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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE FATIGUE AMONG
STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY
SARA C. FURR
CHICAGO, IL
MAY 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so thankful for the community and support who helped me get through this PhD process. My mom is my biggest cheerleader. She always told me I could accomplish anything I put my mind to and I believed her. Everything I am today is because of the example she has always set for me. My sisters for caring about what I was doing and listening to all my boring school stuff. I will always be your baby sister but maybe now you'll call me "doctor." Dr. John Dugan, for seeing something great in my project and believing in the possibility of creating something new. None of this would have happened without your leadership. To my amazing committee for taking me through the finish line; Dr. Bridget Turner-Kelly, Dr. Mamta Accapadi, and Dr. OiYan Poon. I feel so lucky to have a badass committee of women of color who inspire me. You've shown me how to be a caring critically conscious scholar who is willing to resist the norms of the academy. I will forever be grateful. Gaby Ortiz, for sharing your gifts and talents with me on this project. I never imagined finding someone with the technical skills I needed who matched my passion for this research. Nicole Go, the amazing website developer that I am so happy to call you friend. Your ability to read my mind is a little scary but so helpful. There are so many others to name: Myra McPhee, Emy Cardoza, Peter Paquette, Christina Yao, becky martinez, Leilani Kupo, Ben Correia-Harker, T.J. Jourian, Dian Squire, Landis Fryer, Ajani Byrd, Lester Manzano, Jason Chan for accompanying me on this journey. And finally my participants and co-conspirators; DeLa Dos, Colleen Riggle, Franklin Ellis, Natalie Gross, Leilani Kupo, Joe Saucedo, and Will Johnson; we did this!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the past year college campuses have experienced a rise in student activism (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016; Prinster, 2016). In April of 2016, *The Atlantic* featured a story on campus politics that highlighted various racially motivated incidents and responses on college campuses (Wong & Green, 2016). Some student protests or demonstrations were in response to specific racial bias incidents such as students or staff dressed in Blackface, although much of the activism was responding to years of difficult campus climate issues. The increase of student activism on college campuses has sparked new interest in mental health and wellness associated with campus activism; specifically focused on students' wellbeing, particularly student activists (Ruff, 2016). Having a marginalized identity is often a contributing factor for mental health concerns given structures of systemic oppression, holding our institutions accountable through activism efforts comes with an additional toll on one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Sue, 2010). Although there is burgeoning literature examining the effects of this on students, this begs the question regarding the current state of well-being for student affairs practitioners (SAPros) who are not only at the forefront of student activism and institutional responses but are also charged with advocating for marginalized students and creating inclusive campus environments. To what extent might this create and contribute to social justice fatigue?

Given there is no existing definition of social justice fatigue in academic literature, the working definition I am using is that it reflects *the physical, mental, and/or emotional toll*

incurred through advocating for social change while serving as an agent of an institution of higher education. Through this research, I hope to facilitate collective efforts to refine this definition as well as identify the core features of social justice fatigue while also understanding to what extent SAPros experience the phenomenon. Finally, I hope to identify strategies SAPros employ to both survive and thrive as well as how SAPros define both of these concepts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to better understand the construct of social justice fatigue as experienced by SAPros. Additionally, this study allowed participants to explore strategies they employ to cope with social justice fatigue. Using participatory action research allows for the creation of a community to construct this knowledge while also having a direct impact for participants and the field.

Research Questions

1. How and to what extent does the definition of social justice fatigue resonate for SAPros? What do SAPros identify as the core features of social justice fatigue?
2. How and to what extent do SAPros experience social justice fatigue?
3. What are the strategies SAPros employ to cope with and combat social justice fatigue?

Rationale

Social justice fatigue is a phenomenon that is understandable but is not empirically known until now. This study provides data supporting the existence of social justice fatigue. Until now concepts such as racial battle fatigue (RBF) and compassion fatigue allowed us to understand how SAPros experience organizations. I outlined below why I used the term social

justice fatigue in particular with the support of existing literature around RBF and compassion fatigue.

Racial Battle Fatigue

RBF is the physical, mental, and/or emotional/behavioral response to racial microaggressions, which are subtle, conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, layered, cumulative, verbal and nonverbal, behavioral, and environmental insults directed at People of Color based on race and other distinguishing characteristics that cause unnecessary stress while benefiting White people (Smith, 2004; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). RBF describes the social psychological stress response by People of Color that results from encountering racism on a constant basis (Smith, 2004). RBF locates its philosophical base in critical race theory, a framework that emerged from critical legal studies and the Civil Rights Movement to expose the ingrained patterns of racial exclusion in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Psychological responses to RBF range from frustration, shock, anger, and anxiety to disappointment, hopelessness, helplessness, and fear (Smith, 2015; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Headaches, high blood pressure, indigestion, fatigue, insomnia, and frequent illnesses typify physiological reactions to RBF (Gee & Ford, 2011). Emotional/behavioral responses include overeating or reduced appetite, procrastination, withdrawal or isolation from others, neglect of responsibility, and poor school or job performance (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2007). The constant susceptibility to racial microaggressions can cause RBF to remain “switched on”

and symptoms can occur *in anticipation of* a racist event: rapid breathing, upset stomach, frequent diarrhea, or urination (Smith, 2004). Not only does the constant battle with racial stress agitate the lives of People of Color, the subsequent psychological and physiological symptoms of RBF can be lethal when left unnoticed, untreated, misdiagnosed, or dismissed (Smith et al., 2007).

Although RBF helps us understand how People of Color experience racial microaggressions, its lack of an intersectional focus makes it insufficient for this study, hence why I utilized the term social justice fatigue to capture various identities held by SAPros as well as the microaggressions experienced from those identities. Intersectionality honors our overlapping social identities and corresponding systems of privilege, oppression, and domination that interact with them (Crenshaw, 1989). This is an important consideration because all of our identities are inextricably linked and therefore there is no singular experience of an identity. Participants hold various identities, both marginalized and dominant, and their full selves are important components to understand social justice fatigue.

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

Compassion fatigue is a term that was first introduced by Figley in 1995 to describe a condition commonly experienced by human services workers (Adams, Boscarino & Figley, 2006). Compassion fatigue emerged when front line workers appeared to be experiencing the same negative effects as their clients (Figley, 1995). Even though compassion fatigue is a separate phenomenon, there are some striking similarities to burnout and it is important to understand the difference between the two (Maslach, 1982; Radey & Figley, 2007).

Compassion fatigue identifies a psychological or internal locus of control that can manifest “suddenly with little warning” (Figley, 1995, p. 12), or can occur due to “stress connected with exposure to sufferers” (Bride, Radey & Figley, 2007, p. 207). An internal locus of control suggests that an individual believes that they can “regulate their experiences” (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 61). Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) described compassion fatigue as “a transformation in the therapist’s (or other trauma worker’s) inner experience resulting from empathetic engagement with the client’s trauma material” (p. 151). Compassion fatigue changes the individual’s core beliefs and feelings toward the world. This “vicarious traumatization” (Barnett, Elman, Baker, & Schoener, 2007, p. 603) imitates post-traumatic stress disorder in its significance of symptomology (Bride et al., 2007). It is closely aligned to Freudian countertransference, meaning that human services personnel risk internalizing the trauma or suffering of those they are helping (Adams et al., 2006; Kinzel & Nanson, 2000). A compounded danger of compassion fatigue is that a person struggling with it may contribute to an adverse effect for the persons being served.

Valent (1995) described burnout as a phenomenon resulting from “the noxious nature of work stressors themselves or from hierarchical pressures, constraints, and lack of understanding” (p. 19). This phenomenon is one that is cumulative and builds with time (Maslach, 1982). Burnout also aligns with the organizational structure and the lack of control that practitioners feel over their situation (e.g., unrealized professional goals and limited advancement) that impact the helping relationship (Maslach, 1982; Veninga & Spradley, 1981). The characteristics are consistent with an external locus of control. In other words, “persons who see themselves as controlled by forces outside of themselves” (Tarver, Canada & Lim, 1999, p. 2). This linkage

between an external locus of control and burnout is an important distinction that separates compassion fatigue and burnout.

Both burnout and compassion fatigue share common aspects in their expression and threat to job satisfaction and productivity, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and disconnection (Brewer, Lim & Cross, 2008; Figley, 1993; Maslach, 1982; Radey & Figley, 2007). Figley (2002) contended that “burnout, countertransference, worker dissatisfaction and other related concepts, may have masked this common problem” (p. 3) of compassion fatigue. There are distinctions in the ways in which burnout and compassion fatigue manifest themselves. As Adams et al. (2006) noted, there is an “overlap” of symptomology, but “compassion fatigue and burnout are both related and independent of each other” (p. 104). This distinction in language is important because while SAPros might experience both burnout and compassion fatigue, I intentionally used the term social justice fatigue to link coping strategies of SAPros responsible for equity-oriented work. The use of the term fatigue is also significant because it centers the locus of control internally.

Significance

There are several potential benefits of this study. The first and most immediate benefit is for the practitioners who choose to participate in the study. Creating a community of SAPros to understand social justice fatigue simultaneously served as a community of support and validation. Exploring social justice fatigue helped us understand social justice fatigue as a phenomenon SAPros are experiencing, ways to identify it, and strategies to combat it. Beyond this, I have intentionally chosen participatory action research to amplify the potential benefits and long-term significance of this research.

Overview of Methods

This is a qualitative study that utilized a participatory action research (PAR) paradigm and quasi-experimental design. A qualitative approach was well suited for this study as it is a naturalistic, interpretative approach that allows for understanding the meaning people attach to phenomena within their social worlds (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). PAR emerged out of a need to disrupt dominant research paradigms seen as insufficient and oppressive (Bennett, 2004). Dominant research paradigms assume expertise is necessary to conduct research. This perspective benefits those who have had access to such expertise and often targets people traditionally underrepresented in academia. PAR provides an avenue for those traditionally underrepresented in society the opportunity to gain access to knowledge and action for improving their situations (Almeida et al, 1983; Tandon 1981). Given the lack of empirical research on social justice fatigue, current practitioners are the best source to create our knowledge. Additionally, the liberatory effect of PAR serves as an added benefit for those who may be experiencing social justice fatigue and choose to participate in this study. As researcher participant, I created and participated in a virtual community for us to track our own social justice fatigue and engage with others in community regarding our experiences. Chapter Three expands on the details of the data collection process.

Definition of Terms

Student affairs professionals – SPro; staff working at U.S. colleges and universities within units offering programs and initiatives that aspire to provide leadership, support, and service to students.

Racial Battle Fatigue – RBF; the physical, mental, and/or emotional/behavioral response

to racial microaggressions (Smith, 2004).

