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Working for justice: the life history reflections of privileged college student social justice allies

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**Working for justice:
The life history reflections of privileged college student social justice allies**

by

Timothy Packard Phillips

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Nancy J. Evans, Major Professor
Sharon R. Bird
Warren Blumenfeld
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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DEDICATION

To the men who contributed to this project and their struggle for justice. Thank you for your patience, candor, and authenticity. I am certain I did not do justice to the essence of who you are through this work. Know that I stand in awe of who you are and what you do.

To our allies holding diverse identities who have given us patience, grace, and the courage to struggle for a more just world that we might all enjoy.

To Grandpa Deral, who I never had the privilege of knowing but who passed on through his son to me that to be educated is a privilege and with that privilege comes a responsibility to serve the community.

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological life history study examined the dynamics that led privileged college students to engage in social justice work. I explored how privileged college students were led to understand how individuals get opportunities in life and ultimately achieve success. Also, I explored what moments or elements caused participants to question what they had learned and what barriers they faced to engaging in work for justice. All findings contributed to understanding what led privileged college students to engage in work for a more just environment. Using the social construction of dominant group privilege and ally development theory as the theoretical frameworks to guide this study, I analyzed how participants came to see injustice within the context of their privileged identity and why, unlike many of their peers, they chose to work on changing a social system from which they benefitted.

In all, nine students holding privileged identities participated in three qualitative life history interviews each through which data for the study were collected. Profiles of each participant were developed from the data. The data were then transcribed, coded, analyzed, and organized into emerging themes. The findings revealed that a search for authenticity, environmental influences, a critical event, or experience as other first made privileged students aware of injustice. Barriers to participant engagement reported most often included not understanding their role, a general lack of awareness about injustice, others influential in their lives lacking awareness, and the absence of skills interacting with people who held diverse identities and in doing effective work on justice issues. Finally, educational institutions had significant influence on participant awareness of injustice issues, the need to advocate for change, and ultimately their decisions to take action. Specifically, college

curriculum, peer interactions with those holding diverse identities, and co-curricular engagement opportunities were cited as having an impact on participant decisions to engage in justice work.

Finally, I discussed ways these findings contributed to the existing literature and shared recommendations for future practice. I concluded with suggestions for future research to further expand our understanding of college student ally behavior development.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.

James Baldwin (1963)

Writing to his nephew, Baldwin penned the above quote to explain that White people have come to believe the social system in the United States of America was built on freedom, hard work, and equal opportunity. Baldwin's observation revealed what those holding oppressed identities have long known, that the concept of the self-made man is a façade constructed to hide the realities enjoyed by the privileged. Scholars have supported this notion noting that individuals who are White, male, Christian, or hold other privileged identities, because of who they are or how they appear, have an invisible knapsack of unearned assets that offer advantages, that place them at the cultural center, and that make them more powerful than those who do not have such privileges (Kivel, 2002; McIntosh, 2003; Patton & Bondi, 2009; Reason, Broido, Davis, & Evans, 2005). Yet history offers examples of privileged folks who not only have come to understand this dynamic but, more importantly, have taken steps to change inequitable social dynamics. Initiatives of this nature have come to be commonly referred to as social justice or social change work.

Problem Statement

Since the inception of America, people in leadership have touted the country as the land of freedom, justice, and opportunity (Picca & Feagin, 2007). Language and stories permeate U.S. culture fostering the belief that those who are smart, work hard, and perhaps get a little lucky ultimately can achieve wealth and success (Kivel, 2004). Therefore, as Bell (2007b) asserted, "Many Americans, particularly White Americans, believe the playing field

has been leveled and our society now operates as a meritocracy in which, despite race or station, anyone willing to work hard enough can get ahead” (p. 120). By and large the prevailing normative belief persists that every person has an equal opportunity to be successful (Kivel, 2004; Feagin & O’Brien, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Wise, 2005).

In reality, the majority of opportunity in the United States has been channeled to White men and these men continue to be the beneficiaries of an unjust social structure (Johnson, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Wise, 2005). In fact, the success of White men has been so prevalent and framed in such a manner that many have come to believe that White men are superior in achievement and culture to women and people of color (Johnson, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Given the pervasive beliefs, many do not see or understand the true social dynamics and rarely question the belief structure existing in the U.S. Picca and Feagin (2007) explained, “This framing is so taken for granted that relatively few whites ever think critically about its major contours and deep significance” (p. 9). As a result, schools and history books tout those who illustrate and reinforce commonly held beliefs about success while largely leaving out those who held opposing opinions or took opposing action (Loewen, 2003). White individuals thereby tend not to see that inequity exists and feel even less inclined to act for change to the social structure.

To foster a more comprehensive understanding, social and educational systems must begin to more systematically examine social inequity and to make the unknown known. Many have sounded the call to examine the dehumanizing impact of the current U.S. social structure (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004) and more importantly the need for White people to better

understand how they both collude with and can work against the oppressive system (Bishop, 2002; Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Tatum, 1997). Given that White people are the largest beneficiaries of and colluders with current systems of injustice, it is critical that educators have knowledge of individuals who have viewed society and their place in it differently. Unfortunately, role models are not often known, as historical accounts often leave them out (Loewen, 2003). Such awareness moved Tatum (1994) to suggest that having access to the stories of White people working for change makes a difference to those looking to be agents of change. Further, it is also important to understand what events, social dynamics, and influences led participants to deepened awareness and motivated such individuals to work for social justice when others choose not to engage in similar work (Bridges, 2011; Brown, 2002).

Therefore, the purpose of this initiative was to study privileged college students who were engaged in work for social justice to understand what dynamics led them to strive for outcomes that would reduce or eliminate systemic advantage for those like them. Specifically, the study was designed to answer the research question, “What triggers, key moments, or life dynamics led privileged college students to work for social justice?” Working for justice requires action for the purpose of creating a more authentic and equitable social structure, yet often carries little reward for doing so. Upon inquiry, a gap existed in the literature with respect to research on social justice work by those holding privileged identities. Arguably, conducting such a study risked continuing to place privileged college students at the cultural center, a position systemically maintained both knowingly and unknowingly (Dyer, 2003). Acknowledging some concern about placing the privileged at the center, the absence of social justice oriented role models for those with dominant identities

was a call to action, as the socialized inclinations of the privileged serve to preserve the status quo (Harro, 2000, 2010a; Kivel, 2002). Calling attention to the work being done by us, the privileged, to bring about social change, thereby created role models who offered a more purposeful example and contributed to a comprehensive effort to dislodge systematic injustice.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to study college students who held privileged identities and were engaged in social justice work. Specifically, in the study I sought to understand what life events or dynamics led students to attempt to influence changes in their social environment that reduced or eliminated systemic advantage. Concern was also given to reviewing what barriers existed for privileged students that prevented their participation in social justice work. In so doing, this study revealed how social environments might influence greater levels of engagement in social change work for the common good.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How did participants come to understand their social position?
2. What participant life experiences raised awareness of the need for social justice?
3. What barriers to engaging in social justice work did each participant face?
4. What triggers, key moments, or life dynamics led privileged college students to work for social justice?

Each of the first three questions inform the findings regarding the fourth question, which is of overall interest. With the first question, I was interested in how privileged college students were taught to view themselves relative to those around them, their access to

opportunities, and the steps to achieve success in life. The second question was designed to explore what factors first helped privileged students realize that the social system contained unjust elements. Having chosen to work against those unjust elements, I also thought it important to understand through question three what challenges, or barriers, privileged students encountered to engaging in social change initiatives. Finally, knowing all they had had to overcome, I wanted to more directly explore what each participant felt led him to engage and stay engaged in his work against systemic inequity.

Significance of the Study

The dominant narrative in U.S. culture holds that each individual has equal opportunity and that success is achieved through hard work. These beliefs have been transmitted through hegemonic discourse, defined as “the ideas, written expressions, theoretical foundations, and language of dominant culture” (Blumenfeld, 2006). However, there are also individuals who assert and offer a counter-hegemonic discourse, thereby holding equal opportunity to be a myth and advocating for a cultural revolution to liberate individual and collective conscience, transforming the lives of all (Gramsci, 1971; hooks, 2013; Katz, 2013; Love, 2013). This study focused on privileged individuals seeking to advance a counter-hegemonic narrative.

Privileged people working against the status quo have been largely absent from known histories and are thus invisible as role models (Loewen, 2003). Working for justice requires action for the purpose of creating a more authentic and equitable social structure, yet frequently carries little reward for doing so as such action disrupts normalcy for many (Cabrera, 2012). This study was conducted in response to the absence of information in the available literature. Studies to date on college student ally development had not focused on

participants who held all privileged identities and were conducted at single educational institutions, which limited findings and application thereof (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Howard, 2011; Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009; Munin & Speight, 2010; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Patton & Bondi, 2009). Additionally, in literature that had addressed related topics, a call emerged to explore the roles privileged individuals were playing with respect to disrupting inequitable social structures (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Patton & Bondi, 2009; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). I used a life history approach to understand pre-college and social justice engagement development that led to participant decisions to engage in justice work. Therefore the knowledge gained from this study provides insight into the potential for cultivating the engagement of privileged students in justice work.

This study may be of particular interest to social justice advocates wondering why privileged students became involved, or resisted getting involved, in social justice work. College administrators and faculty may find this study useful for identifying how to better engage privileged students in productive and constructive leadership initiatives that further a just environment. Additionally, privileged students may benefit from spaces where they can confront inaccurate social narratives, process the impact of that new awareness, and discuss what that awareness means for them going forward. Also, the participants in this study reported that they benefitted from the comprehensive reflection on how their lives led them to do justice work, potentially inspiring them to continue with a clearer vision. Finally, identifying the emergence of attitudes that might lead to working for social justice allows for

early identification of and leadership development for individuals with an inclination to embrace social justice work.

Researcher Perspective

As the principal researcher, I believe it important to acknowledge that I hold similar identities as the study participants. Specifically, I have for most of my life and do now identify as White, male, heterosexual, upper middle class, able-bodied, and Christian (Catholic). Holding those identities undoubtedly influenced and presented the potential to distort the methods used in this study and my interpretations of the outcomes. Yet my interest in this topic originated from significant reflection on my own privilege and the responsibility I draw from my privileged status. My work on college campuses has uniquely positioned me to hear first-hand from those I have oppressed, individually and systemically. Additionally, my work at colleges and universities that purport to develop engaged citizens and to advocate for social justice influenced my interest in this project, my desire being to improve my work as a practitioner.

