Intersections of My Lesbian, Feminist, and Activist Identities:

Problems and Strategies in Everyday Impression Management

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The question I ask myself is—how do I want to participate in my growth in both personal and public life? I have become aware that as a human being each of my life issues and problems (both large and small) that arise are all important to my growth. Do I have *a* (i.e., one) problem or issue that can be identified and related to the universe on a macro level, or are they several? It seems to me that all my questions about who I am and who I want to become overlap. I am not able to see each specific experience as independent of the others. Instead, I perceive each experience as a manifestation of a specific life lesson. Through my exploration of some of my previous and current experiences I hope to be led closer to this lesson.

As a young adult I experienced a shift in consciousness in regards to my sexuality. Although I was able to reconstruct my self-image after this event, I have not been able to let go of the inquisitive perspective toward life that I acquired during my experience. This shift in consciousness has changed my perspective on how I view the world. Until this shift I had not questioned who I was in terms of my senses of myself and the world. This change in the way of looking at the world is like taking a **phenomenological** perspective toward life. According to Wallace and Wolf (1999), a phenomenological approach allows people "to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world" (1999, pg. 253). A major implication of this shift in consciousness has been my adoption of a **feminist** perspective towards the micro and macro forces at work in my life. The implication of this is that I am dissatisfied with many institutions, attitudes, and actions within myself and especially in the outside world. I am stuck in a position of trying to make some sense of the inequalities that exist in society and focusing on what I can do to improve what I perceive to be unjust.

In order to problematize my place in society I must begin with my **selves.** I use selves, in plural, rather than the singular self because I view each specific issue in my life as one of many waves of experiences that all have contributed to where I find myself today. Throughout my life I have experienced shifts in consciousness, behavior, and perspective and have experienced different versions of my selves along the way.

I grew up in a white middle-class town, south of Boston, Massachusetts. During my adolescent and teenage years I experienced the "average" life of a teenage girl. I spent all of my free time with friends, drank alcohol before I was legal and had non-committed relationships with boys. I behaved like others around me and never questioned my reality. I **conformed** to what my family, friends, and society expected of me.

After graduating, I wanted to experience life far from the small town I grew up in; so I moved to Orlando, Florida. The best way to describe what my experience was during the year I lived in Orlando is to de-

scribe how I identified my self with others. Lacking any social group at all I met new friends and was able to explore my sexuality in a new way. I was kissed by another woman and was shocked into relating to women romantically for the first time in my life. This revelation began a two-year struggle with what I thought was my **identity**. At the time I considered "coming out" as a lesbian to be a lifelong issue but that does not seem to be the case any more now that I look back. Rather I see that experience as beginning a process toward how I now view and interact in the world. The first step of this process was the epiphany that my selves had been **socially constructed** at least in part and I began to deconstruct parts of my identity that did not seem to coincide with how I felt.

The realization that I had acquired an identity that had been shaped by my social environment and was at odds with how I innately felt sparked my opposition to the **patriarchal** structure of society. Along the way I also began—because I am now considered part of the gay community—to experience the realities of **gender stratification** in society. Identifying as lesbian involves encountering heterosexism, homophobia, and prejudice from some groups and individuals in society. However, my immediate struggle after realizing my romantic interest in women was facing my own personal **prejudice** towards lesbians. I had internalized a negative stereotype of what a lesbian was so I chose to identify as bisexual. At the time it was beginning to be "trendy" to be bisexual (if you were a woman) so it was okay for a while. Then I began to feel **alienated** because of how I felt around other lesbians so I rebelled for a short time and labeled myself asexual. Looking back, I see this process to be a manifestation of the struggle in me of what George Herbert Mead calls the **"I" and the "me."**

According to Wallace and Wolf, citing Mead, the "me" is "…those perspectives on oneself that the individual has learned from others." This part of my struggle stemmed from what I had learned from the **heterosexist** society I grew up in. Mead says, "The attitudes of the others constitute the organized 'me', and then one reacts toward that as an 'I'." (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 198) Therefore, my "coming out" phase was a movement on the part of my "I" as a reaction to the attitudes I had internalized from society. A quote from Mead sums up this experience:

> The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience. (Mead, quoted in Wallace and Wolf, 1999, p.199)

My struggle with fighting against **internalized** labels that others as well as myself use to describe *who I am* is another manifestation of my inner I/me conflict. Because of identifying with a new sexuality many new questions about myself and the world have emerged. This has caused a new way of thinking for me, which involves being more outwardly expressive of views I used to hide. In a way I am struggling with the very essence of what the self is according to Blumer's interpretation of Mead. According to Blumer, as cited in Wallace and Wolf (1999), "[The self] is more centrally a social process, a process of self-interaction in which the human actor indicates to himself matters that confront him in the situation in which he acts, and organizes his action through his interpretation of such matters" (p. 197).

For example, given my situation, I do not usually behave the way the **"generalized other"** prescribes for women and this leads to some tension in my life. I do not agree with the biological perspective that naturally men are aggressive and women

passive. Rather I see this difference to be largely a result of **gender socialization.** I do not feel comfortable or natural acting in a passive manner in situations where my opinion is strong. Also, I believe it is important for women to learn to be strong and aggressive due to the many faces of violence they are subjected to in our society. Usually, I am quickly labeled as being aggressive. Although I admit I am strongly opinionated and have done some work on not behaving arrogantly toward others I believe that sometimes reactions to my aggressiveness are due to society's prescriptions for female behavior in general than a response to how I actually behave in specific circumstances. Aggressiveness is seen as a positive behavior only when attributed to the male gendert. This is especially true in the workplace where being aggressive is often rewarding for men but destructive for women.

A major issue I have with the prevalent rituals of gender socialization is how women are invasively treated as individuals and as a group in society. To illustrate, consider the lengths to which popular media will go to hyper-feminize women, especially female athletes. Often demeaning comments by media are used to keep women in places of subordination within the sports world as well to uphold the degrading myths of the feminine stereotype. In her article titled "Anti-man to Anti-patriarchy," Emily Margulies similarly describes her discomfort with certain practices of prescribed behavior and overall her critique of patriarchal society is in line with my own. In particular, I can relate to her story about how many "disparaging remarks" were made towards her during one morning (Margulies, pg. 7). She counted twenty-one remarks during one morning that she says, "made me feel uncomfortable in some way." In everyday interactions with men many women are subjected to behaviors and comments that are used to degrade and subordinate women. Although I blame society and socializa-

tion as well as those male actors who perpetuate this behavior it is sometimes difficult to not react emotionally to situations like these. My aggressive reactions is probably due at least in part to my experience with unwanted sexualized comments I have received from men over time.

I am often disillusioned with the amount of gender-prescribed behavior that men as well as women get away with in the world. On a micro level more often that not I observe my immediate family members and friends adopting a gendered perspective in their lives. I struggle just as Margulies did with not blaming the "men" but blaming the patriarchal structure of society. But, to go a step further, I also blame the players within that structure, in this case the men and women who seem to be unaware of their hidden biases and their part in misconstructing social reality.

For instance, I make sure to vocalize my dissent when something makes me uncomfortable. This is because I believe there can be no positive social change without awareness. Undoubtedly others have a right to support a patriarchal institution but if they don't consciously know they are perpetuating certain social structures by their actions, then it is impossible for them to decide whether or not they agree with it. I have met many people who are unaware that America is a patriarchal society. This ignorance of discrimination and oppression reminds me of the storyline of the motion picture "The Matrix." Humans were unaware of the kind of society they were living in because their minds were controlled by a system the machines set up. Isn't our society like this in some ways? The movie "Affluenza" illustrates well our society's preoccupation with materialism**.** "Affluenza," the disease of overconsumption, is also unconsciously driven because society has shaped us to believe money bring happiness, just like how The Matrix made humans feel they were free, but were in fact lived in bondage in a world controlled by

machines. Machines used the Matrix to make humans unconsciously serve their purposes. This is exactly how companies use the media in order to control human psychology in our society. If "by age 20, the average American has seen $1 million dollars worth of commercials," as the narrator of the film points out, it can be assumed that to come away from this experience unaffected is nearly impossible.

