

**From *Reflection in Action: A Guidebook for
Student Affairs Professionals and Teaching Faculty***

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Chapter 9

Moving From Social Justice to Social Agency: Keeping It Messy

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Think of a time when you heard someone use words or act in a way that was oppressive regarding race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, dis/ability, nationality, or another social identity. Yes—really—we are talking to you, the reader. Do you have a situation in your mind? What was it? How did it make you feel emotionally? Physically? Was the thing said or done about you or someone else? What did you do in the moment? What did the people around you do? About an hour later did you think, “I really wish I had said. . . .”? What did you feel good about in terms of your response?

Recognizing social injustice versus acting on that injustice are two different, albeit related things. We have both wished we had handled something differently at various points in our lives. Penny worked in student and academic affairs for 10 years after her master’s and before starting her PhD and becoming a higher education and student affairs faculty member. Brittany was a master’s student concentrating in student affairs with a graduate assistant position in a

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multicultural scholars program as we started writing this chapter. Now, as a graduate, she is excited to start the next stage of her life as an Upward Bound math and science counselor at The University of Pennsylvania. Throughout our careers, we have seen oppressive comments, actions, policies, and procedures happen every day on our college campuses and it's *not* okay. Simultaneously, colleges and universities are places of learning and growth; we cannot know what we do not know, so we must continue to teach and learn. As such, we argue that campuses need to foster environments that encourage learning so we may move from understanding notions of social justice to acting as social agents for change as we (students, administrators, staff, and faculty) directly address issues of inequity, discrimination, and oppression.

The term *social justice* is used in higher education and student affairs, but often not defined. We appreciate Lee Anne Bell's (2010) definition as she talks about social justice both as a process and a goal. She states,

The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live. These are conditions we wish not only for our own society but also for every society in our interdependent global community. (p. 21)

The American College Personnel Association's (ACPA) *Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards* (2006) echoes this sense of agency and states, "student affairs professionals . . . have a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of the communities in which they live and work and to act as advocates for social justice for members of those communities" (p. 5).

While many of us may have good intentions around issues of social justice, we ask you—and ourselves—Do we always act as advocates and agents of change in front of and behind closed doors? Do we take our knowledge gained through research, theories, and personal experiences and put it into practice as we act as agents of social change on a daily basis?

This chapter discusses the transition of individuals from aligning with a group, cause, or reading for a class that is "socially just" to acting as social agents as reflected in the ethical standards for the field. First, we talk about why this shift is imperative for the field. Next, we share the "Three *Ds*: Dialogue, Disregard, and Dissonance" as they relate to interactions between people in the field. Finally, we offer case studies that connect in-class and out-of-class experiences in the field as well as a few discussion questions in the hopes that they will be useful as we interrogate the complexities of moving from thinking about social justice to acting as social agents of change through our own spheres of influence.

Why Social Agency in Higher Education and Student Affairs?

Why is acting as a social agent around issues of social justice important for the field of higher education and student affairs? Oppression across race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, age, nationality, size and additional social identities – and the intersections of these identities—continue to exist in our institutions and society at large. For example, students walking into a classroom laboratory at Central Michigan University found four nooses hanging

from the gas lines in the ceiling—later determined to be deliberately placed by a 28-year-old male engineering student and declared a “racist act” by Michigan State Senator Hansen Clark (CNN, 2007; Defaultuser, 2008; Monacelli, 2007). Rutgers University first-year student Tyler Clementi committed suicide in September 2010 after his roommate Dharun Ravi used a webcam intentionally placed in his residence hall room to view and post online Tyler having sex with another man. Ravi was convicted for this hate crime and, after sentencing, apologized (*New Jersey v. Dharun Ravi*, 2012). In another example, George Huguely was convicted of killing ex-girlfriend Yeardley Love, a University of Virginia lacrosse student-athlete, in a domestic violence attack in the University Corner district in Charlottesville, Virginia, after drinking heavily (*Commonwealth of Virginia v. George W. Huguely, V.*, 2012). Two years previously, Huguely had been arrested for public drunkenness and resisting arrest outside the Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity house at Washington and Lee University where police had to tase him to subdue him.