Further, I acknowledge the danger of giving privileged people the green light to talk about themselves, which either affirms a misguided perspective that privileged people have been left out or furthers an overwhelming sense of guilt that may stifle individual ability to act (Dyer, 2003). Acknowledging some concern, I embraced the perspective that the purpose for doing such work is to dislodge the centrality of privilege (Dyer, 2003; Kimmel, 2000). I found the limited writing on those who held dominant identities to be a call to action, as systems worked diligently to preserve the status quo and perception of what is normal to those like me (Harro, 2000, 2010a; Kivel, 2002; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Moreover, I believe calling attention to the work being done by privileged college students to bring about social

change identified role models who offered a more purposeful example of lived lives and contributed to a comprehensive effort to dislodge systematic injustice.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded theoretically by the work of scholars who view dominant group privilege as a social construction (Goodman, 2001; McIntosh, 2003) as well as the work of scholars who offered a conceptual framework of ally development theory (Bishop, 2002; Edwards, 2006; Evans & Washington, 2010; Washington & Evans, 1991).

Dominant Group Privilege

The dominant group privilege perspective focuses on a belief that certain people hold privileged social identities that therefore receive unearned privileges as a result of who they are (Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 2003). Scholars assert that the commonly held belief that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve success in life is a myth (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2007; Wise 2005). In reality, certain social identities are privileged, both knowingly and unknowingly, which results in the uneven distribution of opportunities and resources (Adams, Blumenfeld, Casteneda, Hackman, Peters, & Zúñiga, 2000, 2010; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003).

The privilege associated with certain social identities derives from the frames that people have socially constructed to identify, make sense, and understand the information we receive about social norms (Fisher, 1997). These norms are not based on ability as much as on what those making decisions, holding power, and writing educational curriculum hold to be true and honored. Within U.S. culture, the ideals of self-determination, equal opportunity, fair resource distribution, and compassion for those less fortunate permeate the dominant frame (Kivel, 2007; Wagner, 2000; Wise, 2005). The problem is that such frames, endorsed

by both those privileged and oppressed, become highly restrictive and reinforce inequitable social dynamics through the information not widely known (Picca & Feagin, 2007). Further, scholars also assert that those privileged are complicit in the perpetuation of systems of injustice by contributing to and actively working to perpetuate the maintenance of injustice (Applebaum, 2010; Mills, 1997, 2007).

Within U.S. culture, those of us who hold social identities as White, male, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied, and Christian have established the frame that defines what is normal (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006). Those holding these collective identities enjoy the greatest benefit as those like them have established what is preferred (Johnson, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007). However, because the ideals espoused by this group in social settings, educational institutions, and through social media depict life as normal, dominant group members often remain unaware that they are receiving any advantage at all (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002). Therefore, the thought that work for social justice is necessary remains foreign and is viewed as unnecessary by many.

The theoretical perspective of dominant group privilege was important to this study as it provided an avenue to explore the meaning participants derived from holding dominant group privileged identities and how their contextual awareness of social inequities influenced that meaning. Given the social influence, the constructivist epistemology grounding this research study is also complimented by the theoretical perspective. Both frameworks hold that the influences from social interactions form the meaning individuals construct to frame what they know and how they respond (Picca & Feagin, 2007).

Ally Development Theory

Washington and Evans (1991) inserted ally development theory into student affairs literature in effort to discuss how heterosexual people come to serve as allies for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender persons. In this early work, Washington and Evans asserted that becoming an ally entails developing awareness, knowledge, skills, and taking action by interacting with and advocating for persons facing oppression based on their sexual orientation. Evans and Washington (2010) later expanded their model of the process to include the demonstration of an overarching desire for a just society that transcends personal gain. To be a true ally, an individual must come to ultimately realize their work transcends their own benefit and that of those they serve, embracing the goal of a common good for greater society.

To further expand, Washington and Evans (1991) noted that the first level to move through toward becoming an ally begins with the recognition that some identities, one of which is heterosexuality, are privileged. Once becoming aware, people then must seek to expand their knowledge through reading, peer interaction, and research of the systemic impact on oppressed individuals and those around them. Knowledge must then be complimented with the will to expand skills and effectiveness at sharing and using the knowledge gained, identified as often the most difficult step in the process. The final level involves taking action to address systemic issues and to bring about change.

Bishop (2002) similarly developed her framework for ally development from a racial justice lens and complimented the work of Washington and Evans (1991). Bishop (2002) identified five steps in her proposed ally development framework. First, allies needed understanding about the oppressive nature of the social structure and each individual's role in

that. Second, possible allies needed to see how they shared common interest with those who are oppressed, understanding that all are harmed by unjust structures. Third, consciousness and healing needed to occur for allies and the groups they work to support. Fourth, allies needed to feel how oppressive structures impacted lives of each individual to provide the motivation to change systems that were hurting themselves and people about whom they cared. The final step was to situate their primary ally work within communities occupied by the dominant group, thereby liberating themselves from the very spaces they had been helping to create.

Finally, in an update to the original model, noting influence from Edwards (2006), Evans and Washington (2010) posited one additional level where allies work beyond their own self-interest to foster a just society for the common good. For privileged people, the work as an ally assumes a counter-cultural approach to life. Therefore, I believed that this theoretical framework provided an additional structure to understand why privileged people might be drawn to ally work. Further, the framework suggests the presence of a mutual self-interest in the process. Given that the study focused on college students, I felt this theoretical perspective provided a framework for identifying the meaning making that motivated engagement in justice work among this particular population.

Summary of Research Approach and Design

Given the desire to understand the life influences for privileged social justice allies, a constructivist and basic interpretive qualitative inquiry using phenomenological life history methodology guided the data collection and analysis. Using a purposive approach, nine participants were screened and selected for this study. Three interviews were conducted

using a semi-structured format in which questions for each interview were provided prior to each interview. All interviews were transcribed and sent to participants for member checking.

An interpretivist phenomenological approach, which holds that human interpretation is the foundation for constructing knowledge, guided data analysis (Merriam, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Prasad, 2005). Data were screened for themes using a focused coding approach and placed into a critical incidents matrix to identify significant life turnings. Data were also placed into an explanatory effects matrix to identify key life influences that each participant experienced for the purpose of identifying significant life moments. Transcripts, critical incidents matrixes, and explanatory effects matrixes were member checked for accuracy and participant input. A peer reviewer was asked to review two sets of participant documents and used to discuss preliminary findings relative to those data sets. Finally, Chapter 4 participant profiles were created and member checked.

Overview of the Dissertation

The following dissertation is composed of six chapters. Chapter 1, just presented, includes an overview of the study. Chapter 2 of this document includes a review of the literature relevant to the study. In Chapter 3 I describe in detail the methodology and methods that I used throughout this study. I present the participant profiles in Chapter 4, situated so as to allow their own words to shape the essence of who they were. In Chapter 5 I present the findings gathered from data collection and my analysis of that data. Finally, Chapter 6 includes my detailed discussion of meaning garnered from the findings and implications derived from the study.

Definitions

The foundation for this study is built on a common understanding of how certain terms are defined. Therefore, the following definitions were held constant through the course of this document and research study:

Social Justice Work – Acknowledging an awareness that U.S. social structures advantage some while depriving others, social justice work is defined as actions that seek to change the very fabric of our social structure by addressing issues of equity, power relations, and institutionalized oppression (Goodman, 2001, p. 4).

Ally – The principle participants of study, allies are defined as individuals who hold privileged or dominant group identities and who are engaged directly in acting against the system of oppression from which they derive their power, privilege, and social position (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006; Johnson, 2006).

Privilege – For purposes of this study, participants were selected who held historically privileged identities. To be privileged, an identity must be subject to receiving unearned advantages or something of value simply because of the social group to which one belongs (McIntosh, 2003). Privilege is unearned because it is predominantly conferred through birth or good luck (McIntosh, 2003). In this study, these identities include White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper middle class, and Christian.

Dominant Group – Individuals holding privileged identities are said to be part of the dominant group. The dominant group is defined as any identity or identities that provides privilege to an individual or group and is regarded as “normal” or “a favored state” (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 2003).

Traditional College Age – Participants selected were, or were at the time they first engaged in justice work, of traditional college age, which is defined as within the age range of 18–24 years old.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the study through a review of existing literature. In the literature review I have summarized the theoretical and research findings relevant to privileged college students who are engaged in social justice work. Theory had recently begun to emerge in the existing literature that offered insight regarding the research questions posed. Empirical research was also emerging, although it remained limited in scope. Research presented had primarily focused on oppressed group advocacy and was rarely situated directly on historical analysis of privileged students engaged in social justice work. Gaining an understanding of the theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature was particularly important as each aspect of the literature identified gaps for future study. Therefore, to ground this study, I focused the literature review on privilege and dominant group behavior, privileged identities, social justice work, life course theory, identity development, and social justice ally development. What follows is a summary of the findings from the review of literature.

Privilege and Dominant Group Behavior

Those who established the foundations of the United States of America asserted that “all men [*sic*] are created equal” (Declaration of Independence, 1776). However, through a critical examination, Wise (2005) asserted that the United States of America fosters a political, economic, and educational hierarchy that advantages some and disadvantages many (p. 11). Others have affirmed the assertion that equality exists only in writing, citing evidence that only some enjoy the benefits of the inequitable distribution of opportunities, resources, and support in the U. S. social structure (Adams, et al., 2010; Johnson, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Kivel, 2007; McIntosh, 2003; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Defined as

privilege, the dynamic surfaces each time that someone receives something simply because of the social group to which that individual belongs (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 2003). Social groups identified as holding privilege include, but are not limited to, those who are White, male, heterosexual, upper class, able-bodied, and Christian (Johnson, 2006, p. 11).

Further, McIntosh (2003) distinguished the unearned advantage gained by holding a privileged social identity from unearned entitlement, those being qualities we should all receive, such as a sense of belonging, and equitable opportunity for personal development. Because they are seen as more desirable, yet largely unobtainable to most people, socially privileged identities are systematically given permission to control and overpower certain other identity groups, thereby establishing a state of conferred dominance (McIntosh, 2003). Holding one or all of the privileged identities places an individual into what is referred to as the dominant group (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006).