Microaggressions – subtle, conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, layered, cumulative, verbal and nonverbal, behavioral, and environmental insults directed at People of Color based on race and other distinguishing characteristics that cause unnecessary stress while benefiting Whites (Sue, 2010).

Compassion Fatigue – The negative effect or undesirable outcome experienced by caregivers who work with traumatized clients (Jacobson, 2012).

Burnout – The gradual emotional depletion, deficit of motivation, and lessened commitment to professional boundary adherence (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2008).

Secondary Trauma Stress – A set of intense emotions or feelings experienced by individuals who indirectly witness violence, threat of violence, or mistreatment of others (Arvay, 2001).

Social justice –

both a goal and a process. The goal is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The process for attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change. (Adams & Bell, 2016, p. 3)

Social Justice Fatigue – the physical, mental, and/or emotional toll incurred through advocating for social change while serving as an agent of an institution of higher education.

Social Change – acts that aim to improve the human condition, dismantle systems of oppression and/or create a positive difference in the world.

Activism – acts of defiance or resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the study and brief introduction to social justice fatigue. Even the most thorough listing of campus activism efforts, racial bias incidents, and organizational responses could not paint a full picture of the current climate on our campuses and in our world. Because of this, a short video (<http://tinyurl.com/sjfatiguevideo>) accompanies this chapter to provide a more comprehensive view of what SAPros are managing in our day to day work. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of literature that informs the study and chapter three outlines methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data. All findings for the study are located at www.socialjusticefatigue.com.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Now that we have an understanding of the importance of studying social justice fatigue, this chapter explores literature to support how I conceptualized this phenomenon. For the purposes of this literature review and this study I use a definition for social justice articulated by Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997), as both a process and a goal and including “a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p. 3). The process for achieving social justice must be inclusive and involve people working together to develop strategies for creating social change (Bell, 1997). Until now social justice fatigue was a construct that did not exist empirically. I begin the literature review by discussing diversity and changing demographics as a precursor to the emergence of socially just educational policy, social justice broadly in higher education, and the specific connection to student affairs. After providing an understanding of social justice and its connection to student affairs, I explore the various ways fatigue has shown up in the literature. Racial battle fatigue (RBF), burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma are key facets of this often explored in human service settings. Finally, I explain the conceptual framework I used to ground this research study.

The Growth of Diversity and Socially Just Educational Policy

The growth of diversity in higher education in the United States and its relationship to the development of socially just educational policies is important to understand social justice in

higher education. In the following section, I briefly explain notable events related to the growth of diversity and social justice-related educational policy and the promotion of socially just educational environments.

Although the following discussion notes important moments in the history of higher education in the United States, the country's history of colonization and slavery set the stage for any of this to occur. The creation of our earliest universities began with European conquest and the mission to Christianize the "savages" of North America (Wilder, 2013). Furthermore, higher education was fueled by the slave economy and is therefore built on a foundation that upholds racism and White Supremacy. We must keep this in mind as we explore the notable moments outlined below because these changes in law or policy never set out to dismantle the fundamental connection between oppression and higher education.

Notable Moments

Throughout its history, the United States government has enacted legislation to administer and regulate educational policy to create an equitable environment on college and university campuses (Chang, Milem, & antonio, 2011). These acts of legislation outlined changes in governmental expectations--some initiated to support greater equity and accessibility for students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and some to maintain control in the hands of the privileged. In addition, colleges and universities themselves have enacted organizational and policy changes in response to the increasing diversity of the student population, which have had similar positive and negative effects related to the creation of socially just campuses.

The Morrill Acts

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1867 were first and foremost land grants to expand the United States westward by giving land to eligible states; higher education was not a primary objective (Thelin, 2004). Both of the Morrill Acts, however, helped to cultivate the growth of universities, as the United States began to build for the future by spurring economic growth and expanding its western territories (Thelin, 2004).

Under the 1862 Morrill Act, eligible states received 30,000 acres of federal land to enhance or establish post-secondary institutions (Thelin, 2004). If a state had seceded to be a part of the Confederate rebellion against the United States during the Civil War, it was ineligible to receive the land grant (Thelin, 2004). However, as long as race was not an admission criterion, the 1867 Morrill Act extended the grant to southern states (Thelin, 2004). The United States government added an addendum in 1890 allowing these states to create a separate land grant institution for People of Color (Thelin, 2004).

Many of the states awarded additional grants, however, neglected to provide funding to these Black land grant institutions, thus creating inequitable learning environments for People of Color (Thelin, 2004). Many of the Black land grant institutions evolved into the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that still exist today (Thelin, 2004). The United States government may have intended to create equitable educational opportunities for People of Color with the 1890 Morrill Act, but instead it divided education by allowing states to propagate segregation through poorly funded Black land grant institutions. This action is an example of how the U.S. government has authorized discriminating acts throughout the development of higher education. While HBCUs were facing declining enrollments, the current racial climate

lead to a resurgence of enrollment but the question of whether or not funding is going to follow remains unanswered (White Good, 2017).

A note regarding both Morrill Acts, the first act provided acres of land sold, invested and then used to fund the creation of institutions while the second Morrill Act merely provided cash for the creation of institutions. This is important because first and foremost the acquired land was stolen from indigenous people. Secondly, providing land to be sold created funds that were first invested and then used to create land grant institutions means that these institutions are still profiting on the stolen land even to this day. This is very different from the second Morrill Act, which provided cash that went directly to the creation of HBCUs, for example, which did not create a long-term investment of physical assets, which provides sustainable resources including funding. This provides further evidence that while the institution of higher education has adapted over time to provide access to marginalized populations, it has never been equitable nor was it designed to be so.

Women in Higher Education

During the last part of the 19th century, even though it was unpopular, at least 45 United States institutions of higher education began to allow the attendance of women (Graham, 1978; Thelin, 2004). Thirty-two percent of the undergraduate students were women by 1880; 40% in 1910 and by 1920 “women were 47 percent of the undergraduate enrollment” (Graham, 1978, p. 764). Interestingly, the depression of the 1930s led to a decline in the undergraduate enrollment of women. This is likely due to the need for women to go directly into the workforce during this time.

By 2009, however, enrollment of women increased to 57% in U.S. undergraduate institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a). Because many traditionally male institutions felt uneasy having women on campus, institutions created the dean of women position to nurture the needs of women students (Schwartz, 1997). While Oberlin College hired the first woman to supervise students as the “Lady Principal of the Female Department” in 1833 (Bashaw, 1999), in 1892, Alice Freeman Palmer was the first dean of women in the United States (Schwartz, 1997). By 1927, there were 17 deans of women, primarily in the Midwest (NADW, 1927 as cited in Schwartz, 1997). Schwartz noted that deans of women were responsible for “the housing of women students, training in etiquette and social skills, women’s self-government, leadership opportunities for women students, and women’s intercollegiate athletics” (para. 7).

The deans of women also built “the foundations of practice for student affairs and higher education administration, including graduate study, the development of professional associations, research on students, college environments, and student guidance and counseling” between 1890 and 1930 (Schwartz, 1997, para. 9). However, in 1937, the deans of women began to disappear as campuses began to follow the recommendation of the American Council on Education, based on a proposal by William H. Cowley, to combine the activities within student personnel services. Generally, deans of men had the opportunity to serve as the dean of students; whereas deans of women either retired or became full-time faculty. By the 1970s, the dean of women position on campus was almost completely extinct (Schwartz, 1997). While the combination of student services under a dean of students appears to enhance equitable services to all students, it also

resulted in women students losing a major advocate on campus and professional women losing an important role in student affairs administration.

G. I. Bill

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, popularly known as the G. I. Bill, passed by Congress in 1944 (Thelin, 2004) and contributed to a thriving student population enrolling in higher education after World War II. The government, as well as society, saw college as a way to create opportunities for the average U.S. citizen, particularly veterans. The G. I. Bill helped to open campuses to men and women who were previously unable to attend due to lower socioeconomic statuses and the perceived elitism of higher education. College was now accessible to all veterans regardless of cost and social status. Because of resulting high student enrollments, institutions identified the need for improved management techniques and organizational designs (Thelin, 2004), which led to the further development of the student affairs profession (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949).

Civil Rights

Segments of society began to question who should and should not be allowed to attend college (Thelin, 2004). These opinions usually revolved around the concepts of access, equity, and excellence (Gaston-Gayles, Wolf-Wendel, Nemeth Tuttle, Twombly, & Ward, 2004; Geiger, 2005). College campuses became a symbolic focus and battleground for civil rights in U.S. life due to racial segregation and other forms of discrimination (Gaston-Gayles et al., 2004; Geiger, 2005). College students across the country joined these conversations for equality and rights in higher education (Geiger, 2005). Civil rights legislation beginning with *Brown v. the Board of*

Education in 1954 and continuing through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 increased access to education. The intent of these equal opportunity acts was to increase accessibility for those traditionally marginalized (People of Color, women, among others); however, researchers have concluded that these acts also should be considered a form of interest convergence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006, as cited in Hiraldo, 2010), where White people actually benefitted more than the intended equity recipients: people of color. For example, *Brown v. the Board of Education* benefitted those in power (who were White) because the decision itself made the United States seem friendly and open to all people (Bell, 1980). At the same time, the majority of White families could send their students to private schools or move out of the desegregated school districts (i.e., “White flight”; Bell, 1980, p. 518). Thus, economic and educational superiority continued for White people. While *Brown v. the Board of Education* did not create whiteness as property, it helped solidify White Supremacy as foundational to our educational systems and is one case where the law embraced race and identity (Harris, 1993).

Three additional pieces of legislation addressed needs for people with disabilities: the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which protected and provided support for people with disabilities who participated in higher education; the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which made it easier for qualified students with disabilities to enter postsecondary education; and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 that provided additional protections in school and work settings (Geiger, 2005; Thelin, 2004). Each act helped create opportunities for students with disabilities from an environmental perspective; however, the societal construction of the disability identity still needs to be deconstructed to create an equitable higher education

experience since society determines what is normal or abnormal for a person (Evans, Assadi, & Herriott, 2005). The creation of a socially just campus is not just about enhancing the operational and learning environment; it is also about deconstructing how society interacts, works, and learns with and from people with disabilities (Evans et al., 2005).

These notable moments are important as the field of higher education changed with the intentional increase in diverse student identities. While many of the policy changes came out of equality efforts, they also highlighted greater needs to create inclusive environments for all students. While these efforts increased access to higher education for traditionally marginalized populations, the presence of a more diverse student body exposed how woefully unprepared institutions were and continue to be to serve all students.