These incidents connect issues of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class—to name a few. Each of these incidents is also ensconced with issues of power, privilege, oppression, violence, perceptions of masculinity, fear, crisis, public shame, intimidation, threats, residence life, Greek Life, athletics, classrooms, technology, alcohol, and/or myriad issues all too familiar to practitioners and scholars in the field of student affairs. Further, each of the three cases is embedded with the complexities of murder, suicide, and death of college students (for more information see *College Student Death* by Cintron, Weathers, & Garlough, 2007).

The incidents operate at pervasive levels across individuals, institutions, and society during a time when our campuses are becoming increasingly diverse (Rhu, 2010). For example, one to two million additional young adults will seek access to higher education and a large proportion of potential students will be students of color from low-income families (Carnevale &

Fry, 2001). This group of students wants access to higher education although will continue to face inequities due to the social context in which they live (Carnevale & Fry 2001). In terms of gender, the percentage of degrees conferred to women has increased over the years (Ropers-Huilman, 2002) yet a gap remains in terms of the disparities across institution type and degree program (Allan, 2011; Pasque & Errington Nicholson, 2011). Further, millennial students of color; multiracial students; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students in our institutions have similarities and differences from majority students that are important for student affairs professionals to understand. Bonner et al. (2011) discuss the complexities of these similarities and differences in *Diverse Millennial Students in College: Implications for Faculty and Student Affairs*.

With the increase in diversity across college campuses, the continuation of blatant hate crimes and murders, and subtle exclusionary and silencing tactics (which we discuss below), we argue that institutions—and individuals within institutions—cannot continue to operate from the same dominant paradigms that have perpetuated oppression for centuries. Change is needed and students, faculty, staff, and administrators are in a position to help make such change. We take cues from Robert Reason and Tracy Davis (2005) when they state that

Ultimately the development of social justice allies must result in action that upsets the status quo – the dominant ideology and culture that maintains social inequality (Bergerson, 2003; Goodman, 2001). The status quo can be maintained consciously through active reinforcement as well as unconsciously through a lack of action. Failure to take action that upsets the status quo therefore maintains the dominant ideology. Thus, the development of social justice allies must focus on the translation of attitudes into action if anything is to change. (p. 7)

Reason and Davis specifically address “allies” who are people with agent identities—people in groups that have unearned privilege (e.g., with gender, agents would be men)—who take action to create spaces of inclusion. Social change and agency are also important for people with target identities—people in groups that have been disenfranchised, exploited, and systemically oppressed (e.g., with gender, this would be women and transgender people). For more information on social categories, classifications, and structural inequalities, see Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey (2010).

Reason and Davis (2005) also stress the importance of recognizing the conscious and unconscious as we translate attitudes into action. As such, we challenge you—and ourselves—to examine what oppression and discriminatory acts on college campuses are conscious and easy to see *in addition to* what may be currently unconscious, difficult to identify, or identified and articulated by our peers.

The Three Ds: Dialogue, Disregard, and Dissonance

The two of us have spent many hours over the past year discussing the content for this chapter, the complexities of our own social identities, social in/justices we have experienced in student affairs graduate programs and in various college environments, numerous readings and research related to these topics, hopes for practitioners in the field of student affairs, and what we want to say to you, the reader, that might potentially be beneficial. Our conversations have been fun, difficult, and emotional. As we described our experiences to each other, tears were shed, arms were flying through the air for emphasis, and we may have even slammed a hand on the table once or twice to stress a point. Our conversations were definitely “messy” as we waded through different topics and described experiences that were difficult to grasp and unpack. Even though it

was messy, it felt good to come to a place of understanding and acceptance as we explored the complexities of the issues in our lives.