Finally, scholars have argued that privilege comes at a price and is harmful to all (Blumenfeld, 1992, 2013; Kimmel, 2003; Kivel, 2002). Those who are privileged often do not recognize their privileged and oppressive thoughts and actions. For example, White people frequently have no awareness of their cultural history and background, men struggle to become the man they feel they are supposed to be, and people fear forming intimate relationships with members of the same sex (Blumenfeld 1992, 2013; Kimmel, 2003; Kivel, 2002). The result is that all human beings struggle to realize their full authenticity and capability. However as will be discussed later, Edwards (2006) would suggest that acknowledging privilege and working against systemic privilege and oppression can serve as a liberating experience for us (p. 51).

Dominant Group Status

Dominant group status derives from those who hold privilege and power positions, and therefore ultimately make key decisions that are of benefit to themselves. Goodman (2001) stated, “Yet I also use the term *dominant group* because it reflects the fact that this group not only gets privileges and has greater social power but also sets the norms” (p. 6). Pragmatically this supposition means that the prevailing language, style of dress, mannerisms, values, and images are those of the group in power. That which is most prevalent or deemed by the dominant group to be the preferred way of doing things is what we learn to regard as normal. These norms are therefore prescribed to individuals through their membership in the dominant social identities or through their assimilation into dominant groups. The consistency, prevalence, repetition, and renewal of dominant group behaviors serve to maintain the existing norms not simply for dominant group members but for all.

Both dominant and non-dominant groups therefore learn to understand and interpret the dominant norms handed down. Fischer (1997) suggested that people create frames to identify, understand, and make sense out of the information about social norms that are received from social outlets, including families. Fisher (1997) asserted, “Cultural frames provide people with the tools from which they can construct meaning from information they encounter to make sense of their world” (para. 5.1). While arguably essential to understanding people’s function in society, these frames become highly restrictive and reinforce the oppressive environment in the social structure (Picca & Feagin, 2007).

White racial frame. Most dominant in the United States social structure is that of the White racial frame, propagated and held by most White Americans and accepted by many people of color (Picca & Feagin, 2007). Picca and Feagin (2007) explained, “At the most

general level, the racial frame views whites as mostly superior in culture and achievement and views people of color as generally of less social, economic, and political consequence than whites—as inferior to whites in the making and keeping of the nation” (p. 9). Americans pass the White racial frame from generation to generation, using the script to shape human action and behavior in ways that often remain subconscious. Because this frame is viewed by most White people as normal, few ever acknowledge, let alone think critically about, the pervasiveness of how their lives are so shaped by these beliefs, style, gestures, and expressions. The White racial frame becomes culture.

Complicating the perpetuation of the White racial frame is that dominant group members often remain unaware that they are receiving any such advantages (Cabrera, 2012; Kendall, 2006). As noted, the frame used to shape understandings and guide everyday social behaviors remains largely automatic and unconscious (Picca & Feagin, 2007). When confronted with the existence of such inequities, dominant group members often respond by denying the existence of any such advantage (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2002; Wise, 2005). In cases where individuals do recognize advantage, such instances are often rationalized as what is “normal” and “right” (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006). The result is a pervasive attitude of preferred status that is fostered through educational, economic, and political systems (Picca & Feagin, 2007).

Further, teachers, employers, and politicians both knowingly and unknowingly act such that the system of advantage is preserved and furthered (Reason, Scales, & Millar, 2005; Tatum, 1997). Hardiman (2001) affirmed, “I knew that I had been trained since infancy to see race, think racially, and assume my position as a member of the dominant race in a racially stratified society” (p. 109). Structural alignments that reinforce privileged social

norms and disadvantage people of color have been documented in higher education (Aal, 2001; Cabrera, 2012), the job market (Kivel, 2007; Wise, 2005), social structures (hooks, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007), and the school system (Chubbuck, 2004; Ferguson, 2000; Haviland, 2008) in particular. These social institutions are established to best serve those who hold a privileged and dominant group status, effectively underserving those with non-dominant identities such as people of color, women, people with disabilities, those holding a faith other than Christian, and individuals with a gender identity other than heterosexual.

Epistemology of ignorance. Finally, an emerging body of scholarship has begun to assert an epistemology of ignorance with individuals, studying how that which is unknown is produced and sustained for the purpose of advantaging others (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). Specifically, scholars have begun examining how people come to know what they know with a greater focus on power and disadvantage (Alcoff, 2007; Feenan, 2007). Mills (2007) defined ignorance “to cover both false belief and the absence of true belief” (p. 16). Therefore, scholars have asserted, not only do people holding privileged status often not know the advantage they are given by such status but when presented with new information they are unlikely to believe it, thereby becoming complicit with the perpetuation of systemic injustice (Alcoff, 2007; Applebaum, 2010). For example, specific areas of scholarship under examination include gender (Feenan, 2007) and race (Applebaum, 2010; Mills, 1997; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). The importance of considering this scholarship cannot be overlooked. As Applebaum (2010) asserted, “As long as white complicity is not acknowledged, I explain, the status quo remains beyond challenge” (p. 7). Therefore, the

dominant group must in all aspects of life come to know reality differently and to use that knowledge in action for a justice system from which all benefit.

Dominant Group Oppression

Those speaking out or working to change such systems of privilege historically have often identified with oppressed groups, as working against the norm offers little advantage to those holding privileged identities (Fine, Weis, Pruitt, & Burns, 2004). Ironically, because they are often oblivious to the advantages they receive, dominant group members frequently oppose any measures designed to create equity for all as these measures are deemed to be advocating for unearned advantage (Tatum, 1997; Wise, 2005). Two such examples that have polarized our nation at times include affirmative action policies and the welfare system, ironically designed to minimize unfair disadvantage yet vehemently opposed because they are seen as offering handouts (Wagner, 2000; Wise, 2005).

Members of the dominant group have opposed unfair systems throughout time, yet their stories remain largely undocumented (Loewen, 2003). Though limited narrative research on the work of the privileged can be found in the literature, scholarly accounts of White men engaged in justice work have begun to emerge, especially documented anti-racism initiatives (Brown, 2002; Thompson, Schaefer, & Brod, 2003; Warren, 2010). With a focus on their work in general, existing literature offered a limited sense of why those of privilege engaged in work designed to dismantle their systemic advantage. Scholars hinted at, but had not isolated, what led privileged activists to engage in their work (Brown, 2002; Thompson, et al., 2003). Some of those activists included revealed experiencing seminal events that challenged the core of their being (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Warren, 2010). Warren (2010) explained, "These experiences make Whites aware, for the first time, of the

reality of racism” (p. 27). Such work affirmed the need to focus on and isolate life events that served to dislodge privileged individuals from their unaware reality and motivated them to initiate action.

The focus of the research work had been to chronicle the work of White privileged men, noting the successes, struggles, and, in some cases, what led them to do their work (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Brown, 2002; Rice, 2009). However, research did not isolate individuals for complete privileged identity status, selection primarily based on their race and sex as the identity criteria, while allowing oppressed identities such as sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and disability to be present (Thompson, et al., 2003). Additionally, work to date had been primarily focused on privileged individuals in their adult years, well after their college and college-age experiences (Brown, 2002; Phillips, 2009; Thompson, et al., 2003). Developmentally, and otherwise, researchers have not explored the early maturation of social justice workers, leaving room to better understand what life events had led some individuals to embrace justice work in their daily lives as well as why some have not taken such action.

Masculinity and College Men

There is perhaps no more privileged identity in U.S. social structure than that of the White male. Since this study included participants who identified as male, it was important to understand the social construction of masculinity. Literature is abundant on men, masculinity, and the need to engage boys and men more deeply in their own identity exploration generally and more specifically in awareness of their privileged status in society. Drawing from feminist writings on women’s identity development, men’s studies scholars have sounded a call for greater education, analysis, and discussion on the social construction

of masculinity (Connell, 1996, 2005a; Doyle & Femiano, 1999; Griffin, 2007; Johnson, 1997; Kimmel, 2004; Messner, 1997; Schacht & Ewing, 2004). While a focus on men's identity development and awareness furthered the fundamental placing of men at the center of social privilege, position, and ultimately power, such a step is necessary to move in the direction of social equity. The inability of educational institutions to reach and enlighten men's deeper awareness, knowledge, and skills, along with issues of power and privilege, continued to allow an oppressive social dynamic to perpetuate itself (Johnson, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007).

Emerging scholarship had begun to reveal the complexity of men's identity development (Connell, 2005a; Kimmel & Messner, 2010). Yet, understanding that complexity had not fully translated theory into substantive practice that appropriately nurtured men's development (Kellom, 2004; Laker & Davis, 2011). Though at the center of focus, men were largely seen as disengaging from social and educational environments. Mortenson (2006) posited, "By a broad array of economic, social, family, and civic measures a growing share of American men are in serious trouble" (p. 1). Citing the disappearance of labor jobs held predominantly by men, a decrease in children living with fathers, lower degree attainment, lower male voting rates, higher suicide rates, and increased incarceration rates, Mortenson (2006) suggested that the state of American manhood, as measured by traditional means, was not healthy. Education has long existed to foster awareness, impart knowledge, and develop the skills in graduates to lead healthy and successful lives (King, 2000). Literature was raising concerns about the degree to which men were fully developing skills for success in a changing landscape.