Just as dominant groups in society use the media to control others' behavior I feel my life in the gay community is also subjected to social control from within it. Just as dominant society has certain rules of behavior prescribed for males and females the gay community has rules for behavior as well. Because it is a **subculture** it is impossible to escape certain rules of behavior that exist in the gay community. In order to not fall into the trap of conforming completely to these prescriptions for behavior I am faced with continually approaching the gay community with an attitude akin to the **phenomenological** perspective.

As mentioned earlier phenomenology allows us "to question our way of looking at and our way of being in the world." (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 253) I have approached situations in my life from a similar perspective since my initial experience. For instance, I went from an eighteen-year-old girl who believed whole-heartedly that she would become a physical therapist working primarily with disabled children and who was "heterosexual," to a 26-year-old woman who has changed majors twice and become a lesbian. The more time I spend in college the more unclear I become about what I want to do with my life? My phenomenological view prompts me to wonder almost constantly whether I am subconsciously on an "auto-pilot" just as I had been for the first eighteen years of my life. This approach to life also allows me to observe and question my **looking-glass selves.**

Charles Horton Cooley contributed this idea to sociology. According to Wallace and Wolf (1999) Cooley states, "the imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society, and to observe and interpret these must be the chief aim of sociology" (p.195). Cooley's three elements of the looking-glass self are 'the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of their judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification'" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 195). These three elements shape a person's identity in everyday life, but they do not have to. The fact that I am aware that my ideas about who I am do not have to stem from others' imagined or real judgments make it easier to feel comfortable in my life.

The looking-glass self can be associated with the **social construction of reality** and can be illustrated by looking at what the character Neo faces in the movie "The Matrix." In the movie, Neo struggles with accepting that the social reality he has taken for granted is something that has been constructed for him by the machines. Neo feels alienated when he realizes that his entire reality has been constructed for him. The program the machines used to control human's minds shaped all of his ideas, memories, and thoughts. When Neo is freed from the Matrix he is able to break away from the constructed social reality shaping his identity and take part in reconstructing his life and society. How I have perceived my life and my efforts to deconstruct the parts of my identity that I feel uncomfortable with is similar to Neo. Just as it was difficult for Neo to accept the truth about how his reality had been constructed for him it was also difficult for me to realize and then accept who I was in relation to the world. My experience mirrored Neo's when I first realized the social reality imposed on me did not match my "true" self or subjective reality. Like Neo, after some time, I began to accept myself and be most natural and comfortable with how I was

rather than how society had wanted me to be. This process has involved a new **externalization** phase of my life. According to Wallace and Wolf (1999), this process is, … "wherein individuals, by their own human activity, create their social worlds" (p.278). I am constantly faced with whether or not to use **impression management** to alter my behavior depending on which subgroup of people I am socializing with. I usually end up analyzing an experience from the different perspectives I can conjure up in my mind and fighting against altering what comes *natural* to me.

On a personal level I try to identify those parts of myself that have been constructed by others and what kinds of **prejudices** I have due to that construction. I realize that it is extremely difficult to recognize bias within oneself as I often notice it in others. While reading an article by Jillian E. Sloan, titled "Religion in an Individualistic Society" I realized that she did not seem to recognize when her own personal prejudices were at work. For instance, Sloan (2003) professed that she "…was raised as a Lutheran Protestant" (p.73). She continues, "In my experience I have had every opportunity to develop my own beliefs, both by my church and my mother" (Sloan, 2003, p.73). This statement seems flawed because it seems impossible to be given the opportunity to develop one's own beliefs underneath a myriad of influences. Sloan does not elaborate on this and I assume it is because she has missed a personal prejudice she may have stemming from her own experience. To clarify, consider the question; How does one choose to believe in an *omniscient male being* when an alternative is not considered?