Current Demographics on Campus

The student population on today's campus continues to diversify in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). As of 2014, full-time undergraduate student enrollment reported 56% women and 44% men (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Note that the U.S. government still relies on the binary construction of gender therefore providing no data related to transgender and gender non-conforming students on U.S. college campuses. Similarly, no systemic governmental data reports the proportion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, plus (LGBQA+) students in college. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the percentage of college Students of Color in the United States has been increasing. From 2004-2014, the percentage of Hispanic students doubled increasing from 1.4 million to 3 million and the percentage of Black students rose 57% from 1.5

million to 2.4 million. The term Hispanic is used here instead of Latinx because that is the term used by the government which houses this data. During the same period, the percentage of White students increased only 7% from 9 million to 9.6 million. We have actually seen a decline from 1% to 0.8% for American Indian/Alaska Native over this same time period. Data about Asian/Pacific Islanders and multiracial students was not available until 2010 which is why I am not providing comment on their relative increase or decrease from 2004-2014.

As the student population changes, the need for the demographics of staff and faculty to reflect the student population will continue to be of great importance. To date there is no data on the level of representativeness of SAPros to student populations they serve based on race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Flaunting the increased racial and ethnic diversity of students as an accomplishment without looking at its' relationship to staff representation presents an incomplete picture and fails to address potential issues related to staff demographics. Without such examination, Ahmed (2012) would say institutions are merely performing superficial notions of diversity and have yet to make a full commitment to their espoused goals of creating inclusive and anti-oppressive environments.

Promoting Equitable Educational Environments

According to Freire (2000), in a safe educational environment, students “come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p. 83). If higher education intends to adapt to demographic and societal changes, it will have to work towards an inclusive campus community by transforming and working to dismantle its White Supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative roots. To accomplish this goal, higher education will have to take steps to attract and retain a diverse student population while changing the funding paradigm

(Calhoun, 2006; Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). The talents of underrepresented students will go unused unless higher education takes on the responsibility of investing in critical student support resources: staff, faculty, financial support, and programs to create equitable environments (Chang et al., 2011; Zusman, 2005). Institutions will also have to work collaboratively with the government to increase accessibility for students from socioeconomically challenged communities (Chang et al., 2011; Zusman, 2005). The creation of a safe socially just environment on campus allows students to explore their societal roles regarding power and privilege without repercussions (Ayers, 1998; Chang et al., 2011). The profession of student affairs was originally created to help support such an environment (Dungy & Gordan, 2011; Hurtado, 2005) but the conditions necessary to support SAPros have not always been present or even explored.

The Student Affairs Profession

Colleges and universities are expected to prepare students from different backgrounds to live and work in a diverse society (Dungy & Gordan, 2011; Hurtado, 2005). Originally, the position of student affairs professional supported students while in college; addressed their needs, particularly outside of the classroom; and prepared them for their future as citizens of society (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, 1949). In today's colleges and universities, this charge includes supporting and preparing students for living in a society that is fundamentally shaped and informed by diversity (Dungy & Gordan, 2011). Student affairs professionals accomplish these goals by orienting students to campus, coordinating student activities, operating residential facilities, organizing living arrangements, addressing disciplinary needs, and providing

involvement opportunities using the university or college's mission as a guide to its core values while supporting students.

History and Philosophy of Student Affairs

Originally, faculty members not only taught students, they also supervised all activities of students until the instatement of educational officers (i.e., student affairs professionals; American Council on Education, 1937). The American Council on Education met in 1937 to officially formulate a plan and philosophy to help develop students as whole persons and not just intellectually (American Council on Education, 1937). The creation of the student affairs position provided a means for faculty to concentrate their time on research, as stressed in the German model of higher education that U.S. universities were attempting to emulate (Nuss, as cited in Evans & Reason, 2001).

In 1949, the American Council on Education updated the 1937 report with the expectation for student affairs professionals to help individual students become “an integrated whole--as a human personality living, working, and growing in a democratic society of other human personalities” (para. 7). The American Council on Education (1949) report continued:

individual development is conditioned by the kind of society in which a person lives, and by the quality of interpersonal and group relationships which operate around him [*sic*]. He is constantly affecting society; and society is constantly shaping him. These relationships constitute the cultural patterns with which higher education must be concerned in its efforts to stimulate and guide the development of each of its students. (para. 14)

Dewey (1938) argued that taking the time to learn by observing students would help educators to plan the best way to meet students' needs. Dewey advocated for educators to trust their experience and knowledge and to recognize that they were not just teaching curriculum but also shaping society. Student affairs professionals shape society through the coordination of

programs, enactment of policy, and implementation of procedures that, directly or indirectly, would affect students' experiences. Therefore, observing, knowing, and understanding the needs of students should influence the development of programs, procedures, and policies.

Ever since the early 20th century, national professional associations have been developing reports to shape student affairs philosophy. Each report outlines the importance for student affairs professionals to shape the whole student by establishing a supportive campus environment (Evans & Reason, 2001). Evans and Reason compared many of these reports and summarized how each demonstrated the significance of "educating all students about diversity, appreciation of differences, and respect for all people, regardless of background" (p. 372). The philosophical statements addressed learning, development, and service to students, but omitted student advocacy as one of the foundations for student affairs professionals (Evans & Reason, 2001; Reason & Broido, 2011). Additionally, these philosophical states did not speak specifically to social justice on college campuses nor was care directed towards SAPros as they engaged in this draining and fulfilling purposeful work.

Student affairs professionals hold a unique power position between the institution and the students (Broido & Reason, 2005; Reason & Broido, 2011). It is a responsibility of student affairs professionals to advocate for students while influencing positive social change on campus to develop a more equitable environment all while serving in a dual role as an institutional agent (Evans & Reason, 2001; Reason & Broido, 2011). The report *Practicing Diversity Leadership in Higher Education* (2006) stated, "Leaders can challenge the dominant discourse that marginalizes diversity in higher education, making it powerless as a social force and change agent in society and higher education" (p. 86). Because higher education in the United States is

rooted in hegemonic power, change is not meant to happen therefore it does not come easily when working towards inclusive or socially just environments on college campuses (Chang, 2002; Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010; Osei-Kofi, Shahjahan, & Patton, 2010; Renn & Patton, 2011). Being a social justice advocate is complicated because of institutional politics affecting student affairs professionals' abilities to act on the behalf of underrepresented students (Renn & Patton; 2011; Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

Contemporary Iterations of Social Justice in Higher Education

Clarity about what social justice means in higher education is lacking, as a myriad of programs, initiatives, policies, and practices encompass a broadening umbrella of social justice (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2013; Renn & Patton, 2011; Singh, 2011). Some scholars argued that social justice has become similar to diversity; an over-used and watered-down buzzword meaning virtually anything to anyone at a given time (Gorski, 2013; Patton, Shahjahan, & Osei-Kofi, 2010; Renn & Patton, 2011). Social justice means everything and nothing at the same time. Singh (2011) argued that with a lack of clarity, social justice risks becoming politically malleable and diluted, "the meanings and uses of social justice are becoming stretched in different directions, depending on how policy goals are conceptualized and prioritized when characterizing the nature of the challenging times" (p. 482). Due to the increasingly broad definition of social justice, Singh encouraged an intentional and critical reflection for higher education about social justice:

The challenging times in which we live could benefit greatly from a rigorous investigation of the conceptual, normative and strategic potential of the notion of social justice as currently invoked in higher education...also of the modalities being used to give expression to it and their accompanying ambiguities and rhetorics. (p. 492)

Gorski (2013) concurred and is further bothered by the appearance of a more recent concept lacking clarity and possibly having an adverse impact on already entrenched social justice efforts. This new concept is one of inclusive excellence presented and subsequently commodified by the Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). Absent in all three AAC&U papers proposing a movement called inclusive excellence is the term social justice. Gorski (2013) argued that educators have spent substantial time and energy articulating important differences between diversity and social justice, and the new concept of inclusive excellence may function to further confuse and conflate these terms and funnel energy and attention from activism to explaining the newest and sexiest term.

While I do not want to put too much value on policing language, the importance of the term social justice is it offers a focus on systems, representation, and access as linked to power (Adams et al., 2007). This is an integral contribution the term social justice provides that equality and diversity did not (Berry, 2011; Patton et al., 2010; Perlmutter, 2010). Furthermore, if SAs are to educate students about social justice, cultivate inclusive communities all while experiencing the same oppressive environments, then what might be the impacts on their own lives?

Work Life Balance

Due to the nature of serving in helping roles, SAs encounter a wide variety of stressors within their job or role responsibilities. Serving in a helping capacity when also trying to create social change may require working with students experiencing oppressive campus climates or direct trauma. In equity-oriented work, stress, exhaustion, mental fatigue, and

physical fatigue may impact a SAs ability to help effectively. In assisting students, the helpers may be more susceptible to vicariously experiencing trauma themselves. The current literature on those in helping professions covers four different types of emotional strain: compassion fatigue, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious traumatization (Wilson & Thomas, 2004). I only cover burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma in the sections that follow as they are most relevant to SAs serving in equity-oriented roles. While vicarious traumatization is possible for a SAs, the first three are more directly related to those serving in equity-oriented roles.

Burnout

Burnout is a term frequently associated with compassion fatigue in the literature. Burnout occurs when an individual is negatively influenced through their emotional involvement and engagement (Figley, 1995; Rothschild & Rand, 2006; Stamm, 2010). As a result of burnout, individuals may exhibit a state of exhaustion. Research has shown burnout influences an individual's life both personally and professionally, including an individual's sense of physical and mental effectiveness in life (Figley, 1995). Situations that require a high level of emotional involvement may cause vulnerability for professionals who do not have adequate support within their position or feelings of positive work accomplishments (Adams et al., 2006).

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue was initially identified while observing helpers and family members who worked with soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Figley, 1995). Post-traumatic stress disorder was originally conceptualized as the rare response to traumatic events such as war, acts of violence, or other disasters outside of the usual human experience (Keane et

al., 2008). Today PTSD is more prevalent and studied more broadly (Keane, Silberbogen & Weierich, 2008). The helpers working with the soldiers who experienced PTSD exhibited signs of both emotional and physical exhaustion which influenced their work. The helpers exhibited symptoms of depression, exhaustion, and frustration (Stamm, 2010). The stressors highlighted a negative impact of working with others in a helping capacity (Rothschild & Rand, 2006).

Compassion fatigue describes the stress experienced by an individual as a result of caring for others who need assistance (Figley, 1995; Wilson & Thomas, 2004). As a result, compassion fatigue is “the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event or experience suffered by a person” (Figley, 1995, p.7).

