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### Publication Date

2009

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Campus Based Community Centers:  
Havens, Harbors, and Hope for Underrepresented and Marginalized  
Student Success

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Edwina F. Welch

Committee in Charge:

University of California, San Diego

Professor Alan J. Daly, Chair

Professor Carolyn Huie-Hofstetter

San Diego State University

Professor Cynthia Uline

2009

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Chair

University of California, San Diego  
San Diego State University  
California State University, San Marcos

2009

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Professor Alan J. Daly for his unwavering support and guidance as chair of my committee. His support and belief contributed to making the project truly collaborative.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Uline and Dr. Hofstetter. Your patience, guidance, and willingness to ask tough questions led to un-expected growth and confidence.

To Shaun Travers and Emelyn de la Pena- none of this work could have happened without your foundational support and continued striving for all of us to do a little bit better. To Krysti Dezonias thank you so much for your inspiration and editing help.

Staff and members of the Cross-Cultural Center and the Campus Community Centers- your work and continued dedication to social justice and a better campus climate inspire me every day and this project is a direct reflection of your love, support, and tenacity.

Finally, to the participants of the study, thank you for sharing your time, creativity, energy, and heart to this project and the Campus Community Center team.

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UC San Diego Education Studies Methods Conference, February 2007

UCSD Chancellor's Undergraduate Diversity Leadership Institute: An Innovative Model for Promoting Social Justice Action Across and Within Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality, New York, NY. NCORE 2005

A Declaration of Progressive Values: Cultural Centers Uniting for the Common Good, Centering the Debate: How Cultural Centers Impact Campus Climate, Santa Fe, NM NCORE 2000

Cultural Centers on College Campuses: A Model for Long Range Planning, Memphis TN. NCORE 1999

## NON PUBLISHED PAPERS/ CURRICULM

Chancellors Undergraduate Diversity Leadership Institute- year long program co-facilitated between the Cross-Cultural Center, LGBT Resource Center and Women's Center

Setting a Course for Development: an Integrated Developmental Approach to Cross Cultural Groups and Diversity Training (Scott Raub, Edwina Welch, Dorthea Stewart, 1999)

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Campus Based Community Centers:  
Havens, Harbors, and Hope for Underrepresented and Marginalized  
Student Success

by

Edwina F. Welch

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2009  
San Diego State University, 2009  
California State University, San Marcos 2009

Professor Alan J. Daly, Chair

This study explores the relationship between underrepresented and marginalized student college experience and UC San Diego Campus Community Center organizational practice. Retention differences across ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation groups in the higher education sector, and retention and organizational development literature addressing underrepresented and marginalized populations are explored. Using Tinto's (1975, 1993) *Longitudinal Model of Student Departure* and Wenger's (2002) *Communities of Practice* organizational analysis, student ideas of comfort and belonging within a research university are examined. Following an

embedded, case study design (Yin, 2003) interviews, including photo-elicitation, observations and document review chronicled a six-month period At University of California San Diego's Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender, Women's, and Cross-Cultural Center research sites. Six, purposefully selected, frequent users provided information on their organizational experiences in and across the Campus Community Center sites.

The UC San Diego Cross-Cultural, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT), and Women Centers emerged out of historical legacies that left unanswered questions concerning program effectiveness and campus impact. The development of a new organizing construct, the Campus Community Centers, proved important to individual student success. Students were able to find places of personal validation and at the same time connect across historical group boundaries. Findings show that participants engaged with the Campus Community Centers felt a keen sense of belonging and validation from interactions with the sites. Emergent data on engagement, physical setting, relationship building, and meaning making proved salient across all participants. Ultimately, understanding how organizational linkages create student success can align organizational mission and structure to empirical research in the field of retention and student success.

## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

Recent estimates suggest that by the year 2015 underrepresented and non-traditional students will account for two-thirds of the college going population within the United States (Gohn & Albin, 2006). These students represent various backgrounds including ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability. Research also shows half these students will fail to graduate, particularly from four year institutions (Swail, 2003; Siedman, 2005). Given the increased diversity of universities and the disparities in retention and graduation rates for marginalized and underrepresented students, universities should implement policies and practices that ensure these students succeed at rates commiserate with their increased enrollments. To meet this challenge, universities are responding in a myriad of ways including the dedication of resources, space, and staffing to meet specific needs of women, people of color, and people with orientations other than heterosexual. This resource dedication plays a unique and visible role in the college's commitment to diversity.

### *Background to the Study*

The University of California, San Diego has responded to the above challenge with the establishment of resource centers to address underrepresented and marginalized student needs and concerns. With over 23,000 undergraduates, UC San Diego has grown demographically and in academic stature in the past forty years. The campus has been ranked as the seventh best public research institution in the country. UC San Diego is highly selective in its admissions policy with limited demographic representation of students of color (UC San Diego Fall 2006 Enrollment Report).

While women are demographically a larger percentage of the student body, in many majors women are underrepresented. Anecdotal information, using national estimates, puts the UC San Diego LGBT undergraduate enrollment at ten percent (LGBT Campus Climate Survey Document, 2003).

UC San Diego established three departments to impact underrepresented and marginalized student connection to campus. These departments were also charged to address the need for all students and the campus at large to be informed about issues of diversity and social justice. The Cross-Cultural Center grew out of a student protest movement of the 1970's. The Women's Center has its roots in the 1970's women's movement. The LGBT Resource Center, a staff driven initiative, connects its beginnings to national issues of hate crimes and state policy initiatives that gave recognition to domestic partners.

Each Center has emerged out of specific community concern for inclusion and visibility within the larger campus context and structure. While each Center has a unique role working with specific groups, they come together under a shared belief in cross group connection and social justice. This shared belief, of creating spaces of synergy and inclusion, manifest in tangible ways through joint training, events, and staff connection (Campus Community Center Brochure, 2004).

### *Project Overview*

With an eye toward investigating retention and belonging effects for marginalized and underrepresented students' experiences in a university setting, this project proceeds first by setting a basic overview of the project, laying out the purpose of the study, providing a broad theoretical overview of frameworks employed,



establishing research questions, and finally providing a methodological overview of the project. Chapter two delves into the historical emergence of campus community center models, retention theories, organizational development theories, and communities of practice frameworks in detail. After the literature review the conceptual framework, *Navigating Connections: an Interactional Approach*, is offered as a way to negotiate the inquiry. The framework traces student interaction with organizational systems, communities of practice, and larger university structures. Each of the above mentioned areas connect and have a direct bearing on student belonging.

Chapter three sets a methodological course for the inquiry including study logistical considerations, naming the research sites, sampling methods, and participant selection processes. Data collection and analysis methods, which include detailed information on interview/ photo elicitation process, participant observation, and document review protocols, are then presented. Chapter four offers data analysis with an eye toward defining and explaining how participants navigate, understand, and name their experiences within and across the Campus Community Centers and University as a whole. Chapter five explores key considerations and implications for current and future research on increasing belonging for underrepresented and marginalized student success. Research on student development and retention suggests that colleges and universities need to adopt a holistic approach to student development because students are coming to campus as increasingly complex, multilayered individuals. These new students will also engage with an increasingly

complex, multi-layered campus environment (Komives, Dudley, & Woodard, 2003). The above road map explicates the totality of the project.

### *Purpose of the Study*

This study explores the relationship between underrepresented and marginalized student college experience and UC San Diego Campus Community Center practice. Within the review, the emergence of community center organizational models is examined. The proposal then moves to a literature review on retention of underrepresented and marginalized student populations. Retention literature offers one slice of understanding student navigation of perception, interaction, and practice within university structures. Equally salient is the examination of departmental practices on underrepresented and marginalized student experiences. To this end, organizational systems and structure literature is reviewed. A retention- organization, interactional approach is needed to triangulate the complex interplay of individual, group, and organizational practices as they relate to belonging. However, this binary frame does not fully explain the relationship of student experiences to organizational practice. A binary frame also does not uncover the experiential impact of these interactions to retention and graduation of underrepresented and marginalized students. A more holistic model was needed to explore the relationship between retention and organizational practice. The conceptual framework *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 2002) offers an inquiry process to explore retention and organizational phenomena. By investigating identity, meaning making, practice, and community on the individual and organization level, colleges may improve organizational structures as well as increase underrepresented and

marginalized student sense of belonging. Sense of belonging and connection to the university is a tested marker of student retention (Tinto, 1993).

### *Foundational Theoretical Perspectives*

How students belong is the central question of this inquiry. Examining belonging as a research construct involves overlaying various fields of study including retention research, organizational structure and development theories, and personal-environment interaction models. Each of these research areas has its own approach, inquiry lens, and methodological underpinning. In order to investigate student belonging and bring these large conceptual frameworks into manageable focus, Tinto's (1975, 1993) *Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Retention)* is used to navigate and negotiate this inquiry process. Tinto's model allows for the investigation of individual students attributes with institutional practices through an empirical process. This model is seminal to the study of retention and higher education organizational impacts (Siedman, 2005). Because retention, organizational development, and communities of practice are such large constructs in the review, a brief overview is warranted.

### *Retention Literature Overview*

Retention literatures clearly show that college students are influenced on multiple levels. A family of theoretical perspectives has been used to explore retention empirically. Most research on retention and student change comes from sociological and psychological research areas (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006; Seidman, 2005). Inquiries from the field of sociology consider areas such as pre-college background, campus environments, and economic factors when researching retention and

persistence (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Pascarella & Terezini, 2006). Inquiries from the field of psychology explore student identity and attitudinal factors including motivation, self efficacy, and skills and ability when studying retention (Bean, 1982; Pascarella & Terezini, 2006)

Tinto's model ties together the sociological and psychological components of retention research. Tinto theorized that student departure is related to a complex interplay between student background characteristics interacting with institutional personnel and practice. Tinto's framework follows this interplay by connecting student pre-entry attributes to student intentions about going to and staying in school. These internal forces are enhanced or exacerbated by institutional experiences with academic and social factors of the college. This model can help capture the day to day interactions that influence students' sense of belonging or isolation at institutions (Turner, 1994). Tinto's (1993) model offers an interactional, multilayered lens of this inquiry and shows a direct need to investigate the role of organizational practice on student retention.

#### *Organizational Literature Review*

Another link to understanding the interplay of retention and organizational practice involves person/ environment theoretical frames. Pascarella and Terenzini (2006) offer four broad categories in this area including physical models which include architecture (Dober, 1992; Gaines, 1991; Kennedy, 2005), human aggregate models which explore how individuals create and define environments (Holland, 1973, Strange, 2003; Wenger 2002), organizational environment models (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Kuh, 2003; Senge 2006) which explore system influences on

organizations, and finally constructed environments (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole; Stennis-Williams, Terrel, & Hayes, 1988; Strange, 1993) which look at occupant's perceptions of a setting's characteristics (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006, pp. 46-48). These interactional forces are particularly relevant when exploring community practice, student perceptions, and institutional services. Navigating the space of perception, interaction, and practice could lead to a deeper understanding and research point for creating institutional belonging.

#### *Communities of Practice Overview*

Wenger's (2002) conceptual framework offers a way to connect the fields of retention literature, organizational development, and environment impact through a lens of practice. Wenger's frame is particularly relevant in that it discusses the mutual, back and forth relationship building process that is inherent in most communities of practice. *As social beings*, our understanding of individual background characteristics leads to better environments where working and learning can be enhanced.

*Knowledge generation* happens as each person's experience is connected to and understood through the interplay of practice. *Active engagement in the world* speaks to the emergence of global interdependence that will require new skills and abilities. And *meaning making* is ultimately generated and enhanced in community with others (p.48). Wenger equally explores the concepts of participating within multiple communities of practice, interconnections across communities of practice, and boundaries and brokering relationships between communities of practice. Given the above, this inquiry explores individual community center practice (i.e. Cross-Cultural, LGBT, Women's Center) within and across university boundaries.

Synergistically, Wenger's (2002) model speaks to the complexity of community center work. Wenger's framework for communities of practice begins to define and codify language of belonging. In the end, belonging is not a static, individualistic enterprise but happens as a matter of engagement in practice within an organizational context (p.6). Wenger's model offers a way to explore engagement processes in relation to retention and sense of belonging. The concept of practice is not about doing for the sake of itself, but doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do across space and time (p.47). This level of analysis helps situate complex community center work with organizational practices, larger campus structures, and individual meaning making.

#### *Research Question*

Investigating the work of the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers requires linking diverse theoretical perspectives including retention literature, organizational development literature, and the actual practice of the sites. Campus community centers have emerged within the last 40 years as organizational models that may impact retention, particularly for students of color and other marginalized student populations. However, little is known about how structures, processes, and day to day practice contribute to or constrain the creation of belonging for students. Using an exploratory, embedded case study design (Yin, 2003), three research questions are thus explored:

1. How do the daily practices and structures of each UC San Diego Campus Community Center support or constrain a sense of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students?

2. How do the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers support or constrain student connections to a wider university community?
3. In what ways do the Cross-Cultural Center; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered; and Women's Centers organizational structures and practices meet differing underrepresented and marginalized student needs?

### *Methodological Overview*

A postmodernist lens frames this study. Postmodernism “favors a socially constructed education ...where relationships within and across groups are raised to consciousness, deconstructed, and reconstructed, often with the goal of political and social transformation” (Young, 2003, p. 95). The link of deconstructing and reconstructing experiences from the postmodernist view allows for the centering of relationship processes within a case study design.

According to Yin (2003), case studies arise out of a need to understand complex social phenomena (p. 1). A case study approach allows for a better understanding of the particulars involved in student interaction within the physical and affective space of each Center and how this interaction contributes to a sense of belonging (p.1). Case study design is “particularly suited in situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context” (Merriam, 1998, p.29). Also addressing Merriam's case study inquiry considerations, this study used a critical research lens. This philosophical lens allows for viewing action through the lens of social and cultural reproduction. Research was conducted at the Cross-Cultural Center, LGBT Resource Center and the Women's Center at UC San Diego. Three primary research methods were used to triangulate student belonging

and organizational practice: interviews with a photo elicitation process, participant observation, and document review.

Interviews were conducted with frequent site users. Frequency was defined as individuals who interact with the sites three or more times a week for meetings, studying, using resources (i.e. leaving food in the refrigerator), and the like. Interviewing Center users, who participate within and across the sites, aided understanding about the saliency and importance of the spaces to students. Also through the interview process, discernment was possible concerning emotional and structural elements students point to as salient in their sense of belonging within the spaces and the university as a whole.

A photo elicitation method was employed as part of the interview process (Harrington & Lindy, 1998; Hurworth, 2003; Rose, 2001). Use of photography as a research method first found saliency in the field of anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986). In photo elicitation, participants were asked to create artifacts of their experiences within each research site and then reflect on image selection and image groupings. Employing this research method allowed for the elicitation of meaning in the interview process, the exploration of ambiguity, the process of sense making, and the unearthing of the ‘taken-for-granted’ implicit activities that may have been missed with traditional interview and observation methods alone.

Participant observation (Creswell, 2002; Spradley, 1980) was conducted to chronicle how students inhabit each of the research sites. Through participant observation, subtle cues of the importance of the spaces (i.e. lunch conversations, conversations about campus experiences, etc.) were gleaned. Also, participant



observation allowed for direct viewing of physicality with each site (how students moved within and negotiated each environment). Understanding student responses to the Community Centers and how these responses connect to the literature on retention and communities of practice may help increase a sense of belonging across student groups.

Finally, as a tool for understanding organizational practice, a deep exploration of the UCSD Campus Community Center model was completed with close examination of the founding documents for each site. In the document review process, founding documents for each of the Centers were analyzed (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Coding and analysis of documents helped set the historical and social context for each Center's creation as well as provided a structural base for interview question and observation protocol development.

Preliminary findings from earlier inquiries produced strong metaphors of 'house' and 'home.' Investigating *home* led to the review retention literature in relationship to organization practice. Given the emergent nature of campus community center models, exploring the role of Center practice to student connections using a variety of methodological tools was needed.

### *Significance of the Study*

The analysis of practice, meaning, community, and identity; situated within individual, community, and organizational lives, offers a new way to frame community center work. The complexity and multifaceted understanding needed to negotiate, capture, and leverage change in entities like campus community centers needs a theoretical construct that can account for the systemic complexity experienced

within the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers. At every level (individual, community, and organizational), understanding the boundaries within each Center's practice and the brokering across each site for increased student impact is crucial. This understanding must trickle down to actual, practical influence on students.

Understanding how students view their experience in relation to the practices and structures of each Center will help refine and focus attention not on speculation of student needs but on empirical evidence of these needs. This understanding will help each site as well as other campus departments develop organizational structures that serve to increase student sense of belonging and ultimately retention and graduation.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

In the book, *When and Where I Enter: the Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, Paula Giddings (1986) calls for a re-framing of historical and contextual views of American history, where the stories of Black women are central to the inquiry process. As in the title to the book, campus community centers have *entered* colleges and universities as organizational sites, but little is known of the role and impact the sites have on individual students and institutional structures.

Much retention and student development literature focuses attention on the *entry* of the individual student. High school grade point averages and test scores are key indicators of how students *enter* colleges and university campuses. The research sought to explore *why* and *how* students negotiate campus environments. What factors support or constrain their success? Why do students gravitate to certain environments? What is the impact of the student *entry* on these environments? And finally, how does the environment change and grow from the student's *entry*? In order to fully understand the phenomena, issues of organizational and situational context were explored.

The UC San Diego Campus Community Centers were instituted to attend to connectedness and caring on individual, group, and organizational levels. This review will follow the trajectory of the analogy of *entering*. First, background and history of campus community center models is explored. The review then moves to the exploration of retention literature using Tinto's (1993) model of student integration as the lens to understand the negotiation and navigations underrepresented and

marginalized students experience as they move through college and university structures. Next, organizational context is reviewed with particular attention to organizational system linkages to physical and emotional environmental factors regarding place. Finally, the review comes together with the deep exploration of communities of practice (Bliming, 2001; Wenger, 2002) with an eye to exploring the complex, interactional relationship between students and the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers.

### *History of Campus Community Centers*

The emergent nature of campus community center organizational models and the dearth of research exploring the phenomena of community centers highlights the need to chronicle and examine the history of these models. Given this lack of research, exploring UC San Diego Community Center organizational development and impacts on student sense of belonging yielded new insight previously ignored in the study of underrepresented and marginalized student retention literature.

The Cross-Cultural, LGBT, and Women Centers at UC San Diego emerged from a crisis oriented history of grassroots protest and activism. As a result of growth in demographic diversity, demands from LGBT constituents for recognition, and women student's increased agency led UC San Diego to establish the Cross-Cultural Center in 1995, the Women's Center in 1996, and the LGBT Resource Center in 2000. Each of the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers traces its origin to larger, national movements for inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized people within the higher education sector. The next section offers a brief history of growth and development of each center model.

### *Multi/ Cross-Cultural Centers*

During the past four decades, cultural centers have emerged as one response to college student dissatisfaction and departure from university settings (Hord, 2006; Princes, 1994; Young, 1989). Pioneer centers, often ethnic specific, resulted from student protests against negative campus climate and narrow curriculum. These first centers were placed in a variety of campus divisions and departments and were often staffed by individuals with little student affairs or organizational development background (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002). In many cases, these centers were underfunded, understaffed, and physically located on the margins of campus life (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Hayes 1988, Young, 1989).

Out of these origins a variety of loose, organizational structures developed. Based on specific campus dynamics, centers developed either mono-cultural or multicultural emphasis (Castillo- Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Hefner, 2002). Mono-cultural centers were sites for individual ethnic student group programs and services. Offering a variety of recruitment activities, cultural heritage programs, and academic services, mono-cultural centers provided support to minority students to counteract effects of negative campus environments. Most often these programs started as Black cultural centers (Hefner, 2002).

Multicultural centers also developed at this time. Most multicultural centers combined nurturing students of color with the added role of promoting cultural awareness across campus at large. Centers of either emphasis paralleled enrollment increases in students of color college attendance (Princes, 1994). Today over 400

Black and multicultural centers are estimated to exist on college and university campuses (Hefner, 2002, p. 27).

Cultural centers began at a time when universities were experiencing increased enrollments of students of color. As these students arrived on campus, traditional student affairs structures struggled to meet student needs for inclusion and visibility (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Consequently, universities opened offices of multicultural affairs and ethnic specific retention programs like cultural centers. Little is known about the impact and viability of these sites. Much of the material written about centers is limited to practitioner writings (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). This lack of tested models and commonly understood nomenclature impacts centers' ability to improve services and structures as well as to expand partnerships and collaborations to improve campus climate.

#### *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender Resource Centers*

LGBT centers emerged out of community demands for safety and inclusion on college campuses (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Nationally, there exist over 100 such centers on college and university campuses. Across the nation, most centers were established within the last ten years (LGBT Consortium, 2006). The growth of LGBT centers may be attributed to the hate crime and tragic death of Matthew Sheppard which gained national media attention (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). This incident galvanized student activism for the creation of safe space on campuses. The incident also made colleges and universities aware of the need to address safety concerns on campus as well as to institute organizational structures for enhanced educational programs and dialogue around LGBT issues. Sanlo, Rankin, &

Schoenberg note, “LGBT students are arriving on campuses with the expectations that their voice will be heard, their concerns acknowledged, their needs met, and their educational environments welcoming” (p. xv). Research confirms that LGBT people experience, at best, benign and, at worst, hostile campus climates at colleges and universities around the country (D’Emilio 1990; Rankin, 2003).

LGBT center emergence as sites to support marginalized students and for improved campus climate connects directly with literature on retention and belonging needed for student success (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Much like cultural center research, literature on LGBT centers comes mainly from practitioner viewpoints. *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administration* (Sanlo, 1998) and *Our Place on Campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Services and Programs in Higher Education* (Sanlo, Ranks, & Schoenberg, 2002) offer practical advice to universities and staff on LGBT center program development. As confirmed by Tinto and others (Astin, 1983; Gohn & Albin, 2006; Komives, Dudley, & Woodard, 2003; Pascarella & Terezini, 2006), the study of LGBT student experience shows how involvement in college life positively impacts sense of identity and thus relates to retention (Konik & Stewart, 2004). However, little empirical research has been conducted on the effectiveness of programs and services of LGBT centers.

### *Women’s Centers*

Like cultural and LGBT center models, women centers emerged out of a specific societal context. Most centers were established in the 1970’s as an outgrowth of the women’s movement. Like empirical research on cultural and LGBT centers,

there is a lack of research on program effectiveness (Davie, 2002). Today, more than 460 colleges and universities have women centers (Kasper, 2004). General programs and support services offered by the centers include programming, information referral, anti-harassment/ violence against women education programs, and advocacy as the primary work of many centers (Davie, 2002; Kasper, 2004). Within women's centers larger organizational role, tension exists over being sites for service, activism, or both. In *University and College Women's Centers: a Journey toward Equity* (Davie, 2002), echoes of this tension is felt through a myriad of focuses and roles women's centers are asked to play. Structurally, women centers range from student staffed to professionally staffed offices (Bengiveno, 2000). Their mission and scope also vary depending on the campus of origin context, with some serving primarily students, to expanded models that serve students, staff, faculty and surrounding communities (Davie, 2002).

Women's centers are often seen as sites of advocacy around violence and harassment against women, feminist sites investigating patriarchal structures, sites of career development, and sites for women returning to school. Within this structural constraint, many centers are looking for new models of organizing that push beyond the boundaries of a service orientation to a more feminist organizing approach (Stall & Stoecker, 1998). In a feminist approach, creating spaces of safety from which empowered individuals can negotiate identity and plan for systemic change is the central focus.

