyed people and they’re better than the darker people, so don’t call me Mexican, call me Spanish or Hispanic’...That sort of caught me by surprise because I’m Mexican and proud to be, you know, that I’m light complected and probably have got Spanish blood, but I’m Mexican.”

He also described the make-up and motivations, as he saw them, of three distinct groupings or cliques of his colleagues within the department. One group he described, made up mostly of native New Mexicans, saw themselves as having been discriminated against, i.e., “...they’re concerned their pay is not comparable to others, and they’ve been here a long time...it’s a hell raiser group.” He thought that they’re not doing much for students, rather, “...they think of ‘what’s in it for me and my buddies.’”

Then there’s a middle group of mostly non-native New Mexicans whom he perceived as being “more open; they have experiences [from] elsewhere. They talk about improving their area, upgrading their professional skills, ...and doing something for the students.” He noticed that “...they’ll get together on the weekend and play golf, or go see a movie.” He described them as an “average” sort of group.

The third distinct grouping he described as largely unnoticed because they were mostly younger professionals in the department who were in their mid-thirties, both native and non-native New Mexicans.

“...These are people that are under the director[s] that have a lot of potential, they dream up all sorts of creative ideas and they’re in committees and they get involved and it’s a group that I really admire...They’re at least a half a dozen of these young people who have a bright, bright future...they’re super, they’re not from the old school...sometimes they associate with one of the other groups, but most of the time they’re kind of neutral, but they don’t really network so much but I can see them as a separate group because they have those great characteristics.”

Pablo’s tightrope situation stemmed mostly from his relationships with “the old-timers,” or the first group, who appeared to be the most vocal in telling him when he’d done something with which they didn’t agree.

“Ya, they’ll jump on my case for anything. Just this morning I got this nasty memo from one of them and I called the supervisor and said ‘look, you and I talked about this yesterday. I sent you a memo just to
reinforce and confirm and I sent this other person a copy and they jump on me, they send me this nasty little note, and you were supposed to take care of this.’ You know, they’re just looking for an excuse to send me, some negative.... I mean ‘how dare you! I run this office!’ So I don’t deal with, if they answer to somebody, I’ll deal with their supervisor, ‘you deal with it, you make a commitment and now your person doesn’t like it, it’s between you and this person’.... I don’t have time for petty stuff.”

I asked Pablo if similar things happened where he used to work, and he told me not as much as here, perhaps because people there were more secure and sure of themselves. He also talked about the need to give all promising professionals in the department a chance, especially the “minorities” and to be balanced rather than to “play favorites” with any one ethnic group, his included. “I don’t associate with too many of our staff on a social level...so I’m friendly to everybody but not close to anybody.”

So Pablo described dealing with his tightrope situation by “not dealing with it,” because “he doesn’t have time for that petty stuff.” Yet, not dealing with the tightrope allowed it continually to resurface in this organization. Pablo’s situation was a typical example of the treachery of internalized racism and how it often has devastating effects on relationships within an ethnic group. On the one hand, he had every reason to be angry and affronted by the attacks targeted at him; yet on the other, his withdrawal and decision to not meet it head on might water the seeds of resentment that lead to a continued lack of support from some of his Hispanic colleagues, perpetuating his isolation from them. So to this point he’d figured out how to be “...friendly to everybody but not close to anybody.”

John: “Being a native Hispanic has both helped and hindered.” John, a native New Mexican, had had a long, varied career at Flagship University as both an administrator and as a faculty member. He had given great thought to the historical-cultural significance of the region and how that heritage had influenced the university as well as his professional life within the university. We spoke at length about the state’s colonial history under Spain, Mexico, and the U.S. and its legacy of racial, ethnic and class distinctions. As he recounted:

“...We’ve been very isolated for a number of years and there has developed a unique and distinctive culture, which I think is a little defensive or protective of itself and critical of people coming in from the outside, both the Native Americans and the Hispanics. Whenever people have come in from the outside, it’s to rule the natives, it’s to take over, it’s to exercise authority, and except for a few cooperative individuals not to
include the natives but simply to rule over them...I think you find some of that here at the university.

This is a state of conflicting cultures. Not just ethnic but economic, religious, historical, geographical, ideological, you name it....All of those are fault lines, and the way they come together...we talk about ourselves being a mosaic, which I think is true, but I like the analogy because a mosaic does have distinctive pieces, and together they form something different than each of the little pieces. They also have cracks between the pieces, the grout, the matrix which holds it together. Sometimes that grout or that matrix is pretty wide and very significant...That’s what we have at the university too. It’s been underlaid the past several years by extreme shortage of resources, which has made people even more reactive and more defensive. I’ll say just grumpier....just a little more demoralized because there’s never been enough for everybody, but now there’s even less for everybody and that makes people even less satisfied with the situation. So there is an underlying punch and often it rises to the top.”

John expressed the belief that in spite of all this the state and the university had managed to do some really good things. He believed he had a right to speak of them critically because he loves them both and wouldn’t consider living or working anywhere else.

He described the added dimension for him of being a native New Mexican and Hispanic; that there were different expectations and perceptions both from his own group and from outside his group. He believed there were stereotypes he was judged by because he is Hispanic, with those stereotypes invoked more so in his role as an administrator than a faculty member. He also discussed “…his own personal feeling about to whom do I have obligations and what kind of obligations do I have…it’s made things tough and the expectations are different too.”

In fact, John became the first non-Anglo to attain a very high post at the university after the university celebrated its first 100 years of existence, this in a state and city that continues to have a majority Hispanic population. “Being a native Hispanic has both helped and hindered” him in his career. He recalled:

“Being an [FU] undergraduate helped and hindered in getting a job here. Even though I had done what you’re supposed to do, go away and get your degree and come back. I know that’s the reason some people voted against me, I learned all this later. Because I was a local and you know the idea is you don’t want to get provincial and inbred, you want to get some new perspective...I had people tell me later that ‘the vote was 7 to 4 to hire you and I was one of the four. And I made a mistake ...and you’re doin’ fine and you’re a great member of the department...’”
I told John that several people had mentioned his name to me as a viable candidate for university president, a post that had been open for some time. He said he was flattered, and that he had heard that he had been nominated, but he was not interested. The first go round of the search ended in controversy with very vocal dissatisfaction from some in the native Hispanic community that there were no native New Mexicans or even real Hispanics in the pool. In this cultural milieu, some did not consider the Puerto Rican man from New York who was a finalist an adequate representative of the local Hispanic constituency.

"The trick is who would best fit in this particular distinctive milieu and organization...we've had some terrible mismatches in the past....they looked real good and sounded real good, but they were a fish out of water here. Yet some of my friends and colleagues who are Hispanic say it would be better to have a non-Hispanic who's simpatico and who appreciates Hispanic culture and who understands it than to have a Hispanic who has no feeling for the culture, the university, or the state. That's probably the problem; you construct the perfect candidate and there's no such person."

John wished that rigidly defined regional and ethnic preferences didn't matter so much to some people in such situations, but they still do. He mentioned during his interview that he was looking forward to returning to the faculty quite soon to write one or two more books about the state and then retire in a few years. He appeared to be very much looking forward to finishing up his current administrative obligation and returning to the faculty, the place on campus where he has felt most at home.

**Similarities across all four tightrope situations.** On the surface it might not seem that these four tightrope situations have much in common but once we look at the situational moves taken (or not taken) we can begin to see the patterns in these interactions at a micro-procedural level. The participants described a variety of experiences within one's own ethnic group, in relation to other ethnic groups and in relation to the organizational culture and norms of one's immediate work group. Participants spoke of the constant tensions they experienced between their own beliefs, the constraints imposed upon them by various ethnic and organizational cultural groups, and the constraints they placed upon themselves in their respective blocking situations.

All four participants described relational situations with which they were dissatisfied. Generally speaking, these four people had become resigned to their
situation, at least for the time being, and described situational moves on their part that provided mechanisms for averting rather than resolving interpersonal and group conflict. Ron “...was keeping a low profile,” Bob noticed, “...it’s a very tense situation. I think by just letting people do their own thing eases that tension,” and concluded that this practice “...doesn’t present any problems.” Pablo had figured out how to be “...friendly to everybody but not close to anybody,” and upon reflection John related that “being a native Hispanic has both helped and hindered” him in his long and varied career, more so as an administrator. He was eager to return to the faculty for the remainder of his career at the university.

The tightrope situation movement state was characterized by a certain level of understanding or consciousness of the dynamics of a relational situation by the individual, but the actions in response that were chosen simply permitted surviving, not thriving; they perpetuated perceived or real compliance, and didn’t change the status quo; and they continued the accepted relational dynamics rather than empowering oneself and others to hope for and create more mutually satisfying relationships in these human settings. All four responses perpetuated in some way the continued lack of connection between and amongst individuals and groups; in this way alienation and lack of understanding thrived on all sides.

In each situation the organizational member seemed to withdraw from the difficult situation rather than choosing the viable option of reaching out to others in search of a more workable solution. To consistently withdraw or disconnect without considering or trying out the myriad of other possible responses represents the rigidifying of one’s behavior into an unthinking pattern or automatic response. These four participants had described typical examples of how hard it could feel to act outside of your group’s accepted norms or one’s own internalized oppression, or how hard it could be to simply try something different in the face of very little or no support from ones peers to make different choices.

There seemed with these participants little if any consciousness of the role they themselves played in their continued tightrope situations. Each individual’s lack of flexible, proactive response to their situation; i.e., each’s reluctance to call into question, to name and describe the various ways in which all parties were acting on their feelings of disempowerment, would be a practical first step in changing these difficult relationships.
This discussion of the tightrope situation movement state demonstrated how the set of communicative strategies was used to explore how participants moved through this type of dissonant situation. Ron, Bob, Pablo and John were recognizing, remembering, describing, despairing, complying, suppressing, dis-connecting, isolating, alienating, averting, ignoring, deflecting, surviving, resigning. Viewing the data this way enabled me to identify those strategies common to all four situations, thus signifying where rigidity was occurring in situations where powerlessness (internalized oppression) appeared to hold people back from attempting various responses when faced with difficult situations. Even though these participants as a group had very divergent backgrounds there were striking similarities in their responses to these very difficult yet very common situations in which they found themselves in their respective cultural groups and organizations.

Comparison of Strategies Used by People Focusing on the Collectivity

As a final comparison I will discuss the themes and related strategies common to all five situations that focused on the collectivity. In Table 4 below you will see various examples of the communicative strategies employed in the five situation movement states.
Table 4. Examples of communicative strategies employed in the five situation movement states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Strategy</th>
<th>Washout+</th>
<th>Barrier+</th>
<th>Waiting+</th>
<th>Tightrope+</th>
<th>Effete++</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Attending**          | *tradition  
*self  
*others  
*collective behaving  
*norms | *self  
*others  
*collective behaving | *self  
*others  
*collective behaving | *self  
*others  
*obligations/ expectations  
*stereotypes | *self  
*others  
*collective behavior  
*stereotypes |
| **Creating Ideas**     | *Brothers uncommitted to upholding tradition  
*identifying patterns of internalized oppression  
“perception is reality” | *moving people beyond the victim feeling  
*politics dictates decisions  
*lack of leadership  
*no planning, need guidance  
*hierarchy invoked  
*unspoken rules  
*just existing | *pushing people into the present  
*lack of proactive behavior | *perception of compliance  
*unconscious agreement | *students bring different issues than before  
*reject others’ labels  
*leave community |
| **Seeking/Finding Direction** | *looks to others (not self) to uphold tradition  
*everyone confused about institutional identity, sending mixed messages to students | *communication discouraged  
*racial issues stifled | *lack of new philosophy from leadership | *makes self invisible  
*keeps a low profile | “I call myself Tejana” |
| **Expressing**         |        |        |        |           |          |
| **Finding Connectedness** | *losing Lasallian identity  
*alums vs. newcomers  
*lost, adrift | *not pulling people together to make decisions  
*abandonment by allies  
*isolation perpetuates status quo & lack of consciousness  
*isolation vs. cooperation  
*“wrong” Hispanic | *lack of reaching out to students & others | *superficial relationships  
*non-intervention (isolation) | *“Why can’t we just all be people?”  
*from allies to adversaries (student/faculty relations) |
| Confronting/Opposing or Mediating | *personal security vs. good of the community*  
| *pretense of no conflict in public*  
| *“keep it in the family”* | *deflect conflict privately*  
| *expected to deny conflicts*  
| *balancing various obligations*  
| *non-intervention policy averts most conflicts* | *taking a stand on identity politics*  
| *hostile environment for students of color*  
| *students vs. faculty/staff* |
| Recalling | *Lasallian tradition*  
| *comparing with ethnic dynamics of other regions*  
| *VP’s come & go* | *“rose-colored glasses” of Christian Brothers era* | *historical legacy of ethnic tensions*  
| *recall experiencing these organizational dynamics before (did same thing)* | *campus no longer viewed as a safe, “beautiful oasis”*  
| *transformation of personal identity during college* |
| Symbolic Realigning | *symbolic disintegration (Lasallian tradition)*  
| *need to acknowledge colonial history to heal interethnic tensions* | *people in dept. have changed but philosophy hasn’t* | *merging the old culture with the new to form a caring, professional campus community (not rigid opposites)* |

+Connotes one out of 11 standard situation movement states developed by Dervin (1983)  
++Connotes situation movement state created by Coco (1999) in her study of the Roman Catholic Culture
Three broad themes threaded through the set of situation movement states in which people were focusing on the collectivity: isolation, identity, and empowerment. In a variety of ways the participants who described experiences focusing on a collectivity were concerned with meeting their material, emotional, or spiritual needs. To a greater or lesser extent they took issue with the models of authority operating in their respective communities, workplaces, and cultural groups related to the third theme of empowerment.

**Isolation.** Isolation took on many shapes and sizes for the participants from being discouraged from communicating and meeting with colleagues on the one hand, to not reaching out to people proactively on the other. Sometimes isolation was imposed specifically by others or cultural norms and sometimes it was self-imposed. Isolation was also expressed through the emergence of adversarial dichotomies such as alums vs. newcomers, students vs. faculty/staff, and clique A vs. clique B in the workplace. The theme of isolation illuminated most clearly how the lack of an action such as reaching towards, seeking out and connecting with others, or being prevented from doing so, has an impact on the culture of a group or organization. The reluctance to act to connect is sorely missed and profoundly felt, although it is not often recognized as such.

In the washout situation movement state the dynamics at play included organizational newcomers in isolation from institutional alums and other long time faculty and staff. What was interesting here was that this adversarial relationship had developed against the backdrop of the disintegrating support and commitment of the brothers to uphold the tradition, much to the chagrin of many alums who worked on campus. What had resulted was a painstakingly slow change process in some areas of the institution with little if any philosophical advancements in the institution’s student affairs arena. From this perspective it was unthinkable to blame the brothers, so the newer administration was taking the brunt of the bad feelings of the traditionalists and change was cast as the intruder on the “rose-colored’ memories of the alums, and therefore it was resisted at all costs.

In the barrier situation movement state participants told of countless situations where they were blocked or discouraged from communicating or meeting with others in an attempt to resolve conflicts or difficult issues. Two other hallmarks of this situation were pretense and abandonment. Some participants described their experience of
trying to go up against this norm, only to be abandoned by their allies when the inevitable resistance was met in the public arena. Thus, the eventual feeling that resisting wasn’t worth the trouble and more often than not, lonely as well. Another way that conflict was stifled was simply by pretending that it wasn’t there, like the proverbial white elephant standing in the middle of the room that no one dared acknowledge.

The waiting situation movement state was characterized within the framework of organizational power relations. Upper levels of the administration were waiting for others at lower levels to change and improve, from their perspective, especially in the area of reaching out to students as well as other departments on campus. In this instance, despite encouragement to connect and communicate, isolation was maintained with a resultant preservation of the status quo and, presumably, tradition. On the surface this tactic might be viewed as a positive, effective form of passive resistance, yet from the insights garnered from other participant interviews and meeting observations, this practice had been employed to the detriment of the quality of programs and services for students at both institutions.

In the tightrope situation movement state isolation was used as a response or a defense in difficult situations in which one found oneself: for Ron it was a self-imposed response to protect himself from any possible attacks from colleagues if he dared to bring up any conflict in the organization, be it programmatic or interpersonal. For Bob, an Anglo student from back East who was trying to make sense out of the ethnic tensions he found in New Mexico and on his campus, isolation, or leaving each other alone, was viewed as a workable response as his college shared its space with the Native American Arts College. He observed that, “we just leave each other alone, and everybody’s happy.” For Pablo isolation took on the flavor of having to settle for superficial relationships with his colleagues, where he found himself “friendly to everybody, but not close to anybody.” This was his response in a situation where, because of his position in the organization and lack of native New Mexican status, he found himself at a grave disadvantage in many situations as well as being open to attack on many fronts. John appeared to have done an admirable job of balancing his various obligations to his cultural group, his faculty colleagues, and his administrative responsibilities, yet he yearned for the relative peace and comfort of returning to the faculty upon facing his upcoming retirement. It is unfortunate that dealing with the demands of being with other people, with community, is so stressful or painful to some
that they may distance or isolate themselves in some way as their best response or option. Many workable solutions in any given situation are lost once isolation is adopted unthinkingly as a response.

In the effete situation movement state isolation was eventually rejected by participants as a workable option for their conflicts. One participant struggled well in an effort to maintain her personal identity, at odds with what this meant in her greater ethnic community and feeling empowered and still connected in the end. She proudly called herself “Tejana” amid the generalized objections of her community that she should identify as “Chicana” if she were truly empowered. Another participant, while having somewhat fond memories of the old campus culture, recognized its difficulties and shortcomings, as well as the need for some change if it was going to survive and thrive. Although he was concerned about the more professional, isolating feel of the newer administration, he recognized the changing needs of the student population. In an effort to bridge the old with the new campus culture, this participant had worked towards forging a caring, professional campus community, which had been an uphill battle while some of his colleagues were clinging to tradition and the newer administration was waiting for others to change. This participant saw the need for community rather than isolation as the only viable solution, a merging of the best of the old with the best of the new. The current dynamic was polarizing the long-time organizational members against the newcomers, where each end of this spectrum was rigidly clinging to its position and not considering other viable responses for action.

Blocking, deflecting, abandoning, and (dis)connecting were the main communicative strategies used in relation to material, emotional, and spiritual needs. Exemplars are grouped under main Sense-Making categories in Table 4. Participants described the various ways their respective community’s practices for meeting material, emotional and spiritual needs were inadequate. In these organizational and institutional settings little if any concern was placed upon meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of its members in the discharge of their work responsibilities. Oddly enough, participants encountered numerous ways in which the operating norms of their workplaces prevented them from even meeting the material needs of the organization. There were mixed levels of satisfaction with one’s ethnic or cultural community’s ability to meet both emotional and spiritual needs, which was also reflected in the second issue people raised, that of identity.
Identity. Identity issues spanned the range from ethnic and religious to institutional and regional. Religious and institutional identity appeared to be at the crux of the difficulties encountered by organizational members, of the College of Capital City (CCC), which were best exemplified in the washout, waiting, tightrope, and effete situation movement states. The Lasallian tradition on campus was perceived to not be what it once was by the alumni employees and long-time organizational members and there was great resentment towards the new administration for pretending that this tradition had been preserved, although admittedly in somewhat altered form. While upper-levels of the administration were waiting for the student affairs division through its leadership to adjust, improve and move forward with this evolving institutional identity, some who still yearned for the era when the brothers were in charge had dug-in and were resisting any changes, affecting programs and services for a changing student population that was no longer predominantly raised Catholic.