We have identified the concepts of dialogue, disregard, and dissonance as important to our conversation about agency and to the case studies and discussion questions that we offer at the end of the chapter. We discuss briefly “Dialogue, Disregard, and Dissonance” in the sections below.

Dialogue and Disregard

Penny’s research shows that if you do not conform to the dominant discourse in higher education dialogues then your ideas may be disregarded and relegated to the margins of the conversation (Pasque, 2010). Specifically, your voice gets silenced either by being skipped over by facilitators and/or not appearing in final reports. This sense of disregard happens to people of color, women, and community partners to institutions—no matter what the topic. In addition, this disregard happens when anyone, including people of target *and* agent identities, talks about moving from social justice to a place of action, advocacy, and social change. So, imagine that you are (or maybe you really are) a Latina graduate student with a voice of advocacy working to make change in higher education in a way that disrupts the status quo; you will be disregarded in a quadruple manner according to this study!

We have noticed that one way to disregard and silence perspectives of (a) people from target identities or (b) people with ideas that are not in the majority whether from target or agent identities, is by asking people to conform to “civil” discussion and to display “civility” when engaged in difficult dialogues on campus. This problematic request may be a bit more of an

unconscious issue for some readers, so stick with us while we make this point and see what you think for yourself.

For example, in their chapter “Incivility on College Campuses,” Brent Paterson and William Kibler (2008) define *incivility* as negative behavior including violence, hazing, student protest, and celebratory riots. They argue that “if higher education has a role in developing the values of a younger generation, then higher education needs to address incivility and provide direction to assist this generation of college students in becoming useful citizens” (p. 178). In another example, Joshua Hayden (2010) in “Developing Civility at the Deepest Levels of Difference” through religious pluralism on campus defines a civility framework as building “teamwork skills based on common agreement and accountability” (p. 23). In a third, wide-reaching example, ACPA’s 2012 convention planning team came up with the theme “Create Possibilities” with three critical issues for exploration, growth, achievement, and preparation for life’s work. The third of these issues is “civility on campus” including addressing violence in face-to-face and virtual communities (ACPA, 2012, para 7). We agree with these authors that violence and hazing is not acceptable and needs to be addressed, as indicated in our contemporary examples of oppression on college campuses above. We also support various notions of teamwork. However, forms of student protest have been found to support democratic aims, student development, and digital age democracy (Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009). Further, we argue that common agreement may not necessarily be the desired goal as it often asks people to conform through mediation and give up some aspects of self or of the argument for the sake of the larger group. In this way, some conceptualizations of civility argue more for the “melting pot” idea of diversity where all elements in the pot melt and fuse together (i.e., assimilation) versus the “mosaic” concept where people maintain unique identities and also

become a rich part of the diverse and larger whole. In addition, accountability in higher education can often serve as a (self-) surveillance technique of control within the current era of conservative modernization and academic capitalism (Gildersleeve et al., 2010); people in power get us to monitor each other in terms of conformity and therefore not interrogate the roots of power and oppression.

The words *civility* and *incivility* also suggest a binary. We ask: Are issues and actions around social justice on campus always so binary? Are attitudes and actions so easily demarcated as “good” versus “evil,” where civility is good and incivility is evil? Who determines such “good” values? What should be agreed upon in terms of civility, and by whom? And what is “useful” for “citizens” on campus (and our hope is that this term *citizen* from Paterson and Kibler [2008] includes the undocumented and international students on our campuses as full members of our communities).

Let’s break down this concept a bit further with another example: Were you “Team Jacob” or “Team Edward” if you read the *Twilight* (Meyers, 2005) books or watched the movies? The characters, and behaviors of these characters, were complex as they connected numerous issues across race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, sexual orientation, indigenous culture, post-colonialism, and more. Neither Jacob nor Edward necessarily embodied pure good or pure evil, yet *Twilighters* (not limited to tweens) created a false dichotomy as though you had to choose which man to celebrate and which to reject.