I am also sure that I have personal prejudices that are unrecognizable to me. One major effect of my identity as a lesbian has been a magnified view of male and female gender socialization rituals. For instance, I have been defensive toward hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine behavior that I see

as perpetuating the myths that are degrading to women. This manifests through me mostly as having a low expectation of certain "types" of men in my life. I think my bias lies in the fear that men are socialized to participate in the world from a dominant viewpoint and that this is upheld by the privileges supported by our society. In my personal life I know and am close to many white men who do not want to recognize white male privilege. I often can sense defensiveness when the word feminism or critical ideas about gender socialization enter a conversation. I often find it difficult not to react negatively, but I am hoping through this paper to learn new ways to combat this.

The film *Twelve Angry Men* portrays a good example of this behavior. A major theme in the film involves the characters being forced to re-evaluate how they look at the world. The men are jurors on a murder trial who are in favor of the prosecution. One juror disagrees with a guilty verdict and persuades the others to reconsider why they voted guilty. As the movie goes on each man contributes to the discussion from his personal perspective. Individual prejudices become an obvious barrier in the men's ability to evaluate the case. Some of the men do not want to recognize the racial prejudices involved in the case for fear that it may incriminate them. When the men who are racist break down it is clear that they are not proud of their racist ideas. This major theme in the movie is also a major theme in my life. Part of trying to put together the breadth of questions I have about myself and the world around me involves evaluating my own and others' personal prejudices.

Addressing the issues I face with impression management during my everyday experiences involves looking also at how the society at large has shaped these experiences. Robert Merton's theory of dysfunctions sheds some light on this issue. According to Wallace and Wolf (1999) this

theory involves two ideas, … "something may have consequences that are generally dysfunctional... and that these consequences may vary according to whom one is talking about…" (p. 49). My recent experience with deciding whether or not to "get married" to the woman I have been in a relationship with for seven years can be analyzed from this perspective. From a sociological perspective the institution of marriage is a dominant ***norm***, and therefore is functional for society. At the very least it should create positive family structures and further the human race. Just as Weber saw bureaucracy as efficient and necessary yet tyrannical due to its inflexible ritualism (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 50), I see the institution of marriage as historically necessary yet capable of perpetuating harmful myths about sexuality, gender, and family.

The dominant norm of marriage between one man and one woman set in a patriarchal structured society has contributed to some negative influences on society. Consider the effects of anti-gay sentiment within our society, namely discrimination and violence. Although ***individualism*** as a part of our culture allows people to form an identity apart from society and is in part responsible for the gay ***social movement***, dominant ideas about love and family still embedded in our society carry an aura of ***collective conscience***. Wallace and Wolf explain that certain events in our society have created an increase in collective conscience. One example they use is England and the world's emotional response to the death of Princess Diana (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 21). I see America's growing movement to ban gay marriage as similar to this kind of behavior.

Therefore, although an equal opportunity for marriage has been established in Massachusetts the politics of this decision have created a large ***ideological*** conflict in society as a whole. Wallace and Wolf (1999) suggest "…conflict theorists see civil law as a way of defining and upholding a particular order that benefits some groups at the expense of others" (p. 68). As mentioned above, it seems that in most of America this is predominantly the case concerning the institution of marriage. The fact that in eleven states gay marriage was easily banned is an example of how ruling groups in society has exercised their power at the expense of others. The idea that one kind of love is better and deserving of protection more than another will no doubt continue to contribute to anti-gay sentiment in our society.

We are taught in society that romantic love between a man and a woman is "normal." Growing up not feeling that way can lead to many negative consequences for people. Merton's theory of dysfunctions can also be applied to how the institution of marriage can be functional for some yet dysfunctional for others. The recent availability of marriage option for same-sex couples in Massachusetts caused a conflict in me concerning my own relationship. In this case I was conflicted between "getting married" and therefore reaping the benefits of marriage while at the same time knowing that other same-sex couples in the rest of U.S. were not awarded these same benefits. I distanced myself from the "normal" idea of marriage and decided that it would not only benefit my partner and me but it would allow me to pursue my social activism in a positive way. My participation in the newly legalized same-sex marriage would contribute to breaking down the patriarchal structures of marriage set up in society. My marriage would not have been as much a public issue as it is a private concern for me had I not fallen in love with a woman. I may not have been given this chance to question our society's myths surrounding what romantic love can be.