Masculinity

Scholarly examination of dynamics fostering men's development revealed that the social construction of gender positioned masculinity, and in particular a perceived form of hegemonic masculinity, as both desired and dominant in the social environment (Connell, 1995, 2005a; Johnson, 2006; Kimmel, 2004). Early scholarship on masculinity documented a normative and dominant form, not based on statistical prevalence but rather on perceived image of what men believed it meant to be a man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Put nicely, the traditional masculine persona was typically described as independent, rational, self-sufficient, active, emotionally restrictive, and competitive (Longwood, Muesse, & Schipper, 2004). Considered another way, the traditional man was also described as being controlling, unchangeable, sexist, violent, and out of control (Kimmel, 2004). Scholars noted that because these characteristics were so common place, they often went unnoticed and, perhaps more importantly, unexamined (Johnson, 2006; Kimmel & Messner, 2010; Lorber, 2000; McIntosh, 2003; Schacht, 2003; Schacht & Ewing, 2004). Similar to the White racial frame, specific gender performance was so expected in social interactions that conformity to these scripts was rarely noticed. And when people decided not to follow the ascribed scripts such action was often taken quietly (Lorber, 2000).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further asserted that masculine performance holds a dominant form, known as hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt asserted, "It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (p. 832). Identifying with and adopting the hegemonic form of masculinity rewards men who perform as such with positions of power and authority, a

condition that ultimately undermines work for social justice. Kimmel and Messner (2010) affirmed, “Not only does middle-class, middle-aged, heterosexual white masculinity become the standard against which all men are measured, but this definition, itself, is used against those who do not fit as a way to keep them down” (p. xvi). Inequities facilitated by the continued positioning of a hegemonic masculinity frequently emerge in the literature (Connell, 2005b; Hearn, 1998; Stoudt, 2006). Interestingly, and most importantly, emerging scholarship on masculinity was demonstrating that men themselves are recognizing, though not articulating, disconnect between who they think they should be and who in fact they are with respect to masculine performance (Berkowitz, 2011; Burke, Maton, Mankowski, & Anderson, 2010). Therefore, a critical component in men’s development is the examination, identification, and de-centering of the existing hegemonic form of masculinity to include a broader definition of masculinity and performance.

Further complicating men’s world views were the contradictory ways in which men experienced power. Davis and Wagner (2005) explained,

Men are simultaneously privileged and harmed by their experiences of power. In other words, as a group, men are recipients of power and privilege, but as individuals, they often fall short of hegemonic masculinity and experience the pain associated with it. (p. 34)

Men on the one hand believe as men they are to embody a cultural script of what it means to be a man and yet on the other hand struggle with who they know themselves to be (Berkowitz, 2011; Kimmel, 2004). Therefore, men exhibiting a form of masculinity outside the dominant hegemonic masculinity will deny their true and desired expression for the purpose of fitting in (Berkowitz, 2011). Adding to the complexity, individuals cannot simply

isolate an aspect of their identity given that such a tactic further denies the entirety of who they are and ignores their intra group differences, including their subordinated identities (Crenshaw, 1994; hooks, 2000; Kimmel & Davis, 2011). Subsequently, the most powerful and confident are those men holding multiple intersecting privileged identities through which they experience the least amount of, if any, oppression. By not holding an oppressed aspect of identity, men often remained oblivious to the true advantage they received from their privileged identities (Davis, 2002; Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006).

The College Man

This study focused on privileged college students and therefore was informed by scholarship on college men's development. For traditional college-age students, interpretations of the modern world through their critical thinking and moral development lenses are categorized in the broad concepts of right and wrong, good and bad (Perry, 1999). Compounded by the lack of awareness described above, college men often have not thought about what it truly means to be a man, simply ascribing to the assumed script (Davis, 2002; Harris & Barone, 2011). Further, having a limited understanding of their own identities and how they express gender, college men therefore have significant difficulty seeing a need for social justice work. Davis and Wagner (2005) asserted, "Empathy for the experience of others, a care orientation, and 'speaking out' in response to pain are characteristics both outside the traditional male role and also vital to the development of social justice attitudes and actions" (p. 33). Men clearly face a chasm to overcome and campus dynamics often do not work in their favor.

Jones and McEwen (2000) affirmed that those holding dominant identities find privilege and inequality least visible in their lives. The absence of safe spaces where college

men can understand their identity as men and explore authentic forms of masculine expression become detrimental to men's development (Berkowitz, 2011). Moreover, the spaces most often occupying men's time and attention are counterproductive to healthy development as they symbolize put downs, racial epithets, and swearing as endemic to male relationships (Kimmel & Davis, 2011). In rare instances where identity had been considered, men reported the presence of dynamics such as safe spaces, often with women or individual men, a broader view of masculinity as on a continuum, and an affirmation of their masculine expression as critical to their exploration of masculinity (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Longwood, et al., 2004; Rice, 2009).

Other Privileged Social Identities

While White men hold the most significant privileged identity status, other identities are also privileged in U.S. culture and when present enhance the unearned benefit that individuals enjoy (Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002; McIntosh, 2003). Though not exhaustive, below I include an overview of additional identity privilege germane to this research study. Each identity derives privileged status and power from a hegemonic, or dominant, view of normalcy that juxtaposes authentic identity expressions as abnormal, deviant, or at best less undesirable (Clarke, 2008).

Social Class Privilege

Social class is an identity often not considered or discussed. If it is considered at all, assumptions are generally based on how individuals appear and present themselves (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Liu, Pickett, & Ivey, 2007). Comprising both socioeconomic status (income, occupation, education) and social class identity (how individuals choose to present themselves), it is often difficult to determine where an

individual falls; the default is middle class (Kimmel, 2003). Further, class can fluctuate through the lifecycle, especially for upper middle class individuals who leave affluent homes to attend college. Nevertheless, as an individual navigates the flow between social class of origin, class felt at the present time, and class attributed by the social environment, the privilege gained from class identity can be revealed (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, forthcoming). The understanding that most everyone is middle class is a myth, the divide between those who have and have not only growing (Kivel, 2004; Mantsios, 2010). Privileged status perpetuates itself through the possession of wealth, achieving and exercising power, and maintaining social networks as closed loops (Evans et al., 2010). Thus, the ability and opportunity to navigate social environments, college campuses, and the business environment perpetuates an advantage to those already in the know (Adams, 2010).

Heterosexual Privilege

Similar to social class, heterosexual privilege is a predominantly invisible system within U.S. culture (Evans et al., 2010). Individuals assume others are heterosexual unless confronted with evidence to the contrary, even overlooking subtle cues that might suggest a different story (Carbado, 2010; Evans & Broido, 2005; Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). Those holding heterosexual status have greater access to social networks, policies that support their health and well-being, and opportunities to advance professionally (Carbado, 2010; Mueller & Cole, 2009). Additionally, the realization of an identity other than heterosexual often brings with it ridicule, violent reactions, and dissociation (Blumenfeld, 1992, 2013). Examples of privilege associated with being heterosexual include, but are not limited to, holding hands with a partner in public without fear of harassment, not worrying about being fired from a job because of sexual orientation, and the ability to easily access

non-judgmental healthcare providers (Carbado, 2010; Patton et al., forthcoming). Likewise, heterosexuals who call into question issues of privilege, especially sexuality-based privileges, risk diminishing the privilege they enjoy through ridicule or the suspicion they might be gay themselves (Carbado, 2010; Evans & Washington, 2010).

Temporarily Able-bodied Privilege

Similar to social class, people often assume the ability of another based on what is physically presented (Gerschick, 2000). In reality, ability is a temporary state representing intellectual and physical status, a wide range that is both visible and invisible, at any given point in life (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 2007). Stemming from the privileged physical characteristics attributed to men, those possessing the ability to walk, hear, and see without enhancements enjoy greater access to their physical surroundings, learning experiences, and work opportunities. References to “learning disabilities,” “mobility impairment,” and “hearing impairments” suggest that there is a “normal” and preferred ability status (Evans et al., 2010). Thus, in spite of what people assume, the most common causes of physical and intellectual disability status are environmental conditions and attitudes (Griffin, et al., 2007). The physical barriers that prevent access to learning, work, and care environments result in diminished capacity for some, privileging others (Wendell, 2010). Therefore, because the most common access methods are privileged, the prevailing attitude is that those using unique methods of access are inferior and unable to meet performance expectations (Griffin, et al., 2007; Wendall, 2010). Such an attitude results in the marginalization of many brilliant and talented individuals while allowing others inequitable advantage and opportunity.

Cisgender Privilege

Sometimes confused with gender and heterosexual privilege, those who are able to live authentically through easily recognized body appearance or gender performance experience the privilege of not having to use undo energy explaining their identity to others (Catalano & Shlasko, 2010; Patton, et al., forthcoming). Privileges include being comfortable in public restrooms, seeing one's gender expression revealed in the media, and being able to participate on athletic teams without others being suspicious (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Because the gender binary is so pervasive, those not conforming to narrow gender norms find it difficult to identify a community of others like them (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Within the higher education setting, once emerging into an authentic non-conforming gender identity, students often find limited campus resources that leave them questioning their welcome (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Experiencing greater complexity in relationships than their gender-conforming peers, individuals must constantly negotiate authentic gender performances and heteronormative practices, struggling to find spaces that affirm their dignity (Franklin, 2014).

Christian Privilege

Though there are many religious traditions represented in the United States, Christianity is privileged through its predominance as recognized and honored within the culture (Evans et al., 2010; Lippy, 2010). The result is a system of overarching advantages known as Christian hegemony that exist at the societal, institutional, and individual levels of U.S. culture (Blumenfeld, 2006). While many denominations exist today, virtually every sector of common life contains some of the early influences from the dominant European Protestant heritage prevalent in the 16th century (Lippy, 2010). Often unthought-of, visible

markers privileging Christian values occur in the reflection of the Christian liturgical calendar through the work and school holiday closings most universally followed. Privilege, in the form of time off, is typically granted at Easter and Christmas, contributing to a series of systemic advantages with little consideration that they reflect religious preference and dominant Christian standards (Blumenfeld, 2006; Schlosser, 2010). Marginalized are those who choose not to celebrate such events or who wish to honor different religious celebrations and holidays such as Yom Kippur and Ramadan. While prevalent, Jews for example remain relatively invisible in U.S. culture, subjugating themselves within other more common identity groups (Blumenfeld, 2012; Evans et al., 2010).

Social Identity and Privilege

The interplay of social identity and privilege is complex. Evans et al. (2010) affirmed, “Underlying interpretations of social identity are the concepts of privilege and oppression” (p. 229). Therefore, it is important to be mindful that privileged social forces influence individual social identity, which is comprised of fluid and intersecting privileged and subordinated identities.