We see civility in a similar manner—the labeling of certain language or nonverbal behavior as “civil” limits the parameters of verbal and nonverbal behavior to dominant paradigms and perspectives originally defined by people with agent identities. It is used to regulate discourse. We use our own selves as examples in this instance. When in a heated

conversation, Penny's arms and hands will probably become expressive as she talks; they will flail around in a descriptive manner and she is often asked if she knows American Sign Language because of this nonverbal behavior. Penny also comes from a family (half Sicilian and half Italian) that yells, so the raising of voices is not uncommon nor is it taken as a personal attack. When Brittany is in a heated conversation, she often gets categorized as the "angry Black woman" (ABW) if her voice is even just mildly raised about a controversial issue—particularly around the topic of race. If Brittany's hair, which is natural, is in curly coils or straightened with a flat iron on that day, then she is perceived differently based on her appearance. And, what if one of us sheds a few tears? This verbal and nonverbal behavior certainly does not fit within traditional "civil" dialogue as defined by dominant culture, may create dissonance in the listener if he or she is not familiar with these forms of animated communication, and there are professional and personal consequences to the speaker if we do not conform. It is messy.

Dalia Rodriguez (2011) points out "silence and silencing are gendered, raced and classed. People of color are often silenced by the dominant majority who maintain racial hegemony" (p. 112). As a strategy for survival, people of color have developed what W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) terms *double consciousness* where they need to understand the perspective of both agents and targets. "Masks of survival," or masking inner selves to not show inner feelings, has also been a way to defend against racist educational institutions and serve as a means of self-protection (Montoya, 2000; Rodriguez, 2011). Agents are only required to understand the perspective of agents; understanding of people in various target identities across race, ethnicity, nationality, class, ability, sexual orientation, and so on, is optional. Yet, we have heard White people say, "I don't want you to wear a mask" as a way to try to include student affairs colleagues of color in the dialogue. But, is that invitation genuine and realistic? Can Brittany really drop the mask if

her current behavior is already defined as an ABW even though anger is a legitimate response to marginalization (Linder & Rodriguez, 2012)? Or, will this be identified as a form of “incivility” where she will be disregarded and silenced in the conversation? Will the listener invite the mask to be dropped but then feel a sense of dissonance or uneasiness if the mask is truly dropped?

Again, we ask, whose *civility* are we talking about when we use this word? By using civility as an organizing rule, we automatically exclude comments and voices from public view that fall outside dominant notions of civility. Notably, can there even be dissent to the word because who would argue against civility and for incivility? Asked another way, whom are we consciously or unconsciously including or excluding through what we may perceive as benign language?

Our colleague Karen Myers (2010) asks us *not* to think about inclusion, but to consider “Have you excluded anyone today?” (p. 16). We ask you—and ourselves—whom have I excluded through my verbal and nonverbal behavior? And, to embrace what we may define as messy and uncomfortable in dialogue in order to truly engage with people different than ourselves so we may move from understanding notions of social justice to working as agents of social change.

Dialogue and Dissonance

In an effort to actively encourage inclusion, we argue for expanded notions of dialogue not limited to dominant conceptualizations of civility. We understand that this might make some people feel dissonance and/or uncomfortable. Other people may feel extremely comfortable in this expanded and inclusive notion of dialogue. As such, if you experience dissonance when

talking and acting around issues of social justice then we say to you: Great! This means you are pushing on your own “learning edge” or “getting messy.”

As Pat Griffin (1997) points out, the boundaries of our comfort zone are our learning edges. When we find ourselves at the limit of our comfort zone, we are in the best place to expand our understandings, take in different perspectives, and broaden our awareness. Learning edges are often signaled by feelings of annoyance, anger, anxiety, surprise, confusion, or defensiveness. This feeling of what we call “dissonance” may happen when members of your group are not conforming to notions of civil discourse. It may happen when a student in your class becomes what you may label as an ABW, flails arms around, cries in class, or is silent.