Empirical research on campus center models and impact is scant, but some common themes do emerge from the literature. Each of the three types of community



centers grew from an identified need for individual constituent groups to find a place of identification and safety on college campuses. As college diversity demographics increased, members from underrepresented and marginalized groups began pushing for more inclusion and representation of different voices, different experiences. This demand for recognition and inclusion led universities to develop organizational structures and practices.

What is unclear is the effect of these structures and practices on individual constituent communities and the campus as a whole. Practitioner literature has begun the process of reviewing and codifying the different types of programs and services campus community center sites provide (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Hayes 1988, Young, 1989). Retention and student development literature is expanding to account for particularities of underrepresented and marginalized student experiences as differentiated across and within groups. Additional research is needed, however, to connect and test the work of campus community centers to empirical evidence of impact and success of underrepresented and marginalized students.

#### *Retention Theories and Models Reviewed*

Retention of college students has emerged as a central concern for colleges and universities across the country (Swail, 2003). One seminal model within retention research is Tinto's (1975, 1993) *Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Integration)* (Siedman, 2006). Tinto's model has six components that interact to influence student integration or departure from college campuses:

- Pre-entry attributes (family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling)
- Goals/ commitments (intentions, goals/institutional/ external commitments)
- Institutional experiences (academic, faculty/staff, extracurricular, peer group)
- Integration (social and academic)
- Departure decisions (Tinto, 1993, p. 114)

As an overarching model, Tinto's model offers a macro approach to navigating the complexity of student departure and the corollary, retention. The model helps investigate the phenomena of departure but often fails to address specific application problems when applied to different sectors of higher education as well as different constituent groups like underrepresented or marginalized student populations (Baird, 2000, Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Tienry, 2000).

As diverse students enter college, universities struggle to put in place organizational structures to meet their emerging needs. Much of the retention research falls into four broad areas: persistence (Rendon, Garcia, & Person, 2000; Siedman, 2005 Tinto, 1993), campus climate (Astin, 1993; Hurtado, Milmen, Allen & Clayton-Powell 1999; Davis, 1998), students' background characteristics (Bean, 1982; Horn, 2006; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Hayes, 1988), and student interaction (Antonio, 2001; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, Ngai & Saenz, 2006). These research areas overlay and connect to Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of *Student integration* under the *Institutional Experiences* section. Given the wide scope of Tinto's (1993) model, focusing on the institutional experiences portion (faculty/staff interaction, extracurricular activities, and peer group interactions) for this inquiry

allows a narrowing of focus. It is within *institutional experiences* that campus community centers negotiate and leverage practice.

As mentioned in the introduction, researchers have sought to understand the dynamics of college student persistence and retention from a variety of methodological practices and disciplines, making retention one of the most studied areas in higher education research (Siedman, 2005). Methodologies employed in retention research are often quantitative in nature and depend on large national data sets generated from university research units (Baird, 2000; Tierny, 2000). Research designs tend to follow a survey format that results in a massive database where information can be reviewed using large variable sets. These national databases are designed to test a wide variety of college going and retention measures including student affective background characteristics and descriptive university characteristics. One example of a large national database is the *Cooperative Institutional Research Program* (CIRP) located at the University of California Los Angeles. Established in 1966 by the American Council on Education, CIRP has surveyed freshmen students for the past forty years.

Most research on retention comes from sociological and psychological academic arenas (Pasarella & Terenzini, 2006; Seidman, 2005). When studying retention, inquiries from the field of sociology consider such areas as pre-college demographics, campus environments, economic factors, policy interventions and organizational factors (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Inquiries from the field of psychology explore student attitudinal factors including motivation, self efficacy, skills and ability. These areas might be called affective and contextual considerations. Berger and Lyon

note students, campuses, education societal role, socioeconomics, policies and legislative interventions also must be considered with studying the complex nature of student retention and persistence (p. 3-5). These large variable interplays also make retention one of the most complex phenomena to study (Siedman, 2005).

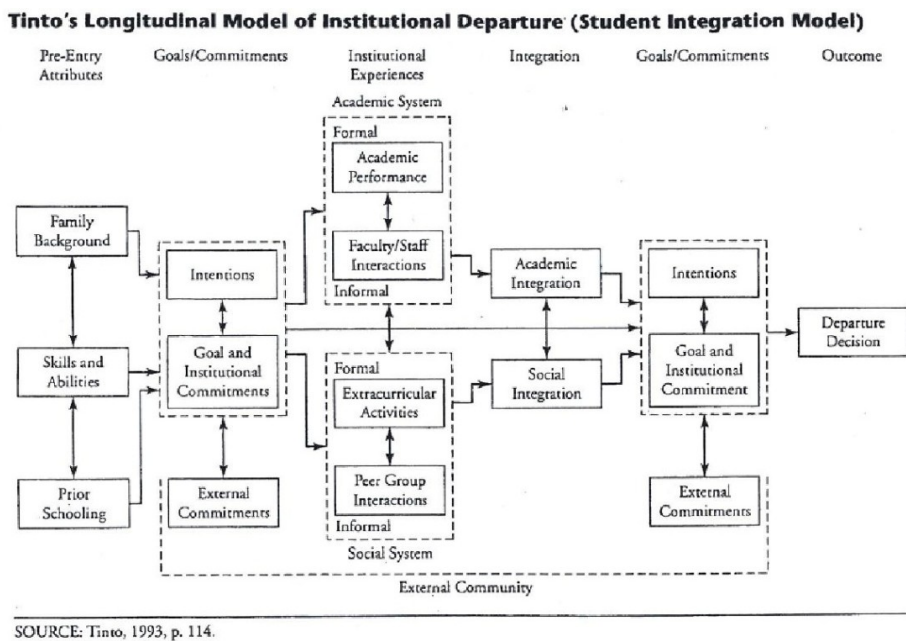
Across academic fields, conceptualizations of retention have been inconsistent (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7). The meaning of terms such as attrition, dismissal, dropout, persistence, retention, stop-out and withdrawal, have shifted over time and are often used interchangeably within the literature. These definitional and research inconsistencies have resulted in an ill-structured problem (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004). Ill-structured problems, in turn, often defy a single solution and require multiple and varied strategies which still may not alleviate the problem in question (p.1). This concern is captured by Spady (1971) in relation to the study of student departure literature.

In an extensive review of early retention literature, Spady (1971) cites categorizations of research from the 1950's and 60's as one area of inquiry needing re-conceptualization. He examined a review conducted by Knoell in 1964 where student departure inquiry was tested from a psychological nature and where four broad categories emerged: 1) *Census studies* which attempted to document the magnitude of attrition within and across institutions; 2) *Autopsy studies* which used self reported data from students on departure; 3) *Case studies* that were generally long-term follow up studies of students regarded as potentially at-risk; 4) Lastly, *prediction studies* which viewed admissions variables to generate prediction success measures (p. 65).

Spady contended that the study of student persistence offered “a variety of distinct approaches lacking an interdisciplinary-based, theoretical synthesis” (p. 64). Further, Spady stated that the literature relied on “correlates without examining the relationship among them or testing for spuriousness” (p. 65). He called for a new line of inquiry grounded in the assumption that departure decisions were interconnected and interrelated (p. 77). Spady’s *Explanatory Model of Departure*, an expanded interpretation of Durkheim’s (1951) work on suicide, initiated the shift toward a more comprehensive and systemic approach to understanding student attrition and persistence (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

*Review of Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Integration)*

One outgrowth of Spady’s 1971 framework was Tinto’s (1975, 1993) *Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Integration Model)*. As seen below, Tinto theorized that student departure is related to a complex interplay between student background characteristics interacting with institutional personnel and practice. Tinto’s framework follows this interplay by connecting student pre-entry attributes to student intentions about going to and staying in school. These student attributes and intentions interact with institutional and external forces which pressure decisions on departure. These forces are enhanced or exacerbated by institutional experiences with academic and social factors of the college.



*Figure 1.* Tinto Student Departure Model

For many years, institutions concentrated on structural elements of diversity, for example increasing the numbers of students of color and women who gained access to university admission (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Orfield, 2001). Research now shows that more is needed to create an environment where diverse students can thrive and succeed (Hurtado et al, 1999; Rendon, 1994). Students bring with them backgrounds, assumptions, aptitudes and attitudes (Tinto, 1993; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2004), and these factors ultimately link to retention and graduation for these students.

Just as there are attributes individual students bring to colleges, universities themselves have specific characteristics and structures that impact students and campus climate. In Tinto's (1993) model, institutional goals and commitments interact with student intentions. It is here where connection and sense of belonging play out on

a day to day, person to person level. It is here where institutional characteristics of individual fit, personal validation, peer interaction, and campus involvement all converge to support or constrain belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students. These interactions either lead to or impede academic and social integration. The next section of this inquiry looks specifically at the above areas as they pertain to Tinto's model.

### *Institutional Characteristics*

Institutions can be seen as having capital (assets) that gets conveyed through the processes and policies of the campus. Orfield, Marin, & Horn (2005) discuss university capital or assets as educational capital (curriculum, academic initiatives and pedagogy), institutional capital (behavior of presidents, deans, faculty), and human capital (admissions, recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff and students (p. 133). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1999) additionally provide a framework for institutions to improve climate and retention for underrepresented and marginalized students. This model has four elements including: 1) an institution's history of inclusion or exclusion of certain communities; 2) the psychological climate of the campus including perception of racial tension; 3) structural diversity elements or the numbers of students, staff and faculty; and finally 4) the behavioral dimensions which include social interaction across race and ethnicity, and classroom diversity (p. 4). Although not explicitly stated in the model, the framework can be extended to include marginalized groups such as women and people with different sexual identities, particularly since these populations are present within any discussion of diversity (i.e. an Asian, lesbian women).

The above elements of the Hurtado et al. (1999) framework connect to the institutional experiences section of Tinto's (1993) model. Institutions need to understand organizational impacts on different populations and manage policies, systems, and interactions to create environments conducive to student retention. For underrepresented and marginalized students, the absence of sufficient interaction is the single most important predictor of pre-graduation departure (Tinto, 1993, p. 75).

Chang (2001) researched institutional characteristics and student interaction variables using the *Input-Environment-Output* (I-E-O) framework developed by Astin (1991). Controlling for entering student characteristics and campus structural diversity, he designed a measure to examine institutional ability to provide opportunities for all students to interact with others from different racial groups. Chang found strong evidence that all students receive an educational benefit on two of four outcome measures: socializing across racial lines and discussions of race in positive educational experiences. He concluded that institutions should enhance efforts within organizational structures for student interaction. Chang's research is particularly relevant to community centers as early mandates call for centers to be a bridge from pre-entry attributes to institutional structures.

#### *Institutional Fit*

Tinto (1993) found that underrepresented and marginalized students tend to face greater problems in meeting academic demands and finding a suitable niche in the social and intellectual life of the college (p. 75). Smedly, Myers & Harrell (1993) and Steele (1999) support Tinto's (1993) findings about the importance of fit, particularly for underrepresented students. Stress and stereotyping by peers show up as two



indicators of retention for students, particularly those of color. Smedly et al. (1993) looked at minority status-stressors and found that all students encounter stress in the transition to college but “minority students may have heightened feelings of not belonging to the university community” (p. 435). Using Hammen, Marks, Mayol, and de Mayo (1985) *Life Events Survey* for college students, Smedly et al. (1993) tested a *Multidimensional Stress-Coping Model* in a single institution quantitative study. They found “chronic role strain coupled with life events, vulnerability to campus climate, and interpersonal tension implicated minority status related pressure “(p. 447). Hammen et al. go on to speculate that negative expectations from white peers, parental expectations, demands from attending competitive universities, and a sensitivity to their *stigmatized special status* as beneficiaries of affirmative action increase status stressors (p. 447).

Several limitations to this study are of note. The researchers did not offer operational or definitional contexts for the *special status* students of color viewed or enjoyed. The authors also had a sample size in the study population that was skewed to majority white students with very small numbers of students of color. While the *Multidimensional Stress-Coping Model* offers a way for understanding stress and retention for minority students, much more empirical evidence and replication of the study is necessary, particularly in light of the multiple identity roles student are entering universities with today (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2004).

Steele’s (1999) research on *stereotype threat* touches on student fit, academic functioning, and social integration. Steele contends that capable Black students’ failure to perform as well as their white counterparts has “less to do with preparation

or ability than with the threat of stereotype about their capacity to succeed” (p. 44). In his experimental study, Steele shows that stereotype threat affects all students, but that Black students have been ”more in the spotlight because they are not just college students; they are on the cutting edge in America’s effort to integrate itself” (p. 45). Steele’s findings mirror the Smedly et al. (1993) stress study. Couple their findings and layer on issues of gender and sexual orientation, and the importance of additional research becomes clear.

#### *Student Validation*

Several researchers view institutional fit from a different viewpoint (Rendon, Garcia, & Person, 2004; Rendon, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). They challenge Tinto’s integrationist acculturation model as not valid to fully and appropriately capture experiences of non-White students. These researchers call for institutions to move from seeing underrepresented and marginalized students through a deficit lens and begin viewing these students’ unique background attributes as assets. These researchers note ideas of language, maneuvering multiple realities and negotiating social, political, and economic hardships as key areas of strength that could be emphasized to validate non-traditional student populations.

In a study of student retention, Rendon (1994) tested a validation model on non-traditional student populations. The study defined non-traditional students as students of color, immigrants, first generation, low social economic status, and non-racial minorities such as disabled students, gays and lesbians, and those in the religious minority (p. 33). Using qualitative measures, Rendon examined the *Transition to College Project*. This project was designed to determine how student

learning was affected by student involvement in academic and non-academic experiences in college (p. 34).

Researchers interviewed 132 first-year students from various sectors of higher education across the country (a community college, a predominately White residential liberal arts college, a predominately Black urban commuter college, a comprehensive state college, a predominately White residential college and a research university). Interviews revealed five important differentials between traditional and non-traditional students:

- 1) Differences in the type of college attended and fear of succeeding.
- 2) Differences in student need for intervention in campus structures.
- 3) First year success was contingent on institutional involvement.
- 4) The most vulnerable non-traditional students transformed into powerful learners through in and out of classroom academic and/or interpersonal validation.
- 5) Involvement in college was not easy for nontraditional students.

Rendon's study showed that students who became involved in the social and academic fabric of the institution appeared to be more excited about learning.

These findings are consistent with Tinto's (1993) academic and social integration components but shift the focus to the vantage point of student experiences. Rendon (1994) offers a practical definition of validation that connects a new model of learning with faculty and staff interaction, creating a validating classroom and fostering a therapeutic learning community.

Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson and Mugenda (2000) provided a similar review of research that looked at validating Black students' experiences on predominantly white campuses and reached analogous conclusions. By understanding the characteristics of entering students and treating these as assets, underrepresented and marginalized students may feel validated and accepted within the university environment. This validation may be enhanced through peer and faculty interaction.

#### *Peer and Faculty Interaction*

Research shows that different types of interaction can produce different results across groups and that peer and faculty interaction are markers for retention. Hurtado and Carter (1996) found that at large, research institutions underrepresented and marginalized students use peer organization membership to achieve personal goals, make sense of campus environments, and to engender a sense of belonging to campus communities. They call for a re-definition of the integrationist perspective to a model that has at its core the process of belonging.

Hurtado, Ngai and Saenz (2006) conducted a study of factors influencing positive interaction across groups. They examined the nationally funded *Diversity Democracy Project*. This longitudinal survey was administered to incoming university students across nine public institutions. The researchers controlled for pre-exposure to diverse others, opportunities in college for enlightened dialogue such as in a classroom, and peer group influences in both formal and informal settings. They found that, across all ethnic/racial groups, the propensity to socialize appears to be one of the strongest predictors of positive interactions across groups after accounting for all other institutional and student-level factors (p. 24). In other words, students who

develop the excitement and skill of interaction have a more positive student experience and better skill development.

Other researchers have reviewed interaction and differential impacts of academic and social experiences across groups (Antonio, 2001; Nora, Cabrera, Hegedorn, & Pascarella, 1996). Antonio found that frequent interracial interaction among students may be more important in developing cultural knowledge than involvement in more formal activities such as cultural awareness workshops (p. 593). Using a large national data set, he determined that interracial interaction has a significant and positive partial correlation to leadership ability and cultural knowledge, after controlling for pre-college and institutional variables.

In contrast to Antonio's (2001) findings, Nora et al. (1996) found that institutional experiences, academic achievement, and external environmental pull factors contribute most to university departure decisions for students of color. They note that the positive effects of informal and formal interaction with faculty and peers does exert positive influence on student decision related to departure, but not enough to negate the negative external pull factors like family responsibility and working off campus. Only for females in the study did positive effects on persistence show in non-classroom interactions with faculty (p.427). Given the time differentials of these two studies, future research could connect demographic shifts and regional complexities to enhance this line of research inquiry.

Nora, Cabrera, Hegedorn, and Pascarella (1996) found a specific connection to faculty interaction and student retention. Similarly, faculty engagement in the classroom and faculty availability for mentoring of students was one of the top

indicators for retention of students and proved empirically relevant for Black students (Tinto, 1993). Brown (2004) conducted a review of the literature on Black student retention and also found evidence connecting faculty engagement with student success. Hurtado, Ngai and Saenz (2006) found similar results. In their study, opportunities for intensive dialogues in class and faculty interest in student development both served to increase student learning as well as foster positive inter-group relations on campus (p.26).

In another study, Hurtado (2001) linked classroom environments to diversity in the success of underrepresented and marginalized students. She found gender and race differences in instructional techniques used by faculty. Women professors were more inclined than their male counterparts to require cooperative learning, experiential learning, and field studies. Faculty of color was more likely to utilize pedagogical approaches that capitalized on the diversity in the classroom (p. 194). In her study, data was analyzed and controlled for various academic disciplines. This study helps show the need for increased diversity in faculty at colleges and universities and the need for more planned interaction within the classroom setting. Community centers can link faculty interaction, through collaborative programs, to student populations in ways that may enhance these services on college and university campuses.

### *Campus Involvement*

Along with peer and faculty interaction, many studies have looked at the concept of formal and informal campus involvement and its relation to retention. Similar to Hurtado and Carter's (1996) findings concerning the importance of student organizations, other authors have found campus involvement a key indicator of

persistence. In one study of 25,000 college students, Astin (1993) found that diversity and multiculturalism affected students positively:

Emphasizing diversity either as a matter of institutional policy or in faculty research and teaching, as well as providing students with curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to confront racial and multicultural issues, were all associated with widespread beneficial effects on student's cognitive and affective development (p.48).

Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez (2004) also found the importance of informal interaction among different groups (p. 17). Gurin's research revealed that group contact did not show appreciative cognitive benefits, but that a specific environment needed to be set up by the institution to get specific benefits. They also found that educators needed to create a meaningful, integrated environment that went beyond simply putting people together in the same classroom.

Each of the above factors- institutional characteristics, institutional fit, student validation, peer and faculty interaction, and campus involvement- are arenas of community center practice and influence. As mentioned in the historical review of community center models, the organizational structures of these sites were created to mediate and negotiate these exact arenas.

#### *Considerations when using Tinto's Model*

Tinto's *Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Integration Model)* is paradigmatic to the study of retention and, while research reviewed here overwhelmingly addresses elements connected to the model, several authors conclude that Tinto's (1993) model suffers from specific limitations. Areas of consideration when applying the model included; higher education sector differences, population

applicably, operational measures and definitions, and lack of methodological differentiation.

Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997), as well as Braxton and Lee (2005), tested the extent of empirical support of Tinto's model components on both multi-institution and single-institution research. Using the tests of result replication and validity, they conclude that certain model components are empirically sound while others garner mixed results (Braxton & Lee, 2005, p. 107). Three components, connected to community center work and the purview of this review, show evidence of impact on student departure decisions and include: 1) the initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration (pre-entry and student intention); 2) the greater the degree of social interaction, the greater the degree of the level of subsequent commitment to the university (faculty/staff interaction, peer interaction, extracurricular activities); and 3) the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college (pp. 115-117). These three areas were verified and shown as empirically sound while other components of the model showed mixed results.

Baird (2000), in a critical review of retention research, indicates questions about Tinto's model's mixed results might stem from "limitations of the model itself, limitations in the operational measures of the constructs, and/or ambiguity in the locus of the models operations" (p. 62). He shows that examination of operational definitions used to study the model empirically reveal an extraordinary range, as cited by Hurtado and Carter in 1996. Baird asserts this diversity may reflect that the model is often tested in secondary analyses of data sets that were developed for other



purposes. Baird calls for expanding retention research into other fields including organizational development where industrial studies can shed light on changing organizational climates (p. 77).

Tierney (2000), taking a different direction concerning Tinto's (1993) model, calls for a move away from quantitative analysis of retention to a more qualitative, discourse oriented approach. He argues that discourse-oriented research must be culturally sensitive or culturally based, preserving the context within which decisions to depart or persist are made (p. 159). Tierney based his discourse-oriented approach on the assumption that when students decide to persist or depart they do so within a socially constructed reality.

The next section of the review begins to unpack the above idea of constructed realities from an organizational development context. As seen in the introduction, student success and sense of belonging, in relation to community center work, is best understood through an interactional, multifaceted lens where the student and the organization connect and change each other in the day to day practices of the sites. In order to negotiate a broad understanding of community center phenomena, a review of organizational literature is warranted.

### *Organizational Development*

Much of the student retention literature calls on universities to examine organizational structure, policy, and practice's influence on underrepresented and marginalized student success (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 2000). Tinto has also

sounded the call for institutions to move from theory to practice with relation to underrepresented and marginalized student success:

There has been little significant development of theory of action that would provide guidelines to institutions of higher education so that they could develop programs, policies and practices to enhance student persistence...the availability of social support in the form of counseling, mentoring and ethnic student centers provide much needed support for individual students and a safe haven for groups of students who might otherwise find themselves out of place... these centers can serve as secure, knowledgeable ports of entry that enable students to safely navigate the unfamiliar terrain of the university (Tinto, 2005, p. 317).

Like Tinto, other authors are investigating belonging through viewing structural and organizational impact. Kuh (2003) offers one such inquiry into university organizational structures. Kuh notes that “organizational theory is a window through which to view the behavior of individuals and groups in the context of complex organizational structures” (p. 270). He contrasts the conventional view of organizations- which are individualized, top down, and control focused- on predictability with *post conventional* organizations, which are inter-dependent, less-structured, relationship centered, and ever changing. The post conventional organization is unpredictable, influenced by external factors, and frequently ambiguous (p. 270). Other authors concur with Kuh’s sentiment regarding the evolution and need for more post conventional organizations (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen, 1999; Senge, 2006).

How does a post conventional organizational view connect to community center work? The next section of the review addresses the above query through five prisms: community organizational environments, diversity organizational frameworks,

systemic process impacts on organization, physical and psychological environments, and communities of practice.

### *Community Organizational Environments*

According to Kuh (2003), post conventional views hold that "colleges and universities are complex, open systems, influenced by external events and changing environments...encouraging the sharing of information within, across, and beyond organizational boundaries" (p. 276). DuFour and Eaker (1998) offer another frame of the post conventional model by contrasting expanded meanings of organization work. Using a K-12 lens, they contend the term *organization* has been defined as an administrative and functional structure, while the term *community* suggests a group linked by common interest (p. xii).

In *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Senge (2006) extends DuFour and Eaker's (1998) notion of community and offers five disciplines or practices that connect ideas about post conventional organizations. Senge explores personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning coalescing into systems thinking approaches. Senge's approach offers tools for individual meaning making and community building that help organizations enhance caring and connectedness. As indicated earlier in this review, caring and connectedness are key attributes to creating a sense of belonging for students (Young, 2003). According to Senge, "systemic structure is concerned with key interrelationships over time" (2006, p. 44). Taking this concept and applying it to higher education, one can speculate that departments within colleges and universities

should understand and leverage relationships to facilitate both internal development and external growth for students as well as the organization.