The concept called ***role exit*** can also be used here to describe a part of my experience with marriage in my life. Helen Ebaugh "explores the process of role exit- "disengagement from a role that is central

to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 50). Part of my decision to get married was due to my activist consciousness to redefine what the image of love and family are in our society. Therefore, I see my decision to use the benefit of marriage as being partly due to my disengagement from the heterosexual role I assumed for most of my life as well as using my experience with that role to become an activist in my own way.

"There is, Dahrendorf argues, an inherent tendency to conflict in society. Those groups with power will pursue their interest, and those without power will pursue theirs. The interest of the two is necessarily different" (Wallace and Wolf, pg. 119). This seems to be what is happening concerning the battle for gay rights, namely marriage rights. On a broader level this conflict could potentially shift ideologies in American culture and have repercussions across the globe. As far as power relations between minority and majority groups in society are concerned, the impact of this conflict could have both serious negative and positive consequences.

Power relations are also tied to how these issues play out in my life. The most obvious determinant of power in my life is my **gender status.** This status arising from biological makeup places women in a subordinated role in our patriarchal society. As mentioned earlier, gender socialization contributed to my shaping "appropriate" feminine behavior in society. Although I have battled against some of these prescribed behaviors I still dress and look like a woman. The conflict between my personal preferences and larger social prescriptions continues.

Lewis Coser's ideas are useful in this regard, when explaining the consequences of conflict. "Coser argues that conflict often leads to change. For example, it can stimulate innovation or, especially in war, in-crease centralization" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 130). Coser sees these in terms of two major types of conflict; external and internal. **External conflict** "makes group members conscious of their identity by introducing a strong negative reference group to which they contrast themselves; it also increases their participation" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, p.131). The challenges I face in conflict with broader social norms helps my identify formation in relation to the gay rights movement and this has generally propelled me to be conscious of my interest in regards to oppositional groups. Elaborating on Coser's perspective, Wallace and Wolf continue to suggest "that internal conflict can be important because 'stability; within a loosely structured society…can be viewed as partly a product of the continuous incidence of various conflicts crisscrossing it'" (Wallace and Wolf, pg. 132). I see internal conflict as a major contributor to the absence of what I consider a major third wave of the feminist revolution. Feminism is not currently a growing movement in America. I sense that the very opposite is occurring due to the inner class and ethnic conflicts that have arisen within the feminist community. For example, feminist literature is lacking in diversity, which I believe has halted the movement from gaining momentum among many minority women in society.

"Foucault's postmodernist perspective, Wallace and Wolf suggest, "implies that an age is defined by the particular way in which we see and comprehend the world, and that this is also what governs how power is exercised" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 371). We similarly view the world from a gendered perspective which has been shaped by ideas and power relations predominant in patriarchal society. In this context, another way I have struggled with impression management may be explored in terms of the **sociology of the body,** which studies how human body and bodily experience have been shaped by so-

cial, cultural, and political contexts.

David M. Halperin describes a similar idea in his boo *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality.* The main point of Halperin's essay is that across history and cultures sexuality has not always been categorized as dichotomously as we categorize it in our culture. Halperin uses classical Athens to show how homosexuality was "invented" where free adult males had sexual partners who were viewed as "passive." They could be woman, young male, or even adult male of lower status. Halperin (1990) says that … "sex was … closely tied to differentials in the personal status of the sexual actors rather than to the expressive capacities of individual human subjects," showing that sexuality was entwined within larger social forces (p.33). This idea is best expressed by Maurice Godelier, a French anthropologist when he states, "it is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body's sexuality" (Halperin, 1990, pg. 33).