Social Justice Work

The byproduct of a privileged social structure that advantages certain identities is a system of inequity and oppression. Those oppressed have access to fewer educational opportunities, live with fewer economic resources, and experience violent or unhealthy situations more frequently than those in the dominant group. In response, many social service agencies, or charitable organizations, have emerged within U.S. culture to serve the needs of those disadvantaged by oppressive situations. In fact, America in general has long demonstrated a love affair with charity work (Wagner, 2000). Since the early 1900s,

Americans have given to charitable organizations in the form of money, time, and support. Yet given the focus of this study, it was important to understand and distinguish social justice work from charity work.

While social service agencies exist to address the needs of individuals suffering from institutional systems of exploitation and poverty, their fundamental purpose is not inherently to change the demand for their service, which exists because of systemic inequity and limitations (Kivel, 2007). To illustrate, serving the hungry through a food bank provides meals to those in need and is a form of social service or charity work. The food bank typically is not focused on addressing the reasons individuals and families are hungry, and therefore in need of the food bank services. Unfortunately, the efforts put forth by charitable organizations largely serve to provide equitable means to those in need with little consideration for what dynamics created the need in the first place. Understandably, people find it far easier to offer those in need a decent meal than to address the reason such individuals are unable to provide that meal for themselves.

However, action that places a focus on changing structural inequities that leave people homeless and hungry is said to be social change work, often used interchangeably with social justice work. Kivel (2007) affirmed, “*Social service work* addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of institutional systems of exploitation and violence. *Social change work* challenges the root causes of the exploitation and violence” (p. 129). Social justice work focuses on dismantling inequitable systems by addressing issues of equity, power relations, and institutionalized oppression (Goodman, 2001, p. 4). Advocates for social justice champion a social structure that allows people to reach their human potential through a mutually responsible, interdependent society

(Goodman, 2001; Kivel, 2007). While social service work is important and necessary given our social inequities, equally important is the work being done to change the social dynamics that led to the need for social services. Social change initiative, referred interchangeably as social justice work, was the focus of this study.

In contrast, a just structure allows people to experience “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (Bell, 2007a, p. 1). A socially just society is built on the equitable distribution of resources where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure, have decent jobs, and are empowered to participate in the decisions that affect their lives (Bell, 2007a). All individuals desire an ability to determine their own livelihood through open participation, access to needed resources, and the opportunity to influence systems toward fulfilling their human capacity (Bell, 2007a; Kivel, 2007). If effective, people are affirmed for who they are, feel a strong sense of dignity and worth, and are able to secure means to lead a healthy and productive life. But achieving such a dynamic within U.S. culture that fosters dominant and subordinated groups requires social change initiatives that complement the work of social service agencies.

Given that those holding privileged identities often fail to understand and notice social injustice, working for social change requires significant self-awareness and institutional understanding. Raising awareness must occur formally and informally for both the educators as well as those being educated, as teachers without proper awareness can actually stifle transformative educational experiences (Haviland, 2008). Seemingly rare and largely unexposed in our everyday lives are those individuals who have an awareness that they use to reveal the reality of how systems advantage some while disadvantaging others, foster the knowledge and attitudes necessary to address these inequitable systems, and the

skills required to bring about social change toward creating a just social structure (Adams, et al., 2007; Goodman, 2001; Reason & Davis, 2005).

Therefore, substantive change simply cannot occur until individuals fully understand how current systems are perpetuated. Knowledge acquisition is necessary to reveal not only how inequities exist with respect to the distribution of resources but likewise regarding how decisions regarding distribution are made. Until individuals have full understanding of how the system positions privileged groups in power positions that perpetuate the oppression of others, the privileged will remain unengaged in work to implement social change. Educators remain in a unique position to foster the fortitude and skill necessary to address social inequity (Bell, 2007b; Kivel, 2007). While the challenge has been particularly problematic for those holding privileged identities, this study was focused on identifying the developmental process privileged students experienced that raised their awareness about the need for and engagement in social justice work.

Life Course

Given that participants were interviewed about the span of their lives to date, this study was informed by a sociological and life course lens that viewed individuals as influenced significantly by their social context over time. Individual lived lives are uniquely experienced given the context within which each person enters the world and moves through it. A sociological lens is primarily concerned with how present social contexts, external to the individual, influence people and their behaviors (Henslin, 2007). Therefore, understanding the social constructs, behavioral patterns, and influences that shape individual lived experiences is critical to understanding human life choices.

Viewed through a sociological lens, scholars generally accept that the life course emerges as an outcome of an interaction between the individual, the environment, and the social structure that shapes the environment (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). The life course paradigm posited that dynamic worlds change people, influencing how they select and construct their environments, and ultimately shape the direction taken by each individual (Elder, 1995; Perun & Bielby, 1980). More specifically, the concept of life course “refers to the interweave of age-graded trajectories, such as work and family careers, that are subject to changing conditions and future options; and to short-term transitions, ranging from birth and school entry to retirement” (Elder, 1995, p. 105). Individuals using a life course perspective assert that individual lives are shaped by the world around them, how their immediate families, social groups, and communities respond to that environment, and how each person individually makes developmental life choices.

Reinforcing the life course perspective, social learning theory similarly posits that individuals are shaped by their social world, which includes peer influence, modeling, positive feedback from others, and commonly held beliefs (Fox, Nobles, & Akers, 2011). Moreover, as such influence occurs, individuals also reciprocate the influence on the environment in which they are engaged (Fox et al., 2011). In a related manner, social cognitive theory asserts that the life course is comprised of multi-faceted aspects of human agency whereby individuals choose their own life direction, obtain life outcomes by influencing others to act on their behalf, and work with others to collectively shape their lives (Bandura, 2002). Thus, all individuals have the capacity to shape their life course.

Conducting a study with a life course lens places the emphasis on reviewing the sequence of events, transitions, and social roles comprising human lives (Elder, 1995).

Viewing these trajectories as interwoven, the life course lens becomes particularly concerned with the transition to adulthood as these social trajectories are particularly prominent and shaped by social forces (Elder, 1995). Time, a developmental concept rather than chronological, therefore becomes a critical and pivotal mechanism regulating the life course (Perun & Bielby, 1980). Perun and Bielby (1980) explained, “We thus assert that the fundamental regulatory mechanism of the individual life course is synchronicity, that is, the degree of coordination displayed by a multiplicity of time tables relative to each other at a given point in time” (p. 101). For example, the decision regarding when to marry, if at all, is embedded in the psychology of individuals and changes over time (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). The choice of whether and when to marry may be significantly influenced by choices about higher education, military service, the law, and work opportunities that circumstantially place individuals geographically separate, financially dependent, needing to delay educational opportunities, or without options. How individuals choose and respond to their life choices shapes the life course in ways only the individual can begin to unravel.

Elder (1995) outlined four key components within the life course approach:

1. Historical change—Social forces shape the life course and have developmental consequences, making time and place key factors to consider. Such forces vary across communities, regions, and societies. Each individual life course is ultimately determined by the individual within the parameters set by the larger social structure. For example, while their desire may exist to learn, how African American boys are regarded in the school system can significantly impact their ability to learn (Ferguson, 2000).

2. Human agency—Individual people have the capacity to plan their lives, make life choices, and to affect their life course. Individual life history, disposition, and differences interact with their changing environment to produce unique behavioral outcomes. Within social structures, individuals each have the ability to transcend their environmental influences. For example, while commitment to organized schooling may be haphazard at best, individuals can acquire significant intelligence and resiliency without fully engaging in the formal school system (Wolcott, 1994).
3. Linked lives—Each individual is interdependent with the social environment. Therefore, personal actions have consequences for others and the actions of others impinge upon the individual. Individuals are connected through social networks of relationships that in turn connect them to the broader social changes of society. For example, teen boys who have significant positive influence from an adult role model or peer group may be less likely to commit violent acts (Messerschmidt, 2000).
4. Timing—Simply put, the timing of an event may be more influential than the event itself. The incidence, duration, and sequence of an event relative to age expectations and beliefs influence the life course. Therefore, an early pregnancy or marriage may have varying impact based on the individual's social world, economic conditions, and family values. For example, individuals immersed in racist social environments noted key events that led to their anti-racist activism (Brown, 2002).

The life course paradigm holds that each person lives a unique and individual life, including experience influenced by the social environment into which people are born and live. Each individual has the ability to choose consistent with or in opposition to socially ascribed expectations. Research makes clear that individuals are influenced by the world around them in both positive and negative ways. What is important is how the individuals make meaning of these choices and the influences that guide the decision-making process (Van Manen, 1990).

In this study I was particularly concerned with identifying points in life that led participants to a greater awareness of the need for social justice and to commit more deeply to working for social justice. To be successful, the immense amount of information gained through life history research must be channeled into manageable groups before sound analytical work can be performed (Mandelbaum, 1973, p. 180). One such grouping suggested was life turnings, described as principle periods in a person's life that are major transitions in thought or action. Mandelbaum (1973) noted these points are important given that life turnings unveil new cultural roles, social interactions, and self-conceptions that people adopt at junctures in their lifetimes (p. 181). Additionally, a turning may occur through a single event or via a gradual shift depending on the nature and impact of the change (Mandelbaum, 1973). Given that those holding privileged identities often remain oblivious to social inequities, I was concerned in this study with why privileged students became aware that injustice existed. Specifically, what points in their lives revealed unjust situations and turned them toward a commitment to social justice work?

Identity Development

In this study I focused on the unique experiences of the nine participants. Identity development has been found to be a key factor in the development of allies and therefore grounded this project (Broido & Reason, 2005). Having a healthy sense of self and an understanding of how the individual self is constructed fosters an awareness of the lens through which one sees the world. For allies, accepting that each person holds a unique lens through which he or she views the world is an important factor in approaching social justice work. Likewise, such a perspective opens an individual to an understanding of systemic injustice and how each person may be implicated in the fostering of inequitable social dynamics. Demonstrating the fortitude to reject negative messages associated with a particular identity, especially when derived from a privileged identity seeking to maintain a prolonged status, is critical for social justice allies to be effective. Finally, the connections and complexities within people must become visible so as to better understand how race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity have shaped the experiences of each individual (Collins, 1993).

Adding to the complexity, Crenshaw (1994) asserted that simply isolating a single aspect of an individual's identity is a tactic that ignores intra-group differences (p. 93). Studying women of color, Crenshaw (1994) discussed "structural intersectionality, the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women" (p. 95). In essence, uniqueness and therefore individual lived experience, comes in part from the influence of multiple identities at their point and points of intersection. Analysis of the identity intersection points is particularly important given that

such intersections create a unique lens through which each individual views the world. To ignore this reality is in effect an act of dismissing the essence of a person.