When you layer diversity and social justice paradigms across units, a conflagration of values, missions, and goals can occur. Campus community centers have missions to work with individuals, groups and the entire organization on diversity, social justice, and retention. Senge (2006), along with other authors, provides a lens to understand the interplay of these relationships as well as ways to interject change and leverage growth within and across units. How do these organizational and community building processes function when layered with issues of diversity and social justice?

#### *Diversity Organizational Framework*

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) offer a conceptual framework that links organizational structural elements to systemic processes. They call for universities to consider *enacting diverse learning environments* by reviewing campus practices through a historical legacy of inclusion/ exclusion, looking at the compositional diversity of campus (demographics), attending to the psychological dimensions of the campus (climate), and lastly reviewing the behavioral dimensions on campus (interaction, curriculum, etc.).

Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) offer a fifth structural dimension, organizational structure, to the Hurtado et al. (1999) framework. With this addition to the model, questions can now be addressed about the undergirding structural dynamics at play when creating diverse organizations. An example of a structural element includes placement of departments within the university structure or how diversity

initiatives become institutionalized. This seems particularly relevant as a research area given that diversity issues are often regulated to the sideline of campus structures and priorities. With the addition of organizational and structural dimensions to the framework of campus wide diversity, units like community centers can now envision their work within the larger university context. As stated in the introduction, Milem et al. (2005) comment that, “One can frequently identify educational innovations, but rarely can one detect structures that link them... the impact of these innovations is isolated rather than pervasive” (p. vii).

*Systems Approaches to Organizational Development*

Allen and Cherrey (2000) offer another link to post conventional organization structures. They connect notions of community building and diversity frameworks with systems thinking within a higher educational context. According to Allen and Cherrey, organizations practice new ways of relating by fostering a trusting environment, developing one’s own emotional intelligence and helping develop it in others, sharing information widely with others, engaging in boundary spanning activities, intentionally creating new relationships, creating relational instead of organizational charts, looking for families of solutions to interdependent problems, and learning to accept the complexities of the system (p. 38-40). For Allen and Cherrey, new methods of student affairs practice involve strategies that facilitate shared learning, influence change in new ways, relate ideas and people in ways that cross boundaries, and use new forms of cohesion that help organizations retain direction without control (p. 21).

Coupling this idea of systemic change with building diverse environments on campuses might give universities a structural process to operationally and structurally infuse diversity. Murray (2003) offers a similar lens when viewing “complexity” from a social science inquiry perspective. Murray contends that, in networked organizations, units are coupled with linkages that range from strong to weak and that change over time given the context and situations.

Following Murray’s (2003) notion of network strength, Allen and Cherrey (2000) propose six characteristics of a network that lead to more effective operations and relationships within organizations. The six network characteristics are:

1. Networks can only be understood from the perspective of the whole system.
2. Networks create blurred boundaries in organizations.
3. Networks behave in non-linear ways.
4. Networks are always in dynamic flux.
5. Network systems have complex complexity
6. Networks can be influenced but they cannot be controlled.

What ultimately holds a network together is a vision and a sense of shared purpose. Each organizational perspective is multilayered and deals with how the individual, communities, and organizations “come to know what they know and thus become effective and valuable” (Wenger, 2002, p. 8).

Part of the higher education diversity disconnect might stem from how different units perceive their roles within a larger structure. The shift to more caring and connected organizational frames are the hallmarks of Senge’s (2006) disciplines, Dufour and Eakers (1998) learning communities, Hurtado et al. (1999) enacting

diverse learning environments, and Allen and Cherrey's (2000) systems approach. These organizational theories focus on ways of moving organizations from conventional to post conventional modes of working. As stated earlier, campus community center models function within the interaction of all these approaches on the macro and micro level. Adding an additional level of analysis can enhance understanding of the complex interplay of organizations and individuals. The next section explores the physical and cognitive impact of environments on students and organizational practice.

### *Physical and Psychological Environments*

According to Turner (1994), students of color and other marginalized students often feel like a guest in someone else's home- never quite comfortable in the physical and emotional climates on campus. How might these notions of home correspond to ideas of physical and psychological locality in campus community center environments? In a review of environmental psychology, Knez (2005) noted three research approaches to address empirical studies of human- place links: place attachment, sense of place, and place identity. These areas of research come from a variety of fields including architecture, history, sociology, and psychology. Concurring with Knez, Strange and Banning (2001) offer four levels of inquiry that connect to person-place links within higher education environments: physical, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed environments.

The previous section of the review offered a detailed look at organizational aspects of the environment. The focus of this section will be the physical, human aggregate and constructed environment literatures. An essential challenge for colleges

and universities is the creation and maintenance of campus environments that attract, satisfy, and sustain students in their efforts to achieve their educational goals (Strange, 2003, p. 297). Strange and Banning (2001) express the need for universities to be mindful, when designing educational spaces, of the promotion of inclusion and safety, the promotion of involvement, and building community aspects of the enterprise.

### *Physical Environments*

As noted in the introduction, physical environment impact how individuals feel, behave, interact, engage and build community (Dober, 1992; Kennedy, 2005). Kennedy (2005) states that these environmental components help create the “sense of belonging” that helps students grow and identify with the institution (p. 47). Malaney, Gilman, and O’Connor (1997) broadly define environments as including components of exterior and interior design, interior décor and furnishings, organizational structure, activities and programs, and service providers and users. They also state that the buildings and environments need to be inclusive, not exclusive to any one group (p. 173). In preliminary research on the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers, students examined notions of the physical environment through artifact collection. Using photos, students gathered data on the use of art within the sites, people and physical activity in the spaces (sleeping on couches, doing cartwheels, laughter) and food rituals, as areas that contributed to the home metaphor they had constructed.

### *Human Aggregate*

When employing a human aggregate focus, a key component of any particular environment is reflected in the dominant group features within it (Strange, 2003). These environments are often characterized by collective or common traits such as



ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. For example, only LGBT students would frequent LGBT spaces. Holland (1973) contends that, “Human aggregate models are instructive because the dynamics of interactions are often seen from the perspective of differentiation or consistency” from within and across groups (p.302). Holland states that differentiated environments are “readily distinguished, by both participants and observers, precisely because they encourage select behaviors, values, attitudes, and expectations, and discourage those dissimilar” (p. 302).

Cross-cultural, Women, and LGBT centers originated out of a human aggregate paradigm where specific groups with common interests and needs pushed for organizational structures to address their specific needs. Key considerations of human aggregate environments tie to Wenger’s (2002) notion of bonding and brokering relationships because entry and movement within and across these communities of practice plays a key role in connection and belonging. Longerbeam, Sedlacek, Balon, and Alimo (2005) concur with the above in relation to studying Multicultural Program Organizations (MPO) and caution that, when assessing MPO’s along with looking at the aesthetic and structural environments, the interpersonal environment or human aggregate view also must be considered (p. 90).

Jones, Catellanos, and Cole (2002) review community center human aggregate issues in their study that investigates ethnic minority student experiences on predominately white campuses. The study used a focus group design to directly capture student voice. While there appears to be difficulty with basic definitions like “involvement” and “satisfaction,” the study does give some evidence of effective relationships with center sites with such comments as “safe haven” and a “home away

from home.” While the study has some limitations and is broad in scope, it remains one of the few empirical research articles to address cultural center physical and affective impact on underrepresented and marginalized student college experiences.

### *Constructed Environments*

When reviewing constructed aspects of environments, Turner (2004) extends the home metaphor to include the notion of “being a guest in someone else’s house” where they can “never relax and put our feet up on the table” (Ron Wakabayshi in Turner p. 356). Using a definition of campus climate as “the sum total of daily experiences,” Turner suggests underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds often have no history in the house they occupy (p. 356). Levels of comfort often come through the unstated, non-tangible artifacts and assumptions in environments. Practitioner writings on community centers call for specialized spaces where identity and culture can be explored and celebrated (Hefner, 2002; Hord, 2006; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Stennis-Williams, Terrel, & Hayes, 1988).

Returning to the Longerbeam et al. (2005) idea of assessment of multicultural organizations, there is an emphasis on looking at the aesthetic environment (physical surroundings), the structural environment (positions, decision making styles, development opportunities), and the interpersonal environment (presence of caring, listening, respect, and teamwork) for assessing and developing programs and structures.

### *Communities of Practice*

Wenger’s (2002) conceptual framework offers a way to connect the individual fields of retention literature to organizational development through investigating the

impact of environment on students. Wenger's frame is particularly relevant in that it discusses the mutual, back and forth interactions between individuals and organizations. Wenger's framework for communities of practice begins to define and codify language that can help campus community centers investigate practice as it relates to student outcomes. Understanding and negotiating this interplay is critical to community center work inside and outside the sites as well as collectively across each center. Wenger identifies four areas that interact within the context of practice:

- 1) *Meaning*: a way of talking about (changing) ability- individually and collectively- to experience life and the world as meaningful.
- 2) *Practice*: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
- 3) *Community*: a way of talking about the social configurations in which enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and participation is recognizable as competence.
- 4) *Identity*: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

Another key element to Wenger's (2002) theory is that communities of practice are everywhere. Everyone has multiple memberships in these communities. This idea has direct connections to the retention literature reviewed earlier which revealed that background characteristics interact with environments in multiple ways. Wenger explores the concepts of participating and interacting within communities of

practice, interconnections of communities of practice, and boundaries and brokering across communities of practice. This negotiation of meaning is also mediated within complex levels internally and externally within the environment:

- 1) For *individuals* it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities.
- 2) For *communities* it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members.
- 3) For *organizations* it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization (p. 8)

The concept of practice is not about doing for the sake of itself, but doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do across space and time (p.47). This level of analysis fits closely into structural elements of campus community centers and higher educational institutions where the day to day, individual to individual practice impacts how underrepresented and marginalized students thrive or fail within institutions.

Synergistically, Wenger's (2002) model speaks to and explicates the struggle within community center work. Identity relates heavily to retention and student development theory. Community was investigated through the lens of organizational and systemic methods of inquiry. These methods of practice lead to investigating organizational dynamics of the built environment. These three areas combine to make meaning for both the individual and the organization. Understanding this contextual

relationship will help units like campus community centers leverage and enhance collaboration to increase connection and belonging for students.

*Borders and Boundaries: Brokering Relationships in Communities of Practice*

Lived experience suggests that community centers offer spaces of safety and hope for individuals and that centers could be considered a community of practice as defined by Wenger (2002). Which elements are present in a community of practice that marks the sites as places of safety and hope? Centers need to employ people who have the tools and skills to develop and grow internal communities as well as skills and tools to interface with the larger university structures. In this vein, applying theoretical frameworks like communities of practice helps negotiate the complexity and interconnectedness of the work of campus community centers.

The navigation of these boundary spaces for both the individual self and the organization can be seen as borders for group interaction. As defined by Anzaldua (1987), “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them... A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition” (p. 3). UC San Diego Campus Community Centers were created to bridge these borders, to create spaces of home for underrepresented and marginalized students. At the same time, the Centers live on the boundaries of University policy and practice, negotiating and navigating the terrain of diversity and social justice. An inquiry into communities of practice allows for a more explicit exploration of living and moving within and around border spaces for both the individual and the organization.

*Navigating belonging: An interactional approach*

Thus far, this review has concentrated on large theoretical constructs to understand and triangulate campus community center practice through a lens of student retention, organizational structures, and communities of practice. These concepts have led to an inquiry process that may help unpack constructs like caring and belonging in relation to student retention. As stated in the introduction, no single theoretical framework can account for the complexity of student background and perception, organizational idiosyncrasies, and the negotiating back and forth between the two. What is needed is a model that deconstructs and reconstructs these relationships in order to give individuals and organizations an understanding of how they impact, and are impacted through, the process of interacting day to day. It is within these small and large interactions that belonging and connectedness form and flourish.

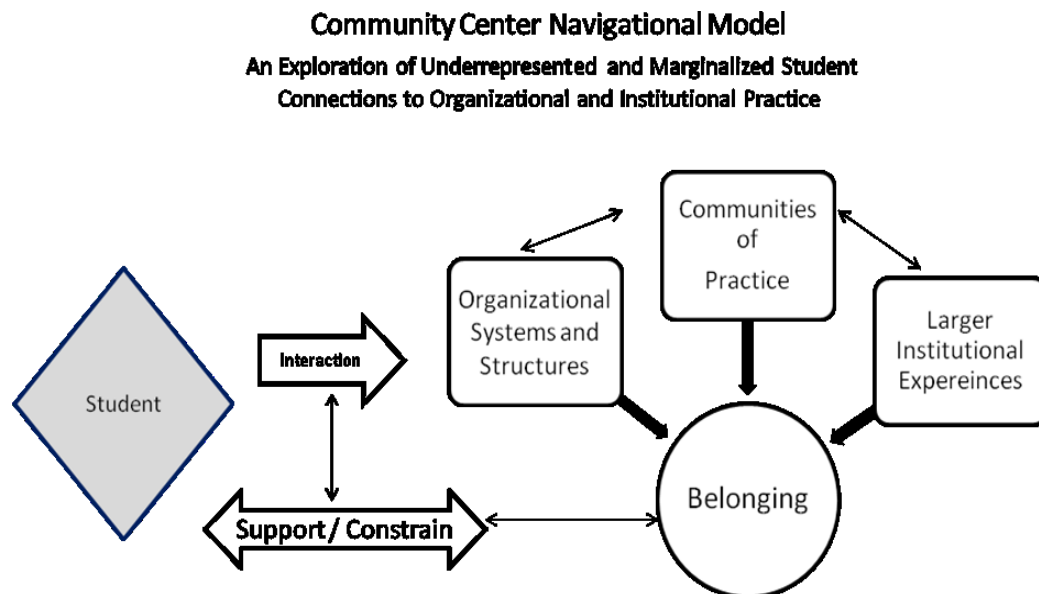


Figure 2. Navigational Model

The navigational model shown in Figure 2 focuses attention narrowly to ways interaction is constrained and supported through engagement with campus community center structure and practices. It expands on Tinto's (1993) *Student Integration Model* in that it negotiates a unique look at the back and forth mutuality of the engagement of belonging and practice. Retention literature often focuses on underrepresented and marginalized student deficiencies that must be overcome for student success while neglecting small organizational changes that can make an impact on connection and belonging (Rendon, 1994; Tierny, 2000). Organizational literature tends to offer a macro look at retention and ignores the affective and aesthetic side of community building (Kennedy 2005; Turner, 2004). The navigational framework presented offers a way to investigate both ends of this spectrum toward creating better relationships and environments for students, individual organizations, and the university at large.

The literature reviewed for this project explored student perceptions and background, the historical emergence of community center models, and organizational and environment impacts within the university setting that promote an understanding of belonging as a research construct. Understanding how the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers help improve and increase interactions for marginalized and underrepresented students may hold the key to increasing student retention and graduation. The navigational model offers a theoretical way to explore the process of belonging within an organizational context. The next section of this review lays out a methodological approach to exploring this interactional relationship between students,

the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers, and the university as a whole as put forth in the navigational model.



## Chapter 3

### *Methods Overview*

A postmodernist lens frames the context of this study. Postmodernism “favors socially constructed education, lifelong learning, informal experiences and multicultural education...where relationships within and across groups are raised to consciousness, deconstructed, and reconstructed, often with the goal of political and social transformation” (Young, 2003, p. 95). As noted in Chapter two, much of the research on retention establishes the unit of analysis at an individual student level. Given the research questions under consideration, explicitly shifting the focus to systemic and structural organizational impacts may illuminate previously missed constructions of belonging. These individual/organizational links may offer a new method of studying retention. Shifting the unit of analysis focus allowed for the investigation of individual and organizational interactions within and across the research sites.

This inquiry followed an embedded, single case research design with the research sites being the Cross-Cultural Center, LGBT Resource Center and the Women’s Center at UC San Diego. According to Yin (2003), case studies arise out of a need to understand complex social phenomena (p.2). A case study approach allowed for a better understanding of the particulars involved in student interaction within the physical space of each Center, and focused on how this interaction impacted a sense of student belonging. The next section codifies these methods by reviewing study logistics (sampling, research site, and participant selection) then moving to the process by which data collection and analysis were conducted.

### *Study Logistical Considerations*

According to Yin (2003), case studies are particularly preferred, as a strategy, when ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions are being explored. The research questions explored here were consistent with the considerations of case study inquiry. Within this inquiry, deciding base logistical parameters helped ground the data collection and data analysis portions of the project. In this vein, research site selection, sampling method considerations, and participant selection are discussed below. Each of these research decisions is critical to negotiating the framework for the study. These decisions are the bedrock for the exploratory process of the research.

### *Research Site*

Research was conducted at three locations: the Cross-Cultural Center, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Resource Center, and Women’s Center at the University of California, San Diego. Each center has a unique context yet they come together under a shared belief in cross-community connection and social justice. Access to each site was open given that the researcher works within the Campus Community Center team.

### *Sampling Methodology*

Using a purposeful sampling frame (Creswell, 2005), interviews were conducted with six Center users who frequented the sites three or more times a week. Purposeful sampling was used as the strategy for investigating the perception of underrepresented and marginalized student’s interaction with the Campus Community Center’s physical and affective environments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviewing Center users aided in the understanding of saliency and importance of

different elements at each site. Purposeful sampling, across the sites, allowed for rich data on the supports and constraints students experience in the environments.

### *Participants*

Critical to investigating belonging and place making was selecting study participants who make direct use of the locations. Thus, site users were defined as individuals who frequent the sites three or more times a week for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, meeting attendance, studying, and use of resources (i.e. leave food in refrigerator). Three female-bodied and three male-bodied students were selected to participate in the research project. In the interview pool, two students identified themselves as first-generation college students with one student having AB540 status (undocumented but participation through K-12 education system). Other interview participant demographics include three students who were queer self-identified, one student who self-identified as multi-ethnic, and five students who self-identified with one primary ethnic group.

### *Data Collection*

Campus community centers have been on college campuses for a short forty years and research on student impact and organizational effectiveness is very limited. A reason for this dearth of empirical evidence stems from a variety of sources: newness of organizational models, lack of time for practitioners to collect and share information, and lack of agreed upon purpose and role for the organizations (Castillo-Cullather & Stuart, 2002). Given the above mentioned challenges, data collection methods in this proposal explore a broad inquiry process that begins empirically to frame Center work and impact. Three primary research methods are used to this

purpose: interviews including photo-elicitation, participant observation, and document review (See Appendices 1 through 4 for detailed protocols). Table 1 provides an overview of the research methods used in this study.

*Table 1. Research methods overview*

Research Questions	Method	Participant Roles	Analysis
How do the daily practices of the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers support or constrain sense of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students?	Interviewing (15 minute introduction and 60 minute post photo project) Photo-elicitation (disposal cameras artifact collection over a week time period) Participant observation (conducted February through June, 2008)	6 students per site  6 students per site  Researcher	Coding schema  Coding schema  (additionally) Field Notes Memo
How do the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers support or constrain student connections to a wide university community?	Interviewing (15 minute introduction and 60 minute post photo project)	6 students per site	Coding schema
In what ways do the Cross Cultural Center, LGBT, and Women Center's organizational structures and practices meet differing underrepresented and marginalized student needs?	Interviewing (15 minute introduction and 60 minute post p & photo project) Participant observation (conducted February through June, 2008) Document review (founding document analysis and coding, photo elicitation process, video analysis)	6 students per site  Researcher  Researcher	Coding schema, Memo  Field notes Memo  Memo, Document analysis, and Coding

*Interview Protocol (including reflexive photography project)*

This research project has at its core the exploration and understanding of individual and Center negotiated and relationship building processes. In other words, this project was conducted to gain an understanding of the mutual back and forth impacts organizations have on individuals. In keeping with this mutuality of relationships, the interview protocol followed a social constructivist framework. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) note traditional interview approaches bring to mind images of “mining and prospecting for the facts and feelings residing in the respondent” where the relationship is asymmetrical and often uni-directional (p. 11). They opt for an approach that treats interviewing as a “social encounter in which knowledge is a constructed enterprise: it’s a site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge itself” (p. 4). In a social constructivist interview process, the researcher and respondent actively share the space of the interview (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

Social constructivism also emphasizes the interaction as the focus of analysis (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005, p. 692). In this perspective, researchers explicitly describe their influence on the discovered data. Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg offer an example of how data discovery and researcher reflection work in a social constructivist interview inquiry. Within this study, the researcher reflected throughout the process on how their understanding changed and was shaped by the knowledge of the participants. Because of the historical and social context of Center emergence and the dearth of data on the phenomenon, having an interview approach that constructed

meaning for both the participants and the researcher gave this project the multilayered level of analysis so needed when exploring complex phenomena.

Given the above social constructivist framing, this research inquiry also followed a semi-structured process (Merriam, 1998). Merriam notes that informal interview processes are useful when, "conducting intensive case studies...where the format assumes that the individual defines the world in unique ways" (pp.72-74). According to Merriam "these (interviews) are particularly useful when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions and the interviews is essentially exploratory" (1980, p. 75). This interview process is particularly germane to this study because the researcher has specific background within each site and using an unstructured process helped participants tell stories free of a power dynamic and the pressure to give answers they believe were correct.

The interview process took place in three stages: introductory interviews, photo project, and follow up interviews. The interview protocol involved one 15 minute interview to gather socio/demographic information (age, background, year in school, major, etc). As part of the data collection methodology, each student was given a disposable digital camera and asked to chronicle a typical week with the Campus Community Centers. Students were shown how to operate the camera and given instructions to return the cameras within a week's time frame. Following the social constructivist protocol, the researcher did not preview any of the images prior to the second meeting so that the process of uncovering themes and storytelling happened in a naturalistic manner (Creswell, 2005). A second set of pictures were developed and given to each participant. All interviews were taped and transcribed

and over 140 images were captured in the data collection process. Participants also reviewed final transcripts for accuracy.

### *Photo Elicitation*

Photo elicitation was employed in the interview protocol of this project. Use of photography as a research method first found saliency in the field of anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1989). The method has since grown to include photo interviewing, autodiving, photo novella, photovoice, photo elicitation, and reflexive photography (Hurworth, 2003). In photo elicitation, participants were asked to create artifacts of their experiences within each research site and then reflect on image selection and image groupings.

Harrington and Lindy (1998) used a similar reflexive photography method to examine perceptions of physical environments and interactions within a university setting. In their study, ten randomly selected first time freshmen were involved in a six week project involving an extensive questionnaire, 27 exposure disposal cameras, journaling, and focus groups. The students were instructed to “take pictures that will illustrate your impressions of *<named the university>* or that would help you describe your impressions” (p. 18). While their study did not sample first generation college students, this article shed light on a process of artifact creation. Employing these research methods allowed for the elicitation of meaning in the interview process, the exploration of ambiguity, the process of sense making, and the unearthing of the ‘take-for-granted’ implicit activities and actions in relation to underrepresented and marginalized student college experiences.



Initial analysis of the photos employed a visual methodological approach (Rose, 2001). Rose calls for the analysis of visual medium to look for meaning in both implicit and explicit ways using a “critical approach that understands that images have their own effect, and is mindful of the social context of the images, and considers the researcher bias when looking at images” (p. 15). Rose calls for the interpretation of images to take into account the technical aspects (hardware and developing), compositional approaches (color, spatial organization, content), and social factors (range of economic, social, political, institutional, and practices) surrounding the image (p.16).