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary traumatic stress (STS), related to PTSD, occurs when an individual assisting a victim of a traumatic situation becomes a secondary victim of trauma through the knowledge of the event and the desire to assist the other individual (Figley, 1995). STS can manifest from either directly helping a person in crisis or through the desire to assist someone despite personal ability or training. While the individual experiencing STS has not directly experienced a traumatic situation, the act of providing assistance to a person who has experienced a traumatic situation can victimize the helper. This term may be called co- victimization (Figley, 1995). Higher instances of STS is seen in responders who may not have the experience necessary to address the situation as well as in periods where time may be limited (Severn, Searchfield, & Huggard, 2011; Sprang, Clark, & Whitt-Wooley, 2007). STS encompasses a set of emotions and feelings experienced by those who indirectly witness trauma through another person while

compassion fatigue is a condition experienced by those due to the nature of their work to care for others.

The Inter-Related Nature of Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Within the field of traumatology, professionals may be susceptible to burnout, compassion fatigue, and STS. Nurses, doctors, social workers, clergy, first responders, and other caregivers regularly come into contact with individuals who may be experiencing or have experienced trauma or crisis. Due to their job responsibilities, these helpers are exposed to the negative impact of compassion fatigue.

The research currently available on compassion fatigue spans across several disciplines looking at the impact of compassion fatigue and burnout within social work, counseling, and health care (Dass-Bralsford & Thomley, 2012; Lauvrud, Nonstad, & Palmstierna, 2009; Musa, 2009; Stamm, 2010). However, a gap in the literature exists within higher education, student affairs, and specifically within SAs charged with doing equity-oriented work.

Figley (1995) described compassion fatigue as the stress individuals experience as a result of helping or wanting to help a person who has experienced trauma. By working with clients who have experienced crisis situations, helpers are exposed to information about traumatic events in their clients' lives. Helpers may utilize empathy as a part of their role, exposing themselves to the negative feelings of the person they are assisting, thus indirectly experiencing trauma-based stress.

The impact of assisting others may manifest in a negative way for the helper due to the information shared with them. Gardner (2014) described compassion fatigue as a gradual

diminishing of an individual's capacity to care, contributing to exhaustion mentally, physically, and spiritually. Compassion fatigue may manifest without warning and may contribute to an individual's inability to separate themselves from the trauma of others. As Figley (1995) continued researching compassion fatigue, he identified two distinct components: STS or burnout.

Figley (2013) identified a difference between those individuals who have exposure to primary stressors and those exposed to secondary stressors. STS focuses the "exposure to knowledge about a traumatizing event" which occurred to another individual they know or help (p. 8). While the individual did not directly experience the traumatic event, through their conversations and work with trauma exposed individuals, the helping individual exposes themselves to traumatization. Within this role, the desire to help others may have a negative impact on the helper. The helper's empathic response, experience with personal trauma, unresolved personal issues compounded by the trauma exposed individual, and the population the helper works with may impact the individual's predilection to STS (Figley, 2013). As such, STS is defined as the "stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).

The symptoms of STS can manifest immediately (Figley 2013). It incorporates an individual's feelings of "exhaustion, frustration, anger and depression" (Stamm, 2010, p. 8). The symptoms displayed by persons with STS include emotional, cognitive, physical, and behavioral manifestations (Morrisette, 2004). Someone experiencing secondary traumatic stress may express feelings of helplessness, confusion, and isolation from others (Figley, 2013). Figley

stated a person may exhibit signs of STS quickly but may experience a faster recovery rate in comparison to those individuals experiencing burnout.

The second area that may exist within compassion fatigue is burnout. One of the first mentions of burnout was in 1974 by Freudenberger (as cited in Schaufeli et al., 2008). Freudenberger worked at a free health clinic and observed the “gradual emotional depletion” of volunteers working with drug users and homeless individuals (p. 205). Moreover, in 1976, Maslach, while studying human services workers, found that individuals “felt emotionally exhausted, that they developed negative perceptions and feelings about their clients or patients, and that they experienced crises in professional competence as a result of the emotional turmoil” (Maslach, 1976, 1993 as cited in Schaufeli et al., 2008, p. 206).

The emotional nature of trauma or crisis work may impact a helper’s ability to complete their job responsibilities. A person who experiences burnout may lose the ability to fully contribute their work or other areas of their life in meaningful ways (Schaufeli et al., 2008). As stated by Maslach (1998), “burnout is an individual stress experience embedded in the context of complex social relationships and it involves the person’s conception of both self and others” (p. 69).

Employees in people-oriented professions, such as education, have been identified as being susceptible to burnout (Maslach, 1998). “Within such occupations, the prevailing norms are to be selfless and put others’ needs first; to work long hours and do whatever it takes to help a client or patient or student; to go the extra mile and to give one’s all” (p. 68). Many of the staff members working within the people-oriented professions may also be influenced by working in high stress and limited resource environments.

Student affairs professionals who serve as the first contact for students are often called to respond to student and campus incidents of social injustice, or to discuss incidents with students. As such, student affairs professionals may be negatively affected by their contact with these events. Although staff may feel a positive effect associated with their ability to help, they may experience secondary negative effects, in the form of compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002). Professionals who have a wide range of responsibilities and work in an overtaxed environment may experience these symptoms in more advanced stages. Figley proposed that the combined effects of the continuous barriers faced by professionals when hearing stories of injustices and trauma can create a condition that progressively debilitates the caregiver that he has called “compassion stress.” Compassion stress describes individual instances of induced stress that, if left unattended to, leads to compassion fatigue.

Although professionals may be able to cope with the stressors involved in overcoming various social justice barriers, they may not be able to sustain themselves without purposeful attention to creating a healthy life (Gentry, 2002). Most importantly, Gentry encouraged, “Making best use of available resources to establish respite and sanctuary for ourselves, even in the most abject of circumstances, can have an enormous effect in minimizing our symptoms and maximizing our sustained effectiveness” (p. 47).

Racial Battle Fatigue

While compassion fatigue gives us an understanding of what SAs might experience generally in the work field as helpers, it does not address the unique challenges one faces when holding a marginalized identity. RBF examines the psychological (e.g., frustration, anger, resentment), physiological (e.g., headaches, a pounding heart, high blood pressure), and

behavioral (e.g., stereotype threat, impatience) responses from racism-related stressors that are often associated with being a Person of Color (Smith, 2004, 2009; Smith et al., 2007).

Fundamental to the RBF framework is the cumulative, negative effect of racial microaggressions or the “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Due to constant preparation, coping, and defending against racial microaggressions, People of Color are often physically and emotionally drained (Smith, 2009). Consideration of RBF adds a critically important layer to understanding burnout, compassion fatigue, and STS with parallel considerations associated with other marginalized identities beyond race.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study utilizes the elements of a wellness model to explore how social justice fatigue manifests itself among SAPros while simultaneously providing a roadmap for intervention. I propose that social justice fatigue manifests because of the interaction between SAPros individual and occupational identities within the environmental context. In the preceding literature review, I provided an overview connecting social justice and student affairs. I then utilized RBF and compassion fatigue to construct the concept of social justice fatigue for SAPros. Racial battle fatigue highlights the specific fatigue associated with the social psychological stress of encountering racism on a constant basis. Compassion fatigue results from working closely with clients, or in this case students, who are similarly experiencing trauma, racism, sexism, homophobia and other stress related to their identities and the environment, both social and structural. I link these theories together to explain how I am

constructing social justice fatigue and most specifically to tie one's occupational identity to the environment.

Most wellness models include at least six dimensions: physical, emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual, and occupational such as the one from the National Wellness Institute shown below.



Source: Hettler, B. (1976). *National Wellness Institute*. Retrieved from NationalWellness.org

Figure 1. Six Dimensions of Wellness Model

This is an interdependent model where each dimension contributes to holistic wellness.

Below is a brief description of each dimension of this model:

Occupational – this dimension recognizes personal satisfaction and enrichment in life through one's work.

Physical – this dimension recognizes the importance and need for regular physical activity.

Emotional – this dimension recognizes the awareness and acceptance of one's feelings.

Intellectual – this dimension recognizes one's creative, stimulating mental activities.

Social – this dimension encourages contributing to one's environment and community.

Spiritual – this dimension recognizes our search for meaning and purpose in human existence. (Hettler, 1976)

This model provides a holistic overview of the integral dimensions of an individual's life without ascribing judgement or norms within each dimension. It is descriptive instead of prescriptive and can provide insight into how individuals might utilize wellness elements to improve their overall life or experience of life. Next, I describe how centering occupational identity helped me understand how social justice fatigue can be mitigated.

My conceptual framework centers the occupational dimension within a larger environment and proposes that the other elements of the wellness model serve as mediators of fatigue. This interdependent model allows us to understand occupational wellness as a component of holistic wellness. I centered the occupational dimension because I defined social justice fatigue within the context of individuals' work. Therefore, if one cannot change the nature of the relationship of one's work to the environment then focusing on the other dimensions of wellness can positively influence how individuals feel about their work.



Figure 2. My Conceptual Framework

With this conceptual framework supporting my understanding of social justice fatigue, I constructed a research proposal that recruited SAPros who self-identified as experiencing social justice fatigue to participate in a 30-day virtual accountability group to explore how social justice fatigue shows up in their life while simultaneously implementing daily wellness behaviors intended to mitigate social justice fatigue. The next chapter details the methods for this research project.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to situate this social justice fatigue study within a particular method of research, provide a rationale for that method, and describe the various components associated with the research process conducted in this study. Qualitative action research was utilized to determine if individual and community guided interventions are helpful to the work of SAPros. By utilizing action research for this study, SAPros informed our knowledge about social justice fatigue while simultaneously identifying strategies they use to combat it. For the purposes of this study, the 30-Day project is known as the Wellness for Social Justice Program. In this chapter, I use the term action research to describe the overarching method of inquiry while participatory action research (PAR) describes the specific methodology.

Epistemology

While I have always known that my identity and lived experience was central to how I think and see the world, I honestly never thought it was of importance to articulate in an academic setting. As a scholar practitioner, I have always used theory, research, and scholarship to inform my practice but most recently have wanted practice to inform research, scholarship, and maybe someday new theories. As a critically conscious student affairs professional who has primarily worked in the area of identity, inclusion and social change I have experienced how institutional constraints mediate the choices student affairs professionals have with regards to style and curriculum. While much of the current literature explores this tension for teachers in

K-12 education, the same tension exists for student affairs professionals as well though current literature is not exploring it. This is the pedagogical location within which I have found myself situated for the last ten years.

I first came into contact with the works of Freire (2000) and hooks (1994) as an undergraduate student studying activism and liberation. Although I found the theorization of what the educational environment should “be” inspiring, their words seemed to ring hollow as I began my own graduate career and subsequently professional career. As a graduate student, I started looking for my critical voice in the pages of the works we read in class. However, the more I began to seek out an active engagement with the relevant literature stemming from both student development scholarship and educational theory, I saw a significant omission across the existent scholarship.