There was not full acceptance or understanding amongst organizational traditionalists that the identity, needs, and issues of today’s average CCC student were vastly different from the CCC student of the 1950s, 60s or 70s. Those organizational members who realized that changes were critically necessary in the development and delivery of programs and services for students were walking a tightrope between wanting to do their job well and responsively for students and preserving their social and economic security in the organization. The institution was at a crossroads: it had been limping along for well over 10 years without a clearly defined identity and needed to decisively and openly articulate who it was for its students, staff, faculty, alums, administration and board of directors. The impact of this hedging on identity was seriously detrimental to the functioning of the organization and the members within it.

The focus of the identity issues plaguing Flagship University (FU) seemed to center around cultural ethnicity and regional culture. These were best illustrated in the barrier, tightrope, and effete situation movement states. One significant way that identity had become a barrier is in the hiring of new organizational members. On the one hand, native New Mexicans were viewed by some as being passed over for important managerial roles. On the other, one organizational newcomer was harassed anonymously and encouraged to not accept a job that was offered in the organization, presumably because she was the “wrong Hispanic,” as defined by some in the current organization. This was a powerful example of the expression of internalized oppression.
Several in the organization recognized the origins of these hateful, hurtful practices as the internalized legacy of colonialism and yet told of the difficulty they encountered in bringing this topic up in a public arena in their community. Still others told of feeling stifled from speaking their mind in meetings and other public settings, especially with respect to issues of race and oppression.

Those in positions of power at FU spoke poignantly about the organizational and cultural tightropes, even straightjackets that they operated within each day at work. On the one hand, there were the expectations of their respective ethnic communities of what one must do to stay in the community’s good graces so as not to be considered a sell-out or to be perceived not Hispanic enough. On the other, there were the demands and needs of their organizational roles which included balancing the broad, institutional needs they encountered daily, as they often did not mesh. Against this backdrop, a student spoke of how her personal identity was transformed during her time at the institution. Rejecting others’ labels, she took a stand on identity politics and chose her own, self-empowering identity.

Drifting, balancing, rejecting and evolving were the four main communicative strategies related to the issues of personal and group identities. For those organizational members who looked to other people or communities in order to provide direction for their lives such as a cultural, ethnic, or religious group, the loss of this force in their lives appeared to set them adrift or walking a tightrope in order to belong or feel like they had a sense of purpose. It is when the spoken and unspoken requirements of belonging to a community begins to confine people in unhealthy ways that one begins to question the costs of membership. The requirements of membership are actually stereotypes taken to heart or internalized, which severely limits what we as individuals may choose in response to any given situation. For those organizational members who looked within themselves to understand who they were and rejected the labels and stereotypes of others, both ostensibly enlightened and not, they were well on the road to experiencing their own sense of power and rightness in the world. There were few in these organizations who didn’t feel somewhat shackled, which brings us to our third theme of empowerment.

Empowerment. Unfortunately, more participants spoke of experiences of powerlessness in their respective organizations than those of feeling empowered. There were some in the washout, waiting, and barrier situation movement states who didn’t
even recognize the powerlessness of their actions, such as looking to others to find direction in their lives. There were many in the barrier and tightrope situation movement states who recognized in very pragmatic, material ways how the structure or operating norms of their respective organization or cultural group blocked or hindered their ability to do their work or consequently to find enjoyment in the doing of it. There were some in the barrier and tightrope situation movement states who saw and felt in very emotional and spiritual ways how their organizations and cultural communities were struggling. Many of these people had offered their observations, only to be rejected or attacked when it was difficult for others to listen to what they had to say. And there were a handful, mostly in the effete but some in the barrier situation movement state, who were able to go about their everyday lives not feeling dogged or trapped into ways of being and acting that were stifling. They had struggled with the meaning of life, community, and identity and came out the other side not unscathed but all the wiser and more content with their choices.

The main communicative strategies related to empowerment on a continuum were existing, complying, suppressing, resisting, listening, voicing, and leading. Those who were existing and complying were feeling significantly less powerful than those noticing they were being suppressed and beginning to resist. Those who were choosing strategies such as listening to themselves and others, voicing what they had noticed and leading themselves or their group into effective change, were feeling the most empowered. There were mere glimmers of this type of communicative activity reported by these participants.

Any withdrawal or isolation represents a decrease in internal assent or involvement in the organization or cultural group, but it may not represent a decrease in the visible support of it. Much energy was spent by those wanting to appear committed to an organization in order to remain employed or compliant in a community in order to be welcomed. Most people in the barrier and tightrope situation movement states were able to maintain split-levels of consciousness while appearing compliant and committed at great emotional and spiritual expense. Yet politically this enabled a very commonplace yet ineffective organizing structure to remain intact, whether it was in a workplace or ethnic or religious community.
Conclusion

It should be noted that the findings reported here represented just over two-thirds of the situations described by participants in the larger study. I have not focused on the situations in which people were either focusing primarily on self or on other organizational members; however, the overall findings were reflected in this chapter.

This study was as much about what was done or communicated as it was of what was left undone or uncommunicated. There was a huge void or absence of communicating out to others, as it was both discouraged in both of these organizations as well as not considered a viable option or response because of the perceived consequences. Of special note was the absence of the use of important communicating practices for resolving conflicts such as confronting, opposing, mediating, seeking connection, expressing ideas, and finding direction. What was reportedly inhibiting this type of pro-social, communicative behaviors was adherence to tradition, norms, and collective behaving; obligations to and expectations of family and other identity groups; and cultural stereotypes, both internalized and externalized. It was in this way that we could see how our silence ultimately maintains our victimization.

Instead, participants reported many experiences of isolation, superficial relationships, just existing in their organizational roles, fear and distrust, divisiveness, nostalgic yearning, alienation, hopelessness, victimization, maintaining the status quo, suffering and silencing. And yet a few participants related bits of consciousness about their situation too. One person very eloquently identified broad patterns of internalized oppression that she had observed in her newfound home within the context of oppression in the larger society. Yet another spoke of the need to acknowledge the impact of the region’s colonial history in order to heal the continued inter-ethnic tensions. One college student spoke of her experience in taking a stand against the barrage of identity politics that she experienced and how she eventually rejected others’ labels. Another organizational member saw clearly that her work as a manager was to move people beyond their feelings of being a victim, which would in turn move the organization ahead in meeting its purpose of supporting students.

It is through these examples of confronting, opposing, mediating, seeking connection, expressing ideas, and finding direction that we can see how effective communicating can generate empowerment and change. Yet these were only a handful of voices that did not feel mostly thwarted in their efforts to propose, to enlighten, or to
empower. It is clear from these participants’ experiences that this journey towards empowerment and positive change was often filled with frustration and setbacks, and when experienced in isolation or without support or connection to others many found it emotionally and spiritually impossible to continue the journey. The value of the procedural approach described in this chapter was that it revealed how people resolved or attempted to resolve these issues for themselves while constructing a new, fulfilling way of being within their respective ethnic, religious, regional, and working communities.

Participants’ actions illustrated that the existing organizing and political structure in these various communities by their very nature could not foster any real communication amongst its members. Partly this was because of accepted norms for operating within these social structures and partly this was because many of us unconsciously comply with these community norms in our efforts to be accepted and connected. For example, the experiences of these cultural group members indicated that we are afraid to challenge those things that have generally become accepted as an ethnic group’s culture that are actually expressions of internalized oppression that have become embedded and unquestioned, no matter how apparently unfair they are. These communicatings or responses have become procedure-less procedures and, assuming that they became handed down in an unthoughtful, perhaps harmful fashion, they will remain accepted, even defended by members of a culture until a process of enlightenment, -conscientization or undoing the hurt - can occur.

Sense-making methodology allowed me to examine in detail the linkages between the micro-communication practices of these organizational members and their respective ethnic, cultural, regional, and organizational communities. The methodology allowed me to see the real-life, day-to-day communication decisions that participants made that are influenced by and in turn influence larger forces in our society. These choices can either perpetuate the status quo or stir up change, a very messy, often lonely process as indicated by those few change agents in these organizations. In this manner, an infinite series of taken-for-granted micro and macro processes and procedures increases the likelihood for oppression and internalized oppression to take hold in a society. In this same manner, an infinite series of thoughtful communication micro and macro processes could conceivably undo or prevent the contagion of oppression and internalized oppression in our society.
In chapter nine I will provide further interpretive commentary on oppression, internalized oppression and liberation in our society by using a framework described by Ruth (1988) that is philosophically and theoretically consistent with the communication and democracy apparatus developed by Dervin and Clark (1993). I will provide examples of how both internalized oppression and empowerment manifests itself via the lived stories of my co-researchers in each organization. I will conclude by theorizing about the relationship between communication competence and communication flexibility, and the place and space for emotion in organizations.
Chapter 9
Theory as Storytelling

In this chapter I will provide my comprehensive *second-order* or theory story of the *first order* stories or narratives of the lived-experiences provided by my co-researchers (Daly, 1997). As a recap, a second order story is a scientific story embedded in the lived and observing experience of the social scientist and includes interpretive commentary of the lived stories of the people being studied. I will begin by providing some interpretive commentary on oppression, internalized oppression and liberation in our society by using a framework described by Ruth (1988) that is philosophically and theoretically consistent with Dervin and Clark’s communication and democracy apparatus. During the unfolding of this framework, I will provide examples of how both internalized oppression and empowerment surfaces via the lived stories of my co-researchers in each organization. Finally, I will further explicate my theorizing about the relationship between communication competence and communication flexibility, and the place and space for emotion in organizations.

In the final chapter, (10) titled *Doing no Harm? Democratic Organizational Communication Inventions, and Recommendations*, I will outline some guiding assumptions about building healthy, trusting organizational relationships; provide examples of some inventions for undoing rigid, disempowering patterns of communicating amongst people in organizational settings by using the analysis of effective and ineffective communication micro-practices identified in Chapter 8; and, finally, make recommendations for further research in this area.

*The Effects of Oppression and Internalized Oppression on Communication*

“Some of it is what you let someone do to you”

The thing that struck me the most about the institution I studied in Albuquerque in comparison to the institution in Santa Fe was the overall, increased level of consciousness that the Flagship University (FU) interviewees had about the experience and effects of internalized oppression. In fact, one person gave an ideal, organic definition of internalized oppression while talking about the treatment and converse self-perception that he felt student affairs professionals have of themselves and their work:

“So that is the difference both in how you’re perceived and how you’re treated, it’s how you perceive yourself, and I think there is a certain...it’s when you integrate other people’s perceptions of you...and you feel like you’re low on the totem pole. And it results either in kind of a
hang dog--I’m nobody, I’m nothing, nobody cares, or a combativeness, neither of which are particularly helpful.”

At the College of Capital City (CCC) in Santa Fe the organizational culture was more “...hang dog...I’m nobody, I’m nothing, nobody cares...” and at FU in Albuquerque there was the “hang dog” phenomenon but also more pockets of consciousness, resulting in a sometimes combative approach to resolving issues. At both institutions there were efforts towards liberation and democracy in the workplace, although these efforts were much more prevalent at FU than at CCC.

Dervin and Clark (1993) offer a convincing argument about the need for the communication and democracy dialogue in academe to begin including an examination of the communicating procedures by which macro and micro-level issues are linked. They describe micro-level issues as the hows: How individuals connect to and make sense of self, other, society, culture, and institutions; and how societies, cultures and institutions connect with individuals and each other. The macro-level debate has focused on the whos, or who gets to speak and who has power, and the whats, or what is communicated (p. 103). An understanding of how oppression can be internalized and thus affect the way individuals connect and make sense of self, other, society, culture and institutions is key to this understanding and would shed some light on which communication practices are empowering and which are not. In this chapter I will provide my analysis of how the micro and macro level issues of oppression and internalized oppression are linked in this study, focusing on the organizational effects of the uninterrupted expression of internalized oppression. I will do this by providing theoretical linkages between the everyday, communication micro-practices of these organizations while embedding them in the social-historical context of this region and each institution’s communication macro-practices. In chapter 10 I will recommend some alternative, empowering organizational communication practices for these organizations.

Some definitions. “...They did some pretty terrible things, like all conquering people do...” A conceptualization of the process of oppression and liberation that addresses both macro and micro-level issues is supplied by Sean Ruth (1988) and can be easily adapted to our discussion of how communication and democracy (or liberation) can be achieved. Ruth defined oppression as “the systematic mistreatment of members of one group by the members of another group or by society as a whole” (p. 434). This
mistreatment is a part of the social and political system and is reflected in the educational and legal processes as well as the mass media, our social customs, etc.

Ruth conceptualized the process of oppression happening through circles of control: physical, economic, psychological and internalized. At the base of much oppression lies physical control, including coercion, intimidation, threats, imprisonment or beating. Although many of us in this country feel very removed from physical forms of oppression, children of all persuasions in many civilized societies are still subjected to these types of conformity producing controls. Economic forms include low pay, low power, and low status in certain jobs, unemployment, and work-related discrimination. Psychological forms include stereotyping, prejudice, unawareness and myths.

Oppressor patterns. “We [the Northern Hispanics] settled this land, and then these white people came along...” It is assumed that no human being is born being racist, sexist, classist, or oppressive towards another person in any way. It is also assumed that no individual or group of people is inherently inferior or superior to one another. People, no matter what their skin color, cultural heritage, gender, or class background, can potentially relate well across all perceived boundaries and differences. As humans we innately have the ability to resolve any differences that may exist between any individuals or groups of people (Jackins, 1997).

One universal oppression in our society is being mistreated as a young person, and this can happen no matter what your gender, racial, or class background (Jackins, 1997). One part of this mistreatment is misinformation about how we and others are as human beings. We are shown and told that we may be better than some people but not as good as others, or that we better behave in a certain way or suffer the consequences. The confusing effects of this mistreatment and misinformation can cause us to fearfully adopt a variety of oppressive, patterned ways of behaving in an effort to escape oppression for ourselves. Our experiences as young people in this society sets each of us up eventually to accept a variety of roles as either agents of or targets of various oppressions, depending upon our particular circumstance and the power dynamics of the situation. This is the main way that oppression and internalized oppression is passed down in societies via both macro & micro communication practices. Today in the U.S. men, the middle-aged, the middle or owning-class, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, the mentally healthy, and European heritage individuals are seen as the primary dominant culture groups.
Ultimately, as we reach adulthood the actions of the agents of oppression can be overt as in the physical, life-threatening abuses of the Ku Klux Klan against African-Americans and other groups; or they can be subtle, such as when any of us stand by or don’t respond to forms of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination that we encounter in our workplaces, in the school system, in our churches, or even in our circle of friends and family. Although the overt forms of oppression are the most recognizable, they are just one piece of how the system of oppression operates in our society. In a later section I will provide more information on how oppression affects dominant culture groups.

*Internalized oppression.* “It’s like the opposite of power.” The fourth circle, *internalized oppression* or internalized control, is when a person or a group of people comes to believe that they are inferior and powerless to change things, essentially agreeing to be oppressed. The internalized form of various oppressions is what actually maintains oppression in our society. Members of the oppressed group come to police themselves, and the dominant group can then take a subtler and less visible role as agents of the oppression (Ruth, 1988).

Internalized oppression is a little understood yet critical component to the perpetuation and maintenance of oppressive behaviors and systems in our society. Again, the one universal oppression in our society that each of us has internalized to a greater or lesser degree is being mistreated or misinformed as a young person. Young people are treated in countless, unthoughtful ways by well-meaning adults and this can occur no matter what our gender, racial, or class background, setting us up to more easily accept further mistreatment and misinformation as a member of other targeted groups in our society. The mistreatment we all have suffered as young people has had an enduring, long-term effect on each of our lives and our society in general.

Internalized oppression can manifest itself as low self-esteem, powerlessness, disunity, fear, and lack of information. Some more overt symptoms of internalized oppression are a generalized feeling of powerlessness which sometimes manifests itself as hostility, sarcasm, complaining, *whining,* or not taking responsibility to change a situation by instead blaming others for its existence.

Other effects are that oppressed groups develop *survival behaviors* so as not to provoke retaliation or invite attention; these behaviors can appear to become a part of the *culture* of the group even when the need for them has passed. Lack of
assertiveness in many oppressed groups is one example of survival behavior. A subtle way that internalized oppression can express itself in individuals and groups is an underlying hopelessness that shows up as discouragement, settling for scraps, or withdrawing and remaining silent. The effects of internalized oppression can also cause us to carry a chip on our shoulder: we might behave towards a situation in the same old rigid, patterned way even when there is no real threat in the present-day situation.

Another effect of internalized oppression is that members of the group will mistrust their own thinking and intelligence, paying a lot more attention to what members of the dominant group have to say than to their own thinking. When the level of oppression has been high we might seek numbing relief in the short term by turning to things to make ourselves feel good, such as alcohol, drugs, gangs and other addictive behaviors or substances. For example, in New Mexico there is a particularly high rate of drinking and driving fatalities, which sadly and overwhelmingly includes the American Indian population, as well as gang violence, which affects the Hispano and Mexican immigrant communities disproportionately. In the long run, these behaviors do nothing to improve one’s situation and might even make it worse.

The effects of internalized oppression on our relationships with others and thus our communicating behaviors are immense and varied; I will focus on a few that are particular to this study. Lipsky (1987) shows how our relationships with other members of our group are adversely affected, primarily through divisiveness within the group. This can manifest itself in feeling ashamed of one another, mistreating one another, being very critical of one another, being unable to unite in a common cause, and feeling hopeless about one another.

Most notably, our relationship with our leaders are adversely affected. Our relationships with leaders can be a double-edged sword: on the one had, we come to have unrealistically high expectations of leaders; and on the other hand, we fail to adequately support them by attacking and criticizing them or abandoning them. One of the key features of many oppressed groups is how heavy the toll is that we take on our leaders, especially if they make mistakes, which we all do if we’re taking risks. This is clearly exemplified in the FU case study, to be described later in this chapter.

Within our group there can be a narrowing of culture (Lipsky, 1987) as the group comes to accept a very narrow and limiting definition of what it means to be a member of the group, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy and seeming to validate the
stereotypes that the dominant culture has of us. In fact, some aspects of culture that have been taken for granted as true by and about a particular group are in fact only manifestations of internalized oppression, not the true nature of that group as human beings.

As a result, the group then either excludes many people because they refuse to conform to the rigid stereotype or they exclude themselves because they don’t identify with what the group is perceived to have become. In this study this is exemplified in the continued stratification of the Hispanic identity into white and non-white, and the historical alienation between Spanish, Mexican, indigenous, and mixed-heritage people in this region. As another example, C. Itzin (1985) argues in her article on women’s liberation work, *Margaret Thatcher is my Sister*, that until all feminists begin to understand the importance of not accepting any boundaries or feelings of wanting to separate themselves from any other women who they perceive as not being pro-women, the women’s liberation movement will be only partially successful. Again, the assumption is that separation and divisiveness are not helpful or liberating no matter what situation they are used in, another point illustrated by the narratives from this study.