Dempsey and Tucker (1991) offer an educational method research focus complimentary to Rose (2001) in their article *Using Photo-Interviewing as Tool for Research and Evaluation*. For Dempsey and Tucker:

Photographs can dissolve the alienating or closed verbal authority of the researcher...the methodology provides a means of *getting inside* the process and its context to describe and explain the programs and its consequences in terms of participants’ realities and meaning systems that oral interviewing did not permit (p. 19).

Dempsey and Tucker believe that photo interviewing can yield richer data than can be achieved without the use of photos (p. 3). In their article, they see photographs as both stimuli and verifiers of perception and note that photographs can help serve as methodological triangulations. One such triangulation process in this project was the use of participant observation as a methodological tool.

#### *Participant observation*

Participant observations were conducted to chronicle how students inhabited each of the research sites (Creswell, 2002; Spradley, 1980). Through participant

observation, subtle cues of the importance of the spaces were discerned (i.e. lunch conversations, conversations about campus experiences, etc.). Lofland and Lofland's (1995) general code schema was used as the primary organizing method for data collection during each site session. Lofland and Lofland's schema includes observing acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and settings.

Participant observations took place March through May 2008 with two sessions per site, one during the lunch and late afternoon hours and one during the evenings at each site. Center staff was asked to help choose optimal times for observation at each site. One sitting and one walking observation took place at each site. In the sitting observation, the researcher stayed in a specific location, normally the lobby area, and took field notes for sixty minutes. Walking observations were also conducted for sixty minutes. In each walking observation the researcher walked the entire research site noting artifacts, zones of use, conversations, and the like. Field notes were transcribed immediately after each observation and coded using the Lofland and Loftland (1995) schema previously mentioned.

#### *Document Review*

The emergence of the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers came out of a legacy of wider social phenomena. Given this social/cultural context, reviewing founding documents for each site was warranted. Documents used within this study included founding reports from each Center. According to Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998), document evidence and the collection of physical artifacts have specific strengths and weakness that researchers should note. Document analysis and physical artifacts are stable and can be retrieved repeatedly, can offer insight into the cultural

and technical features of a site, and offer broad coverage of time, events, and settings. Areas of concern when using document analysis and physical artifacts include biased selectivity, accessibility issues, and material availability (Yin, 2003, p. 86). Given the researcher's familiarity with the sites, bias was a key concern that is addressed within the ethical dilemmas and limitations portion of this review. Another key method to investigate participant day to day reality within each site was to employ a photo-elicitation process.

Each method was specifically chosen to help explicate the complexity of interaction, perception, and belonging which emerged in the data collection process. Because research on Centers is scant at best, having varied and deep methodological considerations was necessary to get an overall picture of the phenomena under question.

#### *Data Analysis*

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), codes allow for the assigning of units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled in the study (p. 56). Lofland and Lofland's (1971, 1995) general schema offers an overview of the types of the data under inquiry including acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and settings. Their schema was particularly relevant because of the ability to study the phenomena from micro to macro levels (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding schema was applied across all data collection methods (interviews, observations, documents, and photos) because it allowed for the interactional analysis of each of these phenomena jointly and separately simultaneously. Data were analyzed using an explicit three step process. First, the Lofland and Lofland (1995)

schema was color coded and hand referenced to all raw data. The next step of the analysis involved a sub-code strategy (Miles and Huberman, 1994) derived from the literature. Thirty-four sub codes were identified and also hand applied to the data. Key data pieces were then referenced on color coded cards and sorted. This sorting process produced four theme strands and fourteen sub-themes from the data. These themes will be explicated fully in Chapter four. Along with a process to code data, issues of reliability with data collection were addressed within the coding process.

#### *Reliability and validity*

Reliability and validity were addressed in a variety of ways to include the development of a case study protocol, code checking, member checking, and document review. Reliability was established through development of a case study protocol and database (Yin, 2003). Miles and Huberman's (1994) code taxonomy schema and code checking processes was also used (p. 64). To check for validity, construct and internal measures were employed through member checking with the participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.34). Reviews of documents for each site provided triangulation to support reliability. By coding these documents as another source of data, matching interview information and the observation process was possible. The data offered a wealth of information across sites for pattern matching and explanation building.

#### *Ethical Considerations and Limitations*

Several limitations have been mentioned including familiarity with the site and power dynamics within the interviewing processes. Given the nature of the observation schedule, only a small slice of the overall way students inhabit each site

was explored. Also, researcher presence within the site potentially impacted how people went about their day to day practice. Within the interview process, views of belonging came from a small segment of Center user populations. This impacted the ability to generalize outside of the specific context in which the interviews were conducted. Also within the interview process, the relationship of the researcher to each site may have impacted data collection.

Lastly, conducting research at the researcher's worksite has the potential to create limitations and biases that must be addressed. Anderson and Jones (2000) note the difficulties in conducting practitioner research, stating "a major threat to the validity or trustworthiness of administrator research is the nature of the administrative role itself" (p. 446). This brings up areas of ethics and reliability measures that pose potential limitations which were addressed by applying coding schema to all data materials and member checking with participants as well as outside review of the document by colleagues close to Campus Community Center work. By applying these methods, ethical bias, while not eliminated, was reduced.

### *Conclusion*

At the onset of this inquiry, the urgent need to increase underrepresented and marginalized student successful matriculation and graduation from colleges and universities across the country was put forth. Given that these students will increasingly be a larger portion of college going populations, universities have a financial as well as moral obligation to develop structures and systems to meet their emerging needs. Much of the literature reviewed in this project echoes this obligation and offers strategies and tools towards these ends. Campus community centers are

one such tool. Centers are emerging as an innovative strategy that may impact student belonging and success on campus. It is hoped that this inquiry process sparks an expanded course of research concerning how to build better environments that help underrepresented and marginalized students and universities navigate to new harbors.

## Chapter 4

### *Navigating Belonging- Data Analysis*

At the onset of this research project, the goal was to gain an understanding of how students navigate belonging in a university setting. A *navigational* model was put forth as a way to understand student and organization interactional nuances related to belonging. It is within these small and large interactions that belonging and connectedness form and flourish. Retention literature has empirically shown that feelings of belonging at an institutional level are markers of student persistence and retention within a college/university setting (Astin, 1993; Siedman, 2005; Swail, 2003; Tinto, 1993). The question that is yet unanswered is what constitutes belonging on an individual or organizational level? How is belonging created on college and university campuses, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized students? In order to delve empirically into the phenomena of belonging, the Cross-Cultural, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender, and Women's Centers at UC San Diego were studied as organizational models that may exert an influence on students' sense of belonging. The specific research questions that guided this study included:

1. How do the daily practices and structures of each UC San Diego Campus Community Center support or constrain a sense of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students?
2. How do the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers support or constrain student connections to a wider university community?

3. In what ways do the Cross-Cultural Center; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered; and Women's Centers organizational structures and practices meet differing underrepresented and marginalized student needs?

These research questions were investigated using an embedded case study design where interviews, including photo-elicitation, observations, and documents review were employed as the methodological tool for data collection (Yin, 2003).

What emerged in answer to the research questions were four major themes that explained university and Campus Community Center student experiences related to belonging: engagement, relationships, setting, and meaning. Within the findings on engagement data, it emerged that individual and organizational interaction proved salient in forming specific types of belonging. Relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and acquaintances, within and across the sites, created a sense of validation and this validation increased belonging. The physical and affective qualities of the Center sites created emotional and intellectual connections and thus increased belonging. Finally, the ability to name and make meaning of Community Center and University experiences empowered students to develop strong affective and intellectual understandings of belonging. The findings of this study come together to form a complex web where participants navigated interaction on individual, specific Center, and University levels and in the process connected to the Centers and the University in ways that increased their persistence. The data revealed that engagement, relationships, setting, and meaning are core ways belonging is created in the Campus Community Centers.



Chapter four unpacks research questions and the *navigational model* in relation to engagement in the Centers, relationships formed within and across the centers, physical setting, affective and intellectual influences from interaction with the Centers, and the meaning that is made of these interactions in relation to belonging.

First, explanations of the analytical frame and coding process that revealed the main findings are reviewed. The chapter then moves to a review of the founding proposals for each Center. Data from these historical documents offer a grounding link and foreshadowing of the development of a Campus Community Center organizational construct. Each Center was founded to work with specific underrepresented and marginalized communities; each Center was also called for expanding constituent work to other communities as well. Linking the historical data gained from a review of Center proposals to the contemporary data collected for this project offered a nuanced understanding of the emergent themes within the data. Engagement, relationships, setting and meaning themes are explored through tying together data from interviews, photos, and observations.

In order to protect the individual identity within the research project photos mostly appear in the setting and meaning sections of the analysis and are regulated to physical settings and objects. Also in order to compare participants' language and experiences across the three Center sites, data is included that is representative of student feedback regarding all sites. This technique of data presentation has direct relation with research question three in that it allows for an examination of the similarities and differences perceived by participants across the research sites.

Presenting the data in a comparative manner also gave a deeper picture of the intricacy of the Campus Community Center organizational model.

#### *Analytic Process Review*

The central research questions in this study concerned how organizational experiences supported or constrained belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students. In order to treat data consistently across collection methods, Lofland and Lofland's (1995) coding schema was employed. All data was initially coded and analyzed using a schematic that focused on *acts, activities, participation, meaning, relationships, and settings*. Sorting in this manner allowed for triangulation using interview, observational, and document data collected at each site. Using the Lofland and Lofland schema also established a basic analytic structure that employed a cross-comparative analysis technique and provided a means for combining varied data forms under a manageable umbrella (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This schema was chosen because the analytic frame matched closely with, and interacted across, the literatures reviewed and research questions proposed in chapters one and two. Specifically, engagement, relationship and meaning findings connect closely with retention literatures. Equally, setting and meaning corresponds well to the organizational and communities of practice literature reviewed.

The first step of data analysis was setting the frame from which the data would be managed, analyzed, and presented. Framing occurred in a two-step process. The first part of the process began with establishing an analytic framework which guided the researcher across the multiple data collection methods. As mentioned above, Lofland and Lofland's (1995) general schema for focusing on six primary elements for

analyzing social settings was employed. In the second step of the process, retention and organizational literature was used to create initial codes for deeper analysis of the raw data. This secondary coding produced thirty-four sub-codes that allowed for the data analysis to be deeply nuanced. These codes tied directly back to literature reviewed in Chapter two and revealed new areas of inquiry within the project.

Using both frames created an interactive/ iterative process for organizing the data, moving back and forth through the data, and finding complex ideas and meanings that organically arose from the data. This iterative analysis process concurs with Glaser and Strauss (1967) constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). Constant comparative methodology was used within and across each data collection type (interviews, photo-elicitation, observations, and documents) employed for the project.

#### *Connecting Historical Documents to Contemporary Data*

One key strategy for triangulation across methods was to review founding proposals from each Center site (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Starting the overall analysis process by reviewing the historical documents helped uncover emergent themes within the study. Historical document review also set the stage for understanding the philosophical as well as organizational factors that participants stated were salient to their Campus Community Center experiences. These tenets emerged as an important lens for understanding and analyzing the contemporary data from the interviews and participant observation. Because the Center documents reviewed were created for a specific outcome and in a specific historical moment, it was important to recognize the documents' unique relationship to the contemporary

data collected and not conflate historical and contemporary data arbitrarily but as foreground of the emergent Campus Community Center organizational construct.

The emergent nature of the Campus Community Center organizational model at UC San Diego and the dearth of research exploring the phenomena of Cross-Cultural, LGBT, and Women's Centers highlight the need to chronicle and examine the historical nature of these models. The Cross-Cultural, LGBT, and Women Centers at UC San Diego developed from a crisis oriented history of grassroots protest and activism. Each of the Centers also traces its origin to larger, national movements for inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized peoples within the higher education sector. Unique to UC San Diego was the connection each Center had to the founding of the others. Each Center's founding had an effect on and precipitated the development and growth of the subsequent organizations. The next section offers a deeper analysis of the trajectory and development of each Center on the UC San Diego campus and how these trajectories led to the development of a new organizational construct-the Campus Community Centers.

#### *UC San Diego Cross-Cultural Center*

During the early 1980s, students began raising the idea of having a cultural center that would support students dealing with a hostile campus climate as well as increase recruitment of underrepresented students. The first indication of traction on the idea was an addendum to a student referendum designating space in a new student union proposal. The referendum passed, but no cultural center was started (Price Center Referendum internal addendum document, 1984). Concerns around budget issues, group self-segregation, and program viability were put forth as reasoning for

the decision. Internal letters from groups like the Student Affirmative Action Coalition (SAAC) continued pushing for a Center through the early 1990s with subsequent requests for a Center in 1989 and 1990, respectively, with no response from campus administration. The momentum shifted when national and legislative political incidents brought national attention to access and recruitment of underrepresented students within the University of California system.

In 1995 UC policy banning consideration of gender and ethnicity in admission and hiring (SP1 and SP2), along with the 1996 State Initiative 209, escalated the demand for a cultural center. Also during this time frame the UC San Diego campus experienced tensions between Black and Jewish students and the defacing of a historic mural (Mariscal, 1996). These incidents, along with state interest in Affirmative Action, galvanized students into action. Early in 1994, a coalition of student of color organizations, supported by faculty and staff advisors, wrote to the Chancellor demanding the establishment of a Cross-Cultural Center at UCSD. In a memo to then Chancellor Atkinson, students demanded “the establishment of a permanent mechanism to combat social injustices which manifest themselves in the underrepresentation of students of color creating a hostile climate at UCSD” (Internal memo to Chancellor Atkinson from Student Affirmative Action Coalition dated January 31, 1994).

Within two weeks of this demand, a taskforce of students, staff, and faculty, charged by the Chancellor, met to consider the students’ demands. After researching other campus programs and practices, this taskforce concluded that UCSD should indeed establish a Cross-Cultural Center, and on May 2, 1994 recommended this to the

Chancellor. A steering committee was quickly assembled to begin planning for the new Center, and by May of 1995 the newly established Cross-Cultural Center opened its doors.

*UC San Diego Women's Center*

The establishment of the Women's Center followed a similar trajectory of false starts and little administrative movement. The development of the Women's Center, however, had a few notable differences from that of the Cross-Cultural Center. Instead of being student driven, an institutional advisory committee, as part of their annual report to the Chancellor, made recommendations for the establishment of the UCSD Women's Center. There was anecdotal information that a women's center had previously been created in the mid 1970's but had closed down after an illness of the director and a subsequent failure to fill the open position (E. dela Pena, personal communication, March 13, 2008).

During the intervening years, a student run collective known as the Women's Resource Center provided programs and services to women students. A policy document from 1991 is the first evidence of a detailed proposal for the establishment of a staffed and funded women's center, and this proposal came out of the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women- CSW (Annual Report From the Committee on the Status of Women, 1991). This proposal focused on women faculty and staff needs with specific mention of a faculty member as director and a research program emphasis. By 1995 a new proposal was drafted with an expanded mandate markedly different from the 1991 program emphasis:

The Women's Center is to provide a supportive and learning environment for students, faculty, staff, and community women...programs and services for women and men at the Center will focus on promoting opportunity, education, equity, justice, and advocacy for women at UCSD and in the surrounding communities (Annual Report From the Committee on the Status of Women, 1991, p. 2).

This proposal expanded the mission of the Women's Center in be inclusive of all women (rather than solely faculty and staff) at UC San Diego and created a new link to the surrounding San Diego community. The updated mission of the Center was a response to a growing coalition of students, staff, and faculty wanting to address broader gender issues.

The increased demand for a Women's Center is connected to the founding of the Cross-Cultural Center. In June of 1995, the proposal was submitted to Chancellor Atkinson on developing a Women's Center at UCSD:

When the Cross-Cultural Center was approved this academic year, Vice Chancellor Caserio once again raised the question of a Women's Center...the planned Women's Center in this document is not intended to argue the need for such a Center, since this work has already been done by the VCAA, but only to show how to design the Center to best serve the campus community (Annual Report From the Committee on the Status of Women, 1995, p. 1).

The founding proposals for the Cross-Cultural and Women's Centers are intrinsically linked, so much so that the Centers were founded within a year of each other. UC San Diego, in responding to the climate of SP1/2 and Proposition 209, approved programs to work with underrepresented and women students, staff, and faculty. The connected founding of the Women's Center and the Cross-Cultural Center, and the similar missions to work with faculty, staff, and students, set the stage for the founding of the LGBT Center a few years later.

*UC San Diego Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Resource Center*

The proposal for the LGBT Resource Center is directly influenced by earlier work and the founding language of the Women's and Cross-Cultural Centers (Proposal to establish a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center, Internal Document, September, 10, 1998). This proposal, like the Women's Center, came out of an advisory committee process where staff and faculty saw a need to create safe space for LGBT students, staff, and faculty. This proposal specifically references each of the above Centers as partners in the efforts to expand diversity at UCSD (p.7). It also highlights the need for "free standing, fully staffed space" that addresses LGBT concerns (p. 7). There is a clear emphasis and demand that the LGBT community concerns not be relegated to one of the existing centers. In commenting on the need for a separate, independent center, the advisory committee stated:

Each Center's mission is unique and although together they support campus diversity initiatives, their separateness strengthens the missions. While many activities and resources could and would be shared with the existing Women's and Cross-Cultural Centers, the mere presence of a visible independent Center supported by the University is essential to beginning to address the stigmatized LGBT identity and fears many people have about LBGT issues (p. 7).

Within a month of proposal submission, the tragic death of Matthew Sheppard on October 12, 1998 directed a national spotlight to issues of LGBT college student safety. Matthew Sheppard was a gay student at the University of Wyoming who was murdered because of his sexual identity and whose death brought media attention to the issue of campus hate crimes. The combination of the committee proposal and the



national exposure of LGBT student needs no doubt created a crystallizing moment, prompting UC San Diego to establish the LGBT Center.

The Cross-Cultural, Women's, and LGBT Centers were established due to a demand for resources and visibility from groups who had historically felt disenfranchised by the University. The Cross-Cultural Center's student proposal demanded expansion of the UC system's obligation to serve surrounding San Diego and statewide ethnic communities. Students placed a strong emphasis on spaces that were designed to increase the recruitment and retention of students of color. The 1995 Women's Center proposal emphasized services for women but also expanded the constituent base to include women of color, lesbians, and communities outside the UCSD campus.. The LGBT proposal, while specifically addressing the needs of LGBT people, began codifying Centers' relationships and work expectations across the three sites. It is within this developmental context that ideas of diversity and justice, from a Campus Community Center identity, had its genesis. This background information is relevant to this study because it helps to uncover how students' individual identity in Centers is negotiated. Students who use a specific space do so because they relate to—identify with--- the activities and purpose of that Center. As individual engagement increased new linkages and definitions of community surface.

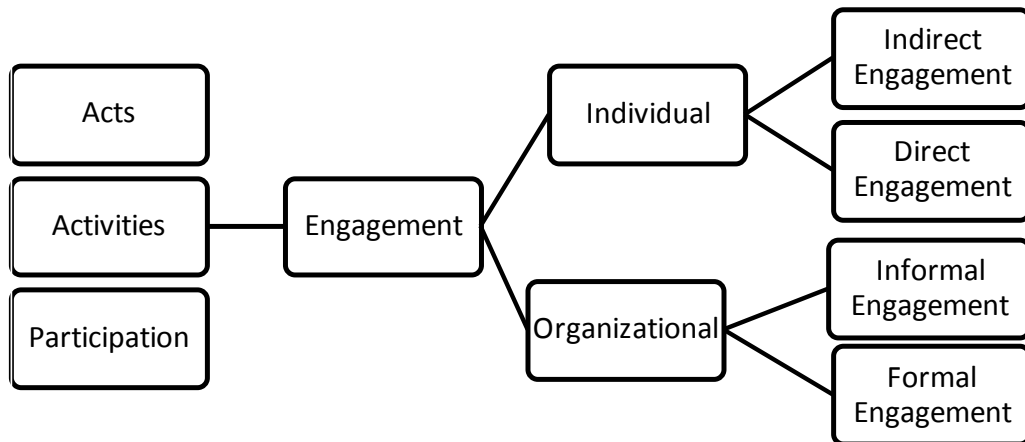
*Engagement as Acts, Activities, and Participation*

Research shows that students' engagement in campus life increases their persistence to remain a member of the campus community (Astin, 1993, Komives, Dudley, & Woodard, 2003; Pasacrella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). According to Wenger (2002), a key component of communities of practice is mutual engagement,

defined as “people engaged in action whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (p. 73).

At the onset of this inquiry, an analytic process was employed to organize discrete data collection methods. Three of the six initial coding areas- *relationships*, *setting*, and *meaning*- proved most salient for understanding the data and generated multiple theme strands, while the coding categories of *acts*, *activities*, and *participant* produced two additional strands unrelated to those that emerged from the first three coding areas. This led to a re-examination of Lofland and Lofland’s (1995) schematic assumptions and revealed that Lofland and Lofland’s analysis categories of *acts*, *activities*, and *participation* were closely tied to Wenger’s (2002) definition of engagement. This resulted in a decision to collapse *acts*, *activities*, and *participation* into a broader category of *engagement* in a community of practice.

The definitional attributes of *acts*, *activities*, and *participation* are all aspects of engagement. *Acts* were defined by Lofland and Lofland (1995) as specific acts that occur in a space performed by individuals; *activities* were seen as general activity within the research setting; and *participation* relied on ideas of who in the setting was participating and at what levels. Taken together acts, activities, and participation are direct components of engagement. Figure 2 provides a schematic of the relationship between acts, activities, and participation and the concept of engagement.



*Figure 3. Analytical flow of engagement*

Within the data, two levels of engagement emerged: individual and organizational. Data showed that individual engagement in the Campus Community Centers happens at two levels. On one level, participants talked about experiences outside of the physical locations through language and metaphorical connections back to the Center sites. On another level, individual engagement was expressed in physical relation to the Center sites. Further analysis revealed that, at the organizational level, participants perceived the importance of both formal and informal experiences in the Campus Community Centers with regards to personal development and community building.

#### *Individual Engagement*

Participants engaged with the Campus Community Centers on multiple levels, including individual and organizational. While each participant noted a feeling of comfort in all three Campus Community Center sites, individually they connected most closely with only one preferred Center. Data revealed the unique ways

participants conflated understandings of campus experiences using the Community Center philosophical frame of reference. In reporting on indirect engagement, one participant commented:

I only regularly attend the Cross-Cultural Center. That's the only center that I can, well not to take pictures of but like identify with when it comes to work [activism] and stuff like that. So the majority of my pictures are just a week in the life of me

In the 'week in the life of me' photos, the participant noted other UCSD physical sites as places of support and connection in much the same way he referenced his experiences in the Cross-Cultural Center. The participant took pictures of his dorm room, venues where his student organizations held events, student government meeting rooms, faculty office buildings, and recreation sites on campus. The participant connected the development of his activism to early experiences in a summer transition program. The summer transition program had direct links to the Cross-Cultural Center. A specific example of connection was a student organizational/ activism fair where students to learn about the Campus Community Centers and student organizations at UC San Diego. This fair happens every year as part of the above mentioned summer program. Thus at the beginning of his UC San Diego experience the participant framed his identity as one where he connected with peers and the Centers to "get work done." This engagement tied directly back to self efficacy he gained as a result of engagement in the Cross-Cultural Center as well as other programs on campus.

Another participant who frequents the Women's Center echoed this idea. In commenting on the support they receive from their academic department this participant stated:

My department [named] I almost call my 4<sup>th</sup> center because I feel [department name] in so many different ways wants to be connected to community, and wants to be connected to students and really... they care so much about you as an individual.