Although Freire (1975, 1978, 1994, 1998/2001, 2000) had provided words of hope and emancipation, I could not conceive of a way to take the words of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and make them speak directly to my day-to-day experience as a student affairs educator. After all, I was not positioned within the institution to be critical or create change. I read Foucault (1975/1995, 1978, 1981, 1984, 2000) and began to question what exactly “power” was. It seemed disheartening. Although later critical pedagogues (Giroux, 1985; hooks, 1994) refined Freire’s words, and made them seem more relevant to students in the U.S., finally speaking from the college environment. Giroux (1985) introduced what it meant to be a “Transformative Intellectual” but I still was not sure what that trajectory of praxis might look like as a student affairs professional.

I read Dewey (1938/1998) and thought I had found a voice I could place my role as an educator in dialogue with. Dewey argued some structure was necessary, that complete rejection of dominant forms created acts of meaninglessness. I began to think of my usage of power as *necessary* to achieve critical goals. But, as I continued reading, I started to question if Dewey and others of his kind (Rorty, 1989/2007; Biesta, 1994) were *too* pragmatic, *too* devoted to praxis, to the neglect of theory. Dewey began to seem dated, perhaps just a more progressive manifestation of the bankers, the agents of cultural reification.

At the end of my coursework, I spent time dissecting an article by Rhoads and Black (1995) that outlined three waves of student affairs work. While the first two waves were grounded in historical foundations of the field; in loco parentis and developmental theory, the third wave was more of a proposition; a critical cultural perspective. My critique of this article was that it described the present time inaccurately. It is aspirational to describe the current state of student affairs as a critical cultural perspective, not the reality. This writing project motivated me even more to articulate and theoretically ground what I, and others, were doing every day as student affairs educators: managing the tension of serving as an advocate for students, an agent of the institution, and creating change from within. It also helped me better articulate what it looks like for student affairs professionals to balance critical engagement and professional pragmatism. It might be fun and idealistic to talk about what should be, but not backing that up with the resources or commitment to dismantle oppressive systems only serves the status quo.

Methodology Selected

I selected participatory action research for this qualitative study. PAR uses a unique process of active collaboration between researcher and study participant by focusing on

partnership and changes within an organization, agency, or institution (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004; Zuber-Skerrit & Fletcher, 2007). Considered active, innovative, and developmental, action research emphasizes improvement or change within a specific practice, system, or specialty (Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallejo, 2004; Zuber-Skerrit & Fletcher, 2007). Viewed as a relatively new research methodology, action research fosters a unique, democratic relationship between researcher and research participant, resulting in collaborative problem-solving and outcome planning (Poon et al., 2016; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). It also challenges systems of hegemonic power.

Conceptualized as a cyclical process, action research allows for a continuation or flow of information between the data collection and data interpretation stages (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Action research is described as a cycle, a spiral, or a helix in that the researcher cycles through three distinct phases or patterns: planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, and reflecting on these processes and consequences (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). This pattern repeats itself as necessary or agreed upon by the group. Following a cyclical pattern, the action researcher and study participants are encouraged to collaborate and continually address integral yet specific aspects of the research process (McIntyre, 2008).

Action research is used to develop working principles to create a parallel experience to the human service work for which action research is often utilized (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Specifically, action researchers encourage effective working relationships, good communication, active participation throughout the study, and involvement of all participants. Because such principles reflect the common practices of the student affairs field, action research was a

justifiable form of methodology for the study of social justice fatigue in SAPros. Action research allowed participants to actively participate in a change process that directly impacts their work as social justice change agents. I am interested in change at all levels; individual, social, and institutional. The SAPros I worked with are already involved in social and institutional change by nature of their work but sometimes that is at the expense of their individual wellness. This study is designed to have people focus on changes at the individual level to priorities their own wellness to mitigate fatigue and ultimately increase the change they can influence at the social and institutional levels. The action research design provided study participants with an opportunity to learn about social justice fatigue and engage in discussions regarding wellness and self-care while simultaneously implementing behaviors that can influence their overall wellness.

Unlike traditional research methods, action research encourages study participants to engage in the research process much in the same manner as they do with their students and colleagues. This is precisely why I chose PAR design, to provide practitioners with agency to make transformative change in their own life and the lives of others. SAPros lead with empathy and utilize effective communication as they navigate the developmental experiences with their students and campus community. Likewise, these study participants not only engaged as an active, collaborative force but also directly benefited from the implementation of this social justice fatigue research. Action research creates processes that provide a positive opportunity for study participants to learn, seek enhancement, and engage on an emotional level (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). This action research design allowed study participants to engage and participate during all steps of the research.

Building on the collaborative approach, Sense (2006) described the researcher's role in action research as that of a coach who actively facilitates discussion amongst study participants. Action researchers must be willing to engage with study participants more informally and with less of a supervisory role. Research suggests that action researchers need to engage study participants by offering a variety of experiences such as creative learning strategies and open question and answer forums, and by encouraging active learning (Sense, 2006). Action research relies on a researcher who acts as a facilitator by engaging study participants in empathy-based learning while incorporating collaborative learning opportunities. I used action research for this social justice fatigue study because it allowed participants to learn, experiment, and provide direct feedback during the research process.

This research seeks to understand what social justice fatigue is and how SAPros combat this fatigue. The specific questions are outlined below:

1. How and to what extent does the definition of social justice fatigue resonate for student affairs practitioners? What do Student Affairs Professionals identify as the core features of social justice fatigue?
2. How and to what extent do Student Affairs professionals experience social justice fatigue?
3. What are the strategies Student Affairs professionals employ to cope with and combat social justice fatigue?

Note that the use of action research means that the above questions served as guides for the implementation of the research and could have been adapted, changed, or otherwise altered based on the collective experience of the participants in the study. For that reason, the research

questions appear after the selection of methodology and without a presumed set of hypotheses. During and at the culmination of this study, we agreed the questions were important as phrased and did not make any changes. Utilizing PAR was essential because of the normative nature of higher education and the way race and racism would be present. Utilizing strategies that center those most marginalized allows us to be more critical of the environment and how it contributes to social justice fatigue among individuals (Bensimon & Bishop, 2012).

Sampling Strategy and Criteria

Due to the nature of participatory action research, sampling procedures were less structured to focus on the phenomena, social justice fatigue (Maxwell, 2013). I utilized the video that accompanies Chapter One as well as targeted email communication to recruit a group of seven SAPros who self-identified as experiencing social justice fatigue to participate in a virtual community of peers to explore the definition and core features of social justice fatigue as well as the strategies they employ to combat this phenomenon. I utilized email listservs for organizations such as the Social Justice Training Institute Alumni, the American College Personnel Association Coalition for Multicultural Affairs, and the identity-based Knowledge Communities (KCs) through the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. Additional outreach was done to members of these groups via Facebook. I targeted these groups because they provided direct access to SAPros doing equity-oriented work on college campuses. These are also groups of which I am a part. I also sent direct emails to SAPros in my community sharing the opportunity for them as well as seeking assistance to share the recruitment post. (See Appendix A for actual email post.)

I recruited participants who are at least five years post-Master's degree. Any Master's degree was acceptable as long as they had been working in the field of student affairs for five years. I selected five years because 50-60% of SAPros leave the field within their first five years (Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016). While student affairs may have different names per institution, such as Student Development, Student Affairs or Student Life, the offices, departments, and missions are often similar: offering programs and initiatives that aspire to provide leadership, support, and service to students. They were currently employed in social justice or equity-oriented work defined as providing direct support for marginalized student populations. Additionally, since RBF is being used to enhance our understanding of social justice fatigue, participants hold the corresponding marginalized identity as the focus of their work (e.g., a SAPro working in a queer resource center identifying as queer themselves).

Interested participants completed a pre-study assessment including demographic information to ensure they meet the established criteria (see Appendix B). Gathering this information ensured that participants met all the criteria described above as well as capture a baseline understanding of potential participants' social justice fatigue.

Data Collection

The data collection section describes and justifies the data collection method. In addition, it describes the process by which the data was generated, gathered, and recorded. Lastly, this section describes the tracking system used to keep the data organized during the study.

Overarching Framework for Data Collection

Based on the assumption that most people have a comprehensive understanding of their lives, action research enables the researcher to transfer such perceptions into the basis of the data collection method (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). Specifically, this study utilized Sakai to create an online virtual community for participants to record their daily check-ins. Daily recorded check-ins were only visible to me, the participant-researcher. After three weeks, participants met with me via video conference to provide feedback on the structure of the study and their participation thus far. No changes were proposed or made to the study at that time.

As typical with participatory research, everything produced during the 30-day study becomes data. I used the daily reflections to better understand the nature of social justice fatigue and how it shows up for SAPros (questions 1 and 2 listed previously). The weekly video meetings provided data for the study. As a participant researcher, I facilitated deeper discussion about the participants' experiences as well as the strategies they were employing to cope with social justice fatigue. This also provided information and data on the nature of and source of their fatigue. While this is not a central question of the study, these discussions provided environmental context that is not captured in the daily reflections. These video meetings were also used to member check themes that I noticed while reviewing daily reflections.

Procedures Followed

This study utilized qualitative action research for the purpose of soliciting written responses from SAPros who participated in the Wellness for Social Justice Program. Interested participants reviewed the program video and completed the program pre-assessment and demographic form (see Appendix B). Fourteen people submitted the pre-study assessment and

five people did not meet one or more criteria for the study. After full review, nine people received communication from the coordinating researcher outlining the time commitment, timeline, and expectations of the program and were asked to confirm participation by reviewing and signing the informed consent letter (see Appendix C). Seven participants confirmed their understanding of the study, including associated risks, participant expectations, and purpose of the study by returning a signed consent letter.

After the study expectations were reviewed, participants received access to the private Sakai group (see Appendix D). Participants reviewed the wellness model covered in the conceptual framework to understand each of the parts included and made decisions about how they would implement various components if they were new to them.

All participants enrolled in a virtual community of discovery and accountability for 30 days. I chose 30 days for this program because of the common belief that it takes 21 days to form a habit, therefore 30 solidifies it (Maltz, 1960). While the truth of this belief has been disputed, a 30-day program is also easy for people to consider and seemed appropriate for this study. Based on the conceptual framework, participants agreed to do the following during our time together:

1. Commit to 30 minutes of physical activity or movement 5 times a week.
2. 10 minutes of daily activity focused on intellectual, social, or emotional development (e.g., articles, books, podcast). Examples of what constitutes appropriate engagement with these was provided. Participants then selected an activity that improves their quality of life intellectually, socially, or emotionally.
3. Each day participants checked in on the Sakai Project Site in the following areas:

1. Did you meet your goals for today? What were they?
2. What type of internal resistance did you face today?
3. What was your biggest external challenge today?
4. How do you feel ...
 - a. Physically?
 - b. Mentally?
 - c. Emotionally?
 - d. About your job?
5. To what extent did you feel the need to address the ways in which you felt? If you did feel that need, what strategies did you use?