Our relationships with other targeted groups can be affected because we might tolerate and/or take part in the oppression of other groups. In effect, we seek relief from the oppression not by resisting it, but by occupying the oppressor role in relation to some other group. Whenever there is an economic downturn affecting working people race relations are strained as the effects trickle down through the classes in our society, showing us how racism and classism are often intertwined and maintained via our current economic system.

Another societal example of this effect is the common communication practice of the mainstream media and government to compare and pit various Asian-heritage groups against other ethnic groups by suggesting that other traditionally oppressed groups would do well in the U.S. if only they would follow the example of the ‘hard-working’ Asian immigrants and Americans, the so-called model minority. The end result of this attention-gaining practice is an unhelpful feeling of competitiveness amongst Asians and other ethnic minority groups who are now focused on their feelings of shame and loss of respect for the other while being expertly distracted from the fact that the various dominant culture groups still reign economically and socially in U.S. society overall. Another result is that the dominant culture can point to the success of many
Asian immigrant groups as proof that the *American Dream* is still attainable in the U.S. as long as you’re willing to work *hard enough*. This current day practice is similar to what happened in New Mexico during its lengthy bid for statehood, which will be described in more detail in the following section.

In effect, internalized oppression causes us to lack pride in and judge ourselves, others in our group, and other groups in relation to the rigid, limiting identity we have adopted. We end up reinforcing the stereotypes of our group ourselves and may even seek relief from the oppression by oppressing other groups rather than recognizing and using our abilities to take action to change the systems that oppress everyone. It is internalized oppression that keeps everything and everyone in its place, maintaining the status quo and sabotaging any efforts towards changing the way society currently operates.

This case provides several examples of the effects of internalized oppression as well as opportunities to describe both liberating and oppressive communication micro-practices within the context of connecting to and understanding self, other, society, culture and institutions. In the next several sections I will describe in more detail some examples of the expression of internalized oppression from the stories provided by organizational members.

*Internalized oppression and identity.* “I thought I was coming to Chicano nirvana.” I have described in previous sections several examples of how identity politics, resulting from New Mexico’s unique history, have influenced the space that Hispanic native New Mexicans occupy. An important key to understanding the history of internalized oppression within this community was to realize the influence of colonization on a people. One Hispanic who grew up outside of New Mexico noted: “They’re not even aware of it, that whole mentality of being colonized in New Mexico, when you talk about it you know they’re not going to acknowledge it, it’s like a no, no.” Yet another organizational member noted “sometimes to just be treated bad isn’t enough to know that you’re being treated bad.” Another organizational member, in talking about bringing up issues of diversity in the DSA meetings, noted:

“I’m not gonna say anything. This is just, I’m tired of that. I’m tired of being the one who always has to go out there….coming here was the feeling that I wouldn’t have to do that…it’s interesting that sometimes I have to do it even more.”
A few organizational members spoke at length about the costs of denying parts of your history as a people. They spoke about the lost opportunity to have a dialogue in order to bring about understanding and healing surrounding the legacy of the infamous Conquistador Onate, both the good and the bad. Many spoke at length about the identity politics in the state, which continued to fluctuate as well as become more entrenched as new waves of Anglo and Mexican immigrants flowed in. I realized there seemed to be a present day ignorance about the situation surrounding New Mexico’s lengthy bid for statehood, especially the internalized effects of nuevomexicanos being coerced into accentuating the European piece of their identity (read white) as potential American citizens for the profit of recently immigrated American and European speculators who were pushing for statehood (Gonzalez-Berry & Maciel, 2000). The impact of those first and subsequent waves of Anglo and Euro-heritage immigrants is little understood but felt deeply everyday through the intricate inter-relationships amongst all who reside there.

Hispanics as a non-majority group have garnered considerable political power and social influence in New Mexico in comparison to other parts of the U.S., but the legacy of internalized oppression and how it continues to permutate as the social landscape changes can make this space bittersweet. The fact that the social structure related to race and ethnicity continues to be so contested and intricately woven is evidence of wide belief in the master narrative that social constructions of race are real in that some people actually are better than others based upon the color of their skin or the purity of their blood.

Internalized oppression and inter-group relations. “Don’t do anything, don’t get involved with us, we don’t get involved with you—everybody’s happy.” So, it is in the oftentimes invisible effects of internalized oppression that oppression shows up in group and organizational settings, affecting the way that people communicate and interact with each other long after the direct oppression has taken place. The myriad experiences that organizational members bring to an organization based upon their gender, cultural identity, class background, age or religious beliefs interact with their experience at an institution which is steeped in its own cultural, religious and regional history. Some of these personal experiences may have been reflected upon and understood in their context while others may continue to affect our self-perception, attitudes, and behavior in
ways that are unconscious to us. As an organizational member, we may or may not be conscious of the environmental nuances of cultural, religious or regional history.

In addition, very few of us who identify as white or Anglo are very comfortable responding effectively to the long-term behavioral effects of internalized oppression within historically oppressed groups because we often still carry our own confusions and hurts about oppression (Rose, 1996). Lastly, the dynamics of oppression and internalized oppression can play out in just about any group or social configuration, be it an all-white high school in a rural area, a predominantly African-American civil rights organization in Berkeley, CA, or an historically Catholic college whose faculty and staff continue to be predominantly white yet who are serving a constantly changing and culturally, religiously and economically diverse student population. The situation in student affairs at CCC is a rich example of this phenomenon. What follows is a brief, historical, socio-cultural framework through which I explored these issues followed by a more specific description of its influence on community at CCC.

A traditional framework of inter-group relationships in Northern New Mexico. “I think the whole relationship... is weird... and I know it goes both ways.” Some organizational members made some telling remarks about the College of Capital City’s (CCC’s) relationship with NAAC, the Native American Arts College. Although NAAC had leased land and buildings from CCC for over 10 years and the leased space was in the center of CCC’s physical campus, intentional collaboration was amazingly lacking between these two schools that shared a dedication to arts education. What follows are some comments made by organizational members at CCC about sharing their campus with the NAAC:

“I think the whole relationship, everything with [NAAC] is weird, it’s just really strange. And I know it goes both ways. I still think it’s strange that we haven’t found more ways to work with them, it’s sort of mysterious but it’s sort of like that phenomenon that occurs like when ...you walk in the student union building and all the Black students were sitting in one area. And that’s really strange to me. So I don’t understand why, but I don’t understand why more efforts haven’t been made, for example by this department. To relate to and put some things together...or a committee that’s made up of people from over here and people from over there to talk about issues that might be problematic...I wonder why something like that never occurred [to the Dean of Students]...

...That’s one of the things that I see that’s really obvious...this is like most campuses where there seems mostly not to be very many people in the faculty and staff who come from other races. So here we
have this institution that’s predominantly white in this Hispanic area. It seems to be put on by the Anglos. I always wonder why that is...I haven’t really explored the history [of the school], but it looks pretty white bread.”

(Laughs)

This second quote about the relationship between CCC and NAAC was from a CCC student who grew up outside of New Mexico.

“...It’s a very tense situation, I think by just letting people do their own thing eases that tension. It doesn’t present any problems...But as for students, I have no idea what NAAC majors are, I don’t think NAAC majors really know what you can major in at CCC. I think that’s why we’ve just kind of left each other alone. We’re in such a tense sociological relationship, by letting each other alone it helps ease that tension, by just, ‘cause you’re doing your own thing. I’m not calling it ‘institutionalized racism’; I’m calling it a theory of non-intervention. Don’t do anything; don’t get involved with us, we don’t get involved with you-- everybody’s happy. In a sense, I think it’s more of an ignorance...”

The first person, a relative newcomer to the organization, was bewildered by the student affairs’ department’s lack of initiative in building relationships across the divide that separated CCC from NAAC. From what was being said, it sounded like issues were dealt with as they cropped up, but there had been no consistent, long-term efforts to communicate regularly and build relationships that might ease the resolution of conflicts as they occurred or even eliminated some.

The second person spoke quite insightfully and perhaps a touch complacently all at the same time. On the one hand, there was recognition of real, felt tension between the two institutions. On the other hand, the only possible resolution, albeit flawed, was seen to be the current so-called “theory of non-intervention” that continued to perpetuate and further entrench this wide divide, precluding any possibility of cross-cultural relationship building and learning.

The scenario described above between CCC and NAAC was consistent with the effects of internalized oppression on relationships between groups of people. In this case, both NAAC and CCC had settled for strained inter-group relationships as they resided shoulder to shoulder on this campus. There was a complacent acceptance of their separate yet commingled existence within the same physical space. There was complacency about the strained relationship, which was always festering and flared up from time to time, never getting fully resolved.
Looking at the regional culture, I saw very similar dynamics between the pueblos, the native Hispanic community, and the Anglo/newcomer community. The level of alienation of each group in relation to the others was high and had been historically. There still existed various unresolved conflicts between the pueblos and the Hispanic community, some dating back to the conquering of the area by the Spanish conquistadors and Franciscans. Some native Hispanics felt animosity towards Anglo newcomers from Texas and California who moved to the area or build multi-million dollar second homes, driving up the price of land and housing for the predominantly working class native New Mexican population. Native Americans often felt disrespected by Anglo new-agers who co-opt their traditional religions. Recent Mexican immigrants were tired of being mistreated by some of their native New Mexican Hispanic brothers and sisters. Hispanics and Anglos felt threatened when the pueblos exercised their sovereign rights in a way that might have affected the lives of others outside of the pueblos. Although the pueblos had continued to exist as mostly separate communities dotting the landscape, each of these other groups also managed to maintain basically separate existences from each other, often ultimately divided along socio-economic as well as cultural lines.

Community at CCC. ‘The walls are just so high and strong.” On the CCC campus I observed the same type of wary coexistence between the various departments and constituencies of the institution. As described in previous sections, such wariness was perceived to exist between the students and the faculty, between student affairs and the rest of the administration, between the faculty and the administration, and between student affairs and the faculty. It was suggested by many that a student union building or a campus center would greatly help in building community across departmental boundaries. It was acknowledged by some that the building alone wouldn’t probably do it since it depended on what people decided to do with this opportunity for increased interaction. It was also mentioned that there was a much greater feeling of community when the Christian Brothers controlled the college, although there was no student union building at that time either.

This wary coexistence between student affairs and various academic and administrative departments often manifested itself as each fiefdom lobbing an attack or criticism over the walls of another in an intermittent, yet endless cycle. I heard many stories about faculty or staff from one department complaining at a meeting or in the
student newspaper about another. I witnessed this on several occasions in the student affairs staff meetings as they discussed their complaints of other departments as well as current or dredged up past criticisms lodged against them by other departments. It was no surprise that the reactions I witnessed were often defensive, with the department ultimately either deflecting or downplaying the concern hidden within the criticism or putting at best a *Band-Aid* solution on the problem. At the student affairs staff meetings I observed, some staff who noticed that the approach traditionally used by the department in these situations was generally not effective made suggestions to their colleagues on how to change; yet I saw little evidence that these insights were fully understood or taken to heart by all concerned.

Overall at the college no mechanisms or even simple norms for resolving issues had emerged that were respectful of all organizational members and based on direct, open communication with an ultimate goal of truly resolving the problem. It was difficult to work towards improvement when feedback or concerns were delivered in a critical manner and then typically deflected or downplayed on the receiving end, especially when coming over the walls from outside of the department. In the end, nobody won in this scenario, least of all the students.

In terms of the impact on students’ services, one organizational member commented:

“There doesn’t seem to be much communication... it seems like if there’s a problem in the department my guess is the department handles it, it’s not shared information...I do know that certain departments they need to take care of their own...all the departments don’t trust together, and if there’s no trust than there really is no communication.

Even between the Dean of Students and the Dean of the College, they’ve both set up such strict boundaries of ‘what I will listen to, what I will hear,’ I mean I’ve heard [the Dean of Students] cut a student off as soon as they say something about a professor, ‘oh no, I don’t want...’ if they’re having academic problems in the class, but if they’re having a student services type of problem with the professor--- [I think] why can’t you at least listen? The walls here are just so high and strong. ‘I don’t want to step on his toes’ she said.”

So, “Don’t do anything, don’t get involved with us, we don’t get involved with you—everybody’s happy.” Even though this previous quote referred to the strained relationships between CCC and NAAC, it was also an apt description of what was happening at a variety of levels; in the region from a socio-cultural perspective, at CCC
as a whole, and in the relationship of the student affairs department to the larger campus community. But the truth of the matter was that there was ample evidence that everyone was not happy; many just seemed to have settled for working and living in an atmosphere of distrust that again is consistent with heavy internalized oppression. These strained relationships appeared to be good enough for some people; their expectations of being able to develop something better were low or nonexistent, and some perhaps had become numb to even trying anymore. What seemed absent in the department and the institution as a whole was the confidence and flexibility to respond to each new situation as it presented itself with the hope and the intent that the problem could be resolved or that relationships could potentially improve.

What was interesting to note was that across the campus there had developed some rigid walls between departments and job responsibilities, but within the student affairs department several members identified blurred boundaries around expectations of their role in the department, relationships amongst some staff, decision-making authority or confidentiality issues. It seemed that rigidity in either direction, be it high and strong walls or confused boundaries, was not the answer; the ability to respond flexibly, thoughtfully and appropriately to each situation had been lost with either extreme and obviously had had considerable impact on departmental relationships and ultimately student services and programs.

From what I observed and what was described to me, it was clear that there had been a lack of success in mending the tears in relationships and community at CCC. I observed numerous discussions about this possibility during student affairs staff meetings but there appeared to be no real interest or effective action taken in rebuilding this trust. This might be true in a number of other departments also. It had had considerable impact on the effective functioning of the institution both in terms of organizational climate and culture issues and day-to-day productivity and long-term planning. In order for this much needed transformation to happen, alienation needs to be replaced with understanding, hopelessness with hopefulness, and discouragement with encouraging, committed action.

The previous examples proposed connections between how internalized oppression affects an individual’s identity and subsequent interactions with others as well as the influence of cultural history on current-day inter-group and organizational
This next section describes the phenomenon of internalized oppression in target groups, which is particularly hard on group leaders.

Targeting our disappointment at out Hispanic leaders. “People have magical thoughts about what a leader can do.” I will describe the many instances I observed and examples others reported regarding how leaders had been perceived in the recent history of the student affairs division at Flagship University (FU). The previous female Hispanic vice president had been overwhelmingly criticized, setting up some volatile dynamics within the division. As one organizational member remembered, “I used to characterize… the atmosphere within the division as one of a dysfunctional family… we were all wounded by [her] tenure.” The following quote gave another interesting interpretation of the cultural dynamics at play:

“When the conquistadors came [to New Mexico] and so many of them started up north… there’s even a difference between northern Hispanics and southern Hispanics and there’s this incredible sense of entitlement [with the northern Hispanics]… one of our vice presidents was an Hispanic woman from the southern part, she had never experienced Hispanics from the northern part… It was interesting to talk with her about it… you know, the sense that ‘we [the northern Hispanics] settled this land, and then these white people came along...’”

Long-time student affairs staff member

It seemed that this vice president and many of the organizational members of the time might have been unable to untangle the reality of their present organizational lives from the cultural legacy of the past, which confounded organizational relationships.

The current Hispanic vice president walked into a minefield: on the one hand, several organizational members mentioned the unspoken expectation of his superiors to be the front man for the administration around issues of diversity; on the other, they were critical of his ability to do this effectively because of his background as a Mexican-American born and raised in southern Texas. All of the non-native New Mexican Hispanics, as well as some other organizational members, mentioned what they perceived as a confusion and preoccupation with identity issues among their native New Mexican Hispanic brothers and sisters. In essence, each was accusing the other of having the same blind spot.

In my assessment, the dynamics surrounding the experience of this current vice president echoed precisely the description offered by Ruth (1988) and Lipsky (1987) of
what can happen within an oppressed group with its leaders when there are high levels of internalized oppression. This group was initially very excited and had high expectations of their new vice president. They thought, “This is our savior!” Then he was perceived to have made some mistakes, or at the very least didn’t do what some wanted him to do, and since then some organizational members had become critical of his performance. Of course the savior wasn’t able to fulfill all of these expectations.

One of the hazards of leadership is often having to deal with the disappointments that have built up over the years of those you’re trying to serve through your leadership, making you the scapegoat or the most likely target of others’ old, built-up disappointments.

This vice president responded as many in his place would have: having started out open and embracing, consistent with his personality, he ended up becoming more controlling of the formal communication structure of the organization as the negative feedback towards him increased, primarily from the native New Mexican Hispanics in the organization. There seemed to be no mechanism in place in the organization for him to hear feedback in a manner that wouldn’t shut him down completely. Some organizational members were upset and vocally so in public, making it difficult for the individual on the receiving end of this upset (the vice president) to take in objectively the content of the criticism, rather than a focus on the attack on his person.

Yet, I am afraid that no matter how hard he tried to control the formal communication networks of the organization, the informal networks rose to the challenge of fulfilling human beings’ need to connect with others, even if in the end it was a disempowering gripe session. This was precisely what happened at FU, and once those who felt they weren’t being heard started convening on their own they were reprimanded for doing so by the vice president. The situation had escalated after each defensive response of either side, and alienation and isolation continued to increase in succession.

As with children, we might try to ignore or even control what are perceived as undesirable behaviors, or we can welcome them into an environment or arena that is structured to allow the negative feelings to come out and disperse, while also holding out the reality that it is possible to find new, different, creative solutions or responses. Listening does not connote agreement, yet simply listening to another human being can often have transformative value. The rigidly patterned response in situations where individuals are protesting or complaining is to ignore or attempt to control others’ feelings
and behaviors, which often subverts and transforms the feelings into hopelessness and despair in these individuals who in the end don’t feel truly heard. If individuals, children or adults, trust that their needs will be met as much as possible and that their voice will be heard most of the time, then they are more likely to develop the trust and confidence to helpfully choose communication methods that are positive and solution-focused rather than negative, critical, whining and complaining, thus putting a stop to at least one strand of the thread of internalized oppression woven into this particular situation.

Finally, I will describe the debilitating effects of internalized oppression on the organizational culture, programs and services of the student affairs department at CCC.

Student affairs’ self-fulfilling prophecy. “...We’re laboring in the trenches...” As I mentioned previously, a few people in the CCC organization were able to describe what they called a self-fulfilling prophecy attitude and victim behaviors in student affairs, but no one exactly linked this with the overall dynamics of oppression and internalized oppression in the institution. One person described what he noticed in the department in the creation of the us versus them mentality between student affairs and the administration:

“It’s that us against them thing that it creates and I don’t think you can get anything done that way cause there’s a certain amount of victim mentality involved in that. As long as you feel like you’re being victimized you have no power. Basically, it’s the opposite of power...if you have a positive attitude and keep tenacious, things happen. If you don’t believe that it won’t happen. I think you have to do something, you just don’t say you want it to happen and wait around for it to happen, you have to put your energy and ability into it.”

This person recognized the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy in that as long as one viewed oneself as a victim, one would have no power because one would act powerlessly. The importance of action as well as hope or intention were also noted. Just wanting or yearning for something to be is not enough; we must actually do something different from what we have done in the past in order to act powerfully to effect change.

There was almost a sense of fatalism in parts of CCC, expressed as the belief that all events were predetermined or subject to fate, so it doesn’t really matter what we do, why expend the effort? This deeply seated sentiment pervaded this region and might at least be partially linked to the area and the institution’s Catholic roots and the legacy of colonialism. Similarly, a person who did not grow up in the Santa Fe area commented about the culture shock of now living in the area:
“I really want to just scream at people, get off your ass and move! Come on people--Santa Fe really frustrates me like that. With the energy they’re lacking they could make up for it. The City of Santa Fe would not have problems of development, of pollution, of population control, of that sort of thing, of gang violence, if they’d just take a little more energetic attack towards it in the sense that they just lay back and let it develop and then deal with it.”