Affirming Crenshaw's (1994) work, Jones and McEwen (2000) suggested that individual identity comprises multiple dimensions that intersect continuously and with differing levels of salience at points in time. For college students, whose identity is still under construction, each dimension is influenced by changing contexts such as family, campus life, social conditions, and career decisions (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). Therefore, one's identity can only be viewed as a snapshot in time, relevant and accurate at that moment prior to additional influence or information. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) expanded this model to include the influence of meaning making to better depict the relationship between context and salience of identity dimensions. Individual meaning-making capacity serves as a filter that portrays "not only *what* relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also *how* they come to perceive them as they do" (Abes, et al., 2007, p. 13). Based on their research, Abes, Jones, and McEwen suggested that professionals must create a healthy context for the exploration of identity and develop more meaningful partnerships that help students gain a more complex understanding of their identity, and the multiple dimensions thereof.

For White people, racial identity in particular tends to remain indistinct from their overall identity (Tatum, 1994). White people can more quickly identify the culture and distinctness of another race and often seek to adopt or emulate these characteristics (Hardiman, 2001; Helms, 2008). To become an ally, those identifying as White must overcome their naiveté about their racial identity, abandon their individual socialized inclination to be dominant, and develop a healthy sense of what it means to be White (Tatum,

1994). Hardiman (2001) asserted, “Whites have to deal concomitantly with two key aspects of our identity: internalized dominance, racism, and privilege, and the search for cultural meaning and identification” (p. 124). To develop a healthy White identity, individuals must come to terms with their Whiteness, understand how their lives are shaped racially, and internalize a vision for how their identity might contribute systemically toward dislodging a hierarchical view of identity. Reflecting on how individual identity is shaped by our social unit and structures is critical to the identity awareness process.

Supporting such identity exploration, Harro (2000, 2010a) posited that people are born into certain social identities and that these identities guide each person’s life course, not the least of which is to further inequitable social systems that privilege some and oppress others. These social identities are maintained by pervasive socialization dynamics that teach life scripts, identities, and appropriate discourse. Each identity is then reinforced by institutional and cultural entities such as schools, churches, and media outlets. For those holding privileged identities these scripts often go unnoticed as they are typically accepted as normal (Johnson, 2006, Picca & Feagin, 2007; Tatum, 1994). Those who step from the cultural norms ascribed, or do what is perceived to be abnormal, experience systematic disregard or oppression, which serves to reinforce privileged cultural dynamics. For instance, those White people who challenge racism are labeled race traitors (Hardiman, 2001) and those men who do not conform to hegemonic masculine norms are labeled as sissies (Connell, 1995).

However, some individuals recognize that their actions, knowingly and unknowingly, continue to perpetuate a system of injustice (McIntosh, 2003). Harro (2010b) conveyed that certain individuals experience a waking up, thus beginning a liberating process of moving

away from their oppressive practices. Harro (2010b) explained, “Once we know something, we can’t *not* know it anymore” (p. 54). In response, those individuals pursue deeper understanding, reach out to community resources, build relationships with those holding oppressed identities, surround themselves with similarly like-minded people, and act to bring about social change to what they have seen (Harro, 2010a). Taking such actions to disrupt the status quo is the essence of social justice work (Evans & Washington, 2010; Kivel, 2002). Through this study I focused specifically on the identification of critical moments in which individuals were motivated to take action against systemic injustice.

The Social Justice Ally

In addition to reviewing literature on privileged and dominant group identities, this study was also informed by social justice ally research. The participants selected for this study were chosen based on their identification as social justice allies, demonstrating attitudes and actions consistent with ally work. Thus it was important to conceptually situate the study in the relevant literature and research and to have a working definition of what it means to be a social justice ally. Developing a social justice advocacy mindset does not come easily as privileged positions inherently shield dominant group members from the realities of injustice (Bishop, 2002; Cabrera, 2012; Goodman, 2001). Therefore, individuals must come to recognize that inequitable social dynamics are in fact harmful to those with power, as well as those subordinated by it (Bishop, 2002; Kivel, 2002).

For purposes of this study, allies were defined as individuals who held privileged or dominant group identities and who were engaged directly in acting against the system of oppression from which they derived their power, privilege, and social position (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006; Johnson, 2006). To elaborate, being an ally also implies

explicitly that justice work is done with members from oppressed groups, using position to facilitate access for those who are oppressed (Evans & Washington, 1991). Finally, being an ally requires that an individual work at the systemic level, as well as supporting at the individual level (Goodman, 2001). Given the complexity and developing nature of the ally identity, labeling oneself as an ally may in fact be somewhat presumptuous (Evans & Washington, 2010). Evans and Washington (2010) explained, “Whether your actions would qualify as those of an ally can best be determined by members of the LGBT population” (p. 419). Allies must remain cognizant that while their intentions might be just, their actions may miss the mark entirely. Therefore, those working for the common good ultimately do so to create a just environment for all, not simply to be recognized or labeled as an ally.

Equally important, allies must act in ways that seek to dislodge the very systems from which they derive privileged status (Bishop, 2002; Washington & Evans, 1991; Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2007; Reason & Davis, 2005). Allies directly concern themselves with identifying the root causes of inequity and then actively seek to change dynamics that allow such inequity to exist. Action may include, but not be limited to, educating men on attitudes that foster systemic violence against women, engaging with communities of color to address systemic racism, and reaching out to politicians with a call to provide health care to all people. Those allies who take action move from “bystander”--someone who sees an issue but does nothing--to “upstander”--someone who steps up, speaks out, or intervenes to stop injustice that is happening (Cohen & Hamilton, 2009; Katz, 2013; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014).

Finally, an ally must be concerned with knowing when to listen, speak out, or get out of the way (Reason, Broido, et al., 2005), the intent being to challenge privileged status so as

to foster a shared power structure that empowers equitable benefits for all people. Facing such challenges, the question arises as to why those holding a privileged group status would work at dislodging the very system that provides such benefits? Through this study I was concerned with providing clarity to that very question.

Ally Development Framework

The literature review confirmed an emerging focus on the social justice ally. Though knowledge existed that privileged people have walked alongside the oppressed and worked for a more just environment, their stories had been written out of historical accounts (Brown, 2002; Loewen, 2003; Tatum, 1994). Reflecting on the traditional college ally experience, Broido (2000) suggested that perhaps the lack of information is because the question of how people become social justice allies has rarely been asked (p. 3). Recognizing Broido's call to consider social justice ally development in general, scholars have responded both conceptually (Edwards, 2006; Lechuga, et al., 2009; Munin & Speight, 2010; Reason & Davis, 2005; Reason, Scales, & Millar, 2005) and empirically (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Cabrera, 2012; Fabiano, et al., 2003; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Patton & Bondi, 2009; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). Such initiatives have begun to shape the landscape for social justice awareness and action in the college setting.

Early efforts to highlight ally action emerged through scholarly work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues on college campuses (Washington & Evans, 1991). Washington and Evans (1991) initially explored factors associated with becoming an ally, highlighting the importance of recognizing heterosexual privilege, motivations for becoming an ally, the practice of advocacy, and what an ally should know, positing that such a disposition stems from advanced moral development. From their observations emerged four

necessary steps toward becoming an ally (Evans & Washington, 1991). First, individuals must develop an *awareness* of who they are and how they are different from oppressed individuals. Second, individuals must gain *knowledge* about the oppressed groups with which they may work as an ally. Third, individuals must develop *skills* in communicating with oppressed groups and communicating to others the knowledge that has been gained. Finally, individuals must take *action* to share knowledge and advocate for language, access, and opportunity that allows oppressed individuals full participation and benefit from the social structure. Each step is a process and requires continued attention, evaluation, and time on task. The final step is most critical as being an ally often means positioning oppressed partners to become leaders, advocating for their presence in leadership roles, and relinquishing the control of everyday situations.

Complimentary to the work done by Washington and Evans (1991), Bishop (2002) formulated a framework for social justice ally development through extensive personal reflection and observation of other allies. Although specifically focused on racial justice allies, the concepts of power and privilege were reviewed broadly and therefore apply to all ally development (Broido & Reason, 2005). Bishop (2002) determined that the first step to becoming an ally involved understanding the oppressive nature of the social structure and each individual's place in that structure. Such an understanding was determined to include knowledge of how the current oppressive culture developed, what held the system in place, and the respective roles people exhibited in maintaining the system. Bishop (2002) stated, "We carry within us a blueprint of the culture's oppressive patterns to be reproduced where we have influence. The name for this is 'internalized oppression'" (p. 73).

Noting a belief that each individual holds both oppressive and oppressed identities, the second step in the framework requires an awareness of how identities share common interest. Bishop (2002) pointed out that because the system is based on separation, hierarchy, and competition people have a tendency to use position for personal benefit. While the oppressed aspects of identity heighten individual awareness, the dominant identities and inclination to achieve advantage prevail in most cases. Therefore, analysis of these contradictory roles must occur, thereby allowing people to see shared interests that individual identities possess.

Framework step three involves consciousness and healing. Each individual and group must become aware of the pain carried from oppressive social dynamics and take steps to heal that specific pain. Bishop (2002) described the process as uniquely individual in approach yet both private and community based in breadth. Only through deep individual and collective work with others can people come to truly know the unique pain experienced and thereby begin to heal from it. Emphasizing the importance of such work, Bishop (2002) asserted that consciousness and healing, “make the difference between a person or group that gets some power and uses it against others who are less powerful and a person or group that gets power and works toward building a new society” (p. 99).

Step four in the framework therefore requires people to recognize where oppression touches individual lives, thereby creating pain, and acting to change such an environment. Through such action individuals begin to become liberated from systemic injustice. Bishop (2002) asserted, “Healing requires taking action to save others from experiencing what you experienced” (p. 100). Sharing pain with others, identifying the source of pain, and using the power gained from others can and must therefore become a source of energy and action.

Embracing such a perspective opens individual hearts to a power-with rather than power-over model (Bishop, 2002).