In slight contrast, another participant chose to focus their photo project within the Centers; "I guess I understood it to be everyday practices, like how the Campus Community Centers affect my everyday practices...I guess the thing I captured in the first place was I'm in this space [CCC] for different reasons all day." This participant goes on to highlight a typical Monday where they are "pretty much at the Cross for like 12 hours." The above participant defines their Center connection through relationship building and their personal involvement on campus. Observational data also supported this perspective.

Ideas surrounding individual engagement surfaced within photos taken and participant observations, particularly around blending informal and formal use of each site. There was evidence within the data that individual students use the Centers as a "home base". Stopping by between classes to check in with peers or to warm up lunch are examples of this witnessed at all three sites. Also, in all observations, there was clear indication of engagement around academic work and activism, particularly within conversation zones at each site. At the Cross-Cultural Center, students were having an informal meeting while doing homework on their laptops. In the LGBT Center, individual engagement played out in conversations about class work and

organizing transportation for a statewide meeting. At the Women's Center, students were simultaneously commenting on car repair needs and sharing notes from a class they just attended while eating leftovers from an event.

Wenger (2000) notes individual engagement is an aspect of *community maintenance* and that much community maintenance work is less visible than more instrumental aspects of that practice (p. 74). Observational findings bear this out. Data revealed more nuanced ways students engaged at the sites including day to day connections with friends, activism work combined with personal conversations, and the sheer time students spend at the sites. These less visible acts of individual engagement are the bedrock of student participation within the Campus Community Centers. Often described by student participants as "just hanging out," this level of engagement emerged within the data as critical to developing connection and a sense of belonging.

More visible than individual engagement at Campus Community Centers is formal organizational work. This work often translates as event planning, referral services, organizational meetings, committee work, and other structures of organizational engagement. As with individual engagement, data from the study revealed that organizational engagement at the Campus Community Centers is both formal and informal and in some are one and the same.

#### *Organizational Engagement*

Evidence of organizational activities driving engagement emerged from the data. All participants spoke to the idea of organization and Center engagement in the interview process, including a feeling of engagement during formal and informal

Community Center events as well as student group activities. One example of formal engagement was specific mention of the Chancellor's Undergraduate Diversity Leadership Institute (CUDLI). One student commented "CUDLI made me feel so welcome and so loved and almost like to the opportunity to learn and to grow that I thought the Centers have to be somewhat similar." Another participant agreed:

Because of CUDLI I was immediately exposed to the system and how it works with the Women's and the LGBT Center...It really shaped my understanding of the campus from the very start about how identities inter-link and just how institutionally these resources have come together to build this larger community.

In remarking on participating in more informal Community Center events, similar findings were evident. One participant noted that just being around during an event created connections:

I am horrible at arts and crafts but that's ok, other people are very good. But I think it was neat to be watching everyone do their arts...I wasn't a part of it but at the same time I was. I was just sitting there watching them and laughing with them.

Four of the six participants had similar feelings about a weekly Women's Center program called Gender Buffet. One participant, commenting on a photo, noted that Gender Buffet is one of "the many places where I've had very, very good conversations within the Community Center and that's where Gender Buffet happens and a lot of varied conversations have been taking place."

Being engaged in groups that meet at the Campus Community Center sites allowed participants to work across group lines. One participant stated "I wanted a picture with me and [another organizational leader]. We have been through a lot this year...keeping our own organizations responsible...we really had each other's backs

this year.” This participant commented on the value of joint activities the student organizations did together, including meetings and events. This was confirmed by another participant who perceives relationships across student organizations.

Its actually allowed me to have space where I’m building all those connections because when I think about my friendships and who I’m really close with...none of this would’ve happened, I would’ve never met these people, if it wasn’t for the Campus Community Centers.

As seen in the above interview data, individual and organizational engagement fell within two distinct strands: how participants and students negotiated individual engagement and how participants negotiated organizational engagement. On the individual level, students are using the Campus Community Centers as points of entry to the cultural, social, and academic life of UC San Diego. This is happening as they just “hang out “and during their involvement in formal and informal programs at the Campus Community Centers. Engagement also increases a sense of belonging when students just stop by Center events and strike up casual conversations.

The *navigational model* has the core feature of *interaction* as the connecting link between students and the organizational systems of the Campus Community Centers. Findings reveal that participant interaction comes in the form of formal and informal engagement in the sites. This engagement, in turn, increases a feeling of belonging. In order for belonging to develop and flourish, and for engagement to occur, Center users must first perceive the importance of relationships and the role of the setting in fostering these relationships. A careful examination of engagement through the frame of relationships and settings can explicate how engagement



becomes meaningful within the settings and, ultimately, within the university as a whole.

### *Relationships*

Lofland and Lofland (1995) define relationships as “parties’ interacting with some regularity over a relatively extended period of time and who view themselves as connected to one another (p. 106). Retention, organizational development, and communities of practice literature all agree that relationships between individuals and organizations are key markers of belonging and organizational effectiveness (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Tinto, 1993; Senge, 2006; Wenger, 2000). Relationships, in the context of this study, involve the complex interplay of personal definitions of relationships as well as affective relationships to environments.

The findings indicate that participants had slow integration to the university organizational environments. However, once they interacted with the Centers, participants experienced an increase in their sense of belonging. Several themes around *relationships* emerged within the data: personal fit with the campus and other peers, relationships with staff at the Campus Community Centers, faculty/academic interaction with the sites and across campus, and acquaintance relationships made possible because of the sites. Each of these themes will be explored in turn below.

#### *Personal fit with campus and peers*

As seen in the literature on retention, students who find niches and connections early in their college career have a higher likelihood to persist in their attendance (Tinto, 1993). Within the data, there were several echoes of difficulty in connecting with peers initially and with the campus environment.

In my suite at [named college] I wasn't myself; I didn't talk about the things I really wanted to talk about. I was different from my suite mates.... They were checking out sororities, dating...none of that was wrong it just didn't fit me. The things they said. They used words like "gay" or "that's retarded"...I just didn't feel like I was growing at all. I felt like I had to change myself to fit.

Another participant had similar difficulty: "I didn't know how to start conversations with people like that... you know, are you *conscious*?" This initial difficulty with finding peers with whom they could connect also surfaced as participants first interacted with the Campus Community Centers.

The students interviewed stated that relationship building took time and depended on how the participant 'entered' the particular spaces in the Campus Community Centers. In one particular interview, a participant spoke to the difficulty of connection to the Cross-Cultural Center: "funny I didn't know the interns at that time even though I was in Center twice a week." Because he did not initially connect with people at the Center, this participant thought of leaving UCSD, "I really didn't know the interns, I didn't know the staff that well and I was actually thinking about transferring." Another peer encouraged him to "give it time to build the same networks you had in high school." The participant continued interacting with the Cross-Cultural Center and today is a key leader on campus. Difficulty with entry might be due to the Center's physical layout and perceived function of the CCC site. For example, some students may view the Cross-Cultural Center was as more insular and just for student organizational use. Study participants supported this idea, stating that, initially, they did not know where the front desk was or who talk with about questions.

Contrast the above experience of a slow engagement to the Cross-Cultural Center with a description from a participant who was introduced to the site by a family member. When discussing a photo of a group of friends, the participant noted:

I read this quote that said family is just a group of people that may miss the same place.... I think that's how my friends and I are connected... we work together both in organizations and the community. And when we do our work, we get to know each other, and we talk about our lives and our stories. We talk about things that make us angry, like if we are doing the work. And we all feel like it's validated. So we share a lot of our frustrations and we try to share a lot of our joys.

In a supporting example, another participant talked about the importance of relationships when telling the story of his favorite photo captured at the Cross-Cultural Center:

It's a picture of me standing on the side and those are two of my closest friends right now in life ...they keep me grounded, they keep me motivated, and they keep me pushing to do what I want and to do what I need to do.

Time and the circumstances under which participants entered the Campus Community Centers emerged as key components of feelings of belonging. One participant supported this finding when he shared a story about his first time at the LGBT Center, stating “[staff] was walking out, I said hello, and he invited me in and told me about lots of stuff and then from there I kind of like got involved with Men’s Group and Queer People of Color.”

#### *Relationships with staff at the Campus Community Centers*

As is evident in the literature, interaction with faculty and staff are key markers of a student’s ability to develop a sense of belonging within a campus community. Another key consideration for belonging and the development of relationships was how the students built relationships with, and witnessed the relationships of, the staff

of the Campus Community Centers. One participant remarked on how the staff supported them personally, stating “I can go talk to them and it’s interesting in a good way.... [staff name] just listened and managed to just see things that I can’t see because when I get caught up in everything I do I tend to lose sight of why I do things.” Staff relationships seem to help participants feel validated and this validation created a direct sense of belonging.

Implicit staff modeling also emerged as an important factor in belonging and the development of relationships. A participant appreciated and noted the camaraderie of the staff across the Campus Community Centers sites, stating, “[staff from the Women’s Center] just walk around and say “Hey” and I’m going to hang out, and like to, with LGBT Center staff. Another participant noted this same feeling of camaraderie at the Women’s Center when she said “those are the people who are always there. If anything is wrong, they’re the first ones that pick it up.”

The informal yet consistent pattern of welcoming and staff’s high visibility helped participants connect across the Campus Community Center sites. While participants seem to have one specific Center they frequented, witnessing how the staff crosses boundaries helped participants feel a sense of belonging and validation. Belonging, for participants, also arose through faculty and academic connections made at the university and Campus Community Center sites.

#### *Faculty and academic interaction with the sites and across campus*

The above section provided an initial glimpse of how internal and informal relationships and boundary spanning of Campus Community Center staff and interns make relationships and spaces comfortable and validating for users. The data revealed

that academic validation from faculty and peers also proved salient for developing a sense of belonging. In discussing validation, Rendon (1994) notes “the role of the institution in fostering validation is active- it involves faculty, counselors...actively reaching out to students” (p. 44). A participant expressed the connection between validation and relationships with faculty, stating:

I used to always go to his office hours and just talking with him- just talking to him- is good...he always used to help me out. I felt like, especially him being a faculty of color, that was really important for me to have that bond and that relationship...it kind of made me remember that I... and I felt like I actually belong-- not belong, but that someone actually cares about what I am learning.

The notion of relationship with faculty and staff as a marker of belonging emerged not only during interviews but also during each of the observation sessions. At the time of one observation, a faculty member and a staff member were both conducting office hours in different zones of the Center. In one conversation, an undergraduate student asked the staff member for advice about the difficulty and process of applying to graduate school. In a second observation, similar informal advice giving occurred as a graduate student, who was waiting for a committee meeting about academic freedom and curricular reform on campus to start, discussed with faculty the difficulties he was experiencing in graduate school.

At the LGBT Resource Center, echoes of formal and informal faculty and academic discussion were also evident. On both observation occasions at this setting, conversations were witnessed regarding academic concerns. Center users commented about classmates who were not aware issues of multiple identities. In this same exchange, the students lamented about their professors’ teaching techniques that seem to “just stick to the readings”, leaving little room for discussion. In a second

observation, conversations around academic issues also arose when two students discussed differences in science and social science lectures.

At the Women's Center, two informal occasions focusing on academics and faculty interactions occurred. Several conversations were recorded regarding professors' teaching styles and classroom management techniques. In another instance, a graduate student was speaking to an undergraduate student about their experience in moving across country for graduate school and how family expectations were navigated and managed.

The formal and informal impact of staff and faculty, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized students, is often not readily visible within the context of organizational day to day interactions. As seen in the findings, relationships within and across the Campus Community Centers are nuanced. The building blocks of these relationships include initial comfort within a Center setting, connecting with faculty, or just talking about classroom concerns with peers. These day to day relationship fostering activities form the core for creating a sense of personal validation and thus increase a feeling of student belonging at the Centers and at an institutional level. Another area seldom recognized as important for belonging is the idea that acquaintance relationships make campus environments more manageable.

*Acquaintance relationships made possible because of Centers*

Hurtado and Carter (1996) and Antonio (2001) note that peer interactions are the means by which underrepresented and marginalized students experience the saliency of their college relationships and connections. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* an acquaintance relationship is characterized as knowledge of a

person but less intimate than a relationship. An acquaintance is someone you see within a common environment but with whom you have no direct interaction. The importance of peer connections and acquaintances were themes that emerged from this study. Participants in the study made reference to acquaintance relationships as one of the means by which they bring the university down to size.

When I am outside the Cross you'll see people from the organizations that I always see at the Cross but I don't really know ... we all say hi because we have this commonality and things like that of the Cross experience.

This thought was also communicated within another interview which highlighted the significance of an acquaintance relationship to a participant at the Women's Center:

The reason why I took a picture with her is because I met her at the Women's Center. I also know I would never have met her if it wasn't for the Women's Center...she always says hi you know...for someone to just randomly say hey, how are you? Are you still breathing? It's almost representative of what our relationship is... we ask each other and then we move on.

Data collected on *relationships* provided a multi-layered understanding of how relationships were experienced by participants in this study. Relationships were experienced on the individual, organizational, and community areas of the campus. Ideas of fit and communication across peer groups, validation from staff and faculty of the Centers and campus, and the importance of acquaintances for bringing the university down to size emerged from the data and all proved relevant to increasing a feeling of belonging for the students in the study.

At the onset of this project, the notion of belonging, connection, and practice were put forth as research inquires to aid in understanding student of color and other marginalized students' experiences within the Campus Community Centers and the university as a whole. The images students produced during their photo project and

voices of the participants captured during interviews and observations stress the importance of relationships and their connection to engagement. The settings in which these relationships are developed, managed, and nourished proved equally salient within the data set.

### *Settings*

Research on organizational environments shows links between physical structure and impact on individual well being (Knez, 2005). In the literature reviewed, physical, psychological, constructed, and human aggregate frames were all referenced as important areas of consideration when studying the impact of the environment on students of color and other marginalized groups in a university setting. Within the data, themes related to the importance of furnishings and resource use surfaced within and across each site. This idea of “comfort” within a setting helps explain the interview and observational data that revealed environments can have affective qualities for students who use the Centers

The next section of this review first examines the importance of resources and physical aspects of an environment and the ways in which they impacted participant experiences. The review then goes on to connect these aspects to the affective qualities they evoked in the participants. Data revealed four key areas that have a relationship to developing a sense of belonging: use of resources, importance of created atmospheres, environmental comfort, and artifacts as personally transformative. Each of these themes is explored in turn.



*Use of resources within the Campus Community Centers*

All participants spoke to the importance of resources in creating welcoming atmospheres and feelings of ownership in the sites. Data across methods revealed three key components of resource use that proved most salient: the use of the Center libraries and videos, furnishings (particularly couches), and the importance of kitchens in creating an atmosphere of belonging. In fact, these resources proved pivotal as a means for enabling students to gain site entry in a comfortable, non-threatening manner. One student stated:

I think for the most part a lot of people go there [LGBT Resource Center] trying to get acclimated to the Center. Just trying to get a reason to go there and one of them is like the videos... that was my first connection. That was a reason for me to go even though I hadn't felt-- even though I didn't feel okay with myself being in the space.

Observational data supported this finding regarding the important role played by resources in offering students a comfortable point of entry to Centers. The researcher witnessed a student coming to the LGBT Center for the first time and asking, during a tour; "is it ok for me just to come here? Are there places in the Center I can't go?" A student intern, in turn, addressed the use of the libraries, resources, and events open to all. The idea of resource use as an entry marker proved a key finding of what attracted students to the sites. For one participant, libraries were cited as a key attractor for Center use:



*Photo 1. Library at Women's Center*

I was just taking pictures of the things that I thought were very valuable to the space for me, which is the library. I really enjoy... I just love libraries and books and each Center has a really good library for the themes that they organize around.

While some participants specifically referenced libraries as resources, the importance of furniture for creating comfort was present in all interviews and witnessed in all observational data.

Data showed a deep connection between use of resources and feelings of connection and comfort. Findings also revealed that furniture and the ability to come to the Centers and sleep was a key contributing factor to belonging. All participants made reference to the ritual of napping. “There’re these really fantastic couches at the Women’s Center. Everyone can just pass out... like if you really want a 20 minute nap, a 2 hour nap, it’s just the best couch ever.” This sentiment is echoed at another Community Center site:

This picture is of the community office [CCC]. This couch is the most comfortable couch to nap on... I tried to make it look really enticing. I sort of fluffed these pillows below this window. I feel like it’s a running joke of

everyone that uses the Cross, they like just taking naps here, being able to come in and just kind of crash and not feel like you have to be part of this crazy chaotic system of the university and getting work done all the time.... That went along with something telling you ownership of the space and being able to just, ok here's the couch, I'm going to take a nap here for an hour and not feel awkward about sleeping in public... the couches for me represent I guess a level of comfort.



*Photo 2. CCC Community Center Couch*



*Photo 3. Women's Center Lobby*

The idea of comfort also emerged from the data when participants discussed the idea of spending time within the sites. The ability to spend hours in the Campus Community Centers connects with notions of home seen in the literature (Turner, 1994). The sites are organized in a way where informal and formal structures operate simultaneously to create a synergistic feeling of belonging.

The lobby of the Cross a few of us hanging out, studying maybe, napping, ... I feel like I spend, not the majority of my time, but like the time I spend here is really worth it. Every time I come to the Cross, it's like to eat or handle business or I have something, you know, worthwhile. Either to study, meet up with somebody, build community, bond or do something. I don't feel like I waste my time at the Cross. The cross is a productive space.

Furnishing and other physical aspects are identifiable as tangible points of connection (i.e. having couches to sleep on or libraries that draw students in).

The data also revealed a new concept- "taken for granted" resources. In organizational structures, certain everyday practices and furnishing are expected elements of most work sites. Desk, computers, art on walls, copiers, etc. are all familiar items in the typical office setting. Data in this study revealed that the importance and use of these items have more nuanced meaning to the participants than previously known. One poignant picture (Photo 4) and accompanying participant statement captures the importance of a formal resource to students who use the Centers.



*Photo 4. Women's Center Cooler*

This picture is representative of why, like almost very small reason I use the center...I'm just like a used the water...I always get so thirsty and I drink so much water...the CCC and the WC...I wanted to take a picture of this because I use the Center's water so much that I need to give them credit for it... so that's part of the reason why the Centers are appropriate for me is that all these are a safe space for me to talk and stuff. But it's also convenient for me. I'm able to have those little resources that wouldn't be available.

This same participant helped unearth another formal and taken for granted resource- the Women's Center copy machine.

This particular picture, she didn't want to be photographed but I met her friend through a class in Econ[omics] and we needed to make some copies... she loves the fact that the copies at the WC are five cents, so she goes back to the Center just for the copies, although she's starting to be a part of the space more. Like ok, I'll stay here for a bit... I was so glad that I was able to introduce her to the Women's Center even if it's just for copies because I know that later on, it's going to be a little bit, for more for other stuff.

In the above example, the formal resources helped network and bring new students to the Campus Community Centers and serve a networking role between users and new students. In this vein, resource use acts like the acquaintance relationship process mentioned in the previous section. Also, data revealed these ‘taken-for-granted resources’ have both formal and informal qualities that create a non-institutional environment that proved salient to participants’ feelings of comfort and belonging.

Along with formal resources used by participants, data revealed a more informal, implicit way resources created belonging within the Campus Community Center physical environments. Artifacts like lamps, pictures, candy, donated furniture, and fabric table coverings implicitly create a homey environment. What was clear from the observations was the random, un-intentional way the environment was being created. During walking observations, the researcher made note of furnishings at all three sites that were non-institutional in nature. Each of the sites had donated posters and art displayed on the walls as well as fabric coverings on shelves and tables. Each of the sites also had what appeared to be used lamps, tables, and other smaller furniture items that resembled items one might find at home rather than in a work setting. All of the sites had knick knacks and toys throughout the room as well as a community kitchen with mismatched dishes, community food, and refrigerators with magnets, cartoons, and drawings on the doors. When an inquiry was made about the above artifacts, it was explained that they were donated or brought by staff to the sites.





*Photo 5. Protesting ducks in the LGBT restroom*



*Photo 6. CCC Snack Basket*

The final piece of data related to environment and a sense of belonging that has both formal and an informal implication was the importance of kitchen use to the participants. In many cases, kitchens in office or organizational resources are off limits to customers and only available to employees. In the Campus Community

Centers, kitchens are physically accessible to the community. The Campus Community Centers also encourage food foraging with values that allow for open eating if an item is not clearly marked.

I captured a picture of the fridge because a lot of my food and my lunches are here... I guess this sense of entitlement you can put your food in the fridge... I really like the way the kitchen has been a part of the Cross in terms of family style eating. I think food is so essential to the community and so I feel like the kitchen has been a really essential part of the Cross.



*Photo 7. CCC Kitchen*

Echoing this sentiment, another participant noted “these are some of my favorite days that I would go and there’s just food on the table up for grabs.” Along with food being an important resource, the actual spaces of the kitchens proved to be zones for informal conversations and gatherings, providing the opportunity for new relationships to develop.

In an interview, one participant noted “people always congregate in the kitchen...I think it’s because usually someone is waiting for the microwave and then someone else come in to get water, and they start talking in the kitchen.” Another



participant summed up the importance of kitchen use to the comfort in the sites by saying “I also have a picture of the microwave and toaster oven-- goes to the theme of ownership.”



*Photo 8. LGBT Kitchen*

*Importance of creating an atmosphere of belonging*

The above section speaks to the use of resource as creators of belonging and connection within and across the Campus Community Center sites. The physical resources of the Centers reflected directly in participants’ statements about how they feel within the space. Data revealed key affective connections participants made through using the resources. One participant noted a sense of pleasure as a result of the casual atmosphere, stating “I think one thing that’s awesome about the Cross is the casual atmosphere... sometimes we use chairs or sometimes just chill on the ground.” In an overarching example of the importance of resources to users of the sites, another participant echoed this sentiment:

It’s a chill way to use your resources... I think it’s great to have the Centers as an open space for students to come in and be comfortable and like study....it’s

open for anything, you can do pretty much whatever you want. That's what I like about it.

In a parallel statement, another participant commented how the formal and informal resources and feelings of the Campus Community Center sites impacted the functions of student organizations:

Partly because of the resources and then giving student orgs [organizations] a space to talk among themselves to figure out and determine what their identities are and so forth... the space is also important, but in addition knowing that the professional staff is there to answer any questions and help us along the way.

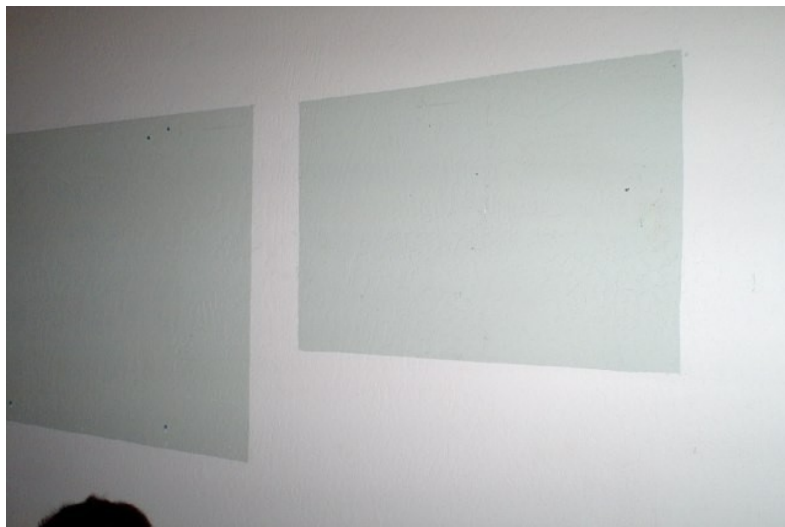
The openness of resources for individuals and the casual atmosphere combine to create a space of comfort for participant users. This 'feel' is one of the key findings regarding factors that influence a sense of belonging.