The previous comment was a telling description of the difference between being proactive and reactive in relation to when one finally takes action on issues that are known to be a problem, or even seen as a developing problem. The need to be more proactive was a concern about the overall student affairs department voiced by members in and outside of the department. Instead of waiting for problems to become full-blown it would be more educational and empowering for students if staff focused on developing programs and services at the college that addressed important issues and concerns before they became critical problems or crisis situations. The process of empowering students is qualitatively different from responding to crises and requires a thoughtful, educational approach to program development, service delivery, and planning (Manning, 1994). Related to this issue, this next person talked about the victim mentality and how it could squelch creativity:

“The problem with a victim mentality is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy if people aren’t careful. Departments or individuals who find themselves thinking that way are much less likely to be creative or do things over time that might change things. And there’s also a, ‘we’re laboring in the trenches and are totally unappreciated and that’s why we’re owed.’ There’s a sense of right of better salaries or more money, not based on the list of parameters you usually hope for but rather it’s just a right because we’ve been so downtrodden and unappreciated...Some of that exists here.”

If you view yourself as a victim then you will be less likely to energetically and creatively approach your work. You might be more likely to deflect or downplay problems or issues that involve your work or your department and react defensively whenever an issue is brought up. You might develop a mindset that you are unappreciated (which may be true, perhaps partly because you have probably become less than effective in your work) and conversely feel that you should be rewarded for your endurance, loyalty and longevity rather than your creativity, effectiveness or the
results you produce for the organization. Several long-term student affairs staff echoed this feeling of being unappreciated by the current administration:

“They expect [staff members] to work all these extra hours without pay or not even a pat on the back; they expect you to do it because you love the school so much...When the brothers were here if I was in the same position working the same hours I’d get a call every other week from the president or his assistant saying we really appreciate what you’re doing, you’re doing a great job, etc. A lot of people think a president shouldn’t have to do that, if I was working at Notre Dame that would be stupid, but at [CCC], that’s another thing...the brothers were more caring as human beings...the brothers didn’t have to worry about going home to their wife or kids, they always had a safe place to stay, their whole life is dedicated to teaching kids you know, you kind of have to be fair about it. But it was a whole different atmosphere at that point and you just felt better about things.”

Another student affairs staff member commented:

“I think you have to give people resources, you have to give them time, you can’t just overwork people; a lot of people work way above and beyond the time that they have to be here on campus. There are some people that I know are here every weekend and late at night. Sometimes I don’t think it’s worth it because usually you’re not appreciated for that type of thing.”

Again, this feeling of not being appreciated was partially linked to the change from the more informal, family style of management employed when the Christian Brothers were running the campus to being more businesslike and formal in organizational relationships as the lay administration set to work to save the college. This might have also included a shift away from rewarding loyalty and longevity to the family towards rewarding professionalism and effectiveness in the organization. This change in organizational values has been reflected mostly in the corporate sector but has been permeating both public and especially private higher education as the costs of educating students has skyrocketed in the past twenty years. In fact, one organizational member commented:

“In order to survive in a very competitive environment private schools increasingly are going to have to not just talk about being student-centered or student focused, they’re going to have to be actually offering programs and doing it as well as they can.”
Since the college had been seriously understaffed and in some cases spinning its wheels in its confusion to get things done and make changes, I was told that some people were consistently working way beyond 40 hours a week while others were perceived as just barely putting in their time. Another long-time staff member talked about how they had coped with working at CCC:

“...My job doesn’t require me to seek the approval of many different areas so that the frustration level isn’t as high. I don’t get burned out because, I see this, I do what I do then I don’t take it home with me...This is part of life, we work here and then we have another part of our life. I think if you invest too much emotional baggage and personal energy here you don’t find it repaid in kind, but you tend to burn out very quickly and become frustrated. I do what I need to do for the time I’m here and then I do my other things, and then it doesn’t get to you...It’s just the attitude factor. Another thing is that it’s important for me to be here in this area...I haven’t really been willing to look at other options.”

The previous quote was a telling description of how and why some staff at CCC had endured or survived so long in this work environment. This person also mentioned the limited work options in Santa Fe, especially in higher education. Another person talked about what it’s like for her to work at CCC:

“It’s not bad [working here]. At least for me it’s not...I wish we had more resources. I think things are going pretty well. I wouldn’t still be here if I didn’t like it, I’d be long gone, but I enjoy the community; I enjoy the campus. There are times I’m frustrated, I’m not saying everything’s rosy because it’s not.”

This statement reflected the sense of frustration as well as the sense of resignation that had developed with some staff. As quoted in a previous section, another staff member described the unspoken expectation in student affairs that you approach your work with an eager posture but you were not expected to be particularly productive while at work. The underlying message essentially was, *We do the best that we can do with few resources and a lack of appreciation or support, but our hands are basically tied.* This sentiment illustrates another hallmark of internalized oppression: having accepted the identity of being the underdog or the victim, the individual or the group affirms the stereotype by continuing to act within this rigidly defined role. Now even if there currently exists no need for this survivalist strategy, the individual or the group continues to respond powerlessly long after the need has passed.
Some had accepted, even embraced their role at the institution as a less important and under-funded department and would not relinquish it easily; it’s comfortable, it fits. In the case of the student affairs department, it was a posturing about survival and what the institution could dare to expect out of its staff given the difficult circumstances of working at the college. To ask them to do more was viewed as an affront; they had accepted their victim role and were unwilling to move out of this space that they had carved for themselves at the institution: the identity of the misunderstood, unappreciated “soft underbelly” of higher education. Another student affairs staff commented on the institution’s money woes:

“It’s just a struggling school. You know what, I like that struggle though. I like being involved in a place that is really struggling and trying to keep their head above water. I’ve seen a lot of institutions with a lot of money and you know they throw their money around and knock out programs and everything else. For some reason they don’t have that kind of spirit that--what do I want to say--it’s not a competitive but a spirit of wanting to make things work and you know even though it could be difficult I like that, I like that in a college. If I had a department that had all the money and all of that, but didn’t have the type of dedication that all of the various people have I don’t think it would be as much fun as it is.”

Some at the college appeared to have romanticized their identity as a struggling institution and had become quite skilled at surviving and maintaining; not even wondering if something different was desirable or attainable. It seemed that the looseness and freedom in the culture of the organization had allowed those who wanted to continue to maintain the status quo to do just that and those who wanted to move ahead to do that too--to an extent. What had resulted was an institution and a student affairs department that were out of sync with each other. As long as some key departments were out of step with others and the overall new direction of the institution, there would be only so much progress that could be made towards clarifying identity and organizational culture and values, which are key to this organization’s healthy functioning.

One of the other ways that internalized oppression had expressed itself in interdepartmental relationships was the jealously, denial for needed changes, and denial of progress expressed when other departments were doing well or making changes, which in effect was a severe affront to a survivalist or struggling identity. Shifting the focus of the institution from serving primarily the impoverished local community at the
advent of the community college was one example. The institution had since sought out students from across the U.S. and strengthened its arts programs by tapping into a major industry of this region. As noted by one staff member in a previous section, “I don’t think you can really blame the [current] administration for that,” yet some people had. One student affairs staff member related:

“I came back from a tour of the visual arts center and was just absolutely awestruck. You know, I said to people ‘have you seen it? This is a world-class exhibition building’ and they’re like ‘yeah.’ You know they didn’t want that, they didn’t want that to be good. They wanted something else to be good. You know, that can’t do anything but bring more people to this campus. It’s incredible. So yeah, there’s not a recognition of the movement that’s going on on campus.”

When discussing with another staff member how he saw the self-fulfilling prophecy being expressed in his department he related a story about discussing with some colleagues the planned student union building. These student affairs colleagues were bemoaning how much one was needed yet denying that it would ever come to fruition, obviously having been disappointed on numerous previous occasions and not willing to allow feeling disappointed to happen once again. This residual disappointment can breed discouragement and hopelessness and if not thoroughly worked through can contribute to a whole host of victimized behaviors and responses to situations.

What was severely lacking at this institution was an all-encompassing desire, will, and decisive action to move the college ahead into its future. Although there was some who appeared to have a good understanding of the dynamics of the self-fulfilling prophecy and resultant victimized behavior, no one in a key, organizational position appeared to have figured out a consistent, appropriate response to undoing this aspect of the organizational culture. Even those within the student affairs department who had an understanding of this dynamic felt frustrated in knowing how to respond when confronted by this behavior in their colleagues, and some even appeared fearful of losing their jobs if they raised the issue too insistently.

I acknowledge that this is not an easy task; when we are chronically confronted with dealing with the hopelessness or powerlessness exhibited by others, it can tug at those well-hidden feelings of hopelessness that we all carry, sometimes paralyzing our thinking and actions. Knowing how to respond in a variety of empowering ways to the
expression of internalized oppression will be a crucial communication skill members of this organization must acquire, especially its core leaders.

In this last section I provided several detailed descriptions of how internalized oppression had affected organizational functioning at FU and CCC. They included: 1) The present day impact on personal identity of not acknowledging/healing from your people’s colonized past; 2) The influence that socio-cultural history can have on present-day, inter-group relations at all levels of organizing; 3) Having unrealistic expectations of what leaders can do and then targeting them with our disappointment when they fall off the pedestal we have placed them on; and 4) Competition and jealousy about the successes of other departments, as well as projecting a hopeless attitude that becomes a self-protective denial (and self-fulfilling prophecy) that positive change will ever happen.

In the next section I will describe Ruth’s cycle of empowerment or liberation, again providing examples from the two organizations studied to illustrate each stage.

*Understanding the Liberation Process*

“...You have to put your energy and ability into it”

It is important to review what happens when people or groups start to change as they move towards liberation or empowerment. The process as described by Ruth (1988) has generally four phases, the first two of which are: 1) the *pre-liberation* or the *Dependent* phase where an individual or group is passive, accepting or dominated with a negative attitude towards themselves and a positive attitude towards the dominant culture; and 2) the *Counterdependence* stage, when a group or an individual in it begins to question the dominant culture ideology, giving the appearance of throwing off the shackles of oppression but often still acting within the constraints of internalized oppression. There is an awareness of the ways in which they have been systematically mistreated by the dominant culture yet they have not become conscious of its internalized effects on their behavior. Strategies employed by oppressed groups at this stage are heavily influenced by a victim-type approach such as violence, hostility and negativity towards former oppressor group members, reflecting their on-going feelings of self-doubt, anger, and powerlessness.

I believe that the student affairs department at CCC was somewhere between stage 1, *pre-liberation*, and stage 2, *counterdependence*. The romanticized view that many long-term employees and alumni held of the Christian Brothers era at the college
was indicative of a generally positive attitude towards the Anglo, Christian Brothers (dominant culture) controlled CCC where employees felt appreciated and a part of a family community, yet were also clearly expected to carry-out the dictates of the authoritarian, Christian Brothers administration, many doing so gladly. One interviewee commented that he felt many at the college viewed this era through “rose-colored glasses,” and several commented that it was clear that the brothers were in control. Yet another noted that part of what had actually instigated the change to lay leadership was a deep concern by faculty and staff that they were kept too much in the dark regarding budgetary matters at the institution, especially considering its dire financial predicament at the time. It appeared that many across campus still felt in the dark on budgetary matters, referring to the “big black hole” of the administration building where forms, requests and proposals were sent, never to be heard from again.

For several years, the Anglo, lay administration (dominant culture) had been asking for more leadership, change and proactive programs and services from the student affairs department, yet several, important, long-term employees appeared to have little confidence and perhaps little desire to grow, change and develop with the new direction of CCC, while also being generally skeptical or unsupportive of the evolving CCC mission and identity. One interviewee said of the situation, “...sometimes we can pull people into the present or sometimes you can be pushed into it, and I think in our case, in this situation they’re probably being pushed as much as they can.” At some point, individuals had to decide if they’re “going to put their ability and energy into it.” Yet some had instead romanticized the struggle, eschewing a more proactive, intentional approach to their work. Now, employees were critical of the different, Anglo, lay administration; they could virtually do no right in some eyes and must simply be endured or survived.

There appeared to be a lack of self-awareness of the internalized effects of oppression with several influential organizational members in student affairs; yet as described above, the strategies employed by some in the group fell into passive-aggressive victim-type behaviors such as bitching, whining and moaning rather than violence, hostility or visible anger that is also a hallmark of stage 2. As mentioned by several other organizational members, the entire college was attempting to make the shift to being more proactive rather than being reactive or in survival mode, another significant internalized effect of oppression. Those who understood the dynamics of the
situation were frustrated and didn’t know how to respond to others’ passive stance. Group members’ self-doubt was expressed each time they complained of feeling unappreciated and misunderstood or that, as staff at the college or the student affairs department, the administration would not listen to them.

There was a lot of divisiveness amongst the student affairs staff based upon the narrow definition of what it meant to be considered loyal to the department, yet it was hidden or minimized like most of the conflict that occurs. Pervasive both within the department and between the department and the administration was an *us versus them* mentality that confounded all attempts to bring about useful change. Although this social situation wasn’t as bloody as the Irish liberation struggle, for example, it had taken its toll on all involved by entrenching people further; it reinforced a victim mentality with some, increased the confusion and frustration of others who refused that role or identity, and isolated still others further as they withdrew more and more from the group. Because the dynamics in student affairs were not *in your face*, overt or bloody, it was easy to dismiss, minimize or underestimate their importance.

Many individuals and liberation movements have gotten stuck in phase 2, *counter-dependence*, and many are still struggling (i.e., Northern Ireland and Great Britain, Israeli-Palestinian conflicts). Some of the most confusing group dynamics based in internalized oppression can take place when the group becomes so divided within itself that it cannot operate effectively to bring about useful change. The defining issues are the divisiveness within the group and each faction’s isolation from one another, reinforced by a lack of respect for one another. As long as the *other* is seen as the problem either within the group or in the form of the dominant culture, the problem will go unresolved. There was some of this dynamic at-play between the overall institution and student affairs, as well as within the student affairs department.

*Fighting & resisting versus empowerment.* “THEY is US. [FU] is not a THEM, it is an US, WE are THEM.” An Anglo organizational member of FU when describing the culture of their institution shared a good example of this phenomenon:

“I have seen this victimization in student affairs more than anywhere I have worked. There’s a cultural victimization among some, but not all, Hispanics in this culture...there’s an anger and hostility that goes with that. Seeing it where it isn’t, seeing it where it is, *and it’s there*...One of the analogies that I made, jokingly, to an Hispanics friend of mine who understood exactly what I was talking about...I was working with a task force....I said ‘I couldn’t have been more ignored than if I was
an Hispanic female.’ He knew what I meant...It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy...that is the result of racism and internalized racism...there is a culture of victimization, opposition, and also a tradition of ethnic confrontational politics from the 60s and 70s that I was a part of and I understand...some of it has been earned by the institution because it does a lot of it. It’s tokenism. ‘This is where we handle this situation....’”

A Hispanic organizational member described what this looks like in her department:

“...There is not a camaraderie among the different silos...there is a tremendous layer of suspicion of the administration...there is a victim role that a lot of [FU] staff members have taken upon themselves...there is a lot of dialogue about, ‘THEY did this and THEY did that, And THEY won’t let US do this,’ and I have said...‘THEY is US. [FU] is not a THEM, it is an US, WE are THEM.”

Another way that internalized oppression played out either individually or as a group was settling for what you think you can get, instead of going for what you need or deserve. An African-heritage organizational member described how this looked in the organization:

“.... there is a very disheartening tone, a very self-centered tone...which results in individuals just trying to protect their own turf, their own little territory, or themselves as an individual...there’s very little interest or ability to connect with others and develop care for your surrounding colleagues or your surrounding community...we talk about recruiting and retaining students...it’s pretty hard to look a young person in the eye and tell them, come to [FU], you’ll have a successful experience here. When within your heart of hearts, you don’t feel that yourself you know. And you may be here for twenty years, but you’re here because you feel some sense of obligation...and if you could leave you would...if you go to the people who deal as liaisons between the student level and the administration and other staff...that’s what you’re going to hear...”

Yet another organizational member related:

“...those of us who are in the [ethnic center] programs and who are invested in the programs have to you know, have to really hold on. And I don’t think that that’s necessarily a healthy thing for the org--for the division...it’s trying to hold on to what you’ve got.”

This comment brought with it the insight that placing oneself in the position of merely holding on or resisting was limiting. In fact, many of the long-term organizational
members talked about their work in terms of student affairs is fighting the battle for and in the university, ostensibly for the students. Some organizational members even referred to some of their colleagues as “comrades.”

Another organizational member had many interesting insights about the type of student affairs programs and services that tend to emanate from a victimized identity:

“...But it’s my observation here and elsewhere, and it’s what typifies the traditional approach of the people who feel victimized in terms of their work. I call it the ‘Avuncular Model of Student Services,’ it’s this, ‘I am the person that these victimized students can come to, who understands them, and will help them, nobody else in the university cares about them. We’ve got to get other people in the university to care about them, but WE are the people who care; we are the people they come to. That’s part A. Part B is ‘the university is a cesspool...all of these students...I see them all...It’s terrible out there...’”

“When I worked in [one office] we dealt with all of the complaints and grievances...I saw myself as sort of a savior, ‘I’m going to help these victims’...then I worked in a different office and I saw there were students who were happy, they were succeeding, they needed assistance, they needed support, but...it was an awakening for me, And if you’re a savior, then only people who need saving will come to you. There’s a shortsightedness in terms of what program approach is necessary...but what else besides advocacy? ...But it’s something I had to unlearn...you have to do a program, you can’t just be it. That’s not sufficient...it’s a matter of setting up a program that will survive when you’re gone.”

“It’s like the Dutch Uncle model, or the model of Andy Hardy’s father who was the Dean of Students in the movies from the 1930s....if someone needed money, or a job, or a place to live, or counseling, they came to one person and that person knew where the jobs were and knew where the scholarships were, etc. Those days are gone.”

“Because the other culture...that is frustrating to me is ‘the work that I should do is the work that satisfies me’...not necessarily that does the job...or, ‘I want to express myself’...it’s that thing we find with a lot of people in student affairs, you’re satisfying yourself rather than showing satisfied students.”

There were several student affairs staff members at [FU] who eloquently described the everyday manifestations of internalized oppression within this organizational setting. Many had even noticed the hazards of the fighting and resisting response to them as individuals, to their work in student affairs, and ultimately to the students they served. It is difficult to support the empowerment of others when we ourselves are not approaching our lives from a place of empowerment.
A final insight that I would like to offer comes from Laurel Richardson (1997), a feminist scholar who wrote about her work in academe:

“Writing ‘against’ the current tied me to the ‘mainstream’ always aware of its speed, eddies, whirlpools, displacing the power and centricity of my own ‘current.’ I no longer desired to position my work as ‘counter’ or ‘anti’ or ‘against,’ as I had been doing for years. I did not want to write about issues that were uninteresting; and I wanted to write through the ‘personal’ binaries (me/them, good/bad, for/against) that were my walls, invisible to me then, bracing and constraining.”