Internal resistance would describe any individual challenges or barriers such as imposter syndrome or feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, external challenges would include any barriers or issues experienced external to ones' self, such as a bias incident on campus or insufficient supervision.

At the beginning of the project, I introduced participants to the proposed model for the study to solicit feedback. The basis of the study made sense to everyone and we solidified a start date of September 11, 2017. Participants were informed that they could stop participating at any time and the success of the study is not dependent on full completion for all participants. At the end of the first week, we added a weekly reflection to capture any missed daily reflection submissions. This emerged from the participants. After three weeks, participants were invited to meet virtually together. This actually turned into individual meetings with each participant because coordinating schedules was a major challenge. In these meetings, we discussed how

they were feeling, what they noticing about fatigue, and whether or not the interventions were valuable and identified any other coping mechanisms that were serving them well. These meetings spanned across week 3 and beyond the 30 days of the study. I utilized these check-ins to determine how participations thought the information should be disseminated. It was unanimously expressed that audio or video would be the best format to compile our learning. During a conversation with Franklin, I firmly decided video would be the more inclusive option since we will have closed captioning for those who may be hearing impaired. At the end of the 30 days, each participant submitted an audio recording and corresponding images on their overall experience, describing their social justice fatigue, and keys learnings for themselves and others. The audio and images were arranged in a video. Each participant video is included as part of the Acts of Wellness series found on the website (www.socialjusticefatigue.com).

Data Analysis

PAR is both about the process and the goal (Greenwood, Whyte, Harkavy, 1993). As such the participants participated in the data analysis portion of this project. You will see this indicated with the use of me and us throughout this section. As noted previously, participants submitted daily reflections. I used a critical constructionist approach to develop conceptual categories that arose from my interpretation of the data (McIntyre, 2008). Utilizing the technique of thematic analysis allowed us identify emergent themes significant to understanding the phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2007).

As data was coded, it was constantly compared and contrasted to successive segments of data (Polkinghorne, 2005; Schwandt, 2007). During the virtual weekly meetings previously described, I presented my reflections on the data for participants to clarify, elaborate on, or

critique. Key themes emerged through the co-construction of knowledge between and among participants and myself. Utilizing this method as an iterative process is most in alignment with my values as a researcher but also aligns well with the subject and methods of this project.

The constant and continuous analysis of data allowed for a dynamic participatory action research project as well as ensured the data collected was sufficient to answer the research questions. Utilizing this dynamic process allowed for greater integrity of the data while also maintaining responsibility and accountability for the community of participants. Staying true to qualitative research analytic techniques, we relied on researcher intuition while dissecting pieces of data to make sense of the whole phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). The use of the weekly group meetings served both as a member checking process as well as a means of solidifying themes.

Ethical Considerations

In my study, I followed all of the procedures as outlined in this chapter. I ensured participants had all the information needed to participate fully throughout the study. Given the participatory action paradigm that guided this study, participants had ample opportunity to provide feedback throughout the process, not only at the pre-determined times.

In terms of addressing privacy and confidentiality, I did not guarantee either. As mentioned, the information gathered in the individual daily reflections were only viewed by me and the participant. Additionally, since participants could possibly join a group video chat at the end of each week, participants may see one another. This only happened one time during the study where two participants joined a Google hangout at the same time and therefore learned

about one another. Since privacy and confidentiality could not be guaranteed, participants were asked to waive confidentiality (see Appendix C).

As a current scholar practitioner in student affairs, participants working at the same institution as me were not eligible to participate in this study to avoid a conflict of interest or issues of power dynamics given my position at the institution. Participants from the same institution were not selected, though this was not an issue from the pre-study assessment. While I did have a pre-established relationship with two participants, I do not believe this negatively influenced the study. My position, reputation, and pre-existing relationships may have improved my ability to recruit participants as well as increased participants' level of trust. In fact, five of the seven final participants were either directly connected to me or directly connected to a close friend/colleague of mine. Also, as a full participant in the study, I experienced the same confidentiality and privacy risks. Participants had full information of my identity prior to joining the study. Participation was voluntary and participants had option to withdraw at any time.

Because I asked participants to regularly reflect on their fatigue, there was potential risk to evoke emotional responses. Simultaneously the nature of the community developed in the study provided support as well. A list of potential resources was available if participants decided that participation evoked an emotional response greater than anticipated. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. Though their participation in the study was not confidential, their daily check-in responses were kept confidential. Throughout the study participants had a minimum of two opportunities to inform and change the course of the study. While the study provided at least two formal opportunities to shape the study, feedback was accepted throughout the time designated for the study.

Limitations

Similar to other qualitative studies, this study does not represent the diverse experiences that all SAPros engaged in equity or social justice oriented work. From a critical constructivist perspective, no study could truly achieve this given the lens and experiences of both the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For this study, the group of participants was small, specific (meeting the criteria previously outlined), and all participants engaged in particular behaviors and reflections for 30 days. Although attempts were made to recruit a sample that reflects the diversity of social identities, I was simultaneously looking at a subset of SAPros who hold marginalized social identities that correspond to the nature of their work. The goal of this study is to better understand the construct of social justice fatigue and coping mechanisms to move beyond survival. The seven participants represented a wide range of social identities as well as functional areas within the social justice and equity oriented work such as social justice education, multicultural affairs, student success office, and women's center.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of existing empirical information about social justice fatigue. I asked participants to first identify this phenomenon in their own lives and agree to further understand it with a larger community. My lived experience showed that SAPros would understand this construct, and this proved to be true as I recruited participants. Finally, the use of participatory action research in this project may have limited individuals' abilities to participate. Since I could not guarantee confidentiality of participants' identities, there may be more extreme cases of social justice fatigue not explored in this project.

All in all, these limitations seem minor in comparison to the importance of the study. The potential benefits of understanding social justice fatigue and associated coping mechanisms can be applied to individuals experiencing it and potential strategies for transforming our organizations that may be perpetuating the phenomena. I am personally committed to better understanding social justice fatigue because I want every SAPro to have the opportunity to move beyond surviving to thriving.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

I am a Multiracial, Asian American cisgender Woman. I identify as a first-generation college student from a working-class background living currently as middle/upper class. I am temporarily able-bodied and able-minded. My less salient and privileged identities include being mostly English speaking, mostly heterosexual, and Christian. I was born in the Philippines, grew up in Japan and began my socialization in the United States when I was 14 years old. I am the only one of my siblings who did not go through the naturalization process for U.S. citizenship because I had birthright citizenship; born on U.S. soil abroad. I have been a Student Affairs Professional for 13 years spending 10 years doing equity and justice-oriented work including access, persistence, retention, advocacy, programming, identity conscious leadership development, and social justice education. For four years prior to launching this study, I experienced social justice fatigue and oversaw a department of staff who also experienced social justice fatigue. I care about this research because I believe we can transform our workplaces to ensure that SAPros are able to implement holistic wellness behaviors and shift the responsibility beyond individuals (self-care) towards collective responsibility.

As researcher and participant, my role in creating and facilitating the online community was important to acknowledge. I asked peers to provide personal information in their daily check-ins. They trusted me with this information and while there may have been some barriers to being completely honest throughout the 30 days together, this was not the case with this group. As a fellow professional in the field, participants may worry about how their participation could impact future professional interactions. I shared my own experiences with the group as a participant to help break down some of these barriers. I personally identify as a student affairs professional experiencing social justice fatigue and want to be open with the group about how that has influenced my lived experiences as well as strategies I have employed to combat this.

Social justice fatigue is a phenomenon that I personally experience. While I experienced it most saliently in my occupational identity, hence the structure of this study, it comes up in all aspects of my life. I am a Woman of Color and a first-generation college student from a low-income background. When I started this project, I was director of a department with an explicit mission focused on equity and inclusion. In this role, my staff and I were accountable for our divisional and university equity, social justice, and inclusion efforts. When those efforts required holding other divisional leadership and colleagues accountable was where I experienced the most challenges. All of this influenced my relationship to this topic. When I began the 30-day program, my department had been dismantled three weeks prior and I was starting a brand-new job that was justice and equity adjacent. In my role as Dean of Students in a graduate/professional school, I oversee enrollment management and student affairs components for our masters and PhD programs ensuring that identity, inclusion, and social justice are woven

throughout the academic experience from admissions to graduation. My reflexive practice acknowledged the fact that I am part of the same world I am studying (Maxwell, 2013). While I did not intend to unduly influence the study, I was and continue to be more interested in accounting for the full experience of the group, our identities, and the social context in which we exist.

Throughout this project, I completed the same daily reflections I had participants complete. During the video check-ins, I checked in with participants, gathered feedback, and checked themes with each person. Going through the parallel process with participants allowed me to stay present throughout the research study and share my own struggles throughout the process. I was able to openly discuss the dissertation process and product including how they would like to disseminate the information.

Summary

In summary, I used participatory action research to better understand social justice fatigue, how it shows up among SAPros, and strategies employed to combat social justice fatigue. By creating an online community, participants had an opportunity to test wellness interventions and shape the study. Participating in the study provided direct benefit the participants, informed the field broadly and provided a process that can be replicated with other professionals in the future. The website and video project serve as a collective space that documents our time together but also serves as a resource to anyone experiencing social justice fatigue.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

These chapters highlight the main findings and analyses of the study and how to navigate the accompanying website. Due to the participatory action design of the study, I asked participants how they wanted the findings and analysis to be shared. The product is the website, www.socialjusticefatigue.com, while the findings and analysis presented in the videos on this website, a short overview is also provided here.

On the website, you will find three videos that correspond with each research question, in addition to a series of participant videos titled Acts of Wellness. The table below outlines which video(s) correspond to the research questions in the study.

Table 1. Video Index by Research Question

Research Question	Video
How and to what extent does the definition of social justice fatigue resonate for student affairs practitioners? What do Student Affairs Professionals identify as the core features of social justice fatigue?	“What is Social Justice Fatigue?” Video
How and to what extent do Student Affairs professionals experience social justice fatigue?	“Student Affairs Professionals and Social Justice Fatigue” Video
What are the strategies Student Affairs professionals employ to cope with and combat social justice fatigue?	“The Construct of Time” Video AND “Acts of Wellness” Series

Over the course of the 30-day Wellness for Social Justice Program 80 reflections were submitted. While no participant completed every single daily reflection, there was no attrition

from the study. Participants stayed engaged through the weekly reflections and maintaining communication with me via email. Participants were not willing to give up on themselves throughout the process. In the rest of this chapter you will find a brief overview of the information presented on the website.

How and to what extent does the definition of social justice fatigue resonate for student affairs practitioners? What do Student Affairs Professionals identify as the core features of social justice fatigue?