*Environmental comforts and affective outcomes*

The physical aspects of the Campus Community Centers implicitly created both informal and formal atmospheres. This 'feel' helped the participants connect with the sites on an affective level. The affective levels of comfort emerge individually and symbolically within the data. One participant spoke of a psychological connection to how they navigate one of the particular sites:

Whenever I don't come here, like if the Cross is closed, I feel like my day's very incomplete, I'm like I don't feel like I've been productive even though I come here sometimes to do nothing because its where... it just represents home.

Another participant viewed the Center as a symbol of the energy and power of the people who use the building, bestowing the site with affective qualities:



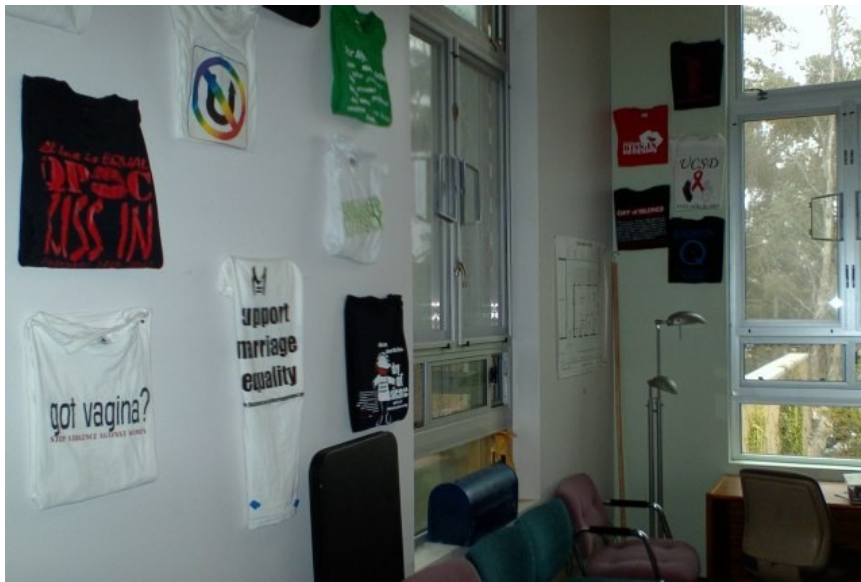
*Photo 9. CCC lobby before move*

Something I think is symbolic to people. Like something was here in this building before the Cross came and now that the Cross is leaving...this place used to be Financial Aid and it had very different energy. The Cross was powerful to actually change the energy in this place. The energy was powerful from all the frustration and money and economic things that went on here, the Cross and the people who came here changed that so much.

Data collected from participant interviews and site observations highlighted the impacts of created atmospheres within the sites. As one participant noted, “for example this ...community acted [on the] space...someone put all these pictures up and put the shelves, designed the table in there, put a beautiful couch all these things and those are transforming actions.” This idea of community acted upon space is very prevalent within the photos and observational data from the study.



*Photo 10. Women's Center Gender Buffet art project*



*Photo 11. LGBT Center Heritage Room*

In a specific example that connected created environments to historical roots within the site, two participants spoke of the LGBT Center Heritage room using a photograph to elicit discussion.

This is called the heritage room because the fact that there's things all over the walls- sayings about what different orgs and the student in the history of UC,

the history of people with stories with LBT issues have gone through these year with just these t-shirts on the walls. Which is really cool, the heritage room is also , this is kind of a little tour where you get to the end, this is actually exactly the same size what the LGBT resource office was... so its heritage in all of its forms.

Within the participant data and across the site observations notions of history, heritage, legacy and art as transformative emerged.

*Art as transformative- linking people, past, and future*

A key topic of discussion among the participants was the influence of art and artifacts within the Campus Community Centers. The art was seen by site users as a resource but also an affective link to participants' individual identities as well as histories and legacies. These linkages manifest in two ways: the perceived absence of visuals connected to social justice legacies and personal identification with art within the sites.

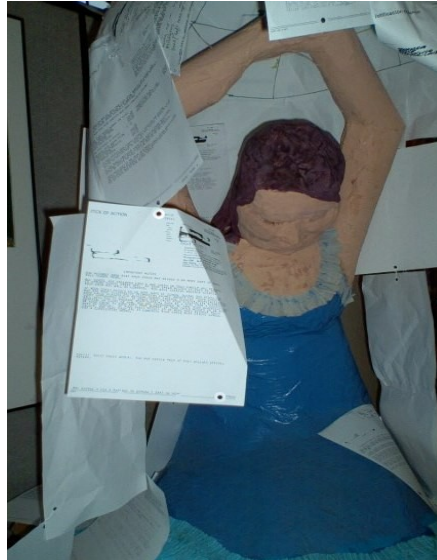
Two participants interviewed, as well as students who were part of the observations, commented on art specific to the LGBT Center. Participants felt that the contemporary art donated to the Center did not reflect the community of people who use the site. This sentiment arose specifically when students were noting the difference in art created by LGBT users and other forms of art. LGBT community created art was pointed to with enthusiasm and pride.

I love this wall, but the same time I'm kind of upset at it...it's in a good space because it's a hall, you walk down the hall to the heritage room... but I think this wall is so much more important if it was on the outside in the community space for us to put things on. I feel it makes me feel proud and it angers me that the things we do addressing the different issues in our community are put on this wall towards the back.



*Photo 12. LGBT Center Student Art Project*

A second participant also discussed the importance of the symbolic links created by art at the Center. In responding to a public art display at the Cross-Cultural Center, the student stated “the exhibit was really striking. I had no idea these are eviction notices. And this woman is like under a faucet or the sink or something... I feel like it speaks of resilience.” In commenting on another of their favorite photos that represented the empowerment of women of color, a participant stated “until college I didn’t know art was healing.”



*Photo 13. Community Art Display at CCC*

In a similar vein, one participant spoke directly to the empowerment of art when commenting about a book picked up from a Community Center display case:

I was looking through this book [*This Bridge called My Back*] and there was a sign on it and I was like wow, this person was... one of my friends said that the author or editor of that book had already passed away... I saw that it was signed and was just like, wow this person touched this book and I'm touching it now and I'm reading it and it's just like this hold so close, you know. Like you hear and read about it in history, but they are just words in a book. But when something like having a book signed, knowing that they were here... and it's like that much more amazing and you're connecting to a history, and you're receiving something and you're connected to something and you have responsibility, but a passion that continues on in this legacy...its amazing to reach back through history and pull it closer to you and just be a part of that train or that time or that link of being an activist.

From the proceeding sections on engagement, relationships, and settings, the data revealed a complex interplay between these concepts that is captured in the idea of meaning-making as a multilayered, complex process taking place within and across the sites. According to Wenger (2000) meaning-making within communities of practice is negotiated in the way individual and collective meaning is made.

### *Meaning*

A key component to addressing research questions and the application of the *navigational model* involved unpacking participant meaning-making derived from interaction within and across the Campus Community Center sites. The preceding sections showed that engagement, relationships, and setting all interacted and impacted the participants' sense of belonging. This interaction, when examined holistically, created a means for understanding the impact of social settings and how these settings engendered belonging for individuals. Both Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Wenger (2002) offer a way of further explicating the phenomena of belonging by offering definitions of meaning within social settings and communities of practice.

For analyzing social settings, Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) break down meaning into cognitive components which include ideologies, roles, self concepts and identities. In this vein meaning, "directs attention to the socially constructed character of our worlds and the objects that constitute them" (p. 133). Meaning also can be understood as emotion or feelings. Thus, in Lofland's analytic view, gaining an understanding of meaning requires concentrating on the emotions, practices, episodes, and encounters in a social setting, roles people inhabit, or the emotional pitch within organizations. In Wenger's (2002) conceptual framework regarding *communities of practice*, meaning is a key component. His definition of meaning gives "a way of talking about (changing) ability-individually and collectively- to experience life and the world as meaningful" (p. 14). Human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning (p.53).



Using the Lofland et al. and Wenger's work as a lens, *meaning* was explored through all the collected data and was a focus of the analysis for this study. Four major themes emerged from the data that explore meaning: meaning of entry to the university and Campus Community Centers, meanings of safety in the University environment, meaning and development of language to explain experience, and how navigating the above concepts led to notions of work and justice for the participants. Each theme will be explored turn below.

*Meaning of entry to the university and Campus Community Centers*

As seen in the section on *relationships*, participants expressed difficulty finding their "home" on campus. The Campus Community Centers emerged as a way to counteract this experience for students within the study. Within the data, two distinct themes surfaced: isolation and the personal impacts of the physical campus environments. One poignant example echoes comments heard across participant interviews while also giving voice to specific experience:

I was a commuter my first year, not connected to any type of community... it was really hard for me to come to school... I didn't feel like I was in college. It felt like I was alone and by myself. I was never part of any social life on campus...I was missing part of my college experience because I was never part of the dorms.

This participant goes on to explain how even the physical layout of the campus contributed to this feeling of isolation:

For me UCSD was ridiculous, really cold and really lonely. I would sit in stairwells to study and it was literally cold and lonely. I kept thinking that this was not what college should be. I kept blaming myself for wanting to go to college- well not blaming myself but mostly thinking if I would have been [lived] on campus it would have been different, if I had been able to pay for school it would have been different...almost like imagine thinking that it's your fault for not being able to form my own space. I have to leave home...I

felt...I think I almost blamed my parents for forcing me to come to this horrible place. It was just a very lonely and sad and isolating period. And thanks to the Centers I was able to form myself into an advocate and understand what that meant, and understand what I wanted to do.

The participant further states that they felt they had to choose between family roles and student roles. This dichotomy of choice is echoed in literature about underrepresented and marginalized student experiences in college settings (Nora, Cabrera, Hegadorn, & Pacarella, 1996). Earlier in the study, this student shared sentiments of not being able to start conversations about this experience with family or peers. This internal struggle often goes unsaid and unacknowledged in college environments:

It was so hard for me to actually recognize the privilege that I had and still be part of the community back home. How I had to decide... it was horrible, how could UCSD force me to decide between those two communities?

This feeling of isolation and aloneness happens for all students (Tinto, 1993) but was particularly prevalent for participants in this study. As seen in the narrative above and preceding sections, participants of the study had difficulty connecting with roommates and others early in their experiences at UCSD. Even when students first visited the Campus Community Centers, trying to navigate connections proved challenging.

Three participants talked about the difficulty navigating the Centers. In referring to the CCC, one student said “People knew each other. I didn’t feel comfortable going in and sitting on the couches and hanging out with everyone who was in the space.” Another student noticed everyone was smiling but they really didn’t connect to the spaces. A similar experience happened to a participant at the

LGBT Resource Center, who noted “I was really nervous about going in even though technically I was out as queer but I still wasn’t comfortable going into the space.”

Through time and engagement in the Campus Community Centers, students began to negotiate the dichotomy of choosing between family, identity, and their college experiences. As the interviews progressed, stories emerged that highlighted a shift in participant views about how their university experience was impacted by engagement with the Campus Community Centers. The participant in the preceding section, during the course of the interview, honed in on how the Campus Community Centers changed and influenced their thinking as they were preparing to graduate from UC San Diego:

I wanted to portray in the pictures my interactions with the Centers. I feel very much a part of the Centers...but I am not a physical part of the space... I wanted to make it clear that I’m still a part of the Center in so many ways but at the same time I’m not. It’s almost like a good-bye gift. I’m not going to be here forever and it’s ok. You know, it something that transforms me.

In talking about experiences in the Community Centers, one participant commented “I guess overall, its really impacted my experience by making me feel like I do have a niche here or that I do have somewhere I work where I feel like I do have a sense of ownership and I have a sense of belonging.” In perhaps a culminating quote, one participant remarked about how they navigate the Campus Community Centers in relationship to their background and needs as a student:

The Women’s Center... I don’t know such a homey place. It was almost like finding the balance between UCSD and back home... for students who are really part of UCSD [stay on campus] they need a lot of back home... they need the space [referencing CCC] in order to survive. The LGBT Center I think a lot of people who feel they are not part enough of the UCSD community they are able to find that space with the LGBT center.

In another quote, one student speaks to how the Centers played a role in their overall college experience and their ability to complete their college education:

The Centers have been amazing to me... when I was sad, when I was lonely, when I needed that space, when I needed support, there was either a group or someone in the Centers that was caring enough and smart enough to know what was going on with me and I think that part of community is not something that... I don't think I would have been able to finish college if the Centers were not there.

When asked how experience in Centers impacted college experience, another participant commented specifically on LGBT Resource Center as well as the Women's and Cross-Cultural Centers:

It has given me more than what people would say a home base or campus or your favorite spot. For a place to sleep... there's a place-- it's really hard to find people like me, I found people like me. I've learned to be very important to my academic success. The fact that they're [Campus Community Centers] are on campus actually brings everything together, we're academic, you're also a cultural person and you're also invested in learning about your major and also things about yourself and your culture and your people...so it makes you well rounded. I think these spaces are just as big...I can think of the campus as just a classroom and actually think of the Centers as my campus.

As students became more connected to campus through engagement and relationship building, data revealed how this process shaped notions of safety on campus.

*Meanings of safety in the environment*

Within the data, two themes emerged concerning safety in relation to the campus environment participants navigate: campus climate and niche creation. Turner (1994) examines this concept of safety, noting that students of color and other marginalized groups on campuses often feel like "guests in someone else's house" unable to put their feet up, relax, and be themselves. Safety comes up in the data

surrounding issues of exposing one's identity as well as outside pressures relating to how they are seen by others.

You know it was just really hard for me to actually scan people on immigrant rights...are you going to harm me? Are you going to be ok with that?... I really sympathize with the LGBT community because I understand that they have to almost like scan people and feel like are you doing to do something to me?

Referring to a picture of the Price Center Plaza (a central gathering space on campus) and ideas of safe spaces on campus, another participant noted:

This picture reminds me of [student organization] how important it is to show our faces because this is the center of campus where most people walk through every day, or chill, or eat. [It] reminds me of being [one of the few] just having that awkward space for a while but you kind of break the ice. You step out of your comfort zones then you start getting comfortable and like, ok, it's not that bad.



*Photo 14. UC San Diego Price Center Plaza*

For five of the six participants, student organizations helped create that safe niche on campus. One participant in particular framed safety in terms of marginalized voices within the campus community:

I think it has to do with the idea of marginalized voices and this [the CCC} being a space of where those voices are heard because I think a common theme in a lot of these spaces is that our voices aren't heard outside this space. You know they aren't heard in the classroom, they aren't heard in university settings... we try to consciously create these spaces to counteract that... the Cross has been a space where that has occurred a lot where, yeah, we counteract the notion that we don't have anything to say or contribute.

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen and Allen (1999), discussing *enacting diverse learning environments*, speak to the creation of campus climates where students of color and other marginalized populations can feel connected. While every public university strives to be demographically representational, Campus Community Centers can fill a critical void by creating trusting environments for students. When exploring notions of safety and trusting environments fostered by the Campus Community Centers, a participant noted:

I really feel a sense of camaraderie here because I feel like the people around understand the campus climate, they understand how this is different from the rest of the campus. It's kind of funny, we talk about UCSD not being diverse in some ways. I think for me and the people who are really involved, especially with the Cross-Cultural Center, we are immersed in such a diverse environment. It's kind of ironic, I step outside the Cross, the lecture halls or like somewhere else I can see how there's not diversity because at the same time I am surrounded by it here.

In addressing how the LGBT Center created a sense of voice and balance, a participant stated:

If not for LGBT Center I would be a different person because I remember coming to UCSD and I wanted to find certain people to explore certain things, portions of my identity and I was lucky there was this space in which case I'm highly fortunate to meet new people... who were just like me in certain aspects but at the same time also different from me.... People who were already out and people who were still coming out... Also similar to me like in [ethnic background] and so forth.

Tying the ideas of safety and physical setting together, one participant, when explaining a photo of the CCC microwave, commented:

This goes along with [picture] theme of ownership of the space... with safe haven [referring to project title] so I guess I was trying to capture that in these pictures of feeling like the Community Center's our safe haven because we have a sense of ownership and we have a sense of belonging.



*Photo 15. CCC microwave*

Highlighting the complexity of navigating meaning within the campus environment, data emerged on how these navigations shaped participant ability to understand and name their own experiences. This naming of experience had an empowering effect on engagement as evidenced in the data.

*Meaning and development of language to explain experiences*

A review of the data revealed that naming and voicing personal experience was facilitated by engagement in the Campus Community Centers. Stories told by

participants during interviews showed the critical importance of naming and codifying experiences:

It [language] wasn't something that I could articulate right after when I came here [UCSD] the way the Campus Community Centers helped me because being able to put language around it and being able to have a discourse about social justice and being able to actively engage in these conversations...I knew why I felt wrong and I knew I certainly felt bad but I didn't know I can engage in dialogue with somebody.

This language acquisition also helped the participants be reflective about their own identities:

Being here at UCSD has really been a process of understanding what my identities are and how it really impacts how I interact with the world because in high school I wasn't as conscious about... I mean I knew what my identities were but I didn't really know what it meant to hold these identities. I think in terms of institutional things that happen around race and ethnicity but I was really oblivious to...I wasn't even conscious really that there weren't a lot of Latino and black people in our IB (international baccalaureate) program.

Participants specifically appreciated the Campus Community Centers for helping them negotiate these understandings from a social justice perspective:

I am very appreciative of the fact that they [the Centers] are so connected, the fact that it's not us versus them. The thing that I think has shaped me the most is the fact that I understand that I am not just working for immigrant rights but also LGBT community rights, it's also women's rights. And I think building that inter-connectedness in my life has helped me understand what I am fighting for.

Having language to explain experiences helped students frame common understanding: "there is so much in terms of language and power and language culture...so I think part of the cultural identity of the Community Centers is this idea of we use similar language." Data revealed that participants entered the university understanding complex issues of diversity and social justice but sometimes without the requisite language or voice to use this understanding to describe experiences at the



university. Engagement with the Campus Community Centers helped participants acquire language that precipitated their personal development and activism.

*Navigating meaning: concepts of work and justice*

Astin (1993) discussed student involvement as an empirical marker of college retention, particularly for students of color and marginalized groups. Astin notes that, for students of color, activism may look like anti-university and segregated community building when in fact this particular type of student engagement is a direct marker of niche building and belonging. Aligned with Astin, Hurtado and Carter (1996) critique retention research for not taking into account student of color and marginalized group specific types of involvement. Hurtado and Carter indicate this may result in a skewing of national college retention data for these populations.

In the interview data, research participants expressed both personal and political ideas about activism and belonging at UCSD:

These pictures are really personal. They're of my friends and they're the people I care about... I can't separate my work or my passion from the people I work with... they remind me of why I want to be [named career choice] and why I want to have educational discussions...my pictures kind of tell a story, like a personal story because it shows what I care about.

Referring to taking an ethnic studies class (but not as a major), one participant stated:

For myself, not until recently have I delved deeply into social justice things and actually thinking about race relations in America...I want to take as much as I can when I leave... I have a really big fear about where I'm going to find my spaces outside of UCSD...it's been a really tough struggle going through that where I'm going to have safe space for, to talk about these things and to me myself and actually staying active about social justice issues

In reflecting back on experiences with the Cross-Cultural Center and the understanding of the Center's mission, a participant added:

I guess it was a slow realization about the mission of the Cross in terms of not just being here to get work done... but recognizing that a part of social justice work is self love and taking care of ourselves and checking in with people and the whole community building aspect...it was a slow realization of what community building actually means.

In a similar sentiment, a participant expands on the way in which the Campus Community Center influences how they view their role in advocacy work. Referring to another location just adjacent to the Women's Center:

I took the photo there because even though it's not part of the Center, I think we are part of the Center, like each individual part of the Center. We're not in the constraints of the physical space, like our presence itself is part of the Centers. So, yeah, all the people I know, all the students sitting there regularly at the Center... I think it's just a part of the student movement that works for social justice, social and economic justice is part of the Centers... whether you wanted to make it official or not, I think you are part of Center because the Centers were built for that.

Another participant explored the idea of student work and advocacy from an institutional level

This picture [campus administration complex] is significant because we are at continual battle with the administration for issues that students face. The administration is going to be a crucial factor in my experience here. I am going to have to deal with the administration to get something done.



*Photo 16. UCSD Administrative Complex*

This notion of the meaning of student work within the context of the Centers is also linked to ideas about historical legacy that was explored in depth previously (see *Settings* section). This historical link also gave participants connection and meaning to their ideals of activism. Wenger (2002) points to this idea in his framework on modes of belonging where the histories and stories shared in a community of practice are ways individuals develop tools within a community. Referring to a picture of the CCC activist room, one participant connected to the campus activist legacy, stating “I took a picture of all the pictures of history ... because I really feel like being here at the Cross is continuing the movement. And I think the best thing in the community is being part of this legacy.”



*Photo 17. CCC Activist Conference Room*

The participants also perceived a link between individual identity and the importance of history. Commenting on how the linkage to history makes connections at a personal level, one participant noted:

One thing that I love about the Cross is that this is actually space where I can learn about the history and I can actually see it on the walls and I can talk to people who know about that history because it isn't taught in the university.

The above data sheds light on the ways in which physical aspects of the Center sites lead to affective outcomes for the participants and how they derive personal meanings from physical environments.

### *Conclusion- Setting Sail*

When participants first arrived at UC San Diego, navigating belonging proved difficult to the point where some participants felt they might leave the university all together. As they connected to the Campus Community Centers in formal and informal ways, they began developing voice and empowerment as a result of these experiences. Data revealed a clear link between engagement with the Campus Community Centers and feelings of belonging. Data also showed this belonging helped students negotiate their day to day lives within the University environment.

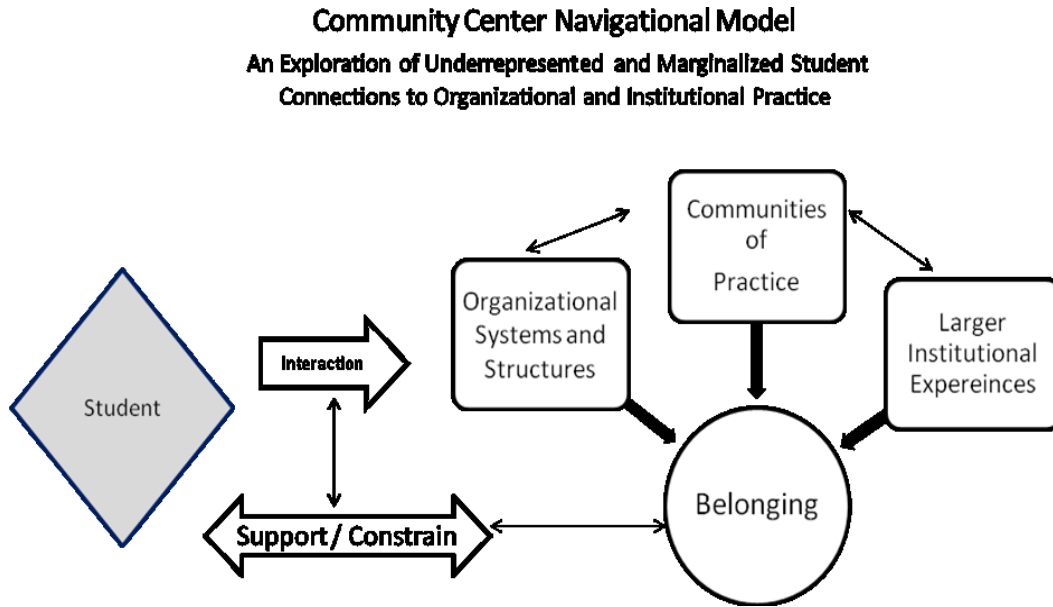
Themes of university entry, safety, resources, relationships, and meaning proved salient for participants as they navigated engagement on individual, organizational, and community levels. This complexity of belonging is captured by Wenger (2002) as he explicates interaction within a community of practice as being “both personal and social...it is a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging and involves our whole person including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations” (p. 56).