It seems that many different kinds of people--student affairs professionals, academics, women and men from a variety of cultural-heritages and socioeconomic backgrounds--are slowly and painstakingly figuring out how we need to reframe the resistance paradigm if we are to realize full liberation in our society. I believe the key is reconceptualizing resistance from fighting against the mainstream or dominant culture to conceptualizing our identity from our own inherent sense of self-worth and then taking action for the good of all people. Consistent empowerment will not happen for any of us until all of us can come together and risk trusting each other through listening and communication micro-practices that support speaking out, being heard and healing. Some further detailed descriptions of what the empowerment process looks like are provided in the next section.

*The faces of empowerment.* “I would not take it personally, I wouldn’t get mad…I got too tied up in being mad.” During my interviews, I also heard many stories about how people had successfully stepped beyond the anger and hostility stage of liberation (counterdependence), having recognized the hazards of the victim identity and behaviors. One organizational member related:

“It’s real and perceived power, and I think also it is real and perceived self-image that there is in student affairs, as I’ve found on every campus I’ve ever been to, that one is perceived, or perceives oneself as being perceived inferior, that you know it, that you know that you’re low on the totem pole...You look at your salary, you look at who’s called, you look at the body language that people use with you, you look at how people address you and don’t address you...I have had to privately rebuke some academic administrators here for how they spoke to me. That was the first time it had ever happened. I don’t take that from anybody, but there are others who will.”

Another staff member talked about what she had said to her staff:
“Don’t let anyone take away your joy, and two, put you in a role where you feel as though you are a victim. Don’t do that. You have a choice. Now, you’re choice may be difficult for you, your choice may ultimately mean that this environment is not working for you, and so you make the choice to leave, but remember that you have that choice. One staff member said, ‘they’ve always done that to us.’ And I said, ‘and if you allow it, they will always do it to you, and only you can change that, and your choices are [what I said before] or stay here and try to do something different about it.”

Yet another long time organizational member recalled:

“...That was a really difficult time...some of it is what you let someone do to you...I look back at that and realize that I could have changed the situation by looking at it in a different way...you really make your life and put it together...if you let someone like that impress you, it’s your problem, not theirs...I would handle a supervisor like that differently in the future...I would not take it personally, I wouldn’t get mad, I wouldn’t worry about where her values were...I got too tied up in being mad...you either leave or you decide you’re going to work with them...you can still run a good thing and work with those values...I could have been happier working with her if I’d had a different attitude too...”

The last two phases of liberation Ruth (1988) identified are 3) Independence and 4) Interdependence. Independence can happen when all viewpoints are accorded respect and allowed expression and is characterized by people reclaiming real pride in themselves as members of their group, not in comparison with the oppressor group. It is not a pride based upon the endurance of or resistance to oppression (survival), but liking yourself as a woman or young person or an Hispanic or working class person who is intelligent, creative, courageous and good; not better, bigger, stronger or more honorable than THEM. During this stage the attitude towards oppressor groups is still one of independence, coupled with aloofness. One no longer feels the need to prove oneself in relation to the dominant group but there is still confusion about how to have close, workable relationships with others across all perceived boundaries.

For example, women at this stage can experience great creativity and power, accomplishing changes in their lives that make things more supportive and rewarding for them personally. They tend to redefine, for example, what they want out of life for themselves without dictation by the needs of the men around them. This can be a confusing experience for the men around them as many are still unaccustomed to relating to empowered members of a traditionally oppressed population, also making it
difficult for some women to even consider that men will be useful, necessary allies along their road to liberation. In effect, as each of us struggles toward liberation, all of our relationships-spouse, partner, mother, lover, daughter, sister, friend, employee, boss-are called into question, and all will be altered.

The major difficulty that people still have in this stage is a residual unsureness or lack of comfort with the dominant group. They are clear about their own worth, but still ambiguous and not totally trusting of the dominant culture. They notice that some dominant group members seem okay or even act as allies on their behalf; some still behave in prejudiced or oppressive manners; and sometimes they may get a little of both types of behavior from the same individual. It is clear that the final stage, Interdependence, cannot be accomplished until the dominant group can itself change too.

Undoing internalized oppression is the key step in beginning to undo all oppressions in our society. Our effectiveness in being advocates and allies to others is increased as we begin to let go of the effects of the oppressions we have internalized. As we begin to rediscover who we truly are we can begin to notice the humanity in every person. All of the oppressions are intricately linked; no one is free while others are still oppressed. As we begin to undo the chains of internalized oppression, believing in and acting on our own inherent worth and intelligence, the way that the dominant culture relates to us in the social system will have no choice but to change too.

This brings us back again to a critical assumption in this analysis: no one is born racist, or sexist, or homophobic, etc. Rather, individuals are conditioned, even trained, to play an oppressor role in relation to a historically oppressed group. In fact, individuals must first be mistreated themselves (often as young people) or witness the mistreatment of others as the foundation for oppressor patterns of communicating to take hold. It is because of this conditioning and fear of being targeted that they perceive no other alternative than to pass along the mistreatment to others if they were unable to heal or participate in a consciousness-raising process to undo this conditioning. In this sense, it is the system that enforces the oppressive roles that is the problem, not the agents of the oppression who have been conditioned to enact a certain role. Attacking the agents of the oppression will not work in the long run because this will not change the system, and the system will not change because people who are attacked typically do not heal or
have their consciousness raised about how their actions or inaction ultimately hurts others.

Creating a foundation for trusting relationships. “Don’t let anyone take away your joy...” One of the key reasons that members of oppressor groups need to look at how oppression affects their lives, besides for their own personal benefit and full enjoyment of their life, is that once oppressed groups redefine their relationship to the dominant culture, the latter is forced to examine itself. The final stage of liberation, Interdependence, cannot be achieved until all groups are in the process of liberation. The key work of this liberation process for dominant culture groups will be undoing guilt in order to realize their innate goodness, and undoing fear in order to give up all oppressor patterns and become true allies to targeted groups (Rose, 1996).

Fear and confusion are often the real, unconscious basis of oppressor actions. Shame, embarrassment, numbness and deeply seated feelings of powerlessness are at the basis of the inaction of many dominant culture group members, even if they do not behave in overtly oppressive ways in most situations. This can manifest itself in dominant group members as a fear or reluctance to stand up to oppression when they see it and even as an inability to respond effectively to the victimized behaviors expressed by oppressed groups and individuals, colluding with their feelings of powerlessness. Together, this action and inaction keeps the dominant culture from being effective allies to mistreated groups and individuals in many situations (Brown & Mazza, 1997).

Shame and guilt can also keep dominant culture groups from seeing their own innate goodness as European-heritage, male, or middle and owning class people, for example, and further confounds a truly positive self-image for dominant culture group members. This in turn can thwart efforts towards unity and liberation for all people. For example, it is unhelpful for the European-heritage and even people of color to label some whites liberal or okay, and others conservative, old fashioned, bigoted or racist. This common, contemporary practice is divisive amongst all people, especially the European-heritage group, and ultimately distracts us from addressing the many subtle, covert forms racist behavior has taken today. It is important for dominant culture groups to take real pride in themselves and everyone in their group (Itzin, 1985), not the false, fear-based pride of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacy groups. This illustrates a commonplace, rigid communication micro-practice in most liberal circles during this
politically correct time in our society, and it ultimately thwarts efforts towards unity, pride and liberation for all people.

When we focus most of our attention on the most extreme forms of oppression, we in effect let ourselves off the hook and don’t deal with the even subtle ways oppressor patterns have affected all of our lives. And in a different way, oppression hurts those of us from dominant culture groups too in that our fears about getting close to others who are different from us robs us from having authentic, enriching, close relationships with a wide variety of people.

This is how all oppressions are linked, as an example: one of the things holding sexism in place is the conditioning and oppression of men, and one of the things that holds men’s oppression in place (and by extension, women’s) is gay oppression or homophobia, which affects all men by reminding them that it is not safe to step out of their traditional role as defined by the expectations of the larger society (Ruth, 1988). One of the things that supports the elimination of men’s oppression (and by extension sexism) is a powerful, loving female ally who won’t stand for the mistreatment of any man in the name of war (kill or be killed) or money (breadwinner). One of the things that supports the elimination of women’s oppression or sexism (and by extension men’s oppression) is powerful, loving, male allies who won’t allow any female to be treated poorly or view herself as inadequate, unable or powerless, for example. It is imperative that we are allies for each other, not allowing each other to be treated thoughtlessly in our society or on an individual basis, and not allowing each other to act out our feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness or any other expression of internalized oppression. Therefore the complete liberation of any one group will depend on the liberation of all other groups. It is through this illustration that we can see that no one is free while others are still oppressed.

It is often hard to think clearly about these issues about our group(s) from the inside looking out as we are still affected in unrealized ways by the legacy of internalized oppression that has been passed on through the culture. This is where different groups, each doing its own liberation work, can be effective allies for each other, beginning to realize what true interdependence and eventually full liberation for all will look like. Therefore, it is important to remember that a key component to any liberation process will be open, respectful communication micro-practices that allow all parties to be heard fully and help reconnect people with one another across all perceived boundaries. I
believe that it is primarily through democratically based communication practices that this important work will reach its fruition.

Communication Competence or Flexibility and the Undoing of the Effects of Oppression

“I look back at that and realize that I could have changed the situation by looking at it in a different way...you really make your life and put it together...”

In Dervin and Clark’s conception of culture, communication, and democracy, increasing the communicative competence or flexibility of individuals in a system or culture will concurrently alter the reified rituals, norms, values, and belief systems towards more liberating assumptions, philosophies and practices. Alternately, undoing oppression is intricately interwoven with empowering individuals and groups through democratic communication practices.

Dervin and Clark (1993) assert that the capacity for communication competence is inherent in the human species and a prerequisite if democratic communication practices are to be successfully employed. In this case, communicating effectively requires that each individual have access to his or her full range of capabilities in relating to human beings. As has been described throughout this study and posited through my observations, it is the hurtful effects of oppression and internalized oppression that adversely affect human beings’ inherent capacity to communicate flexibly and connect with others across all perceived boundaries. Oppression and internalized oppression are hurtful to all human beings but in different ways.

For example, in the CCC case the shifting identity and culture of the institution, when coupled with the survivalist mentality and unempowered communication micro-practices of key student affairs staff, had perpetuated the continued operation of internalized oppression in this department, thus hampering the effectiveness of its programs and services. In the FU case it was the unearthed examination of historical identity issues coupled with the VP’s self-protective attempts at curtailing opportunities for public discussion of important yet difficult issues that rigidified communication in this organization and confounded attempts at more flexible organizational communication effectiveness. In both of these situations there appeared to have been few if any successful attempts at responding effectively to the myriad ways internalized oppression had been expressed in the organizational arena. It will be difficult to successfully institute democratic communication procedures that have an empowering, liberating or
conscientizing effect on its members, but I believe doing so is critical to each organization’s thriving, not merely surviving.

It is not enough to be simply aware of the effects of internalized oppression and oppression; procedures that work to heal the hurt are necessary to undo the rigidified, resultant communication behaviors because the habitualization of the behavior is deeply enmeshed in the acceptance of oppression or hurt (Dervin & Clark, 1993, p. 134). It is here that an assumption of the necessity and naturalness of emotional expressiveness in organizational settings is critical. Again, what is needed is leadership and decisive action to ensure that processes or procedures are in place that will increase the possibility of flexible, healthy communication and relationships that will empower organizational members to be more effective in their work and in their lives in general.

It should be noted that both Freire (1993) and Dervin and Clark (1993) recognized that it is important that any conscientizing process be self-directed; no one ultimately can or should be forced into having his or her consciousness raised. Although one may artfully and thoughtfully use others during this process, in the end it will only be effective if it is self-initiated and self-controlled. In essence, it is an act of individual emergence from past circumstances; an individual decision to give up rigidified ways of thinking and perceiving in the world. Most societies have paid very little attention to incorporating procedures of this nature for this important tactic, so it is up to us to invent some possibilities. In an organizational arena, instituting a few well-placed empowering procedures could have a transformative effect on the organization and its members. Descriptions of some democratic communication micro-practices, which could be useful in these and other organizations, will be provided in Chapter 10.
Chapter 10

Doing No Harm? Democratic Organizational Communication Inventions,  
And Recommendations

In this final chapter I will begin by describing the feedback I received during the member checking process including some known repercussions of this study. I will then outline some guiding assumptions about building healthy, trusting organizational relationships including how to empower human beings and intentionally provide settings for the invention, testing, evaluation and revision of a variety of democratic communication procedures. I will also provide examples of some inventions for undoing rigid, disempowering patterns of communicating amongst people in organizational settings that use the analysis of effective and ineffective communication micro-practices identified in chapter eight. These practices, including training, educating and preparing an organization to implement them are useful tools for any organizational consultant or organizational member. I will conclude by making some recommendations for student affairs research and practice on these issues, as well as describe limitations of the practices recommended.

*Emotions in Fieldwork, Doing no Harm?*

The process of conceiving, refocusing, conducting, and writing about this research project has consumed most of my 30s. I was almost 32 when I initially started writing my dissertation proposal and I turned 40 this past fall. For better or worse, I have placed a considerable amount of my attention on this research idea, the resultant data, and the people in these organizations, some of whom I can remember quite vividly from particular things they said in their interviews or during one of their staff meetings I observed. This process has been acknowledged as an emotional experience for me, alternating between elation and discouragement, boldness and trepidation, and many places in between. I still wouldn’t have traded it for anything. I say this even if I now might have made some choices differently knowing what I do about the way some things were going to turn out.

As I was finishing the CCC case, Mike’s work life took a seemingly inexplicable turn, with him eventually realizing that he could no longer function in a healthy manner in that environment as it surfaced. I too felt that I needed to take a break from my writing...
while we were making a somewhat heart wrenching decision to uproot our family once
again in search of a more positive, life-giving work environment for Mike. Since
returning to my writing in Santa Cruz, California, our new home, I have made some
changes to both case studies, condensing and focusing them, either by moving sections
to new chapters or eliminating them. I think what I ended up with is more concise and
lucid. I am pleased with the results.

It has been approximately two and a half years since we left New Mexico for
greener pastures in California for a more supportive and empowering, less combative
work environment for my spouse who worked at The College of Capital City. Little did I
know, shortly after Mike began working at CCC, that a handful of his newfound
colleagues would paint the picture of their organizational experience that they eventually
did. I think if the Dean of their department had known what was really on some people’s
minds, she would not have given permission for me to conduct my study. It is telling that
she did not. Even though Mike’s interview for this study, having taken place just a
couple of months after he started work, was relatively ordinary by comparison to his
colleagues, I decided that I needed to exclude his interview from the transcription and
analysis process in an effort to avoid future accusations of bias. I was sure to let his
supervisor know this when I handed her an initial draft of the CCC case for member
checking purposes (see Appendix A, sample member check letter). She never did tell
me what she thought, either written or verbally. The few times I tried to talk with her and
get some feedback she evasively said she hadn’t had time to read it. Another long-term
organizational member whom I asked to review the case study draft reluctantly
commented, “Well, it certainly describes all the attitudes present and communication
issues.”

A couple of other CCC department members who I had asked to read drafts did
have some things to say. One was quite fascinated with my analysis and felt it offered
another helpful way of viewing what she experienced as troublesome organizational
phenomena. She had even asked if she could share a copy of the draft with the newly
appointed college president in an effort to try to bring her up to speed on historical,
organizational culture issues. I declined for several reasons, the most important of
which was I felt that this wasn’t the purpose of what I had written, and given the sensitive
nature of my analysis, I didn’t want to jeopardize me or my husband’s relationship with
the organization, or our integrity.
The fourth organizational member that I asked to read the draft wrote a detailed, scholarly analysis of my methodology, apparently situated from this individual's orientation as a traditionally trained researcher/practitioner in their field. I have included a copy of the critique and my response in Appendices B & C. In many ways, the letter is a real-life exemplar of the resistance exhibited by many traditionally trained academicians towards new approaches to understanding human phenomena. Even though I asked each member checker to comment on the case study based upon his or her lived experience as an organizational member, this individual was obviously more compelled to offer a standard, intellectual appraisal. Note the disempowering rhetoric and the eloquent way this individual is attempting to maintain the status quo in regards to questions of reliability, validity, and objectivity, relegating any research that is done differently, albeit just as rigorously applied, to the bottom rungs of the academic acceptability ladder.

Perhaps this situation also problematizes the now standard practice in qualitative research of member checks. As I indicated in my methodology chapter, all final interpretations are mine, based upon countless observations, interviews, and theories to which no individual member checker would reasonably have access. Nevertheless, I stand behind the quality and thoroughness of my research and writing, including my unorthodox inclusion of both personal and emotional content as well as the emotional elements in these organizational members' everyday lives.

I also mailed four copies to FU organizational members for member checking purposes and heard back from two of them. I did not receive any feedback from the Vice President or one long-term organizational member. I did hear back from someone who had since moved on to a different administrative post at the university, and that person felt the case rang true of her experience in the division. Another person I heard back from, a long-time organizational member and native New Mexican had much to say about his thoughts, feelings, and resultant actions after reading the case study draft. Coincidentally, unbeknownst to me, he also wrote a bi-weekly column on diversity issues for the campus newspaper. He was fired-up about oppression and colonialism and New Mexicans not talking about it, so he wrote his column on the topic one week, stirring up the most commentary he had ever received as a columnist up until that point. I have attached his column and copies of the letters to the editor he received in response in Appendix D. What I am struck by in this incident is the swift dive his critics took into
sarcasm, defensiveness, and other hopeless maneuvers, rather than seeing his provocative words as an invitation to dialogue and ideally and eventually, much needed healing. Perhaps they were taken aback by the anguished nature of his telling of this piece of regional history. It seems it was nearly impossible for he and his critics to listen fully and well to what the other had to say, to pick out the truths about each person’s experience of oppression and colonialism.

So all of this begs the question, is it possible to do no harm with our sojourns into the real world of people as we try to understand more deeply what makes things go right and what makes them go wrong? Probably not. But it also depends on your definition of harm. I realize from personal experience that when you get real about things like oppression and internalized oppression, people have feelings about it. Is it harmful or hurtful to bring something into someone’s consciousness that may trigger some feelings for him or her? Not in the present time. I would like to suggest that we all have a bucketful of unresolved feelings regarding our experiences with oppression and internalized oppression, and it is often confusing in the present when these feelings come bubbling to the surface from the past. Ideally, we will know of a constructive way of dealing with these feelings, learning from them and then eventually letting them go to move on with a place of renewed understanding and sense of power.

Whenever I have talked with people about my dissertation they have been interested, attentive and insistent that I share its insights more widely than with just my dissertation committee or the organizational members who are my co researchers. My vision is that this project will continue in a dialogical manner. My hope is to continue to explore these proposed communication inventions and others; creating, testing, adapting, and influencing new assumptions and organizational procedures that are explicitly based in democratic, empowering principles of organizing.