In this study, we found that the definition of social justice fatigue, *the physical, mental, and/or emotional toll incurred through advocating for social change while serving as an agent of an institution of higher education*, resonated with all participants. Each component manifested at some point during the 30 days together. The following images capture the nature of each dimension:



Figure 3. Physically



Figure 4. Mentally



Figure 5. Emotionally

While we found that there is something specific about the context of higher education that contributes to social justice fatigue, the extent or severity varies by identity, position, work environment, and possibly many other factors we did not collect in this study. The Women of

Color in the study, had a more difficult time completing the daily reflections each day though they were thinking about the reflections prompts consistently. Their fatigue prevented them from tracking their reflections for fear that the written reflection itself would increase their fatigue.

How and to what extent do Student Affairs professionals experience social justice fatigue?

The setting of higher education is a core finding. Social justice fatigue is a construct that may be specific to higher education institutions. The media portrays college campuses as liberal meccas where free speech, particularly conservative speech, must vehemently be protected from social justice warriors. We assume this type of environment would make it easier for educators advocating for social change but this is not the case.

College campuses and higher education was unanimously described as problematic but simultaneously better than other work environments. When asked “what keeps you in higher education?” The most common reply was that it is better than working in other settings, in addition to the need for a paycheck and the opportunity to make a broad impact in the world. The world of education seems to suggest that we will reach “those other environments.” This is the sentiment that if we are successful in our educational aims to create more socially just college campuses, students become graduates who go out into the world and bring those aims with them. Is this what we tell ourselves to keep going? To stick around? Or is this true? Someone should definitely study the impact of graduates from institutions that have strong commitments to social change and social justice. If our current socio-political climate is any indication of this, it would actually tell us we are not necessarily creating broad sweeping change in the country or world.

Another possibility is that we are experiencing the backlash of efforts for creating more equitable and just world.

All participants cited hegemony in higher education systems as a consistent problem particularly how they maneuver the environment. These professionals in particular were hired to advocate for marginalized students, create more inclusive campuses, and create opportunities to increase critical consciousness or multicultural competence or even just dialogue across difference. Unfortunately, they often are not given resources to successfully accomplish the goals expected of them. Resources include financial resources, human resources, or even access to build or influence institutional priorities that would allow them to pave the way towards success. It is almost as if SAPros are being set up to experience social justice fatigue because institutions are willing to espouse justice goals but are not willing to create the conditions to actualize those goals. Some might call this labor exploitation. Furthermore, when institutions do this they are taking advantage of the good nature of professionals who have a particular commitment to social justice and equity work because often the slight chance of seeing change is what keeps these professionals engaged but also perpetuates their fatigue. Institutions must be willing to make more than a verbal commitment to social justice aims and actually provide structural and formal support to ensure those goals can be realized. Otherwise any supposed success will likely be at the expense of SAPros.

This finding distinguishes social justice fatigue (SJF) from racial battle fatigue and compassion fatigue. As previously discussed, compassion fatigue (CF) describes the experience of those in helping positions, CF is associated with the nature of the work but not specific to the environment where it occurs. Racial battle fatigue (RBF) describes the experience of people of

color across multiple environments not necessarily associated with one's work. Social justice fatigue describes the specific experience of SAPros because of the nature of their work and their work environment. This study suggests that SJF is a unique finding among SAPros doing equity and social justice work within the context of higher education.

What are the strategies SAPros employ to cope with and combat social justice fatigue?

While the Acts of Wellness video series answers the bulk of this question, a major barrier to coping is: the ambiguous yet normative nature of the construct of time. The construct of time shows up in four ways: the definition of the day, how goals are valued, notions of productivity, and scheduling self-care. I grouped them together here because they all contribute to the same concern. First this is important because the study was designed around daily reflections but I did not provide specific guidance about how to define "the day." During check in meetings with participants, I found that some reflected at the end of the work day, most frequently defined as 9-5, so they were completing their daily reflections before leaving the office. Some took the construct of the day more broadly and would complete daily reflections in the morning before starting the work day for the previous day. Some completed their reflections quite literally as they were wrapping up their entire day before going to bed. Why is this important? Because for some this was the barrier that prevented them from completing the reflections at all. The work day does not always end at 5pm and by the time they got home and were able to think through the various reflections, they were exhausted and even the act of reflecting was going to cause more strain on their day.

What is a goal? Daily reflections required participants to reflect on their goals for the day and whether or not they had accomplished their goals. The types of goals listed and

accomplished varied from the very tactical (items on the to-do list) to emotional (setting intentions and strategies for the day “I will not get angry or go off on anyone today”). I highlight this separately because it feeds into another manifestation of the construct of time: being productive.

Most participants at some point reported not “feeling productive” which lead them to critique their goals or to-do lists. Are they trying to do too much? Not setting big/important goals? Am I using my time wisely? This is important because our work is so tied to capitalism. In a capitalistic society, we obsess with our “production” though we are not working in factories the concept of producing consumes us and how we measure this is often tied to our to-do lists or what we can show for our day. Sometimes it is easy to measure our productivity “I finished a report for my supervisor, I balanced our budget, I hosted a program and had 300 attendees, I wrote a curriculum, I facilitated a workshop” but how are quantifying the advocacy we do for students? How is the labor exerted supporting our most marginalized students being qualified and valued? Especially when that is the labor/work that is not always valued. When students are popping in and out of our offices throughout the day, preventing us from completing our report, we are often told we could have managed our time better or closed our door to get work done. These are often the days that SAPros left feeling unvalued, unproductive and even more fatigued.

Finally, the last theme related to the construct of time is the opportunity and need to schedule self-care. Many participants cited that my study came at the right time or helped them re-prioritize their self-care. Or that they really had be intentional about scheduling in order to meet the expectations of the study. A reminder that the components of the study should all be doable with just 1 hour a day – 10 minutes of personal development, 30 minutes of movement,

and 15-20 minutes to complete the reflection. Movement activities varied widely for participants; hiking, walking, running, playing basketball, CrossFit or other group fitness classes were the most common. Personal development activities varied just as much. Some were reading books like *Braving the Wilderness* by Brené Brown or books on mindfulness or organizational change. Podcasts were popular for personal development as participants could listen to while getting ready in the morning or getting ready for bed at night or during their commute. I personally listen to podcasts or audiobooks during my commute. Selected podcasts included *Politically Re-Active*, *The Mixed Experience*, *This American Life*, and *Pod Save America*. Most folks agreed their personal development needed to speak to their humanity and saw it very distinctly from their professional development.

It should not be such a task for people to find this time during their average day though each person reported that it was a challenge to ensure that all of these things happened each day over the course of 30 days. Participants who had the least difficulty doing so came into the study with at least one of these activities already a part of their regular habits or schedule. What is most concerning about this is that it places most if not all responsibility for one's wellness on the individual and begs the question of what the role or responsibility is for institutions of higher education to ensure that the environment is conducive to prioritizing one's wellness routine.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After participating in this study, I have no doubt about the existence of social justice fatigue. While there may be differences in the way it manifests, each person confirmed its existence and impact on their life. We all appreciated the language to describe our experiences and felt some relief from fatigue when we prioritized our own wellness. The chapter provides researcher reflections, why we should care, and implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Reflection

Social Justice Fatigue is real and our institutions perpetuate SJF. While I looked at a specific subset of SAPros, it is likely that what participants describe as the core components of SJF applies to SAPros in other functional areas, particularly if they embody a critical consciousness or attempt to incorporate social justice initiatives into their work. Additionally, I believe this is a unique burden for people with marginalized identities and is even more compounded for those holding multiple marginalized identities. The two Women of color in my study struggled the most to consistently complete the interventions each day and/or complete their reflections. Both of them cited the act of reflecting as contributing to their fatigue.

The wellness interventions prescribed in this study did have a positive influence on participant's fatigue. This is seen most directly with Joe as he was the most consistent in completing all the interventions each day in addition to the reflections. By the end of the 30 days

he cited more focus, happiness, physical wellbeing, and an overall sense of hope, peace and joy in his job and life. In addition to being most consistent with the daily behaviors, Joe was even more consistent with his reflections. He completed the reflections even when he did not complete his movement or personal development. I believe the consistent reflection allowed him to see differences in how he felt depending on his activities and therefore realize benefits of the wellness interventions more immediately. For example, he felt more fatigued and less hopeful on days when he did not have time for movement or personal development. In the future, I hope to find ways to better articulate this process for future groups to engage in the wellness program and better understand their own fatigue.

When I designed this study I fully met all the criteria for participation and that was intentional for me to be a full participant researcher. Unfortunately, due to changes at my institution, my department was dismantled. The 30-day program marked my first 30 days in a new role that did not have the explicit focus of advocating for social change or supporting marginalized students. As the Dean of Students in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, I am lucky that our school has a very explicit justice and equity-oriented mission but I have also felt some relief not having to constantly fight or justify social justice initiatives or the need to pay attention to campus climate, among other issues. In my role, social justice is welcomed, respected, and in many ways expected. Some of this comes with the positional power that I hold in this role but also from the direct critique and activism from students the previous two years before I arrived.

It was interesting to experience this study while not completely having the same experience. My fatigue showed up very differently over these 30 days. When I think back on

how I felt in my previous role as Director in the Center for Identity, Inclusion, and Social Change, I shared similar feelings as the other participants. I relied heavily on my daily wellness habits to ensure I did not exacerbate my fatigue and while I did not plan to start a new job during this process, it did provide me with a different point of comparison.

Limitations

In addition to previous limitations discussed in Chapter Three, the host or medium of the virtual community and scheduling of group meetings would have improved our community connection. Sakai provided limited opportunity for participants to engage with each other. Ideally participants could see when others had submitted their daily reflections without seeing the content of their reflections. This would allow for more group accountability versus accountability from me as researcher. Participants would agree to engage with one another and feel committed to their shared goals as a group.

A more dynamic medium would also allow for video reflections in addition to written reflections. Some participants shared that it felt stressful to write. While providing multiple methods for reflection submission would have made data gathering more challenging, outside of the context of a dissertation, this could open opportunities for reflection and learning for participants.

Participating in group meetings was a challenge to schedule for this group. Each time a group meeting was scheduled, only one person would show up for that session. This allowed for personal check-ins but as mentioned previously did not contribute to community development and accountability. I wish I had pre-scheduled these meetings before our 30 days together had

started. It would have allowed participants to build this into their 30-day schedule as opposed to trying to fit group meetings into their schedule week to week.

Both of these limitations had a direct impact on the community building aspect of the project. It was still participatory in nature but each participant's connection was limited to their connection with me versus the overall group outside of written communication. This did not have a detrimental impact on the data collected but could have had an impact on the success of individuals in the group. Being accountable to the group might have helped folks check in more regularly.