Bishop (2002) stated that step five must entail an awareness and understanding of how work is done uniquely with different groups. The primary work for allies must occur within the dominant identity groups by raising awareness, challenging assumptions, and calling for a different approach. Such work also serves to liberate the privileged oppressive nature of dominant group members. Working within oppressed identity groups, allies must listen intently, affirm collusion with systemic oppression, support the work of oppressed groups, and use dominant identities to open opportunities for others (Bishop, 2002).

The final critical step in the ally framework is maintaining a sense of hope. Bishop (2002) acknowledged that working for social change is difficult and often demoralizing. True allies maintain a sense of hope and idealism that fuels the continued work for a new social system. Such an outlook requires that allies approach social change work as a journey, rather than an outcome, and with a belief, though seemingly naive at times, that that dominant group socialization can be both unlearned and thereby changed for the common good.

Building on the above mentioned models and research, Broido and Reason (2005) suggested several ways that ally development could be supported in the college environment. Broido and Reason (2005) stated, “Consistent in the literature is the importance of contact with target group members, acquisition of knowledge about social justice issues, and self-reflection and reflection on learning” (p. 25). The recruitment of a diverse student body increases the likelihood of peer interaction around difference. Complimented by a rich curriculum that addresses justice issues, students collectively have the opportunity to deepen their awareness of equity issues. For privileged students in particular, peer influence,

curricular experiences, and classroom reflections that raise awareness lead to cognitive moments that deepen learning (Broido & Reason, 2005).

Edwards (2006) affirmed the developmental journey reflected to date and expanded it further by suggesting allies' commitment to sustained work over time is influenced by individual views of what it means to be an ally. Specifically, Edwards articulated a conceptual model for self-reflection as a means to move allies from aspiring to becoming allies for justice, where the desire for recognition of such becomes non-existent. Aspiring allies for self-interest, Edwards explained, primarily act to protect those they care about and may not do so when those individuals are not present. Aspiring allies for altruism engage in ally behavior to deal with the guilt from an awareness of their own privilege and the inequity they receive. Noting a distinction, Edwards (2006) explained that allies for social justice “work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression” (p. 51). Perhaps most significant, the model offers an opportunity to identify self-interest so as to minimize unintended harm that allies may cause through isolated and unevaluated work.

Consistent with Bishop's (2002) assertions, Edwards (2006) argued that social justice work facilitated a self-exploratory liberation from systemic dynamics preventing people from becoming fully authentic. While positioning themselves to overcome undesirable harms associated with systemic injustice, Edwards (2006) noted privileged allies were better able to understand their own underlying motivations, communicate with others better, and ultimately to develop effective ally behaviors. The model therefore was not intended to be a measurement tool for aspiring allies but as a structure to facilitate deeper ally thinking, ultimately more deeply connecting people to their own human potential (Edwards, 2006).

Finally, drawing on the work of Edwards (2006), Evans and Washington (2010) refined their early notions of advanced moral development to suggest that the most effective allies developmentally demonstrate an overarching desire for a just society through their acceptance, support, and inclusiveness working alongside those oppressed. Absent from those yearning for a truly just social structure is a desire for personal recognition, for ally work is often thankless and challenging. Above all, ally work requires individuals to model the desired behaviors so as to shape the environment around them (Evans & Washington, 2010).

Ally Action

Though the work of many has gone undocumented, scholarly accounts of activists in action has begun to emerge (Brown, 2002; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Thompson, et al., 2003; Warren, 2010). Moreover, emerging empirical evidence has offered insight into college ally engagement and development. Specific interest and insight focused on highlighting the work of those often forgotten and understanding what led these individuals to do such work. Further, findings from current literature document seven broad categories respondents have offered regarding decisions to get involved in justice work. These categories include family unit influence, classroom experiences, common personality qualities, faith, knowledge from diverse peers, political attitudes, and peer influenced attitudes. Each, and in many cases several, of these factors were noted as influencing student engagement in socially responsible leadership and ally work.

Family unit influence. White college allies studied to date have noted the influence of family factors in their development (Bridges, 2011; Munin & Speight, 2010; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005; Rice, 2009). Through qualitative data collection asking White allies

to reflect on how they came to do ally work, students reported family settings that caused them to gain critical awareness of their Whiteness and what that meant for their place in society (Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). Parents in particular were credited with transmitting values about diversity and injustice (Munin & Speight, 2010). Family units influence future ally development by openly challenging unjust systems and modeling to their children what it means to work for racial justice (Brown, 2002). Findings have also suggested that family members, acting oppressively in nature and inconsistently with individual value-based attitudes, also affirmed the directions future allies were heading and served to fuel the motivation to engage in justice work (Bridges, 2011). Finally, those who held a historically oppressed identity, such as religious identity other than Christian, lower socio-economic status, or minoritized ethnic identity, demonstrated deep knowledge acquisition and an inclination toward advocacy early on as a result of their experiences (Brown, 2002; Munin & Speight, 2010; Rice, 2009).

Classroom experiences. For students, classrooms also appeared to be places for considerable exposure to and development of attitudes and actions consistent with justice work (Bourassa, 1996; Olsen, 2010). Quantitative and qualitative studies revealed that the collegiate environment in general (Dugan & Komives, 2010), information gained specifically in classroom settings to raise awareness (Broido, 2000; Cabrera, 2012; Rice, 2009), and short-term leadership training (Bourassa, 1996; Bridges, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2010) all served to foster attitudes, inclinations, and engagement in social justice action. Students noted gaining previously unknown awareness of inequities through discussion and experiences with oppressive systemic elements. Likewise, students reported that exposure to socioeconomic areas different to their own on the bus rides to school classrooms also had an

impact (Munin & Speight, 2010). Similarly, Howard (2011) found that greater understanding of the privilege they received led privileged students to feel guilty, which in turn motivated their engagement in social justice work. Heightened awareness and exposure to such realities thus cultivated interest in and drew individuals to work for more equitable social structures.

Common personality qualities. Reflecting on allies themselves, Munin and Speight (2010) found the students in their qualitative study exhibited the common personality qualities of extroversion, leadership, empathy, and impatience. Simply put, they found that the strongest personality factor exhibited by the majority of the 13 allies in their study was that participants gained their energy and joy from interactions with others. Participants also exhibited a strong sense of self and healthy self-confidence that drove their desire to be leaders. Participants likewise reported or exhibited an innate ability to sense, appreciate, or feel the emotions of others. Additionally, some participants reflected outward frustration when their action efforts were stifled or when their energy and commitment levels were not matched by peers. Interestingly, a fifth common personality quality of competitiveness was observed only in male participants. Similarly, Corrigan-Brown (2005) found in her study of youth participation in social movements that activism is directly related with higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and also associated with verification and crystallization of identity development.

Faith. Given that the study by Munin and Speight (2010) was conducted at a religiously affiliated institution in a Midwestern urban area, it was not surprising that faith was articulated as playing a significant role in college students' decisions to engage in social justice work. Munin and Speight (2010) noted, "For 11 participants, faith was the bedrock of their lives as allies" (p. 255). Seven of the participants had spent their lives being educated in

religiously affiliated schools while two others reported involvements in Christian summer camps that shaped their orientation toward justice work. Though common, participants reported that faith shaped them in different ways. Participants noted that faith shaped their values and morals, fueled their desire for justice work, fulfilled their identity as one of God's soldiers, and facilitated their religious discernment about questions in general and the injustice within the Catholic church more specifically.

However, these findings contrast with other empirical evidence that demonstrates faith-based attitudes to be both oppressive and prejudicial in nature. For example, Rowatt, Tsang, Kelly, LaMartina, McCullers, and McKinley (2006) measured implicit attitudes among 95 college students, finding that religious fundamentalism was the strongest predictor of negative attitudes toward gay men when compared to heterosexuals. Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, and Tsang (2009) expanded these findings by conducting a study with over 1500 American adults. Findings revealed that "general religiousness" was associated with less accepting attitudes toward gay and lesbian people and display of general racial prejudice. Therefore, it is important to be mindful that faith perspectives, at least of a conservative nature, can also serve to lessen, rather than enhance, commitment to social justice work.

Knowledge from diverse peers. While some might question the impact of peer influence, studies of social justice ally development reported the significance of peer influence in the decision to engage in justice work. Qualitative data noted reports from student allies that it was their interactions with peers, and the knowledge gained from those interactions, that dislodged their privileged thinking (Broido, 2000; Cabrera, 2012; Munin & Speight, 2010). Similarly, Dugan and Komives (2010) revealed accounts specifically with diverse peers that helped participants in their study to see systemic inequities. Reason, Millar,

and Scales (2005) also documented that students' co-curricular experiences and discussions outside the classroom occurring within residential living units caused greater reflection on their race that ultimately led to justice engagement. Further, Rice (2009) documented that when White men became aware of friends involved in oppressive situations the impact of the situation influenced these men to choose to engage in ally action. Additionally, Bridges (2011) asserted that White men in particular benefited from social-cultural conversations with diverse peers outside the classroom. Finally, Munin and Speight (2010) found that students who had experience being the other cited those experiences as helping them develop greater appreciation for issues presented by the larger world. In each of these studies, privileged students entered conversations and interactions with a somewhat tenuous and limited understanding of social power. Many walked away with a greater awareness of perceptions, individual experiences, and understanding of how others see life differently. Participants reported these experiences as life changing, leading to the pursuit of greater understanding that ultimately led them to engage in social justice initiatives.

Political attitudes. Related to attitudes developed from interactions with peers, political attitudes in general were found to correlate with socially responsible leadership and ultimately social justice advocacy. Concerned about low levels of college student social justice advocacy, Nilsson and Schmidt (2005) conducted a study of hypothesized variables believed to contribute to social justice action. Variables including problem-solving skills, worldview, social concern, and political views were reviewed among 134 graduate students in counseling programs at a Midwestern university, 112 reporting as women and 22 as men. The purpose was to identify possible predictors of social justice advocacy among students by measuring social justice advocacy, values, and characteristics. Findings revealed that

political interest was the only attitude that predicted desired social justice advocacy, while age, counselor training, concern for the welfare of others, optimistic worldview, and effective problem-solving skills did not translate into attitudes and behaviors associated with social justice advocacy. Finally, Howard (2011) interviewed privileged college students and found that their engagement in justice work stemmed from a fundamental belief that they could make a difference in the lives of others by implementing change for the common good.