Identified Effective and Ineffective Communication Micro-practices

As I pointed out in chapter 8, this study is as much about what is done or communicated as it is about the absence of communicating. In many cases, various approaches to communicating out to others were not seen as a viable option for improving many difficult situations in both organizations. Instead, participants reported experiences of isolation, superficial relationships, just existing in their organizational roles, fear and distrust, divisiveness, nostalgic yearning, alienation, hopelessness, victimization, maintaining the status quo, suffering and silencing.
And yet a few participants related bits of consciousness about their situations too. For example, one organizational member saw clearly that her work as a manager was to move people beyond their feelings of being a victim, which would in turn move the organization ahead in meeting its purpose of supporting students. It is through these few examples of confronting, opposing, mediating, seeking connection, expressing ideas, and finding direction that we can see how effective communicating can equal empowerment and change, for both individuals and organizations. The value of the procedural approach used in chapter eight was that it revealed how people resolved or attempted to resolve these issues for themselves while constructing a new, fulfilling way of being within their respective ethnic, religious, regional, and working communities. 

Sense-making methodology allowed me to examine in detail the linkages between the micro-communication practices of these organizational members and their respective ethnic, cultural, regional, and organizational communities. The methodology allowed me to see the real-life; day-to-day communication decisions that participants made that are influenced by and in turn influence larger forces in our society. These choices can either perpetuate the status quo or stir up change, a very messy, too often lonely process as indicated by the few change agents in these organizations. In this manner, an infinite series of taken-for-granted micro and macro processes and procedures increases the likelihood for oppression and internalized oppression to take hold in a society. However, it is also true that, an infinite series of thoughtful communication micro and macro processes can undo or prevent the contagion of oppression and internalized oppression in our organizations and our society in general. What follows are my recommendations for some thoughtful, democratic communication practices in organizational settings.

Some Assumptions About Humans in Organizations

In organizations we are hard pressed to develop fresh ways of operating that empower people rather than simply control or coerce organizational members (Kohn, 1993). Sometimes we unconsciously set up organizations or interact with others in ways that have little regard for their need to be treated with the utmost respect at all times, their need to contribute their thoughts and ideas, their need to connect meaningfully with others, and their need to feel both challenged and supported as they gain new skills and experiences and continue to learn and grow throughout their lives. This does not mean that we cannot have expectations that when hired for a role in an organization an
individual will be effective in discharging his or her duties. Where we as human beings
generally struggle (as both supervisors and co-workers) is in giving our feedback in a
timely manner or setting parameters for behavior either ahead of time or as needed later
that are clear and reasonable. When someone is being ineffective we wait too long to
give feedback, often after the problem has escalated, or we set parameters and
benchmarks for improvement for the struggling individual but don't support or give
encouraging feedback during the difficult process of undoing unworkable practices.

As a start it is important to maintain a sincere, high regard for each individual in
the organization while refusing to collude with any victimized patterns of behaving that
they might carry, either as a peer or a supervisor. This will require that we be aware of
the ways that we ourselves struggle around these same issues as well as being able,
respectfully yet decisively, to recognize them in others. In this way the process of
improving the effectiveness of people in organizations can be straightforward and honest
with less opportunity for getting bogged down in fears, insecurities, criticisms and
general hurt feelings. A major piece of refusing to collude with powerless practices is
naming them as such and then giving a clear rationale for why it does not make sense to
base our actions upon them. It requires individuals in leadership roles who are
empowered themselves and who have the confidence and insight to recognize if or
when things have gone awry, empowering others to learn through the experience of then
making things right.

A Culture of Trust

This is where attention to ongoing relationship building is necessary. If an
organization is truly operating in an open and honest fashion where blame and shame
are not acceptable alternatives nor seen as possible solutions, then issues can be dealt
with proactively or as they crop up in a matter of fact fashion. This is only possible if
trust has been engendered amongst all organizational members and there is an
atmosphere where people can say, ‘OOPS! I made a mistake, I'm sorry, I'll fix it this
way,’ or, ‘I don’t quite get this, can you explain it to me again?’ or even, ‘I disagree. I
think we need to do this instead because…,” etc. If there is a commitment to forging
strong relationships across the organization, bringing each new person into the group as
staff come and go, then the healthy functioning of an organization is more probable
through the ongoing ebb and flow of giving and receiving feedback.
But this work can feel very hard for many of us either because we have come to view it as a luxury and not the real work of the organization, or because we are at a loss as to how to implement and sustain it through the peaks and valleys of organizational life. We may not have much experience with the giving and receiving of feedback in a manner that is respectful and empowering to all involved. We may be afraid that somebody won’t like us; or even worse, if we are giving this type of feedback to a person from an historically oppressed group we may fear that we will be labeled an oppressor or racist or sexist or simply one of the bad guys. This is where the guilt we may carry because of the privileges our society affords for being white, male, middle/owning class, middle-aged, heterosexual, etc. can get triggered, and we then may act fearfully and powerlessly and say nothing, instead of doing that person a favor and giving her or him some open, honest, hard, but important information that he or she needs to hear. The fact of the matter is that members of dominant culture groups are still the majority of managers and supervisors in U.S. organizations, so being able to give critical, constructive feedback to a person who is operating from a place of powerlessness is an issue that must be faced nearly every day. Whenever a persons’ behavior is unworkable, they deserve to hear from the people around them why. We are not doing this to feel like we’re better than such persons or to try to play the role of savior. The truth of the matter is that in the long run we are not doing any person any favors by allowing her or his victimized behaviors to continue unchallenged. Human to human we are making good on our connections and relationships with others when we artfully and thoughtfully respond positively, clearly and supportively in the face of negativity. It’s simply a matter of integrity, of taking the responsibility to give another human being who’s having a hard time a hand, and to notice and assure that things go well around you.

Of course, it is always easier to do this when each individual has a reasonably high regard for the other, but that still does not guarantee that the victim will graciously thank you for interrupting his unworkable behavior; in fact, he might severely criticize you for speaking up. It may happen that you are not even totally right in your assessment of the situation. But it is important to remember that silence is a powerful ally to oppression or internalized oppression. It could happen that your approach to the situation could have been more elegant and less like a bull walking through a china shop. It is almost always better to do or say something and screw up royally than to stand by silently,
watching events unfold around you. The assumptions described above work well as guidelines in many situations beyond interrupting oppression or internalized oppression in the workplace. The approach can serve as a set of guiding assumptions or a basic micro-practice that any one of us can employ in any facet of our lives and that can have wide-reaching impact.

Some Procedures and Inventions that Promote Democratic Communication

I have often thought that it would be much more helpful to our society if we as communication professionals promoted the theory and practice of listening, the most important communication skill a human being can possess, in my opinion. What would this world be like; our families, our organizations, or communities, if we valued the fine art of listening fully and well to each other? I am excited by the possibilities of this grassroots movement. Instead, in colleges, universities, and high schools across the country the fundamental or basic communication course is typically public speaking or a hybrid where the focus is learning to organize and present your thoughts coherently and persuasively. As we are debating or even just conversing with others we are often preoccupied with formulating our next point or opinion rather than making sure that we have even understood what the other person has just said. Many of our communicatings with others can feel like a tennis match, with the conversational ball being volleyed back and forth, back and forth, until someone commits an error, a foul, completely misses the ball, or just gives up. Unfortunately, I can personally count too many times in my life where my conversational connections with others have left me wanting more than pretentious niceties or unnerving debates. So, I believe that revisiting our assumptions regarding effective listening is a key component of a cadre of democratic communication practices in organizations.

Types of Listening

Communication scholars are aware of several forms of listening that have evolved culturally in our societies or, in more recent times, have been invented to address a particular concern of communicating. The forms include, but are not limited to: a) active listening, b) passive listening, c) inattentive listening, d) pretend listening, e) conversational listening, f) argumentative listening, and g) informational listening (Weissglass, 1990). I will review examples of the four from this list that are most related to our discussion.
In *conversational* listening the roles of talker and listener alternate frequently and it has become customary in U.S. society for the listener to interrupt the talker to express his or her own view. *Argumentative* listening is similar to conversational listening but often more intense or passionate. When one is in the listening role in this situation one often feels compelled to look for flaws in the talker’s stance or logic. Argumentative listening is not all bad, as long as all parties begin the discussion with the assumption that it is not okay or helpful to simply try to blast the talker’s position (or self-esteem) to bits. *Active listening* is the term coined by Gordon (1977) for the process developed by Carl Rogers. The goal is for the listener to reflect back, paraphrase or interpret his or her impression of what the talker is saying. For several decades, management consultants, marriage and family therapists, and counselors specifically involved in problem solving in relationships have used active listening.

*Constructivist listening.* Constructivist listening is based upon the assumption that if individuals are listened to by others in a particular way, they will be able to make sense of or construct their own meaning or learning about situations in their lives, past or present (Weissglass, 1990). In this view of intelligence, learning is about self-organization rather than instinct, the ability to memorize or the capacity to be conditioned to respond to stimuli. Constructivist philosophy has greatly influenced the artistic, educational, and various humanistic fields of study, including communication research. Weissglass’s development of a constructivist approach to listening was initially to support staff development efforts for classroom teachers, but it is easily adaptable to our concerns in other organizational settings. As I have previously mentioned, I am concerned with the expected separation of our emotional and work lives in the typical organization and similarly, Weissglass is concerned with the unrecognized, unexplored relationship between the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning. Weissglass views constructivist listening not only as a helpful tool for staff development efforts for teachers, but as a necessary adjunct to empowerment, change and reform efforts in education. As my goals as an organizational interventionist are similar, I find the approach I will outline below critical for empowerment efforts in any organizational setting.

This process and its assumptions are the foundation for additional democratic communication inventions that will be described in the following sections. These procedures are a proposed invention for a communication-based consciousness-raising
process suitable for most organizations that can be tested and adapted within this type
of setting.

I will not repeat the arguments here that I outlined in a previous chapter of the
important place and space for emotion in organizations, except to say that it is within this
variety of carefully thought out ways that I believe we can express and deal with feelings
related to our organizational lives thoughtfully and appropriately. Suffice it to say, we all
have feelings about our work, and the accepted practice of not dealing with them except
if they are considered extreme and warrant a professional counselor or therapist is
unhelpful, to say the least, for the effective transformation of organizations and the
empowerment of its members. There are many ways that one may handle her or his
more low-intensity feelings effectively—talking with friends or family, practicing yoga or
meditation, wrestling/playing with your children, or daily walks or bike rides as examples.
There is also much to be said for the power of being listened to with care and
thoughtfulness, both for us and for the side benefit of building relationships and thus
community.

In addition to the principles of constructivism, constructivist listening is based
upon two additional beliefs or assumptions: that the accumulation of emotions left from
past, hurtful feelings (distress) is a primary source of unintelligent and uncaring behavior
and that the physiological processes involved with the expressing of emotions
contributes to our recovery from the effects of our distresses, our making sense of our
experiences and eventually our thinking more clearly. This is the place where one may
artfully use another listening human being in her self-controlled liberation process. The
role of the listener is not to give advice, pat the talker on the back or fix their problem for
them. The role of the listener is to enable the talker to express her or his feelings,
construct (or re-construct) personal understanding, and use his or her full intelligence to
respond in creative new ways to situations rather than with the same old habitual or rigid
strategies. Through the practice of constructivist listening, communication competence
or flexibility can be regained as the talker unloads the distress that has also blocked the
use of his or her full intelligence or sense of power.

Interestingly enough, it is not important that the listener understand completely
what the talker is saying as in active listening. The listener should not be focusing on his
or her own understanding of what the talker is expressing but rather communicate non-
verbally and at times verbally his or her interest, caring and acceptance of the talker.
The listener’s job is to reassure the talker that it is beneficial to express feelings, and
does so through her or his eye contact, facial expression, asking thoughtful questions, or
holding the talker’s hand if appropriate. Criticizing, giving advice and interrupting to tell
your own story are not useful in constructivist listening. After a period of time, a listener
will learn which types of actions and questions help the talker to express feelings, and
which promote intellectualization or a retreat into superficiality.

The types of questions the listener might ask are focused on helping the talker
gain personal understanding, not the listener. There is a focus on truly connecting with
the other person. There is an emphasis on the expression of feelings because it is
believed that these processes reduce stress and assist in meaning construction for the
individual, helping her or him to make sense of the world (Weissglass, 1990). It has
been my personal experience as both a talker and a listener in constructivist listening
dyads and groups over the past ten years that many of the physiological responses we
have to feelings are natural, and once we stop trying to prevent our bodies from
expressing them when the need arises, we experience an incredible release of tension
and fear and the recovery of clear thinking around a particular issue. As a parent it
continues to amaze me how simple it is for children to follow the natural leads and needs
of their bodies when they are in distress, as long as a well-meaning adult doesn’t
interrupt in a way that stops cold the natural expression of feelings in a particular
situation.

Where many people experience trepidation about opening the gates to feelings in
any setting is that we have all noticed that some people do not handle their emotions
responsibly. They may constantly act out their anger, act like a victim and monopolize
people’s good-intentioned attention, or have a liberal if it feels good, do it approach to
life. Sometimes even, leaders of some encounter group type activities have been known
to manipulate others’ feelings or allow others to act out their feelings, such as verbally
attacking others. This is not helpful, nor is it appropriate in any truly empowering
liberation practice. This is where it is critical that there is leadership in the organization
that will not get confused about these types of expressions and will know how to stop
them by setting appropriate limits when they occur. This is similar to knowing how to
respond effectively in the face of someone else acting out his or her feelings of being a
victim. The constructivist listening process, when used appropriately, is self-correcting
and will help members of the organization think clearly as they develop creative
responses to the variety of unhelpful behaviors human beings can express in organizational settings.

It should be noted that most people do not express deep feelings in the early stages of undertaking a liberating or constructivist listening type of practice. Some people may never feel safe enough to express their deepest emotions with their coworkers. That is okay. The process should not be used to coerce people to share their emotions or manipulate them into sharing feelings unwillingly. It is also not meant as a substitute for individuals who would benefit from more focused one-way time as a client with a professional counselor or therapist, for example. It is simply a communication-based means of exploring what one considers important. The practice also helps us regain access to our inherent capability as humans to express our emotions healthfully, at a rate and manner of our choosing.

Implementing dyads. Constructivist listening principles can be used when appropriate in impromptu communication situations one might find oneself in, or it can be used very effectively in dyads (groups of two) or with larger groups in a variety of formats. In order to experience first hand the full potential and benefits of constructivist listening, it is recommended that one explore the more formal structure of a dyad of two people taking turns listening to each other for a fixed amount of time, equally shared. Since this is a self-initiated and controlled process, talkers decide what to talk about, at what rate they wish to proceed, and what conclusions they will draw. A group leader might suggest a topic, but the talker is always in charge of his or her time to talk. The talker is responsible for talking authentically about her or his thoughts and feelings on topics that may be related to a particular issue at work, successes or struggles, things they would like to be handling better, an issue they want to think about and explore more deeply or feelings about one’s job or previous experiences that might be affecting his or her present functioning. The listener’s job is to be an assistant. This can be done by helping the talker focus on feelings by asking thoughtful questions that lead the talker back to them, and to reassure the talker that having feelings is okay and that it’s beneficial to express them in this safe, confidential setting.

The guidelines for this practice are not arbitrary; in fact, they were developed with the understanding that our society has evolved to a state of ridiculing and criticizing the natural expression of emotions, as well as being based upon some additional assumptions about people and their true needs. Each person is given equal time to talk,
because everyone deserves attention. The listener does not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story because people are believed capable of solving their own problems. Because persons need safety to be authentic and the feelings they express at any moment may not represent their rational thinking or even their feelings 5 minutes later, confidentiality is required. This includes the listener not telling others what the talker has brought up during his or her turn, and the listener not bringing up the content of the talker’s session to the talker anytime afterwards either. People will only feel safe if they also know that they will not be criticized or attacked, so any problems or disputes between listening partners should be brought up in a different forum.

In a constructivist listening dyad it most often makes sense for newcomers to start with a shorter listening experience of 1-2 minutes each, gradually taking longer and longer turns as one becomes accustomed to the process and understands how it is different from an ordinary conversation or even active listening. At first it can be helpful for a group leader to suggest a topic. Eventually, you may find that you are saving topics to explore for your next constructivist listening time. At first, novice listeners are asked to not ask any questions, but to just experience and practice what it feels like to give your whole attention to someone without interrupting. Later on you can begin to ask questions as you notice what it’s like to think of questions for the benefit of the talker. Early on, participants are asked to reflect on what it is like for them to be in either role, what’s hard about it, what’s easy, what they need to work on, etc. It should be noted that how one may express emotions in a dyad is not necessarily how emotions can most productively be expressed in social situations. Dyads should also not be used in place of confronting difficult situations one may face in life. It very often happens during constructivist listening that when talkers decide to think about an issue they’ve been struggling with, after the expression or release of any feelings they may be having about the issue, the response that makes the most sense becomes much clearer to them.

**Implementing groups.** The constructivist listening process is also useful as the foundation of a support group whose purpose is consciousness-raising, not psychotherapy. In a constructivist listening support group advice and constructive criticism are not permitted. It is not the role of the group or the group leader to solve any member’s problems, make anyone feel better, or come up with a Band-Aid solution. The same guidelines for dyads are true for groups, including confidentiality, taking equal
turns, etc. Talking, complaining, or gossiping about other group members are not allowed. It works best if there is a leader whose role is to suggest a topic or ask focused questions, but that role may change from meeting to meeting or someone may choose whomever in the group to play the role during their turn.

The purpose of the support group format is to stimulate thinking in possible new areas, to raise awareness of thoughts and feelings that may have been ignored, to allow expression of feelings about successes and problems, and to develop a sense of community, an awareness of each person’s vulnerability, and a desire to support each other in struggle and in triumph (Weissglass, p. 361, 1990). It is not possible to adequately explore the meaning of one’s life or even one’s work life during the time allotted in a support group, but in-depth exploration can take place in longer dyads, amongst friends, or in private reflection or writing. The key benefits of a constructivist listening support group are that one learns about oneself, understands others better, strengthens alliances, and improves one’s ability to listen (Weissglass, p. 361, 1990).

There are many possible configurations for constructivist listening support groups in organizational settings. They could be organized by organizational roles such as managers and administrative support personnel or by constituency groups such as single parents, fathers, African-Heritage, women managers, GLBT employees, Spanish speakers, men, etc. Constructivist listening dyads are also useful to begin meetings as they can help members clear their head so that they focus and work productively on the topic at hand. They can also be a good meeting time out if the group’s thinking has gotten bogged down. Basically, the practice of constructivist listening in our lives could potentially transform all of our relationships, allowing each of us to connect well with others, understand how our and their needs mesh, and proceed with the good of the community uppermost in mind.

The micro-practice of constructivist listening and its assumptions about the needs and nature of human beings are at the foundation of the democratic organizational communication practices described in the next several sections. One is an actual practice in one department of the Student Affairs division at FU. The others are adaptations from a variety of sources that I feel are a good beginning point for testing in the organizational arena.

Good news. For meetings in general there are several options for assuring that they are more positive and productive such as offering Good News, or a portion of time,
usually at the beginning of a group gathering for all members to focus on and share positive news about themselves, the organization, the leader, even the world (Dervin & Clark, 1993). The reason why this is so important is that it can be easy for us to develop a hopeless outlook or get sunk by the things we face each day and thus overlook the many small and large things that occur in our world that are positive and for which we can be appreciative. For example, when asked, What's new and good in your life? colleagues might share about a special time with their child or family, a difficult situation that they were able to navigate well, or some progress they made towards a goal. Focusing attention on the positive at the beginning of meetings tends to draw everyone's attention to the present situation, thereby increasing meeting effectiveness.