When you are feeling dissonance it is important to figure out why, learn from it, and push on your own learning edge. We also think it is important to do this without falling off the edge! If you fall off the edge then you stop engaging in the dialogue, learning from the conversation, and moving toward action. For example, Penny has seen this in her Diversity in Higher Education course when students mentally “check out” or stay silent as they think through a difficult discussion around their target and/or agent identities. This can be a place of perceived safety. Yet, if you continue to stay in this checked-out space and spin in your head on an issue, then you have the potential to remain stagnant. Consider, what is it that you are spinning on? The dominant messages told to us in society or by role models in your life? A new conceptualization of the issue? A comment said by a peer in your class? What are the implications for you to continue to spin in this place and not explore the complexity of the issue and learn from it? What are the implications if you spin on a place of fear and dissonance without working with your support systems to figure out how to unpack the issues? Who will benefit or suffer if you engage in dialogue with the group—people from target or agent identities?

We certainly do not want you to fall off the edge; and, as Chris Linder and Katrina Rodriguez (2012) found, it is important to provide safe spaces and programs for activists to explore their multiple identities and understandings about systems of power and privilege. We also do not want to confuse safety with comfort (Griffin & Ouellett, 1997). Dissonance can be a good thing as learning is not always comfortable within a safe environment. We ask you—and ourselves—to stay “checked in” and engage in the dialogue or step out, process with a peer, counselor, or facilitator, and then re-engage next time the group is together. In this way, pushing on this learning edge may help you/us to understand issues of social justice in a different way and figure out what this means as you move toward social agency.

On a related note, Bobbi Harro offers the cycles of socialization (2000b) and liberation (2000a) which are useful when exploring dissonance and how to move to a sense of agency. The cycle of socialization process within a culture is “*pervasive* (coming from all sides and sources), *consistent* (patterned and predictable), *circular* (self-supporting), *self-perpetuating* (intra-dependent) and often *invisible* (unconscious and unmanned)” (2000b, p. 15). As such, dominant perspectives are reinforced through institutional and cultural messages, which result in dissonance, silence, collusion, ignorance, violence, and internalized patterns of power. At this point, we have a choice to reflect on our own socialization process and do nothing – and thereby perpetuate the status quo – or make change by raising consciousness, interrupting patterns, educating ourselves and others, and taking action in various manners.

Harro’s (2000a) cycle of liberation regarding individual, collaborative, community and culture change requires

a struggle against discrimination based on race, class, gender, sexual identity, ableism and age—those barriers that keep large portions of the population from having access to

economic and social justice, from being able to participate fully in the decisions affecting our lives, from having a full share of both the rights and responsibilities of living in a free society. (p. 450)

Such liberatory and emancipatory perspectives may happen as you engage in dialogue, experience dissonance, then choose to interrupt dominant paradigms of oppression through your work in higher education and student affairs. These changes may be done in front of or behind-closed-doors through individual actions and institutional programs, policies and procedures. We encourage you to explore these cycles if you have not done so already. There are additional models for dialogue and change that may be useful such as the intergroup dialogue programs at institutions across the country which are described in *Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues: Bridging Differences, Catalyzing Change* by Kelly Maxwell, Ratnexh Nagda, Monita Thompson and colleagues (Eds., 2011).

Case Studies

We ask you, and we ask ourselves, how do we take the conversations about social justice in classrooms and professional development workshops to a place of action in the field? How do we use what we have learned in dialogue with each other and transfer it to our work in a way that moves us from teaching and learning about the importance of social justice to actually engaging as social agents of change? We offer these case studies as a way for you to consider different scenarios, engage in dialogue, and explore your own answers to these questions.