Implications for Practice and Why We Should Care

If we know that we are losing 50-60% of professionals in their first five years, we should care about professionals who hold marginalized identities or are called to labor in disproportionate ways. The current socio-political environment requires institutions to hold steadfast in our commitment to social justice and creating inclusive environments. If institutions actually want to live up to the promise of creating socially responsible leaders in the world, we have to be willing to transform the most direct environment to create conditions for professionals working towards justice and equity to be successful. If we were able to do so, we could transform the culture of student affairs and higher education broadly.

The current conversation about self-care puts ownership and responsibility on the individual to figure out what this looks like for them and implement wellness interventions. I propose that we can create conditions for everyone to understand and prioritize their wellness. At the end of the day, an individual can have all the intentions to implement self-care or wellness interventions but if their work environment does not allow for them to succeed, they will not

succeed. We can transform the culture of higher education or at minimum student affairs to ensure that each person has access to define and implement wellness techniques. The responsibility does not fall only to the individual. There is some responsibility on the organization or institution of higher education to create the conditions for advocates for change to prioritize their wellness.

Another practice recommendation is implementing a staff sabbatical policy. This could easily be modeled off the institutions current sabbatical policy for faculty. Extending this to staff would allow for time to focus on their professional development or other academic pursuits. Some institutions allow staff to take a leave and participate in programs such as Semester at Sea or Fulbright Programs. While many SAPros seek these opportunities on an individual basis, it would be beneficial for staff to know there is a policy that allows them to seek these opportunities. When staff are not able to get leave to participate in these opportunities, they may participate in these programs without having job security.

The ACPA/NASPA Competencies is another area to explore for further development. As they are currently written, the competencies and rubrics focus on the individual. After the competencies were published, a set of rubrics followed. The rubrics provide a set of consistent criteria for SAPros to operationalize the dimensions identified in the competencies. Unfortunately, onus is on SAPros to prioritize the competencies for themselves. What would it look like for the competencies or rubrics to be written for organizations? What would it look like for our institutions of higher education to have at minimum a foundational level of competence in relation to wellness and healthy living? I believe it would require organizations

to review the expectations of individuals within their organizations and ensure that everyone not only has access to defining their own healthy living plan but require it.

Institutions can lessen social justice fatigue by creating the conditions for staff to be successful in their social justice aims. This starts by first being honest about their equity and inclusion goals. Every campus is different; has different needs, a different history, a different culture, and different challenges to overcome. University leaders and leadership must get specific about how their communities will look and feel if their goals are accomplished. Starting with the end in mind will give them a clearer understanding of where their efforts should be strategically placed to minimize barriers to success.

Future Research

This study gives us a small glimpse of social justice fatigue and how it manifests among student affairs professionals. Future areas of research include looking at specific identity groups, investigating how salient dominant identities mitigate fatigue as well as looking into mixed methods formats in order to enhance the quasi-experimental design. Some of these are areas that I personally hope to explore in the future.

As previously mentioned, Women of Color seemed to struggle with the daily reflections the most in my group of participants. It would be interesting to repeat the study with a group entirely of Women of Color. I think Women of Color tend to carry a heavier burden or exert more emotional labor in the workplace. Future research could also look specifically at Black women or multiracial women to explore any differences or possibilities to positively influence wellness interventions.

Another area I did not explore during this study was how salient dominant identities mitigate fatigue. The participants who seemed to fair best throughout the study were cisgender heterosexual Men of Color and a cisgender heterosexual White Woman. I think this says something about the strength of masculinity and Whiteness as mediators of fatigue. It would be interesting to delve deeper into how the combination of identities, in particular dominant identities, lends itself to accessing wellness.

As previously mentioned, I think future research should explore the impact of graduates from institutions that have strong commitments to social change and social justice. If we operate on the assumption that critically conscious college students become socially responsible citizens and create change in the larger world. It would go to reason that graduates from institutions with explicit commitments to social change and social justice would have an even greater impact on creating change in the world. A study that focused on measuring this could target alumni from institutions with these explicit commitments and evaluate how they current contribute to social change initiatives beyond their college experience.

In a future research project, I hope to restructure this study utilizing mixed methods. Mixed methods would allow me to quantify some components of data and tell a more complex story about how individual experience fatigue within various environmental contexts such as institution type as well as how various dominant and subordinated identities experience social justice fatigue. Just as a personal trainer uses various quantitative and qualitative data points to build a fitness plan for an individual client, I think it would be possible to use a similar formula of tools to provide more specific and direct wellness interventions for SAPros. A study of this sort would allow for more direct and positive influence on participant's overall wellbeing as well

as contributing to staff retention in the field and provide an opportunity for organizations to be held accountable for the environmental factors that influence wellness.

From this small study, we can no longer deny the existence of social justice fatigue. Not only does SJF contribute to turnover and loss of professionals in the field, but it is causing negative health effects for those who stay. For those with multiple marginalized identities, SJF reinforces the oppressive nature of our organizations. And if we do not prioritize wellness interventions or radical self-care, the status quo remains and maintaining the status quo is in opposition to our mission to create more socially just and anti-oppressive college campuses.

APPENDIX A
EMAIL FOR LISTSERVS

Hello *[insert listserv name]* Community!

My name is Sara Furr, and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago facilitating a study on social justice fatigue.

In this study, I am defining social justice fatigue as “the physical, mental, and/or emotional toll incurred through advocating for social change while serving as an agent of an institution in higher education.” I hope to pull together a group of student affairs professionals who are interested in exploring the concept of social justice fatigue, how it shows up in their lives and the strategies they employ to combat fatigue.

Participants will complete a short pre-study assessment to determine eligibility for the study. Once selected, participants agree to join a virtual community for thirty days. During those thirty days, participants will complete daily check-ins and participate in at least one virtual hangout with the larger community.

Your participation in the study will be voluntary. Given the nature of the study confidentiality is not guaranteed. Other participants will not see each individual's check-ins but because of the nature of the study, I cannot guarantee that other participants will not know who else is participating. Participants will be asked to waive confidentiality. There is a potential risk that the check-ins and discussion may evoke emotional responses. Because of the voluntary nature of this study, participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. The benefit of this study is that it will help student affairs professionals understand the phenomenon of social justice fatigue and strategies employed to combat it. Criteria for participation includes:

- At least 5 years of experience most masters degree
- Currently working in student affairs
- Working with a population on equity and inclusion work that aligns with one's identity

Please contact me at sfurr@luc.edu if you have questions and/or would like more information about the study. If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please complete the pre-study assessment here tinyurl.com/SJFatigue as soon as possible. I will select participants based on the information provided on the forms and will contact folks by August 25 to provide instructions to set up participation in the online community.

Thank you so much,

Sara Furr

Doctoral Student in Loyola University Chicago's Higher Education Program
Director, Center for Identity, Inclusion and Social Change at DePaul University

APPENDIX B
PRE-STUDY ASSESSMENT

The following information will be included in the online form for participants to complete. All information shared in this form will be kept confidential.

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Email _____

Years of experience (post masters degree) _____

Job Title _____

Please describe the nature of your role _____

Please describe your social identities _____

For the purposes of this study, I am defining social justice fatigue as “the physical, mental, and/or emotional toll incurred through advocating for social change while serving as an agent of an institution in higher education.” Please describe how social justice fatigue currently shows up in your life.

How do you feel?

- Physically
- Mentally
- Emotionally
- About your job

What strategies do you currently employ to combat social justice fatigue?

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Wellness Interventions for Social Justice Fatigue Among Student Affairs Professionals

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Sara Furr, (a doctoral student in Loyola University Chicago's Higher Education Program) for a dissertation. Sara is working under the supervision of Dr. John P. Dugan, Professor in the Higher Education Program at Loyola University Chicago.

You have volunteered to participate in this study because you identify as a student affairs professional experiencing social justice fatigue. You are agreeing to participate in a thirty-day online community. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the construct of social justice fatigue as experienced by student affairs professionals (SAPros). Additionally, this study will allow participants to explore strategies they employ to cope with social justice fatigue. Using participatory action research allows for the creation of a community to construct this knowledge while also having a direct impact for participants and the field.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a thirty-day online community. During those thirty days, participants will complete daily check-ins and participate in at least one virtual hangout with the larger community. Participants will receive a full outline of the study expectations. The content provided in your daily check-ins will be confidential but your participation in the study will not be confidential.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. However, because questions may elicit emotional reactions, you should be aware that questions will be asked about your identities, your wellness, and challenges you face. You are encouraged to consider that data from the study will be personally identifiable to you. As such you should consider the impact of sharing the details you approve in the final product and the effects this may have on your life.

There are direct benefits to you from participation as the daily check-ins ask you to reflect regularly on your current experiences as well as implement daily activities to mitigate fatigue. Additionally, participants will have an opportunity to inform how the findings of this study can be used in the future.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality will not be provided to you as a participant. All information collected in the interviews will be tied to you by name. It is the intention and desire of the researcher to

accurately represent your responses and participation. A copy of all final materials will be shared with you prior to its finalization or publication. You will be given the opportunity to correct, clarify, and/or request any element be omitted from the final version. Additionally, all data and recordings associated with this research will be stored on password-protected computers accessible only by the researcher (Sara Furr) and her faculty advisor (Dr. John Dugan). All of these materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research project, feel free to contact Sara Furr at sfurr@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. John Dugan, at jdugan1@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
STUDY EXPECTATIONS

As a participant in this study, you are being asked to enroll in a virtual online community for 30 days. You agree to doing the following and completing daily check-ins:

1. Commit to 30 minutes of physical activity or movement 5 times a week.
2. 10 minutes of personal development a day (books, podcast, etc)
3. Each day participants will check in on the Sakai Project Site in the following areas:
 - a. Did you meet your goals for today? What were they?
 - b. What type of internal resistance did you face today?
 - c. What was your biggest external challenge today?
 - d. How do you feel ...
 - i. Physically?
 - ii. Mentally?
 - iii. Emotionally?
 - iv. About your job?
 - e. To what extent did you feel the need to address the ways in which you felt? If you did feel that need, what strategies did you use?
4. Participate in at least 1 group meeting using google hangout.

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Sara Furr is a social justice educator and higher education scholar practitioner. Over the past 10 years as a professional in Student Affairs, Sara has been actively engaged in all aspects of college life and has specifically lead and served in the functional areas of residential life and housing operations; multicultural affairs and intercultural development; and judicial programs. Sara holds her PhD in Higher Education from Loyola University Chicago. She received her bachelor's degree in public policy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and masters of education in higher education and student affairs from the University of South Carolina and a masters in urban community development from Loyola University Maryland. Sara has presented and published on topics such as identity development (specifically multiracial identity and Asian Pacific American identity), critical leadership pedagogy, retention and persistence initiatives, and power, privilege, and oppression.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL SHEET

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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