The mutual interaction of engagement and relationships working through the physical and affective qualities within and across the sites created a space for participants to explore, name, and take action on their own experiences and needs.

Participants did not enter UC San Diego with language to explain, or in some cases direct niches of, validation and belonging. The Campus Community Centers served as key points of entry for the interactional processes necessary for students to feel validated and thus like they belonged within the institutional environment.

Sometimes student belonging appeared oppositional and contrary to institutional integration but, as seen in work by Hurtado and Carter (1996) and Astin (1993), niches, networks, and peer interaction are key ways underrepresented and marginalized students define experiences within college environments. The *Campus Community Center Navigational Model* attempts to capture this complex process by looking at the key area of interaction within the organizational, community, and larger university practice. In this vein, the model is a living, two-way interactional process of participation and engagement.

This research project had as its core the exploration of belonging through a prism of organizational systems and structures, communities of practice, and larger institutional experiences of underrepresented and marginalized students. The guiding questions involved the extent to which engagement with the Cross-Cultural, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender and Women's Resource Centers at UCSD supported or constrained this sense of belonging.



*Figure 4.* Navigational Model

What emerged from the data are several key points related to the navigational model. One, when the unit of analysis shifts from the individual to an interactional process, nuanced ways of seeing how organizations and individuals impact each other are more easily discerned. Two, because interaction in the Campus Community Centers is so multifaceted, layers of meaning and belonging are seen in all their complexity. For example, participants may have had only one community center as a home base but they were able to articulate the importance of the value of a Campus Community Center ideal and a social justice world view. The model also allowed for the understanding that interaction is spatial and temporal, formal and informal. Some of the participants had difficulty with interacting within the research sites but, as a result of continued engagement, became key leaders within the Centers and at the university as a whole. Lastly, interaction is a complex web of networks, bridges, and

borders. Belonging as a process is thus understood through the complexity of interaction. Figure four offers a visual representation of this process.

The UC Campus Community Centers' explicit relationship to individual students and each other is ultimately an organizational construct. Participants were able to feel comfortable in one location as well as know they were welcome at the other sites. Often this comfort was implicit as well as explicit. For example, art on the walls and library books offered the participants personal validation. Often, the process of belonging happened as a result of engagement in the sites. Once students participated at the sites through organizations or just warming up lunch, they began to see and know others who had similar ideas and values. These formal and informal events and chats led participants to feel more connected and engaged at the university and ultimately to feel like they belonged.

The idea of belonging that emerged from the data was not reflective of a need to lose one's sense of self in order to integrate into a larger institutional structure. Belonging was about discovering oneself and choosing spaces and times to rest, make connections, and work for change. Ultimately, each of the Campus Community Center models was designed to enhance and serve this goal. In Chapter five, a detailed review of the *navigational model* in relation to research questions and findings is put forth. Along with connecting the questions, model, and research on college retention, Chapter five begins a broader discussion on theoretical and practical applications of the findings from this study. The practical applications may give colleges and universities new ways to organize programs and policies to increase underrepresented

and marginalized college student success. Practical applications may also help Multi, LGBT, and Women's Centers envision new ways of working together.



## Chapter 5

### *Measuring Belonging: A New Compass*

Student affairs research calls for the investigation of student niche creation and points of belonging, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized students (Komives, Dudley, & Woodard, 2003). At the onset of this investigation, three research questions were posed in order to gain a greater understanding of student belonging within the UC San Diego Cross-Cultural, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender, and Women's Centers. Data from this study confirmed that engagement with Campus Community Centers promoted a sense of personal validation and belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students. Participants viewed the Campus Community Centers as locations of safety and comfort and engaged in formal and informal relationship building at the sites. In addition, use of the physical resources available at the Centers created tangible links of belonging for the students who were a part of this study. These relational and resource moments resulted in feelings of personal ownership within and across the Community Center sites.

The Cross-Cultural Center, LGBT, and Women's Centers come together to form a new, organizational construct- the Campus Community Centers. This construct is an explicit combination of individual Center values linked to the philosophical underpinning of social justice. Social justice, in this light, means creating spaces for individuals to feel safe both physically and psychologically; then supporting individuals to become productive, interdependent citizens (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Because the Campus Community Centers themselves navigate complex relationships with each other and within the University, participants are able to name,

understand, and maneuver across the sites and the University as a whole. This organizational and individual traversing creates a new and unique community of practice. This community of practice mitigated isolation and created belonging for the individuals as well as the Community Centers.

Before delving into a deeper discussion of study findings and model implications, a review of the project is provided. This includes a summary of the study and the initial research problem and questions; a review of the methodological underpinnings; and an examination of the findings and their relationship to the *navigational model* detailed in this study. This review also connects the literature on retention and organizational development to the *navigational model*. After discussion of the findings, limitations of the study are addressed. Finally, implications for action and recommendations for further research will be put forth. Ultimately, increased knowledge regarding the navigational space of perception, interaction, and practice can lead to a deeper understanding and creation of organizational and university belonging which, according to Siedman (2005) and Tinto (1993), are key indicators for college retention of underrepresented and marginalized students.

#### *Summary of study*

This case study explored the relationship between underrepresented and marginalized student college experience and UC San Diego Campus Community Center practice. Interviews and observations were conducted to gain in depth organizational understanding in relation to undergraduate student perception and use of each site. Case study methodology (Yin, 2003) framed the overall study. Within the case study design, interviews (Holstien & Gubrium, 2003; Merriam, 1998),

participant observation (Creswell, 2005; Spradley, 1980), photo elicitation (Hurworth, 2003; Rose, 2001) and document review (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were methods of data collection.

Participants included a purposive selection (Creswell, 2005) of six undergraduate students who frequented one or more of the Center sites two or more times per week. Analysis proceeded using coding schema developed by Loftland and Loftland (1995) and Miles and Huberman (1994), specifically focusing on acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and settings. This coding schema allowed for micro and macro review across all data collection methods. Each schema was explored in the data and resulted in the emergence of four main thematic strands: engagement, relationships, setting, and meaning making.

#### *Overview of the Problem*

As stated in the introduction to the study, by 2015 underrepresented and non-traditional students will make up two-thirds of the college going population. Research shows that these students are less likely to persist in college than their counterparts (Siedman, 2005; Swail, 2003). Universities are looking for ways to increase persistence among these students as well as to build better campus climates (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen, 1999). One mechanism for accomplishing this goal was the establishment of community centers that work directly with these constituent populations. Little research has been done on the impact of these Centers on student outcomes. This study offers a small step toward filling the gap in the literature regarding Campus Community Center impacts on students.

### *Review of the Methodology*

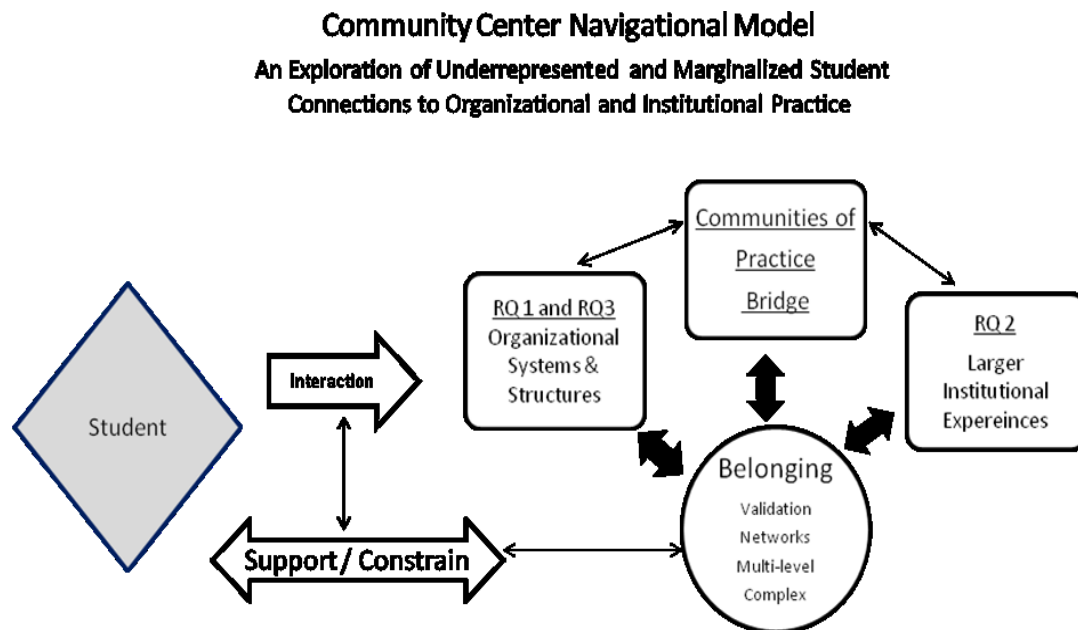
An embedded case study design (Yin, 2003) was employed to answer the research inquiry of this project. A case study approach allowed for a better understanding of student interaction within the physical as well as affective space of each Center and was useful in exploring how this interaction supported or constrained a sense of participant belonging. Using purposeful sampling methods (Creswell, 2005), interviews were conducted with six undergraduate frequent users of the UCSD Campus Community Center sites.

Photo elicitation methods were an integral part of the interview process. Over 140 images were captured by the participants of the study. Only photos of the physical setting are included in this final document to protect the anonymity of users of the three Center sites. Along with interviews, six participant observations were conducted with a minimum of two observations at each Community Center site. The observations included one stationary observation and one walking observation. Furnishing, artifacts, conversations, and zones of engagement were noted during the observations. Lastly, founding proposal documents for all three sites were obtained and reviewed. These documents were examined in order to obtain baseline information concerning the founding philosophies and values set forth for each Center.

A *Community Center Navigational Model* was put forth as a framework for mapping the interactional complexity of community center practice. What emerged from the study was an interconnected network of engagement, relationships, setting and meaning making all working in tandem to support participant belonging to the sites and, by extension, the university. The *Navigational Model* is a visual

representation of this process and supportive of the research questions put forth in Chapter One, which include:

1. How do the daily practices and structures of each UC San Diego Campus Community Center support or constrain a sense of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students?
2. How do the UC San Diego Campus Community Centers support or constrain student connections to a wider university community?
3. In what ways do the Cross-Cultural Center; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered; and Women's Centers organizational structures and practices meet differing underrepresented and marginalized student needs?



*Figure 5.* Navigational Model

Mapping the research questions onto the navigational model was a key strategy for understanding the nuanced level of interaction between student, organization, and sense of belonging. Research questions one and three correspond to the

“organizational systems and structures element” on the navigational model, while question two corresponds to the “larger institutional experiences element” of the model. As seen in Figure 5 the “communities of practice “(Wenger, 2002) element creates a link between the two other elements and opens a bridge to explicate the phenomenon of belonging. What bridged participant views of belonging and validation were experiences within and across the Campus Community Center practices.

The communities of practice theoretical framework provided a means for unpacking the multifaceted, complex nature of belonging that surfaced during the data collection. Wenger (2002) notes “rather than classifying communities under fixed categories, modes of belonging provide a framework for how these communities are constituted” (p. 182). In other words, belonging is not a fixed element but changes and grows through individual definitions of community, time spent in the community, meaning that is derived because of time spent, and boundary definitions about the community. The remainder of this chapter explores these ideas in more depth.

### *Major findings*

The *Community Center Navigational Model* proved relevant to deconstructing and understanding how participants define and navigate belonging within the organizational sites as well as the University as a whole. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: engagement, relationships, settings, and meaning making. All of these themes proved relevant to the discussion of specific supports students garnered through interaction at the Campus Community Centers. Table 2 provides a

visual representation of the navigational model, research questions, and themes that emerged from the study.

*Table 2 Major findings overview*

Analysis (Meta Themes)	Place in Navigational Model	Research Questions	Sub-Themes
Engagement	Interaction Organizational COP	RQ 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Individual</i></li> <li>• <i>Organizational</i></li> </ul>
Relationships	Organizational Larger Inst. COP	RQ 2 and RQ 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal Fit</i></li> <li>• <i>Staff Relationships</i></li> <li>• <i>Faculty and Peers</i></li> <li>• <i>Acquaintances</i></li> </ul>
Setting	Organizational COP	RQ 1 and RQ 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Resource Use</i></li> <li>• <i>Atmosphere</i></li> <li>• <i>Affective Outcomes</i></li> <li>• <i>Art as Linkage</i></li> </ul>
Meaning	Interaction Organizational COP Larger Institution.	RQ 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Entry</i></li> <li>• <i>Safety</i></li> <li>• <i>Language</i></li> <li>• <i>Work as Activism</i></li> </ul>

Findings relate directly to the literature on retention, organizational development, and communities of practice. The next section expands on identified themes, connects these themes back to research reviewed for the study, and finally relates study findings to the saliency of the *Navigational Model*, particularly the belonging component.

Ultimately, having an explicit understanding of belonging as an operational as well as an emotional construct may allow colleges and universities to move toward more

comprehensive models for increasing belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students.

### *Student Interaction*

Retention research is often presented with an underlying dichotomy in relation to interaction. Interaction is either seen as good or bad, present or not. Hurtado and Carter (1996), along with others (Antonio, 2001; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, Ngai & Saenz, 2006), call for universities to acknowledge that “understanding student sense of belonging may be key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these students” (Hurtado & Carter, 1996, p. 324). Because students are interacting on multiple levels, isolating one or a few key variables, while important, may limit a deeper understanding of the nature of the interaction. By investigating belonging as an interactional process, researchers might be better able to structure intervention to assure that a sense of belonging is attainable for all university students. Ultimately, a paradigm shift to a focus on the duality of the variables that impact belonging may prove useful to researchers as well as practitioners.

Wenger’s (2002) frame for understanding engagement provides a means for achieving this paradigm shift. Wenger states “duality is a fundamental aspect of the constitution of communities of practice, of their constitutions over time, of the relations among practices, of the identities of participants, and of the broader organizations in which they exist” (p. 65). Within this study, interaction emerges as not just a peer to peer or peer to university construct, but also individual student to individual department. The ability of departments to examine how communities of



practice operate in their organizations, as well as to examine the ways departments expand relationship boundaries, is of critical importance to cultivating spaces of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students.

Ultimately, interaction is engagement occurring on multiple levels. By uncovering levels of interaction and intervening in formal and informal ways, departments and universities can increase the meaningfulness of the interaction and thus impact belonging. Rendon (1994) and others (Hurtado and Carter, 1996; Jones, Castellanos, & Coles, 2002; Stennis-Williams, Terrell, & Haynes, 1998) urge universities to adopt a more validating, interactional approach to promoting belonging, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized student success. Increasing the scope and complexity of methods to promote student engagement can help organizations structure and evaluate their work in new ways, moving organizations from traditional top down operational models to more fluid, open, post-conventional organizational approaches.

#### *Organizational systems and structures*

Kuh (2003) offers a definition of post conventional organizations as “interdependent, unpredictable, less-structured, relationship centered, ever changing, and ambiguous” (p. 270). Other authors concur and also call for institutions to broaden their scope to meet the changing needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century world (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Senge, 2006). Investigating student affairs, Allen and Cherrey (2000) offer a mandate for organizational effectiveness in higher education that also emerged in the data collected for this study. Allen and Cherrey believe effective departments and organizations

foster trusting environments, develop emotional intelligence, share information, boundary span, create relational charts, and offer communities of solutions.

As seen in the data, the Campus Community Center model met Allen and Cherrey's definition of an effective organization for participants of the study. Students felt "at home" and perceived a sense of "ownership" of the sites, thus connecting to the trusting environmental impacts put forth by Allen and Cherrey. Participants also felt the Centers helped them understand and put language to their experiences, increasing their sense of belonging and efficacy within the campus. Participants shared feelings of connection to all three sites and an appreciation for the Campus Community Centers' physical and affective qualities. Participants also felt the relationships that grew from the sites, both with other students and the staff, helped them boundary span and see linkages across communities.

Study data also revealed that physical environment and resources had both formal and informal impacts, as well as implicit and explicit meanings, for students. Strange and Banning (2003) call for four levels of inquiry into person-place links as they relate to building better campus environments: physical, human aggregate, organizational, and constructed environments. Analysis revealed that each of the above constructs played a key role in belonging. The physical environment created comfort through furnishing, art, and the ability to access formal and informal resources of the sites. The human aggregate function connected participants who shared similar backgrounds or identities as well as values and philosophies about community building and social justice. Organizational outcomes encompassed the informal structures each of the Centers employed, including staff relationships with

each other as well as formal policies and practices each Center had in place. Lastly, the constructed Center environment allowed for a homey atmosphere where students felt they could hang out and be themselves.

The need to honor and create tangible ways for individuals to enter organizational sites was a key finding of Community Center practice. Based on the findings of this research, departments and organizations would do well to unearth implicit values and philosophies at work on the departmental level. Departments should also put in place creative, tangible, comfortable environments for underrepresented and marginalized students. Examples might include student access to ‘back of the house’ resources (kitchens, copiers, etc.) or use of art, specifically created by underrepresented or marginalized students, as a way to make connections across groups.

Blurring institutional structural barriers is another method that can be used to create a sense of belonging without asking students to prioritize their identity in fixed categories like race, gender, or sexuality. Also, departments and organizations should resist the tendency to promote a “melting pot” approach to diversity in which all groups are treated the same. Meeting students at their entry points and helping them further explore their individual identity and connection to others will be a key outcome for increasing belonging. Bonding and bridging values and activities should be made explicit for students and organizations.

#### *Larger institutional experiences*

As seen in Chapter Two, institutional characteristics interact with student experiences to impact how students integrate within campus settings (Tinto, 1975,

1993). Researchers are calling for a re-examination of integration as an outcome to a more holistic view of understanding how different student groups navigate the process of belonging (Baird, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, Tierney, 2000).

Hurtado and Carter (1996), challenging Tinto's integrationist approach, state "integration can mean something completely different to groups who have been historically marginalized in higher education" (p. 326).

Hurtado and Carter also note, citing Attinasi (1989, 1992), that students of color and other marginalized students become integrated, not because they share the values of the majority of students, but because the specific collective affiliations they form help them acquire the skills to negotiate [*sans navigate*] the social, physical, and cognitive geographies of large campus environments (p.329). Community of practice (Wenger, 2002) as a framework fits directly with this claim. As Hurtado and Carter explain "cognitive mapping and the formation of multiple communities, or social niches is useful to understanding minority students' collective affiliations on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1996, p.329). Findings from this study consistently confirm Hurtado and Carter's research. Participants were able to articulate and imagine complex individual and community identities. Once these identities and community niches were understood and claimed, participants were able to envision roles and responsibilities on campus wide levels thus increasing personal and institutional belonging. Belonging, as previous retention research has shown, is crucial for persistence and retention.

Literatures on retention and persistence often conceive of "climate" as individual constructs where the student is the focus of the analysis (Baird, 2000). This

research inquiry treats organizational structures and systems as an attribute of the institution and therefore re-focuses the unit of analysis to the departmental and institutional level with participant views of their experiences as core reflections of organizational processes and structures. Because the interactional process is key to the student experience and at the same time the organizational practice, validation and belonging were thus explored as both/and processes. It is at this level that Campus Community Centers impact the day to day experiences of students.

*Communities of practice*

The communities of practice (Wenger, 2002) framework enabled the investigation of complex organizational phenomena within the UC San Diego Cross-Cultural, LGBT, and Women's Centers. Use of this framework supported an investigation of the Campus Community Center organizing construct in relation to participant notions of belonging. Wenger's frame was particularly relevant in that it discusses the mutual, back and forth relationship building process that is inherent in most communities of practice. It is in these back and forth, day to day interactions that communities of practice develop and grow.

Given that we are *social beings*, it is important to understand the role that individual background characteristics play in the construction of better environments where working and learning can be enhanced. *Knowledge generation* happens as each person's experience is connected to and understood through the interplay of practice. *Active engagement in the world* speaks to the emergence of global interdependence that will require new skills and abilities, while *meaning making* is ultimately generated and enhanced in community with others (p.48). Within the above mentioned process

of community building, modes of belonging surface as the interactional glue whereby individuals and organizations engage in the practice of community building at the Campus Community Centers.

This research project showed that participants were engaging with the research sites on multiple levels. At the highest level, students understood and articulated the ideals of social justice and intersecting identities. Participants spoke directly of the feeling that they did not have to choose identities within the sites and could just be themselves, a factor which contributed to place making and belonging. Students also engaged in belonging with the physical settings, developing meanings and ownerships through artifacts and the comfort of spending time in the Centers. As seen in the study, interaction of Center staff across the sites helped participants understand and appreciate the deep camaraderie and respect staff have for each other. Seeing individuals and communities working together in both formal and informal ways helped participants create new visions of community connections. Also, the development of the Chancellors' Undergraduate Diversity Leadership Institute (CUDLI) helped participants see intersections and inter-linkages across histories and organizations.

Documented histories of the Cross-Cultural, LGBT, and Women's Centers show that, in enacting their mission and vision, these Centers were effective at creating a sense of belonging for specific constituent groups. Through a common vision of social justice, these organizations have honored their original mandates. The sites have also expanded boundaries of historical and organizational borders. In small and large ways, working across borders and boundaries provided the base from which

belonging could grow. The explicit manner in which each Center expressed and displayed the ideals of the common vision had the effect of enhancing belonging for the participants thus creating a unique community of practice.

*Deeping theory for belonging*

Wenger (2002) offers a framework for developing communities of practice where belonging involves not only identity, meaning and community, but also engagement, alignment, and imagination. Engagement is the involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning. Imagination involves creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space, and alignment involves coordinating energy and activities in order to contribute to broader enterprises (pp.173-74). Referring back to the *Navigational Model (fig. X)*, belonging as captured in this study includes involvement with the physical spaces, interaction within and across the spaces, and working toward a social justice ideal. Each of these components creates a network of validation and this validation leads to belonging. In this way, belonging involves personal engagement, alignment of identity, and imagination of a just world, interacting and growing out of Campus Community Center practice.

## Belonging: A Network of Validation

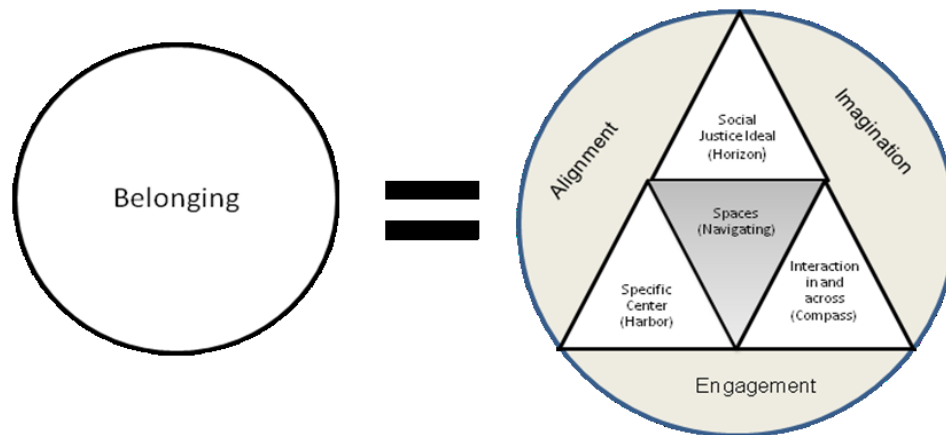


Figure 6. Network of Validation

Engagement, alignment, and imagination tie directly to the engagement, setting, relationships, and meaning meta-themes of this study. Interaction with one or more of the Campus Community Centers alleviated isolation and encouraged belonging for those who were a part of this study. When participants spoke of the importance of Campus Community Center engagement, relationship building and setting aligned to make meaning of their personal and institutional experiences. Once connection and alignment were established, empowerment and willingness to work for social justice and diversity within and across groups emerged. This empowerment manifested itself through participants starting organizations, naming and creating spaces of their own (sometimes in opposition to the university), and wanting to leave legacies of activism. Students felt empowered to name their experiences and began to creatively work toward personal as well as institutional change.