The case studies and discussion questions focus on student affairs graduate students in the classroom and new professionals outside the classroom. They also move from more dualistic

thinking to multiple perspectives. We utilized Broido's Model of College Student Ally Development (Broido, 2000; Broido & Reason, 2005) as we developed the case studies.

Case Study One

Faculty and Students in the Classroom

It is the 35th hour that I have spent in the Diversity in Higher Education graduate course with 19 of my peers and Dr. Pasque. The discussions have been pretty intense. So far we have explored social identity, personal narratives around identity, theories of oppression and privilege, the cycle of liberation and oppression, and numerous other topics that have helped to give me some language to give to things that I was thinking about. We have also engaged in a number of different experiential learning activities including the culture box, who is here, privilege walk, caucus groups, and fishbowls. Today the exercise is called "cross the line." Dr. Pasque reads a statement about the readings, movies, and discussions from throughout the semester. After hearing the statement, I have to stand on the "yes" side of the room or "cross the line" and stand on the "no" side of the room. After we choose a side, we discuss why we are on the side of the room that we chose. Sometimes I agree with people who are on the same side as me and sometimes I don't, which is odd because we both are on the same side of the line. This definitely shows me that I can agree with people by saying "yes" to something, but I may agree for a very different reason than they agree with it.

There was one point in the discussion that I felt pretty surprised with my own response. About ½ way through the list, Dr. Pasque said, "race and ethnicity should be taken into consideration in college admissions processes, yes or no?" I picked "yes" and talked about how I

think people have not had the same educational experience in school or at home before getting to college. I also said that if there was an equal playing field, then we would not have to take race into consideration however, at this point, we should take it into account. Some people agreed with me and some disagreed. It was a really deep discussion.

Next, Dr. Pasque asked, “I support Affirmative Action, yes or no?” This is where I was so surprised! I switched sides and moved to the “no” side because I have never supported Affirmative Action. A lot of people switched sides from “yes” to “no” or vice versa. I switched sides because, for me, I don’t want someone to think that I got into college because I’m Chickasaw and because of Affirmative Action. I want people to think that I deserve to be here just like everyone else. We discussed the complexities of the issue and of the power of language. We also talked about how Affirmative Action policies are often not understood completely – I have to say that I didn’t really understand it. From what I understand now that we had the discussion, it means that people *do* have to meet the standards of the institution and then, when there are too many qualified applicants, admissions officers must decide who should be admitted to the college, who should be wait listed and who should be denied. At this point in time, admissions no longer awards people “points” but they consider the applicant in a holistic way. They consider if the student was a leader, is a legacy, is a student of color, did community service, grew up in an urban or rural environment, and a number of other factors. I think the term “Affirmative Action” is not really understood and people make assumptions that someone does not deserve to be at the institution because of the color of their skin.

Dr. Pasque then asked, “What about gender?” “What about class?” “What about learning, physical, or psychological dis/abilities?” We all pretty much stayed on same side of the line if the question was about race, ethnicity, gender, or class. But, when we got to various abilities, then

people switched sides, talked about the American Disability Act, the shootings on college campuses, and the conversation continued to get messy!

Case Study One: Discussion Questions

- What happened in this class?
- Why do you think some students switched sides after hearing the words “Affirmative Action”? What if the person who switched sides was from a target identity? An agent identity?
- How do language impact social constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, ability and other social identities?
- What is your definition of *affirmative action*? What is your institution’s definition? What is the legal definition of *affirmative action*? What physical reactions to do you have to the term *affirmative action* if any?
- What is the responsibility of institutions to recruit and provide support services for students with varying abilities? What is the value in hiring a staff that is reflective of students in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, etc.?
- What can you do in front of and behind-closed-doors (i.e. designing programs, developing policies, determining hiring practices, hiring student staff, selecting grant recipients) to support students of color in a way that moves from the cycle of socialization to the cycle of liberation? Women and transgender students? Students with varying abilities?
- What can you do in front of and behind-closed-doors (i.e. recruiting, hiring, sustaining, and daily practices) to support administrators of color in a way that moves from the cycle of

socialization to the cycle of liberation? Women and transgender administrators?