For example, in the case of the CCC group it would allow a focused time for Good News to happen for those who tend to volunteer this information spontaneously, and give equal time to draw out those who typically don’t share. Another approach that might be useful for the CCC group is to identify all the ways that they get sunk during their meetings and come up with some signal such as blowing on a kazoo, or make an agreement to call each other on their behavior to prevent meetings from digressing into bitching, whining and moaning sessions with little forward movement or few clear-cut plans for action. It will be hard work at first, but it is important to have each person in the group take ownership for making sure that they stay focused and deal with issues from a proactive, problem-solving mindset.

Adopting the practice of Good News at the beginning of FU’s director’s meetings would allow for the building of closer relationships and perhaps help to build bridges in an environment where pretense, misunderstandings, and assumptions about each other seem to be in the way of allowing each person to see the other’s humanity. The following is an example of a problem-solving procedure used in one department at FU.

“Crossing over the boundaries”-a problem-solving procedure. One department manager at FU gave an excellent example of a communication procedure used during her departmental staff meetings that promoted problem solving and increased dialogue across divisional lines. First, she noted that she had an all-staff meeting twice a month and a senior staff meeting twice a month, because the issues facing the senior staff were different from the ones facing all the staff.

“...The way that I feel I have been able to cultivate this is two things that may sound like paradoxes: one is structure and the other is
open dialogue. The structure is everyone knows what the agenda is ahead of time...I list all the components that are going to be involved...and the manager takes a leadership role in talking about that, then when an issue comes up or a question or a problem comes up, we all enter into the dialogue...When we have a specific issue that we don’t have the opportunity or the time or the information to solve, what we do is then generally set up a small group of people who will do brainstorming about that and bring some options back to either senior staff meetings or all staff meetings, and do problem-solving that way."

Again, this is an example of a specific communication procedure for a problem solving and/or information sharing session that was used in a department in the FU organization to promote communication and inclusiveness. This manager perceptively understood that it was helpful, perhaps even critical, that open dialogue happen in a forum that was also carefully structured. The structure did not inhibit communication; in fact, it enhanced it. This procedure could be invaluable if adopted by either the FU or the CCC student affairs group. Either group could take a complex issue, look at it thoroughly and systematically, and make a plan to address it.

In the case of FU, including the directors in such a structured meeting about FUPact, the controversial reclassification of all staff at the university, could have garnered more thinking power, information, and support for the VP on an issue near and dear to each employee’s heart. The other benefit is that those who often felt they didn’t have all the information or who were later critical of the results could see first hand the intricacies of such a contentious process, which could result in less criticism and more understanding.

At CCC, one topic that came up several times while I observed a beginning of the year staff retreat and several staff meetings was how to effectively address alcohol and other drug issues on campus. The discussions I witnessed alternated between despair and victim-like defensiveness, leading to the adoption of responses that were not well thought out in reaction to criticism from the larger campus community. A more thoughtful, empowered approach would have been to set up a series of meetings to discuss the issues and develop a comprehensive, coordinated, campus-wide response that spanned the student and academic affairs arenas. It is always advisable to proactively seek solutions based on factual information and to include the thoughtful input of individuals in critical roles on campus. One other way to stimulate thinking and problem solving is through a Think and Listen Group.
Critical-thinking. A Think and Listen Group (Jackins, 1997) is where people think out loud with a deliberate attempt to let the group’s attention enhance each person’s ability to think clearly, particularly on matters that seem troublesome to them, difficult to figure out or are particularly profound. The topic is picked by each individual and should be one that probably wouldn’t arise in normal conversation. In these situations it sometimes happens that various emotions and feelings come up as persons wrestle with their topics. In the Think and Listen format, the primary goal is thinking, writing, or composing, and the secondary goal is releasing any feelings that might be getting in the way. The role of the group is simply to pay alert attention to each individual during each person’s turn.

The assumptions and procedures of constructivist listening are also relevant for a Think and Listen Group. Members are not to try to stop someone’s feelings or to give advice or comment in any way on what the speaking person is trying to figure out for her or himself. The time is divided equally in the group, and the same process can happen in a dyad or with just two people equally dividing their time, choosing their own topic, and then focusing attention on it. It is through this focused type of listening attention that individuals can make great strides in undoing past hurts that are at the heart of internalized oppression, thinking more clearly and solving problems as they go along. This is also another way to include others in our self-controlled consciousness-raising process and can do wonders for building trust within a group. Confidentiality is key to the effective running of this type of group, and the group can also serve as a training ground for thinking clearly about when confidentiality makes sense in general.

The Think and Listen process can be an important piece of an overall plan to work through old hurts and stuck thinking in both of these organizations, as well as serving to improve relationships, undo self-defeating behaviors, and ultimately empower each individual to trust her or his own thinking. One staff meeting a month could be dedicated to a Think and Listen process where each member gets to practice listening without interrupting one another as all the involved individuals struggle with their own topic during their turn. It can also be effective in work settings for Think and Listen or support groups to organize or meet across departmental boundaries, building relationships and empowering individuals along the way. Think and Listen groups are an appropriate place to release feelings that are confusing our thinking, allowing us then to think more clearly during those times when we need to be able to respond
spontaneously to difficult situations. This is an example of a way that an organization can explicate communication micro-procedures that assume that people have feelings while at work and could use a structured way of dealing with them so that they interfere less with their effectiveness in the organization.

Staff at most colleges and universities are very action-oriented as demanded by their roles on campus, yet setting aside time for thoughtful reflection for individuals and groups can reap numerous benefits for individuals and organizations, resulting in better conceived and implemented campus processes and programs and more effective, empowered employees. At FU, one area where some Think and Listen time could be of use is around the issues of how to better meet the needs of underserved students on that campus. It was a hard won battle to establish several, constituency based offices for Chicano, African and American Indian heritage students and women, yet there seems to be great controversy as to how these services need to be structured as evidenced by both the previous attempt to consolidate these offices and the results of that attempt. The aftermath was that there appeared to be little if any trust of the upper layers of the administration when I was on campus. A Think and Listen approach could help to begin to unlock each person’s creative thinking about the questions of where it could make sense to consolidate services, and where focused staff attention needs to be sustained in the best interests of the students being served. As it is now, little significant change seems possible given the fear of another outwardly instigated change effort. As suggested by one of the interviewees, involving the directors of the various constituency-based programs is key to any future, acceptable, significant change.

At CCC, a schedule of continuing Think and Listen Groups could help individual student affairs staff members focus on thinking and acting proactively regarding several issues that have surfaced on campus and fall under the purview of the department. This not only sends the message that proactive, problem-focused behavior is required to respond adequately to campus issues, but it also provides a process to help each individual think in this manner and use the results in her or his work. This type of ongoing, communication micro-procedure is critical if any type of self-initiated change effort is going to take root in this department. The following procedures or practices deal with conflict-resolution and could be implemented either during regular meetings or meetings called specific to each purpose.
Dealing with conflict. There are many options and opportunities to deal with conflict and/or issues that surface. One way is to devote certain meetings to only problem solving or conflict resolution or processing/evaluating major programs or events. In this way the purpose of meetings is solution focused and a backlog of unresolved issues doesn’t develop within a group. It is important for individuals and departments to foster an atmosphere where there is a belief that conflict can be resolved and problems can be solved, and that we can learn from what went well and what could be improved through evaluation or processing after programs, events or crises.

One possible way to structure a conflict-resolution discussion is through the facilitation of the meeting. A leader can be appointed to make sure that each person in the group talks once before anyone speaks twice, and no one speaks four times until everyone has spoken at least twice. It is the role of the facilitator to encourage reluctant speakers. Time should be equally divided between all participants (including the facilitator), and all should afford each other respect by giving alert, aware and interested attention to whomever is speaking without interruption or evaluative non-verbal gestures about the others’ comments during their turns. When it is the facilitator’s turn to speak, he or she should turn over the facilitator role to someone else in the group.

In terms of problem-solving or project and program evaluation efforts, it could make sense for the group to decide in advance to go around the group once eliciting comments and then begin to allow for references to each person’s ideas in an effort to garner the good thinking of the group. The purposes of these procedures are to elicit more even participation amongst group members and to focus attention on the hard work of truly paying respectful attention and listening well to others in group settings.

Options for addressing conflict and problem solving, processing crises or incidents, and evaluating programs and services were offered by some student affairs members. Again, being deliberate in their actions and procedures could ensure that these groups address conflicts and evaluate and process events in a more consistent and timely fashion. Full participation of the group is also important.

At FU, it would be helpful to address the issue of hiring from within or outside of the state via a facilitated, problem-solving meeting, realizing that specific personnel issues are confidential and cannot legally or ethically be discussed in an open forum. The philosophical questions of what skills and experiences are necessary for management level jobs in the division can be addressed though, and once more parties
can hear first hand from leaders the issues they themselves must consider when hiring for key positions, and leaders can listen fully and thoughtfully to the concerns of all employees, then more understanding is possible. There still might not necessarily be full support of the leadership’s decisions, but what each person is thinking is out on the table and considered respectfully, which goes a long way in building trust.

At CCC several programs and services such as orientation, discipline procedures, and the alcohol and other drug policy and program could benefit from regularly scheduled, well-structured evaluation meetings. Initially these efforts will feel time-consuming because of the need to gather baseline information and decide on the best evaluation format, but in the long-run, future program planning and evaluation efforts will be much less time consuming because the groundwork will have been laid by a well-thought out evaluation process. With key people across campus being included in the process, more comprehensive feedback is possible, and more campus-wide support for student affairs programs is a likely outcome.

In both of these examples the important feature about communication is that it is increased, not decreased, in the face of conflict or addressing difficulties or areas for improvement. Until organizations and work groups can foster an atmosphere or culture of openly flowing, supportive communication oriented to problem solving, then program improvements and relationships will not be able to be realized to their full potential.

Making meeting procedures specific and identifying the purpose or topic of particular meetings are key steps in changing the dynamics of both organization’s student affairs staff meetings. Meeting times can be used in a more productive manner for conflict resolution, problem solving, long-range planning, debriefing crises and evaluating programs, and informational updates can be emailed or distributed in writing. Addressing various topics in this manner helps keep a group focused on thinking proactively and on building a cohesive, collaborative team.

Giving and receiving feedback. Besides the general assumptions discussed earlier in terms of how to approach building relationships and giving feedback in workplace settings, there are a couple of specific procedures that could aid this practice. One is a performance appraisal process that’s been around for the last 20-25 years and is typically called a 360-degree feedback or performance appraisal process by human resources professionals. The defining feature here is that subordinates have the opportunity to evaluate their supervisors instead of the traditional top-down process that
is still the only option in many organizations. What this does is call into question our assumptions about the relationship between supervisors and employees, or leaders and those being led. Managers and leaders are never beyond getting feedback on their performance and we can all learn how to discharge this very important duty in a way that does not attack individuals but instead offers frank observations about where persons excel and where they struggle or need improvement. The supervisors of managers need to have this valuable information from employees so that they can effectively support and set goals for improvement with the managers they supervise.

If both supervisors and employees handle these processes correctly and with the assumption that it always makes sense to have the highest possible regard for each individual, then these practices can sustain their educational and supportive focus rather than deteriorating into a punitive practice where managers and subordinates either ignore the process or devise highly complicated counter-measures to evade and work around the system. At their best, these types of performance appraisal systems also provide a respectful process for an employee and a supervisor to agree jointly that a position isn’t suitable for an employee or that it would be best for the employee and the organization for the employee to move on to another position or organization that will better meet his or her needs.

At CCC, it appeared that many employees, including the Dean of Student Affairs, could greatly benefit from a formalized, 360-degree evaluation process. From interviewee reports and meeting observations, it was apparent that there had been attempts from higher levels in the administration to provide some feedback for her performance improvement. From the observations reported by interviewees outside of student affairs, there appeared to be no formalized mechanism for feedback. From interviews with departmental staff, it appeared that the culture of the department was to give positive feedback to the Dean where it’s due, but to not bring up any constructive criticism of the Dean’s performance either privately or in a group forum. In fact, it appeared that the group in general took pains to protect the Dean from having to deal with criticism, either by deflecting or discounting it or by simply neglecting to give input, even if constructively given. Several interviewees both in and outside of the department commented on how the Dean’s inability to accept the changes at CCC and move forward had negatively impacted programs and services for students. Here was also a situation where the potential for an individual’s personal growth was being hindered.
because a positively focused, 360 degree performance evaluation procedure was not embedded in the organization, which would make the giving and receiving of feedback a helpful and not as painful process.

Another feedback mechanism and self-initiated process is called *self-estimation* (Jackins, 1997) and is typically conducted within an intact work group or a group of people focused on some ongoing meaningful activity or project. During self-estimation, individuals take a turn speaking to: 1) their strong points in their job, and 2) where they are struggling; each then hears each other person in the group’s comments on the same two points. In addition, group members say how they will support the leader in making positive changes in the areas where they notice they are struggling.

In this way, each person takes the lead in his or her own self-evaluation and then asks for the insights of others, which promotes unity, communication and self-esteem building in the group. Depending on the size of the group, they might set aside a meeting every so often to do self-estimations with each member or do one as a part of each group meeting for a period of time. When practiced regularly within a group of people it can become a thoughtful, supportive and timely way to develop skills in the effective giving and receiving of feedback. Self-estimation should not be confused with another more frequent process called *appreciations*, where members of a group give specific, heartfelt appreciation to each other.

In the case of the VP for Student Affairs at FU, he is already getting, if not directly, a good deal of indirect, negative feedback about some of his decisions and the manner in which he has handled some situations. Some comments are probably valid, and some may not be. I believe this leader and work group could benefit from learning the process of self-estimation and practicing the giving and receiving of helpful, thoughtful feedback, including how they would help and support the leader in making changes in his performance, rather than attacking him if/when he was perceived to have made a mistake. For example, a colleague may offer that she notices that as the VP has received more criticism, he has become more closed in his formal and informal communications with departmental staff, presumably to ward off further attacks. The colleague can mention how she observes this change in behavior, and that although she understands the VP’s self-protective reaction to the attacks, that she will facilitate the creation of *Guidelines of Respectful Communication*, with the VP’s and her colleague’s input. She will also commit to stopping or following up on any future disrespectful
communication she is aware of being aimed at anyone in the group, and will invite her colleagues to help. Here is a possible solution that not only helps the VP to reopen communication but also models for coworkers the creation of formal, problem-solving communication procedures that are respectful and humane.

Within both student affairs departments it would be helpful to formalize a process for giving feedback to all organizational members, including the Dean of Students or VP for Student Affairs. The process should include feedback from one’s peers, from one’s subordinates, from one’s supervisor, and from the constituencies one serves. The process should include mutually agreed upon areas for improvement, including specific identification of the support needed to accomplish the goal and benchmarks or measures for assessing progress along the way.

Outside of this more formalized system for evaluating employees, this group could use the more informal self-estimation process described above a few times throughout the year to check-in with each other and provide support to each other. The key in all of these procedures is connecting people with one another while empowering individuals to take charge of their lives. It is very possible that with the implementation of such open yet also structured communication procedures directed to performance feedback that there will still be individuals for whom the organization or their particular role in it are no longer a good fit. Sometimes, the most positive result for both the individual and the organization is a job reassignment, resignation, or perhaps even termination. Some individuals, even when given the chance to improve with support, are too scared to change. Old habits feel comfortable to us, even if they are very hard on us! Perhaps there simply isn’t enough support possible in the organization at that particular time to help an individual, and sometimes people are so attached to their unworkable behaviors that they are simply unwilling to do the difficult work of long-term change. Being committed to creating and sustaining democratic communication procedures will not make all people problems in an organization go away, but they will go a long way toward defining the most important policies and procedures for organizational members to uphold when difficult decisions must be made.

Summary. What all of these practices have in common is that all individuals take the lead in sharing their Good News, controlling their own consciousness-raising process, and getting to speak their own mind without interruption or evaluation around such important issues as conflict, problem-solving, program evaluation, and giving and
receiving feedback. There is an attempt to model democratic communication procedures while at the same time provide a process for developing the communication competence or flexibility to enact such procedures. All of these practices in time can enhance groups’ ability to work together collaboratively, eventually leading them to reach out to and model effective functioning for other groups that they come into contact with and empowering individuals within those changing groups one person at a time.

All of this work will go much better if we approach it with an attitude of sincerity and respectful listening. We will also need to slow down in order to make these necessary changes in our world and ourselves. We’ll need to slow down in order to really notice what works and what doesn’t. We’ll need to quit using our busyness as a way to avoid looking frankly at our behavior and how we may be holding ourselves back from being fully powerful in our lives.

I believe that it is possible to reinvigorate these organizations through a carefully coordinated process of re-opening avenues for formal communication that are more inclusive and satisfactory to all members. A critical starting point will need to be an open, structured, facilitated series of dialogues about what needs to happen to get each member of each group to treat each other with respect and to begin to offer constructive criticism for all organizational members. The use of a Freirean-style consciousness-raising process in dyads, small groups or as a part of regular staff meetings could support their efforts in unleashing all members’ innate ability to connect well with others and act powerfully in all aspects of their lives.

Future Research in Student Affairs Theory and Practice/Limitations of Recommendations

Besides rethinking the assumptions upon which colleges and universities are organized, other student affairs scholar/practitioners have advanced the idea of reexamining the assumptions that guide the profession’s work with students in the college and university of the 21st Century. In 1986 Barbara J. Love published an article outlining the benefits and limitations of student personnel workers employing liberating communication practices based upon using the theory and practice of Re-evaluation Counseling (R.C.) as a vehicle for student empowerment. As young adults probably away from home for the first time, college-age students are best served by policies and procedures on campus that build a sense of self-confidence by requiring that students do their own thinking, with support as necessary. The author notes two important
limitations of this approach. First, individuals who have become accustomed to feeling helpless and playing the victim role will require considerable one-way listening time before they are able to use this methodology with success. Experience has shown that these individuals will also be resistant to a process that requires that they do the work of coming up with their own solutions to their problems; that they do their own thinking. R.C. (and other consciousness-raising practices) will not be effective until an individual is willing to abandon the role of victim. The experiences of organizational members from this study provide further evidence of the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy of the victim identity. Second, R.C. is not a quick fix solution; it is an ongoing process of recovering one’s inherent power and intelligence. An ongoing investment of time and energy is required for any such liberation struggle to reach its fruition. I have reason to believe that these limitations would also influence the successful implementation of any organization based, democratic communication inventions proposed in this study.

In 1994 Kathleen Manning wrote an article drawing the connections between Paolo Freire’s so called liberation theology and student affairs practice and philosophy, and argued for a clearer paradigm shift in the profession away from in loco parentis practices and towards policies and procedures that support students doing for themselves. She noted the difficulty of changing the culture of a profession, which has at its foundation a pride in helping students and, too often, a false generosity that does not in the end lead towards student empowerment. In her critique of Freire she brought up the crippling effects white guilt can have on fully developing a critical consciousness or a will to act. It is here that the communication inventions described in Chapter 9 are of critical importance so that while historically oppressed ethnic groups are recovering their full power, European-heritage allies are doing their own recovery work in order that they may be welcoming, supported, and united as allies to all people.