Perhaps as a key example of Wenger's (2002) alignment, engagement, and imagination is found in a participant poem about the Cross-Cultural Center entitled

*Ode to the Upstairs:*

You have seen us leave. You have seen us return. You have been a space where we are safe and secure from all the hate and hurt on this campus. Space, you have seen me grow in my time in these chairs from my first interview to my first board position to my last meeting as Chair. I have napped on your couches. Met at your tables...had one on ones with [named staff] near your windows, decorated your walls with my words, and the art hidden in your closets. This space will not move with us but your spirit will.

The above poem speaks eloquently of the day-to-day struggles participants have to engage, align, and create within the larger University environment and how the Campus Community Centers bridge and mitigate those struggles. Engagement is seen in the simple idea of meeting at a table, sleeping on a couch, of just resting from the impacts of feeling isolated at the University. Alignment happens as the participants begin to question why they feel as they do and how they could change the University so others will not have to struggle in the same ways. Imagination thus manifests as poetry, art, and activism. In this way, imagination is a tactic of survival, community building, and personal growth. For the participants of this study, the physical sites of the Centers are more than offices to conduct business transactions. For these participants, the Centers are spaces of validation, empowerment, and connected to something larger.

As the *Ode to the Upstairs* poem suggests, participants of this study were able to develop individually in niches created by the Campus Community Centers. Interaction with the Centers helped participants navigate and connect across space, identities, and the University as a whole. Linking validation and belonging with

engagement in the Campus Community Centers offers a new lens that can be used in conducting inquiry. This new approach moves away from an integrationist point of focus to one of validation and belonging.. As seen through this lens, belonging is not a product of integrating but of finding niches and networks of validation.

Tinto's *Student Departure Model* (1995) is considered by many to be seminal in the research on college retention. The model offers a longitudinal approach to student integration where pre-entry student attributes combine with institutional experiences to create conditions for persistence and retention and is a key construct for capturing the complexities of retention research. This inquiry has shown that Tinto's model, while critical to the field, does not fully explain the institutional experiences of underrepresented and marginalized students at UC San Diego. This research finding is supported by other researchers (Baird, 2000; Braxton & Sullivan, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Hurtado and Carter (1996) offer an updated critique to Tinto's (1975, 1993)

*Student Departure* model:

Although the model does not distinguish between participation (behavior) and membership (presumably a broader concept), it would be helpful for researchers to develop the concept of membership further by identifying activities that bring about a greater sense of affiliation with campus life (p. 327).

This project answers the call made by Hurtado and Carter, adding to the body of research by closely examining the activities that produced a sense of belonging and affiliation in student participants. Statements made by participants showed that membership within a Campus Community Center of practice increased feelings of belonging for students.

*Rich Points: Implications for Action*

Research shows that students of color and other marginalized students will increasingly make up the student bodies of college and university campuses (Komives, Dudley, & Woodard, 2003). Research also shows that these students have lower persistence and retention rates (Siedman, 2005). At the onset of this project, Campus Community Center models were examined to see if the organizing model could be one form of a theory of action. This study offers a paradigm shift where validation and belonging, in an organizational analysis, become the central focus of the research process. This project shifted the research focus from one that problematizes retention to one that is interested in how engaged students navigate campuses and achieve a greater sense of belonging and success. As the research process unfolded, several unanticipated findings emerged. These unanticipated findings create rich points in the data for deepening future study (Agar, 2000). Rich points connect findings to action, thus giving researchers and practitioners alike new inquiry possibilities. Several areas for action surfaced, particularly in niche creation for underrepresented and marginalized students as well as organizational structural actions that can increase belonging. The next section of the review delves deeper into these areas.

*Niche Creation*

Study findings clearly show the Campus Community Centers are decreasing isolation and increasing belonging as noted by participants. Participants spoke candidly about not feeling connected to the University and, in some cases, wanting to leave after their first year. Once students engaged with one or more of the Campus Community Centers these feelings began to change. Participants began to see

themselves as part of a larger community. Participants began to feel safe in the physical sites and this safety allowed them to learn about historical struggles that tied to their current experiences. Once these historical links were made, participants began naming their experiences and voicing the need for individual and institutional changes. Conversations large and small helped participants build relationships across historical borders and boundaries. An example of this niche creation can be seen in the findings of the importance of acquaintance relationships.

As seen in Chapter Four, several participants noted the comfort they feel just seeing someone they know from one of the Centers out in the general university environment. Participants expressed how these acquaintance relationships increased camaraderie and brought their university experience down to a manageable size. Perhaps one participant put it best when he described UC San Diego as not a diverse community but instead as a community in which ninety percent of the people he sees and knows are from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. This example explicates the *Validation Networks* graphic shown in Figure 6. Study participants experience a greater sense of belonging, connection and comfort just seeing someone who knows their name and shares a similar place connection on campus. How then do universities increase constructs like acquaintance relationships as well as organizational connections needed to increase belonging?

Moving belonging from being viewed only as a feeling construct to a tangible, organizing principle can help departments and universities design nuanced interventions for student success. A “one-size” program or event does not fit all students equally. Komives, Dudley, and Woodard (2003) and Rendon (1994) call for

student affairs practitioners to reflect on how work and practice impact the whole student, where the complexity of the students' lives and experiences are validated and treated as assets to the campus and university environment rather than as something to be overcome. In this way, the unearthing of explicit, formalized, and shared practice is not merely translation. Instead, it is transformation-the production of new context for participation and reification in which the relations between tacit and explicit, formal and informal, the individual and the collective are to be renegotiated (Wenger, p. 68.).

#### *Organizational Action*

On the organizational front, how departments set up particular environments and make explicit their values also has implications for student belonging and place making. The Centers are creating multiple ports of entry including libraries, resources, and staff connections. The Centers are also increasing connections through creating physical environments that look and feel different from the general university. Plants, candy, and community created art all signal that the physical spaces themselves are different and welcoming. These physical connections help students feel safe in the University setting which, prior to engagement in the Campus Community Centers, did not exist. Allen and Cherrey's (2000) work offers tools organizations can use to build systemic change in organizations. They contend that student affairs organizations in higher education need to understand and enhance trust, expectations, and common language with individual students and across departmental lines. In the analysis, it was shown how key these factors were in helping participants negotiate a sense of belonging at the Campus Community Center sites.

Departments should understand and name the implicit way diversity is coded and manifested in their areas of influence. Various diversity paradigms hold specific values and outcomes (Hurtado, Milem, Pedersen-Clayton, & Allen, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antinio, 2005). Organizational diversity paradigms may include ideas regarding multiculturalism, social justice, and/or be celebratory in nature. Each of these organizing principles has different ideas, outcomes, and organizational emphasis from which they function. This research project has shown that departments may want to investigate and consider adopting a social justice model. In a social justice model, organizations first attend to the physical and psychological safety of students. Once these conditions are met, programs and services then connect to larger ideals of community building and citizenship (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). As seen in the study, participants felt validated by the Campus Community Centers through the physical settings, relationships, and the ideal of creating a just world. The points of validation opened a way for the Centers to increase belonging within and across the sites. Validation from the Centers also helped participants weather the general campus environment where they had struggled to find connections and points of belonging. Having a social justice frame helped the Campus Community Centers honor the history of individual group struggle while also creating a point of entry for making a change in institutional dynamics.

The UC San Diego Community Centers offer an example of how networked organizations can work to the betterment of students and the campus as a whole, both ideologically and structurally. An example of both an ideological and structural component of Community Center practice is another rich point of how important

“back of the house” resources were for participants of the study. Participant photos of water coolers, microwaves, copiers, couches, and kitchens permeated the data collection process. Again, as seen in Chapter Four, theory was proposed regarding how these small, seemingly inconsequential items were significant factors in the students’ comfort and decisions to use the Centers as a home base. Community created art emerged as a significant influence on student connection to Centers.

Given departmental mandates regarding restrictions on equipment use, not every site can allow students to use copiers and kitchens. Despite this, there might be other ways in which departments can promote a sense of validation and belonging. Small ideas like having candy on desks; displaying student art; providing books in lobbies; having an “open door” policy where people can just walk in; and providing seating areas that invite people to stay after business has been transacted can go a long way toward creating an environment of comfort and belonging, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized students.

### *Conclusions*

Using a community of practice (Wenger 2002) lens, this study refocused research on retention and organizational development to an interactional approach of engagement and belonging. The study uncovered nuanced, day to day individual and organizational practices that had direct bearing on persistence and belonging within the Campus Community Center organizational practice. The UC San Diego Campus Community Centers offer an emerging model that can be used by other multi-cultural, women’s, and LGBT centers to re-think and expand historical borders. Expanding these organizational boundaries at both an individual and organizational level at UC

San Diego has created a key touch point for students and has impacted students' day to day lived experiences in the university setting. As stated earlier, Tinto, as cited by Siedman (2005), called for institutions of higher education to re-evaluate guiding ideas for students of color and other marginalized students.

There has been little significant development of theory of action that would provide guidelines to institutions of higher education so that they could develop programs, policies and practices to enhance student persistence... The availability of social support in the form of counseling, mentoring and ethnic student centers provide much needed support for individual students and a safe haven for groups of students who might otherwise find themselves out of place... these centers can serve as secure, knowledgeable ports of entry that enable students to safely navigate the unfamiliar terrain of the university (Tinto, 2005, p. 317).

Baird (2000) also noted that student appraisals of the environment represented personal understanding of the structures of the environments and their opportunities and constraints upon behavior. Baird (2000) believes it would be helpful to concentrate research on understanding how students are attracted to one another, how informal groups form, how cohesiveness operates, how peers influence one another, how norms are formed and enforced, how people become identified with their groups, how social judgments are formed and how the social roles on campuses conflict or reinforce each other (p. 74). Each of Baird's questions applies to understanding how networks of validation are operating in the Campus Community Centers. This project has helped close some of the research gaps referenced in Baird. By unearthing themes of engagement, relationships, settings, and meaning making, ideas of networks of validation surfaced. Listening to students and asking them explicitly about their interactions with spaces of belonging and comfort is critical to creating the *theory of action* put forth by Tinto.



### *Limitations*

While project findings and suggestions offer new ideas for other campuses and universities to explore and implement, this study emerged out of a specific time and context that must be acknowledged. UC San Diego Campus Community Center organizational constructs grew out of circumstances in an institutional and historical moment with specific individual participants, therefore generalizing these findings may not be applicable to other settings. Within the study, only a small sample of students and observational moments were captured. These captured interviews and observations proved extremely instructive, but different participants and observational times might have garnered different results. Also, studying the phenomenon of interaction and belonging was a complex undertaking that one study could likely not fully capture.

As a practitioner, researcher familiarity within the sites was also a study limitation addressed in Chapter Three. Anderson and Jones (2000) note the difficulties in conducting practitioner research in stating “a major threat to the validity or trustworthiness of administrator research is the nature of the administrative role itself” (p. 446). These limitations were addressed throughout the research project in numerous ways. By triangulating interview, photo, document, and observational data within a tightly controlled analysis process, and making use of member checking and colleague review, limitations were addressed within data collection, analysis, and the final write up of the study.

*Recommendations for future research*

Uncovering the implicit organizing values organizations hold for increasing validation and belonging at a departmental level should be a priority exercise for universities wanting to support marginalized and underrepresented students. Are departments and institutions asking students to prioritize their identity? For example, are they asking all students to melt into the generic landscape or assuming only women are interested in women's issues? Honoring individual histories and cultures while at the same time developing programs and services that bridge groups and concerns offers a strategic way to increase belonging for all populations.

Given the complexity of diversity within the university setting, how might colleges go about increasing belonging? One research area to explore might be the development of a "belonging audit" that could be administered to users of community centers. This audit could include student perceptions of comfort in the spaces, time spent, openness of staff, use of resources, and relationships with staff as key components for information gathering. Institutions with multicultural and other campus centers should also begin reviewing how and if these organizations have the capacity and institutional support to work together. Too often, programs for underrepresented and marginalized students compete for resources in a zero sum process. At UC San Diego, the Campus Community Centers explicitly recognize these challenges and have collectively agreed to work through them for the betterment of students, the individual Center, and the campus as a whole.

Allen and Cherrey (2000) offer organizational and leadership frames that can help organizations like multicultural, women's, and LGBT departments move to a

more post-conventional organizational model. In Allen and Cherrey's model, values of trust, boundary spanning, and relationship building are key hallmarks for success. Students witnessing departmental cooperation and collaboration might be able to model this behavior across different groups and organizations, as was seen in this study.

#### *Suggestions for Related Research*

Outside the scope of this review, but nonetheless related, are research areas that may prove promising for further inquiry on community center development and practice. These include the application of social capital frames (Bourdieu, 1985; Colmen, 1988; Portes, 1998) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn, 2003) to the study of community centers on university campuses. These constructs have implications for helping Community Centers as well as other departments and universities develop frames of reference for student retention and organizational effectiveness.

This inquiry examined belonging as an interactional, network concept using the Campus Community Centers as the unit of analysis. What might be learned or gained by applying social capital and network theory to an individual student unit of analysis within community center sites? Bourdieu (1985) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resource which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Coleman (1988) extended the definition of social capital by distinguishing between the resources themselves and one's ability to obtain them by virtue of membership in different social structures (Portes, 1998).

Underpinnings of social capital ideas are seen in retention research. Rendon (1994) and Hurtado and Carter (1996) make implicit reference to a concept of social capital in researching specific ways underrepresented and marginalized students create belonging with peers and student organizations. Use of a social capital frame might provide new and different modes for promoting belonging—modes that are different from those identified in this study. Use of this frame might shift the unit of study from the “interactional network” unit of analysis to an analysis of within group peer capital that students use to gain capital and persist on college and university campuses. These researchers show that issues surrounding validation, belonging and membership for students of color and other marginalized students are particularly salient for the populations of this study. The findings of this study show, individually and collectively, that Campus Community Centers are providing a network of resources and relationships that generate membership and capital for participants.

The emerging field of *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (POS) aligns with this research project’s post-conventional organizational development frame. While not stated as a specific ideal of authors cited in this study (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Senge, 2006; and Wenger, 2002), POS researchers are subtly calling for more affirmative interactions in communities and organizations. Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) offer a unique view on the usual deficient models of organizational development and research that links quite well to systems leadership (Allen and Cherrey, 2000), and communities of practice (Wenger, 2002).

Two areas in POS that offer particular saliency to community center work in higher education include organizing for resilience (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003) and

positive deviance/extraordinary organizing (Spreitzer and Sonenshein, 2003). Each of these concepts tie directly to the authors explored in the literature and give an expanded and possible new paradigmatic lens through which to view organizational research and change.

According to Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003), “resilience provides insight into how organizations continually achieve desirable outcomes amid adversity, strain, and significant barriers to adaptation and development” (p. 94). As seen in the literature, Campus Community Centers grew out of adverse institutional and national circumstances. Because the Centers at UC San Diego recognized the common link of social justice, they were able to adapt a new organizational construct that allowed institutional barriers to be lessened for the organizations and by extension the students who frequent the sites. Anecdotal information from other universities suggest multi cultural, women’s, and LGBT centers are continuing to function from deficit models of scarce resources and non-trust. Examining community center work from the lens of resilience may offer new ways to bridge borders to make new institutional connections.

In reviewing the POS notion of positive deviance, Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) note that deviance, when looked at from a POS lens, gives us a new way of affirming when groups and organizations deviate from expected practice (p. 208). Spreitzer and Sonenshein’s work on positive deviance involves individual, group, and organizational processes that allow for meaning making, are other-focused, involve courage, empower self determination, and help people develop self-efficacy. As seen in this study, positive deviance can be seen on many levels, including creating

physical settings very different from institutional expectations (couches, tapestries, knick knack placement, etc), institutional relationships of the Centers where participants and staff cross historical boundaries with ease, as well as the adoption on the organizing value of social justice that lessened the notion of competition for resources and visibility. These deviations from expected norms and practices have created a new model for working together. Models of organizing structures around positive deviance can create examples to other campuses trying to build better models for organizational effectiveness and boundary spanning. As seen in this project, boundary spanning efforts between the Campus Community Centers benefited the participants as well as the organizations themselves, creating new ways of working more effectively together.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

In 2007, a staff colleague made the following comment about the Campus Community Centers: “How many places on campus validate you because of who you are?” This research project has shown that validation of students leads to belonging. The project has also shown that explicit organizational development and models which include attention to engagement at the departmental level, role modeling in relationships, and attention to physical and emotional settings all create a sense of meaning making and belonging.

As universities begin to develop multicultural, LGBT, and/or Women’s centers, how will the spaces work together structurally and organizationally? Also, will the sites exist at the margins or the center of campus discourse on diversity? Will the discourse be about multiculturalism, diversity or social justice? These questions

need thought and explicit action if issues surrounding college persistence of underrepresented and other marginalized students are to be addressed in our complex organizational structures. Understanding how communities of practice form and are at work in our departments and organizations are a central means for promoting deeper inquiry methods. At UC San Diego, each Campus Community Center has created new ways of engagement and belonging. Fundamental to all three organizations is honoring the spirit of the founding documents in regard to serving constituent groups while also developing new organizational structures and systems that connect to each other across communities. Each Community Center has engaged in border and boundary spanning work across histories, ideologies, organizing structures, and constituent groups. This study promotes the expansion of these mandates to encompass broader social justice themes.

The results of this research highlight the complexity of belonging. Addressing and validating multilayered identities helped students not only connect within and across each site but also supported and enhanced their day to day institutional experiences. Underrepresented and marginalized students often enter universities in a position that renders them unequal to their peers from a systemic and historical perspective. Organizational models like the Campus Community Centers offer a way to level the “interactional” playing field which can lead to higher levels of college persistent and student belonging. Empirically, belonging is a key marker of retention.

As stated in the beginning of the project, by 2015 underrepresented and marginalized students will account for two-thirds of the college going population. Given this increase, how will universities and colleges create spaces of belonging for

these new students? An analysis of belonging through practice, meaning, community, and identity; situated within individual, community, and organizational lives, offers a new way to frame and thus understand Community Center work. While this research focused on underrepresented and marginalized college student experiences, creating belonging across all groups remains a central concern for colleges and universities. As seen in this study, when students feel they belong they are empowered to give voice to their experiences and to make change in the world around them. Participants in this study engaged across historical barriers, creatively expressed ideas of community and relationships, and developed niches of belonging that helped them connect affectively and intellectually. These are skills all students need to have to compete in an increasingly complex, global world. When students have a strong sense of identity and history, and use this sense for the betterment of their personal lives, the collective lives all people are enriched.



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## Appendix 1: Semi Structured Interview Protocol

First Interview (15 minute introduction to study to take place February-March 2008)

(Introduce self and make sure all consent forms are signed).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project *Campus Based Community Centers: Havens, Harbors, and Hope for Underrepresented and Marginalized Student Success*. This project is designed to help me get a new and different vantage point of how each of the Center's is viewed by the students who use the sites as well as to hear first hand your feelings and ideas about how the spaces impact your life as a UCSD student. During this first interview I just want us to get to know each other.

- a. Please share with me your home town, school year, college and major and any other information to help know you better (general information- researcher will also share information to establish social construction link in process. See Holstein and Gubrium, 2003)
- b. Tell me the story of your first time at the centers (may be one specific site or all depending on level of engagement -grand tour question)
- c. What did you notice about the space/es? (Descriptive)
- d. What did you notice about the people interactions in the space/es? (Descriptive and exploratory around feelings in the space)

After photo project – Second Interview (60 minutes- to take place February-March 2008)

- a. How did each of you choose what to take pictures of? Walk me through your process? (give each student reprints of images they took)
- b. If you were asked to group these pictures into themes how would you group them and what would you call your themes (lay out all pictures and give student time to muse and create theme. Researcher reflection at this time body language, etc)
- c. Could you choose one or two of your favorite images and tell me a story about the picture?
- d. How do you feel connection at the Center's shape your overall experience at UCSD?

- e. What do you think are the similarities and differences between the CCC, Women's Center, and LGBTRC? Communities? Ways of working?
- f. Do you interact with or in each Center? Why? Why not?

## Appendix 2: Participant Observation Protocol

Location: UC San Diego Campus Community Centers  
Cross-Cultural Center  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center  
Women's Center

Dates of Observations: March 2008 through June 2008

Frequencies of Observations: 2 sessions per site 1.5 hours each session for total of 6 sessions

Timing of Observations: One session lunch/ mid-afternoon, 1 session from 4-6 pm

Observational Coding Schema (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, Miles & Huberman, 1994)

- Acts (i.e. general activity occurring during session like eating, talking, etc. )
- Activities (i.e. notation of specific activities by people in the space)
- Meanings (researcher memo notes of interpretation of observations)
- Participation (i.e. who is participating at what levels)
- Relationships (i.e. people to people, people to objects)
- Setting (i.e. furniture arrangements, lighting, art displays, etc)

Recording of Observations:

- Descriptive field notes (events, activities, people)
- Reflective field notes (personal thoughts, reflections)

Access to sites: Open (researcher is member of the Community Center Professional Staff)

## Appendix 3: Photo Elicitation Protocol

### Initial Interview

- One on One interview with each participant for total of nine interviews (15 Minutes)
- Scheduled within time of participant availability
- Audio taped and transcribed
- Each participant given an disposal digital camera with instructions to take pictures within a week time from of “typical” week at Centers
- Leave copy of schedule for planning of follow up interviews

### Photo Project (One week’s time)

- Proceed with picture taking
- Return digital camera for development
- Development of pictures by researcher within one week
  1. Researcher will note and match participants to their specific project
  2. Researcher will not preview photos until second interview and only in the presence of the participant to make for initial reactions within the process (Holstein & Gubruim, 2003)

### Second Interview

- One on One interview with each participant for total of nine interviews (60 Minutes)
  1. See questions- Interview Protocol Appendix 1.
- Audio taped and transcribed

## Appendix 4 Document Analysis Protocol

### Document Identification:

Each UC San Diego Campus Community Center has a founding organizational document that will be reviewed to identify commonalities and differences across sites in the following areas:

- Composition of authorship group and committee structures
- Mission statements
- Values/ philosophies expressed
- Structural elements (number of staff, budgets, locations)
- Constituent group identification
- Programmatic elements (i.e. what type of services, events, expressed within the documents)
- University organizational elements (i.e. where each center fell in campus organizational chart)

### Document Summary Forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

For each Center documents one summary form will be generated. The documents will be coded as listed in Appendix 2 Participant Observation but with specific attention to a document analysis.

- Acts (i.e. what do the documents say about each centers role on campus)
- Activities (i.e. what programs and events were expected)
- Meanings (what is stated about need for each center to be created)
- Participation (i.e. what groups is each center to serve)
- Relationships (i.e. what if any collaborations were expected)
- Setting (i.e. what language or plan about the sites aesthetics are noted)