Administrators with varying abilities?

Case Study Two

Students Outside the Classroom

“Ghetto, loud, uneducated, bossy, nagging, complaining, needy, nigger.” I could not believe that he just used all these words to describe me as a Black woman. “Intelligent, kind, resourceful, opinionated and determined” sound like a better fit for me. The person on the other side of the table at the restaurant after our student development theories class is not a bigot who wanted to cut me down. He is Black and a “friend” who wanted me to know how he felt about most Black women. This is completely shocking to me that he could share these thoughts with me so freely and think that I would not be hurt or offended by them. As he realizes his remarks cut me deeply he says, “But you are the exception”. Out of shock and frustration I laugh and try to help him understand that I am not the exception out of millions of Black women and how hurtful it is to hear him say such degrading things about us.

I think about my mother, grandmother and a host of friends and family, all Black women who have impacted my life. I think about their strength, dedication, and perseverance in a world where oftentimes they finish last. I think about my friend’s mother, who is Black, and how she might feel about the harsh comments her son just made about her and her counterparts. I hurt for him, myself, and hurt at knowing these and similar conversations are happening on college campuses across the country.

As I explain why these accusations aren't true and are very hurtful, I see that while he was engaged in this conversation, he is now starting to disengage. He does not want to hear what I have to say because he has already made up in his mind about what he thinks about Black women. And, of course he shares this with me after class and not in our class so I don't have my friends to back me up. I have some choices at this point. I can throw on my "Angry Black woman" cape and become an example of what he thinks all Black women are. I can show him through my daily example why his claims are off base. Or, I can do a little of both. Why is he putting me in the position to have to make this choice?

Case Study Two: Discussion Questions

- What happened at this restaurant after class? What might you do in a similar situation?
- Is Brittany's friend being "civil" in this conversation? Is she? How do you define "civility" and "incivility"?
- Is it Brittany's responsibility to say something? Nothing? What is her role as an agent of social change in this case? Is it different talking about difficult issues with friends vs. family vs. colleagues? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What are some "hurt words" that you have experienced? What are some hurt words you have heard used in class or on campus? What do you do in these situations? What are the various strategies or ways you might address hurt words?

- Lee Ann Bell (1997) describes internalized oppression and states “oppressive beliefs are internalized by victims as well as perpetrators. The idea that poor people somehow deserve and are responsible for poverty, rather than the economic system that structures and requires it, is learned by poor and affluent alike. Homophobia, the deep fear and hatred of homosexuality, is internalized by both straight and gay people. Jews as well as Gentiles absorb antisemitic stereotypes” (p. 4). In what ways does internalized oppression show up in this case study? In your own personal and/or professional life?
- What action can you take if someone starts to “check out” of the conversation? What action can you take if you notice yourself “checking out”?
- Is it always on the person with the target identity (woman) who is responsible to educate the person with the agent identity (man)? How can people in target identities pick and choose when to educate and when to walk away? How can people in agent identities take action to educate themselves on an ongoing basis?

Case Study Three

In the Profession

I'm so frustrated with the universities policy change! I'm the co-director of a small social justice residential program that has been going well. My boss just told me and my co-director that the nameless, faceless “university” just changed the budget. Instead of employee health benefits coming from the general department fund, they will now be coming from our small program budget. The program will be allocated money to cover this change; however, if a staff

member goes over their allotment, then we will have to deduct the money from somewhere else. If a staff member does not use all their allotment, then we will get to spend this money or the department will take it back at the end of the year.