Following Manning, Rhoads and Black (1995) wrote an article advancing a critical-cultural perspective for student affairs practitioners. They discussed the benefits of student affairs professionals seeing themselves as educators whose role is to attempt to transform institutional cultures and establish an ethic of care and democratic principles as central assumptions and organizing concepts for the profession. In their article, they discussed ways that student affairs practitioners can begin to conceive of their work so that they might help students struggle to understand how culture and social structure has shaped their lives. The end goal is fomenting a critical consciousness so
that students might engage in social and cultural transformation, helping to create a more just and equitable society. While this article provides a theoretical vision, a macro-practice of how student affairs professionals can lead the charge in creating more democratic campus environments for students, I believe the communication inventions proposed in this study provide examples of some of the necessary everyday micro-practices that will be essential for such a vision to come to fruition.

On the one hand, undoing oppression and internalized oppression in our society seems unendingly complex and almost impossible to tackle, yet in many ways it is as simple as making different decisions and having different intentions about how we go about both our day to day lives and the overall direction to which we have committed. In listening to people talk about what stirs up hope and motivates them to be courageous, it is the small acts of kindness and thoughtfulness that they most remember as inspirational.

Last year I was reading a picture book to my son Kai called *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001). I was struck by the truth of this, the actual simplicity of making change from small acts that have far-reaching impact. In this fictional story set in the 1950s or 60s, two young girls, one black and the other white, keep seeing each other over the fence that divides the black and white sides of their town. The African-heritage girl’s mom tells her to stay on their side of the fence, where it’s safe. When she asked her mama why the fence exists, she said, “Because that's the way it’s always been.” But she noticed that this white girl obviously wants to know her really badly because each day she keeps coming over and sitting on the fence, watching her play with her friends. Then one day the African-heritage girl decides to ignore the warnings of her friends and mother and she jumps up on the fence with the young white girl. The two girls slowly become friends and eventually change the attitudes of their friends and family along the way. The girls surmise “surely someone is going to knock down this fence some day?” I wonder how that one act could change this mythical town, and change the lives of these girls as they grow older, and all that they influence? This very believable story shows us the potential, wide-reaching impact of one seemingly small act of courage.
References


Appendix A: Sample Member Check Letter

Gayle R. Yamauchi-Gleason
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Santa Fe, NM 87505
xxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear xxxx:

Enclosed you will find the draft of my case study of the Student Affairs Department at CCC for my dissertation, which is now entitled “Making-Sense of Oppression and Internalized Oppression in Student Affairs Organizations in the American Southwest.”

This is a DRAFT ONLY version: what I am doing at this point is asking a few of the people who I interviewed to comment on the factual accuracy of the description of your institution and department. I have used a variety of qualitative research methods including participant observation of meetings, interview transcripts and historical and organizational documents to develop this case study. When my dissertation has been approved I will be sending a final version of this case to as many of the people I originally interviewed as I can still find.

Please understand that I am attempting to ascertain the validity of this account while preserving the variety of voices and perspectives present in any group or organizational setting. To that end, you may not agree with an observation from a colleague or even my interpretation; I am asking if this description ‘rings true’ in general if you were to step back and try to look objectively at the organization’s dynamics and the variety of perspectives that you know to be present. For example, maybe you don’t hold a particular opinion, but others in your organization might.

I would appreciate any comments you may have either in writing (directly on this document if that is easier), by phone, or we could meet at your office. As I have been working on finishing up my degree requirements for quite some time, I would appreciate hearing any comments from you by xxxxxxxx so that I can complete this process. Thanks in advance for your time and continued support.

Sincerely,

Gayle R. Yamauchi-Gleason
Hi Gayle,

I have read your manuscript. Several issues came to mind as I read it. I would be happy to briefly summarize.

Validity is important when doing any kind of research; this is particularly true when a researcher is doing a qualitative study such as yours. My sense is that you are pursuing "consensual validity" for your study.

I disagree with your conclusions regarding "oppression", "internalized oppression" and "victimization". I also have some concerns about your methodology which, in my opinion, affects the validity of the conclusions you have drawn.

Your data consists of transcripts, participant observations and historical/organizational documents. You have focused on student

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Appendix B: One Member Check Response
(Continued)

services at the College. Behavioral observations, ie., PO components are far better validating indicators than oral accounts in order to support your interpretations and conclusions. Your study was "light" on the PO material, and when it occurred, ie., in staff meetings, I felt it was superficial. Oppression, internalized oppression and victimization are three different and conceptually complex terms. Given this, I believe you have a greater obligation as a researcher in a qualitative study to ensure their presence in terms of a pattern or dynamic. I would have been comfortable with several more behaviorally corroborating observations of oppression, internalized oppression and victimization in order to support their existence.

Another issue that I find troubling is the context in which you conducted your study. The Hawthorne Effect (1939) is a principle of research and the result of an observational study that demonstrated how a researcher's involvement in his study contaminated his results, ie., invalidated his conclusions. As you may be well aware, it is imperative that a researcher fulfill the requirement of impartiality in his/her

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Appendix B: One Member Check Response
(Continued)

#4  NEWMAIL
research. Your involvement with the College, however, vis a vis, your spouse, presents an inherent conflict and bias in terms of your portrayal of the college, its dynamics and the conclusions you have drawn. In my opinion, your "partiality" seriously diminishes any valid analysis of the object of your study, i.e., student services.

In conclusion, you have asked me for two things: 1) "to comment on the factual accuracy of your descriptions", and 2) to acknowledge if your descriptions "ring true". A problem arises here. You blur two things, your descriptions and your conclusions. Descriptions are not conclusions. I believe your descriptions are insufficient; there are insufficient corroborating PO observations to warrant your interpretation/conclusion of oppression, internalized oppression and victimization. Your descriptions are very different from your interpretations. I do not think you have built a strong enough case, i.e., methodologically, to justify the interpretations/conclusions you have drawn. Consequently, no, your descriptions do not "ring true" to me.

Press RETURN for more...

MAIL>
Appendix B: One Member Check Response
(Continued)

#4

One final problem concerns the issue of "informed consent". There was no informed consent attendant to your study at [blank].

Summarizing, the problems I see with your study include the following:

* No informed consent
* Absence of impartiality
* Blurring/confusion of terms, vis a vis, "descriptions", "conclusions",
  "interpretations"
* Insufficient PO validation of oppression, internalized oppression and victimization

I believe you need to address these issues in order to include the component in your study. Thanks for asking me for feedback; I did enjoy the scope of your study and indeed it is an interesting exploratory

Press RETURN for more...

MAIL>
#4 NEWMAIL

investigation. Today is Thursday 12th, ... I suspect I will be very
busy on Tuesday, 17th, so I will leave your manuscript with ... in a
sealed envelope.

Sincerely,

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MAIL>
Appendix C: My Response to One Member Check Response

Gayle R. Yamauchi-Gleason

xxxxxxx
Santa Fe, NM 87505
xxxxxxx

xxxxxxx
xxxxxxx
The College of Capital City

Dear xxxx--

Thank-you for your email from last week and comments about my CCC case study. Your concerns give me the opportunity to further describe the assumptions that undergird my approach to my research, which appear to differ in some significant ways from the assumptions or lens through which you read this case study.

The overall goal of this project has been to focus in a comprehensive way on problematic issues in human organizations and present them so that they are accessible and useful to a wider audience than is typical of most academic research. In order to do this most fruitfully, I have chosen a research genre that is experimental and emerging in the social sciences in an attempt to bring the human back into our research on human beings. My goal is not to behaviorally define terms and give a sanitized account of what I observed. My aim is to retell the stories of organizational members in a way that is illuminating and personally thought-provoking and to engage readers and help them connect what they’re reading with their own lives and their own experiences. In fact, I am attempting to bring to the forefront the various personal views and experiences within your workplace, placing value on you and your co-workers’ lived experiences rather than devaluing and silencing your individual voices under the guise of ‘objectivity,’ ‘neutrality’ or developing a monolithic, singular description of your organization.

Based upon your criticisms of this piece of my research, I am guessing that you are coming from a ‘modernist’ worldview, whereas I would describe my approach as being ‘critical-cultural’ and ‘postmodern.’ As you know, we are talking about a debate that is currently raging in academe and in particular with how we who are interested in understanding human beings conceptualize human phenomenon, and thus approach our work as researchers.

I am unsure of your experience with qualitative inquiry and ethnographic research methods. I have fully described the approach to interpretive validity that I am using in my methodology section. Briefly, most qualitative researchers, myself included, acknowledge that ‘subjectivity’ is a valued and essential element of understanding. In various chapters of my case study I have ‘acknowledged’ my subjective experience as a researcher and as a human being who has been personally affected by oppression, as well as my insights from my personal, focused explorations of this phenomenon. I have also revealed my biases and my relationships with organizational members and where I feel these issues may be influencing this project. I have used data source, methodological triangulation, and member checking protocols for increasing the validity
Appendix C: My Response to One Member Check Response  
(Continued)

of this research. All of these approaches are currently standard, accepted practices for qualitative researchers. Qualitative methodologies are not less valid than quantitative methodologies; the assumptions undergirding the protocols and criteria for validity for qualitative research are fundamentally different from the criteria you outlined, yet are consistent with the assumptions of interpretive inquiry that have guided my work overall.

Let me be clear that I am interested in your views of this case study based upon your lived experience as a member of this organization, rather than your training in traditional approaches to inquiry as a xxxxxxxxxx. I can appreciate that it is difficult for you to separate your personal views as a xxxxxxxxxx from your everyday interactions and experiences as a member of this organization.

I am aware that the experiential accounts of you and your colleagues and my interpretations of them might be considered sensitive by you and many in your workplace. Because of the level of discomfort displayed during staff meetings and described in several interviews with the organization’s approach to dealing with conflict and difficult issues, I am not surprised by your reaction. The truth is that there was much more sensitive information revealed by organizational members and observed during several meetings that I chose not to incorporate into the case study. Because of this, I made a decision early on to not incorporate comments or observations from Mike’s interview transcripts, as I assumed criticisms such as yours would occur.

If you are unsure that you gave your informed consent for this study, I have the original form you signed before your interview. I would be happy to show it to you at your convenience.

I am still unclear from your email and the notations on the case study draft you returned what your particular concerns are about how I have quoted you. As I did not hear back from you, I had to continue with my member checking without being able to incorporate any specific concerns you may have had at that time. I would still like to accommodate any particular concerns you may have with quotations. Please be assured that I will incorporate your comments into the final version of my dissertation.

I would appreciate being able to meet with you face-to-face to continue a dialogue and answer any further questions you may have. Thanks for your thoughtful comments and the time you have already taken to respond to my earlier request.

Sincerely,

Gayle R. Yamauchi-Gleason
Colonized, oppressed people are trapped

There's a pack of guard dogs in an industrial lot that loyally guard their area. Their owner must feed them enough to nourish them but not enough to satisfy their hunger. They always look ravenous and ready to eat you up. They viciously attack their food so they can get more than their share by beating the weaker dogs. They are grateful to their master for feeding them and are loyal to him in that best friend kind of way.

Colonized people behave like these guard dogs. We have just enough resources to get by and to be grateful for. Thank goodness for welfare and social security benefits and that good-paying job in the strawberry fields. We also fight each other for limited resources so we can have more than the next person.

That's how people of color remain oppressed. We are so busy fighting small battles amongst ourselves that we get distracted from bigger issues. I remember a time where LULAC members were divided over whether a Mexican-American from Texas or a non Mexican-American should be national president. During that period, we forgot all about social injustice. We were distracted.

A few years ago I conducted diversity training for a national board for a professional association. Some board members were perplexed that the Gay/Lesbian, Latino, Asian and African-American coalitions fought amongst themselves. They figured that since all groups were underrepresented, they should have a common cause and get along.

Instead the board had to work hard at assuring all the coalitions that they were welcome in the profession. I asked if there were limited resources that all these coalitions shared, and if those resources were diminishing as new coalitions formed. They confirmed that this was the case. I asked if the board could allot more money for the coalitions to share. The board had never been asked of this possibility. The coalitions were so busy trying to get a larger piece of the existing pie that no one thought of ways to make that pie larger.

Various civil rights groups push for the hiring of more Latinos and underrepresented groups into higher positions to reflect the population at large. Yet we get into arguments over which minority should get hired. Will any Latino do? Should they be Mexican-American? Cuban? Puerto Rican? Should they be an African American or Asian? Should "they" get positions before "we" do?

I often wonder whether the hiring officers (or white oppressors) under pressure to hire a Latino, American Indian or African American will hire a "safe" minority. By "safe," I mean someone that won't rock the boat, nor disturb the status quo. Someone that won't point out their whiteness nor their privilege; someone who can speak to "the people" in their language and interpret why administrators made decisions that are for their own good.

Have I been perceived as a "safe Hispanic?" Have I been distracted from the larger issue in my pursuit to win a larger piece of the pie? I have. My radical friends encourage me to bite that hand that feeds me. I get frustrated with Hispanics that aim to please the master, but then I myself pacify the master. Then I get angry with the master. I don't know who I should be, and there's no easy way out.

Living in an oppressed environment leaves me trapped in a conflicted world. It is the same for all colonized people.
Racial labels exist only to fuel racism, hatred
By External Writer

Editor,

I enjoyed reading the Thursday column titled, "Colonized, oppressed people are trapped," in the newspaper.

She discusses several issues, including battles among minority groups over affirmative action opportunities and how "white oppressors" want to hire "safe" Hispanics who won't "rock the boat," who "won't point out their whiteness nor their privilege."

I commend [redacted] for her willingness to speak out against oppression and racism in our society. They are two major problems that this nation has a responsibility to solve. After reading this provocative column, I was left with a number of questions.

What does it mean to be Latino? Is Latino an ethnic or racial group? Do you need to have a Spanish surname? Do you have to speak Spanish? Do you have to have Latino ancestry? How much of an individual's genome must be of Latino origin to be considered "Latino," 100 percent? 50 percent?

What is meant by African-American? I think it means "black," or are whites of African decent considered African-American? If not, how dark must their skin be before they can be considered black?

What about white? How white must my skin be for [redacted] to label me as an oppressor? Truth be told, I don't feel like an oppressor, I don't feel white, either. My skin is more of an olive color, not white. Is this what [redacted] meant by "people of color?" I never see "olive" on job applications. Maybe people such as [redacted] consider me white.

I ask these questions because, after five years of [redacted]
Appendix D: Newspaper Article and Letters to the Editor
(Continued)

graduate education in biological anthropology, I have not found any biological basis for these groupings. One of the major assertions of modern biological anthropology is that races don’t exist. Biological variation in genetically determined traits does exist, of course, but these variations are not distributed as "races."

It is generally accepted in my field that there is usually more variation within these presumed races than among them. If this is true, and it is, this indicates that races are not biologically valid categories.

Seeing “black,” “white,” “Latino” or “oppressor” only serves to divide our society and fuel racism and hatred. As members of society, we must each try to erase racism from our schools, work places and anywhere we find it.

The first step is understanding that races do not exist and that we are all more alike than we are different. Those who see society’s wonderful diversity as nothing more than skin color are part of the problem.

I wonder what taught in her diversity training class?

Anthropology Department

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Opinion
Issue: 03/30/01

**Ignorance and poverty are true forms of oppression**
*By External Writer*

Editor,

I'd like to know exactly what circumstances in life constitute “oppression.” She is employed at a university filled with upwardly mobile, educated and diverse Hispanic students. She has a job and a guaranteed right to free speech and liberty.

If she is wondering why underrepresented groups suffer from internal bickering, it is because the “cause” they fight for is as vague and perplexing as the ethnic boundaries they try to establish amongst themselves.

I work a few hundred yards away from the strawberry fields where my stepfather toiled for years on California’s central coast. He didn’t need LULAC to tell him not to let the “man” get him down. And I don’t need someone to tell me what my place in line is for a job without regard to my abilities or desire.

The problems facing underrepresented Hispanic groups are a gestalt of socio-economic issues topped with heaping servings of ignorance, which was on full display in that column.

What we need is for our youth to understand the values our parents demonstrated in those fields — hard work and perseverance — and to temper those values with an understanding of the value of education.

Our “oppressors” are ignorance and poverty, and neither of those requires an ethnic agenda in order to be addressed. It requires a social and economic agenda, the framework for which already exists in the form of Pell Grants, tuition tax credits and low interest student loans. It requires something LULAC hasn’t

04/06/2001
Appendix D: Newspaper Article and Letters to the Editor
(Continued)

done well; it requires us to tell young people about the opportunities that exist for them in universities.

And we are both remiss, content to complain and argue about the circumstances of our "oppression" instead.

alumnus

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Appendix D: Newspaper Article and Letters to the Editor
(Continued)

Friday, April 06, 2001

Which groups make up white oppressors?

It was with great interest that I read the penetrating (as usual) column on white oppression in the March 29 [Column]. While I am intelligent enough to understand her points, that I am white apparently prevents me from perceiving all the subtleties of racist oppression, and I am unclear on a few points.

What constitutes a "white oppressor" is clear enough, but it was not bothering to make the fine distinctions, presumably because they are intuitively obvious to a colonized person like myself.

Not all whites in the power structure are directly involved in the hiring or supervision of persons of color, so we must distinguish between "active" and "passive" white oppressors. "Dean of Student Affairs," for example, might be considered a passive white oppressor, since he presumably does not colonize her on a daily basis.

Now, normally we would only be talking about heterosexual males, but since there are some female and homosexual whites in positions of power, we must admit the existence of white oppressors who themselves are oppressed. Thus, vice President for Institutional Advancement [name] would be considered an "oppressed white oppressor." And remember George Wallace? There are also "disabled white oppressors," but we know the disabled are themselves oppressed, so technically he would be an "oppressed disabled white oppressor."

I am a bit unclear on "persons of color." Specifically, are Spaniards persons of color or white? I would say white, since they are Europeans, but why then are [name] and other Hispanics not opposing the statue of [name], who would appear to fall into the category of white oppressor, especially if you happen to be a New Mexican Indian.

What about the Virgin and her Son? Are they white oppressors? I gather they are not, since Arabs are considered persons of color, and like them the Hebrews were east Semites, so despite traditional iconography, Mary and Jesus ought to be considered persons of color, though the latter's ethnic background is somewhat unclear, since we don't know what color God is.

But does this make all Jews, who trace a strict descent through the mother, people of color? Was Albert Einstein a person of color? And why do most Hispanics heed the pronouncements of John Paul II, a white oppressor?

But what I want to know the most is, are the Turks people of color? They look white, disparage the Arabs and Kurds — who are people of color — and for at least the last 60 years have considered themselves Europeans. Yet their roots are in central Asia, and they speak a language that is not Indo-European, white's linguistic family. Would this not also make Finns and Hungarians people of color as well?

This is important to me because my ethnic roots lie in Croatia. Now, Croatsians are manifestly white, though they have been unable to fulfill their historic destiny as white oppressors since they have spent most of their time killing Serbs and Albanians, more white people.

But for centuries Croatia lay just over the frontier from the Turkish Empire, and consequently there is almost surely some trace of Turkish blood to be found in my background. Thus, if the Turks are people of color, then I am, too,
and I no longer need to carry all this white guilt around.

A final question: just how much blood of color does one require to be a person of color and thus ready to be colonized? Half? A quarter? A tenth? A millionth? Segregationists in the South used to make these distinctions. Were they actually progressives, way ahead of their time, when they cried, "Not one drop of Negro blood"?

Well, I'm feeling an irresistible urge to colonize someone, so I must go. Incidentally, if you found the article offensive, tough. The First Amendment protects not just speech you agree with, but that of airheads as well.