Wallace and Wolf also mention the relationship between adult males and young boys in classical Greece in relation to the sociology of the body. They point out that, "the sexual drives that we engage in, and that we wish to engage in, are mediated by ideas that themselves relate to underlying structures of power" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 371). These ideas seem to also shed light on my experience as a female and a lesbian. The sociology of the body is relevant to my experience because as a woman it is almost impossible in this society to escape the beauty ideal. While there is a separate beauty ideal within the lesbian community it does not take on dominant society's obsession with the hyper-feminine, hyper-thin model of beauty. In fact many women in the subculture reject most stereotypical aspects of femininity and often take on masculine dress and mannerisms. Whether this is entirely a *dramaturgical* exercise or biological in nature is probably different in each case. The

front region of one's everyday life experience as a lesbian can be contradictory. Front region is "the part of the individuals' performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Wallace and wolf pg. 230). For instance, I dress somewhere between what may be labeled female and male, the latter of which usually does not stand out. My gestures, posture, and speech patterns could probably be considered gender ambiguous, leading to conflicting reactions in specific situations. For instance, men will ask me if I have a boyfriend and women will assume I am straight and engage in a conversation with me about men as if I am romantically involved with them. This kind of behavior is called **heterosexist** and although it affects me on a personal everyday level, it also has broader implications for my life. My growing awareness of dominant assumptions in society and how these can negatively impact any person who does not easily fit into a male/female gender stereotype has pushed me to explore alternative career goals to prevent stereotyping and violence towards minority groups faced with *discrimination.* For example, counseling or helping to redefine gender stereotypes as it pertains to lesbian, gay, intersex, and transgender youth is something I have recently been considering as one possible volunteering or career path.

My personal experience with conflict between personal preference and public prescriptions has motivated me to become actively involved in global issues. I have begun by learning about my own experience and the world experience from a feminist perspective. Dorothy Smith's *standpoint theory* has by far been most useful in my self-research. Her theory illuminates how working women's consciousness is often bifurcated and split between concerns for home-making chores on one hand and career struggles on the other. This results in a gap of awareness that helps link

personal troubles and public issues. Smith's theory basically encourages, as does C. Wright Mills, to move beyond a **bi-furcated consciousness** so that personal and public aspects of one's life can be reexamined in relationship to one another in self-research. My feminist activism is an effort to move beyond this split consciousness, to question how gender and sexual socialization has shaped me and those around me and how I and them can move on to question all things in the world. My experiences have led me to see how it is impossible for me to bring positive change to the world without at the same time being self-reflective.

Had I not fallen in love with another woman I may not have been led to question society at all. I see this realization as being similar to what Dorothy Smith experienced when on a train—looking outward to a poor family on the street—she recognized how her perceptions of reality were built upon her own position and interpretations (Farganis, 2004, pg. 378). "If we begin from the world as we actually experience it," Smith advised, "it is at least possible to see that we are indeed located and that what we know of the other is conditional upon that location" (Farganis, 2004, pg. 378).

This idea is reminiscent of the film *The Big One* by Michael Moore. During his book tour Moore has the opportunity to meet people who have been laid off from work because their companies are moving to cheaper locations in order to make a bigger profit. Moore gives the viewer insights into how it might feel to be a person who has lost their job due to these circumstances and he takes it upon himself to try to show the people in power what they have done. Through his interactions with company executives and people in government he gives the persons in power an idea of what it is like to be the "other." In this way Moore is doing what Smith suggests we must do in order to be aware of where we are located in the world.