The co-director and I met with the administrative assistant who is in charge of budget operations to discuss the new policy and the specific procedures that accompany this change. At one point, the co-director says to the administrative assistant “you need to watch Jeffrey’s health expenditures.” Yikes! I could not believe that he said that; to watch Jeffrey’s expenditures and not the other four administrators in the program!!! I guarantee he said that because Jeffrey, a gay man of color, has told us that he has HIV. This is not okay. I’m so mad but really try to hold in my anger. I say – in what I really hope is a fairly factual and calm voice – “I think we need to watch everyone’s expenditures or none of our expenditures”. I can see he got the point. He just said “yeah – okay” and then we move on. Do I bring this up when we are together without our administrative assistant, or just let it go? This job as a co-director is far messier than I ever imagined!

Case Study Three: Discussion Questions

- What happened behind closed doors in this programmatic budget meeting?
- What would happen if the co-director did not say anything and the administrative assistant monitored only one staff member’s health care expenditures? Was the administrative assistant in any position to mention any injustice if s/he noticed it?
- What are the implications of a co-director confronting another co-director in front of a supervisee? Could the co-director who wanted to watch Jeffrey’s expenditures have brought this

up to the other co-director prior to their talking with the administrative assistant? Could the co-director who was angry have waited for another time to say that this was not okay? Should they discuss this later on in a follow-up conversation where it is only the two of them? What are the pros and cons of each situation?

- What would you say in this moment? What might be said in a follow-up conversation with the co-director? With the administrative assistant?
- Is there any conversation about this – or any related topic – to be had with Jeffery? Why or why not?
- If you were the co-director what might you watch for / be alerted to if you were a part of this conversation?
- Who is (or who are) the “nameless, faceless university” administrators in this scenario? At your institution? What are the complexities of being employed as a co-director by the university and using this language?
- How might this new budget policy impact future recruitment and hiring decisions in conscious or unconscious ways?
- Is this an example of moving from social justice to social agency behind closed doors? Why or why not?
- What are the student development theories that might relate to this case study?
- In what ways may exercises presented (in this chapter or elsewhere) or student development theories be reductive?
- In what ways may exercises or theories be useful?
- How do theories of social justice show up in your work in the field?</case>

Conclusion

Carol Gilligan (2011) talks about the importance of action, connection, resistance and the political. We share it with you in the hopes that it inspires you to action, as it did for us:

Voices from the underground, speaking under the sign of repression, marking dissociations that are still tenuous, knowledge that is fragile, reaching out for connections that sustain the hope that a secret underground will become a public resistance. Then a healthy resistance, rather than turning inward and becoming corrosive, can stay in the open air of relationships. And, by remaining political, work to bring a new order of living into the world. (p. 163)

We encourage you not to turn corrosively inward but to take the knowledge from your experiences, dialogues with your colleagues, readings and theories in the field, and case studies offered, and move from a place of understanding social justice to social agency in order to work toward social change on a daily basis. The status quo is not okay and we all (including ourselves) need to engage in lifelong learning on social justice and social agency.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some thoughts from me, Brittany. Some of the best classes and greatest transformative experiences in student affairs occurred when I took off my security blanket and dug deeply into difficult dialogues. I believe it is my duty to do my best to ignite powerful and transformative discussions about issues of race, class, gender, ability, religion and sexual orientation in- and out-of-the classroom. So many times we forget that what we have learned in our classes not only gives us a theoretical framework for guiding students, but also practical application when working with students *and* our peers in front of and behind-closed-doors. Some of my first real discussions about my identity did not happen until my

Masters program. During those discussions, not only was I sharing my stories and working through my own “stuff”, but I was also learning about my peers and the barriers they have faced. We learned to be allies for one another during those times, to get messy in our conversations, and to simply agree to disagree. I believe it was because of those “not so civil” dialogues that we were able to grow together and really become invested in each other’s success and that is the type of student affairs professional I want to be for the students I serve. I hope to foster safe, supportive and open climates that will build the foundation for us to have our own dialogues, for if we are not practicing the art of being a true ally for our peers, how do we expect to be allies for our students and operate as true agents of change?

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