From a conflict perspective power is also central to my experience with my personal issues. The stress that I put on myself in challenging ruling ideas and norms has also resulted in my own experience of **alienation.** Conflicts such as those waged between religious ideologies and homosexuality often brings in me feelings of **anomie**, or normlessness. Although in Wallace and Wolf this concept by Durkheim is linked to changes in society that upset the norm, I feel this can be related to how I experience society's norms as I confront and challenge them. For instance, growing up in America I am aware that many of us have been socialized to be patriotic. Recently, when expressing my disgust with the U.S. government's choice of attacking Iraq, I was met with hostility from many of my peers at home as well as work. The hysteria to purchase American flags was confusing to me at the start of the war. I felt alienated from most people because I found myself thinking of all the innocent people in Iraq who would be victimized and killed because of the American government's decision. The American government seems to me to be destroying lives in pursuit of power. This destruction is primarily viewed as legitimate by most of society on the basis of what Weber called the predominance of **rational-legal authority** in modern society. "According to Weber, the anchoring of legitimacy in particular sorts of rules is central to modern society's ongoing "rationalization" of everything" (Wallace and Wolf, 1999, pg. 73). I feel that a strong sense of **ethnocentrism** permeates the American culture. The current war in Iraq has awakened my perception of this and I take every opportunity in everyday interactions to challenge ethnocentric comments made toward other people.

The reason why I mention the war with Iraq is because that is when I truly began to act out what I call my activist self. While on a personal level the emotional state of my unrest creates a sadness and distaste for so-

ciety, I have been aiming to use this as a positive change for myself and for what I can offer society. Where college is involved I have started to focus on specific interests rather than continuously changing my mind about what kind of career I may want to pursue. I have often felt conflicted about where exactly I want my academic and career plans to take me and through this self-research I have realized that I cannot do any of the thousands of things I aspire to do if I do not start with a first step. Therefore, I have a decided to set specific short and long-term goals. I see this as a first step in beginning to link the myriad of changes I would like to see in society and myself. I feel I need to consciously **resocialize** myself. Through the initial shift in my sexual identity and gender awareness to my growing activism I have begun to see that all aspects of who I am and who I want to become must be continuously challenged and redefined in order to combat the embedded social institutions that limit my growth as a person. I have therefore begun to choose goals that will reflect a new path I would like to follow in my life.

Morrie Schwartz offers many life lessons which I can also learn from in order to set up some positive goals for change in my life. Morrie's lessons on how to maintain an active involvement in life are especially important to me at this point in my life experience. His view is that as humans we should look beyond the individual roles we play in society and focus more on the core person we are. With this, he is assuming that we all have a core self (Schwartz, 1996, p.63). Then as individuals we can have a meaningful relationship with our community. "…the more you know about who you are, the more actively you can be involved in the world around you" (Schwartz, 1996, p.63). This idea is central to my experience as I have shown that without the opportunity to explore my identity and begin to uncover parts of my core self I would not be able to get involved in the community ac-tively.

Another idea of Morrie that applies to me is his story about the bird on your shoulder. When I watched the movie *Tuesdays with Morrie* this stood out for me in a way it had not when I had read the book. Morrie tells of the Buddhist idea of waking up each day and asking an imaginary bird on one's shoulder if today will be the last. This story teaches us to approach life each day as if it *could* be our last and live life according to this knowledge. Now that I have thought much about this and although I think it would not be good to take this literally, this lesson can be valuable. I hope to continue to be self-aware each day while spending more time working on doing those things that will bring me closer to finding the person I am most comfortable being, ignoring those roles in society that are not beneficial for me. I will approach each situation with the notion that each day is a gift to be lived the best I can live it. These simple life lessons that Morrie offers can help me find a positive answer to the conflicts I face as it pertains to everyday impression management as well as approaching activism in the global community.

The final lesson that I take from Morrie Schwartz comes from his favorite story of the wave. The story is about a little wave that is enjoying being a wave until it realizes it will crash onto the shore eventually. The wave is upset because it does not understand that it is not just a wave who will be destroyed and no longer be, instead it is part of the ocean and crashing onto shore is part of its life, not its end (Albom, 1997, pg. 179-180). On a personal level this story makes me feel significant. This story teaches me that I am not one being on a single journey but rather a part of all things that are connected. Simply, my self-interactions reflect and are as well interactions with the universe and vice versa. As long as I remember this lesson I will know that each small step I take in challenging and changing myself is also an important step in broader social change.

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