Peer influenced attitudes. Finally, peer influence regarding interests and willingness to act was found to encourage engagement in social justice work. Broido (2000) found that interaction with peers revealed an awareness of dominant group attitudes, thereby encouraging work with the group to combat unhealthy attitudes. Similarly, Fabiano, et al. (2003) studied the use of a social norms approach to engaging men as allies against sexual assault. Noting a substantive body of evidence that men significantly influence other men's behavior, Fabiano et al. (2003) addressed men's misperceptions of both men's and women's norms as a means to engage men with women in the process of dismantling sexual violence at Western Washington University. Findings from the analysis found that the only significant predictor of a man's willingness to intervene in a situation that might lead to actual sexual assault was their perception of other men's willingness to intervene. This research supported the importance of checking assumptions and drawing all voices into the conversation (Fabiano et al., 2003, p. 110). Such findings reinforce the impact of peer attitudes and encourage peers to speak up and out in their social groups. Students have also been found to avoid taking action until someone asks them to get involved or until they assume a leadership position where taking action is expected (Broido, 2000). Similarly, Howard (2011) found that privileged students were motivated to engage in justice work when peers, in addition to

parents, rewarded them with positive comments about their presence and their effort. Clearly, student norming plays an important role toward influencing action.

Critical Incidents

A critical incident may occur as a moment in time, observed event, or direct experience that causes an individual to gain awareness, clarify values, or to move in a different direction. Mandelbaum (1973) suggested significant shifts in thought or action may occur as the result of a single event or a series of events over time. Empirical literature provided accounts of social justice allies who experienced events relatively early in life (Bridges, 2011) and those that occurred later in life, the result of experiences building up to an impact moment (Brown, 2002). In common, respondents relayed a clear awareness of the moment or event that led to such an awakening. Once impacted, these individuals described a position of awareness where, knowing what they knew, they could no longer remain idle (Brown, 2002; Bridges, 2011; Fabiano et al., 2003; Warren, 2010).

While significant insight can be gained from theoretical and empirical research revealed through the literature, the same literature provided gaps to be explored further. Though several investigators highlighted the work of White men engaged in social justice work, the literature and research base did not isolate for privileged identities beyond race and gender. White men holding oppressed ethnic, religious, and sexual orientation identities frequently appear as social justice participants. Suggestions for future research called for inquiries that were designed to consider what variables moved students to action (Nilsson & Schmidt, 2010), what experiences led to social justice action (Reason, Millar & Scales, 2005), how White male allies developed through their social justice work (Patton & Bondi, 2009), and why some White men chose to engage in justice work while others did not

(Bridges, 2011). Though the bulk of research was conducted with racial justice allies, the findings served to inform the direction of this research project.

Summary

Summarizing what was known, significant evidence demonstrated the absence of an equitable social structure that provided all people with equal opportunities (Johnson, 2006; Kivel, 2007; Wise, 2005). Privileged people in particular often remained unaware of the advantages gained through the privileged identities they held, as the system of framing served to normalize their experiences (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Picca & Feagin, 2007). Due to that lack of awareness, many privileged people saw the world as equitable and absent the need for change to the social structure. While some privileged people have both seen inequities and engaged in social change work, historical literature often left out the stories of these privileged allies (Brown, 2002; Loewen, 2003; Tatum, 1994).

Responding to the demonstrated absence, authors of the literature base had begun to reveal the motivation behind why privileged people became involved in social justice work. Examples of research on adult subjects revealed the awareness of seminal moments in their lives that crystalized their need to work against injustice (Thompson, et al., 2003; Warren, 2010). In some cases, action was precipitated by a gradual shift in thinking over time and in other instances action work occurred from the earliest memories (Brown, 2002). Individual experiences where people could identify with oppressed groups accentuated awareness and their desire to act (Brown, 2002; Warren, 2010). Finally, direct exposure to oppressed identity groups through membership, work environment, and most prevalently friendships,

led privileged people to embrace justice work (Brown 2002; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Feagin, et al., 2001; Thompson, et al., 2003; Warren, 2010).

Specific examination of the research on those of college age who engaged in justice work revealed similar and unique themes. Like their more seasoned adult counterparts, college students often noted critical incidents that they experienced, which motivated them to do justice work (Broido, 2000; Bridges, 2011; Rice, 2009). Additionally, family units played a significant role, both by nurturing advocacy directly and by doing the opposite, thereby creating an oppressive environment that students knew in their hearts was wrong (Bridges, 2011; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005; Rice, 2009). Interactions with diverse peers that led to cognitive dissonance and deeper conversations also impacted these individuals to move toward action (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Rice, 2009). Finally, aspects within the college environment such as classroom discussions, leadership training opportunities, and the general campus environment served to move privileged students in the direction of justice work (Bourassa, 1996; Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Rice, 2009).

The literature base did present limitations. At the time, no scholar had published a study substantively analyzing the life history accounts of social justice allies and why they chose to engage in social justice work. Specifically, the question of why privileged individuals chose to engage in work intended to dislodge unjust social dynamics remained unanswered (Bridges, 2011; Warren, 2010). Likewise, while graduate students (Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005) and administrative staff (Patton & Bondi, 2009) were studied, research involving undergraduate privileged students had been limited in size and scope. Comparison studies of why some chose to engage, while others did not, had not been conducted (Bridges,

2011). Scholars had developed theoretical explanations that had not been analyzed and discussed with the allies themselves. Moreover, because few accounts of truly privileged students doing social justice work existed, these students lacked exposure to role models who approached life with a sense of obligation and commitment to dismantling the norm (Kivel, 2002; Tatum, 1994; Thompson, et al., 2003). By conducting this research study, I came to better understand the motivations of privileged college students. Further, the study provided implications that may be drawn by educators to guide the creation of more influential learning experiences that lead to social justice advocacy and engagement in systemic change work.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Given the focus on understanding what life moments led privileged college students to engage in social justice work, a constructivist and basic interpretive qualitative inquiry using phenomenological life history methodology guided the data collection and analysis. The constructivist and basic interpretive approach seeks to facilitate understanding as to how participants make meaning of their experience over time, as mediated through inductive researcher interpretation (Merriam, 2002). The phenomenological life history approach focuses on the essence of an individual lived experience and demonstrating how complex meanings are built out of direct experience (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, this approach was concerned with exploring in depth the essence of participant lives, placing a focus on moments identified as significant and meaningful to each participant.

Epistemology

Framing any research study is the epistemological approach, or the foundational basis on which knowledge is considered and legitimized. Maynard (as cited in Crotty, 1998) noted, “Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (p. 8). Through this study I employed a constructionist approach to the view of knowledge. As Crotty (1998) explained, constructionism holds that there is not an objective truth; rather, individuals construct truth through interaction with and interpretation of the realities experienced in the world (p. 8). Therefore, the conclusions drawn in this study were derived from a process of discovering and understanding meaning making as constructed by the participants, both as they perceived life events that happened and through the process of reflection facilitated during the study. The research lens used assumed that each participant

had come to know the world uniquely, though through a similar socialization process. The focus of this study therefore was to report and compare knowledge from individual vantage points.

Theoretical Perspective

Several assumptions were made in selecting the chosen methodology and it is important for the reader to have contextual understanding of those assumptions (Crotty, 1998). Noted above, the theoretical perspective guiding this study was a basic interpretivist phenomenology. The interpretive tradition holds that human interpretation is the foundation for constructing knowledge about the world individuals experience (Prasad, 2005).

Specifically, Prasad (2005) explained, “What is of paramount importance is how we order, classify, structure, and interpret our world, and then act upon these interpretations.

Phenomenology assumes that the experience of any reality is possible only through interpretation” (p. 13). Holding true to that view, study participants were treated as experts on their lives. Each participant constructed a unique experience based on his identity and interactions with the world around him.

Recognizing that phenomenology underpinned this qualitative research study, my focus was concerned with the meaning derived by participants from the basic units of their life experience (Merriam, 2002). Specifically, in this study I was interested in the social process each individual experienced that led him to engage in social justice work. More precisely, I focused on elements in participants’ lives that, upon reflection, served as influences toward a commitment to social justice work. Finally, I sought to understand at which point participants chose to act toward interrupting their cycle of socialization (Harro, 2000, 2010a), and at which points each chose to do nothing. The emphasis was thus on

creating an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences and to report how those experiences shaped their lives. Each individual was positioned as an expert, the approach assuming that understanding was being revealed and constructed through the life history gathering process itself.

Methods

The life history methodological approach holds that every life experience is unique and therefore the process of compiling a life history offers the opportunity to learn the unique meaning individuals make from their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). As Goodson and Sikes (2001) explained, “This, in our view, is the essence of the approach: life historians examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhabit” (p. 1). Interview narrative was intentionally collected in such a way so as to ask the participants to reflect on the influences that shaped their life course, in the context of what was going on at the time. Acknowledging uncertainty between the participant’s perception and reality, actuality and truth, the life history process was concerned with facilitating deeper awareness of self and how that self was expressed in daily context (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 3). The participants were asked to reflect, understand, and acknowledge who they were through their life experiences, specifically as each experience led them toward engaging in social justice work.

As I considered each perspective, it was critical to maintain an awareness that the process of participating in life history research was a process of constructing the meaning from lived experience. I was in effect a facilitator of meaning making by guiding the individual through a series of reflections to construct their life story. Inevitably this reflective exercise resulted in the consideration of both how the individuals viewed experiences as they

were occurring and, through the process of reflection, how they viewed the meaning of these experiences at the time of the interviews. Byrne (2003) clarified, “This negotiation between the self of the present and the self/selves of the past is an inherent part of telling one’s life story” (p. 30). Participants came to terms with who they were and who they might become. To achieve a meaningful outcome, a partnership developed through researcher facilitated questions and candid reflection by the participant.

Most important, the true value of the life history approach is that this methodology empowers the voiceless by disrupting our fundamental assumptions about what is known (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). A distinguishing characteristic is that the story constructed reveals *a* truth rather than *the* truth. For as each individual maintains a unique perspective on lived experience so too is the truth that is known. While quantitative research places an emphasis on what can be proven to be known, qualitative life history places the emphasis on the meaning revealed and what factors influenced the story that is revealed. Messerschmidt (2000) offered,

Although it is important to verify factual information and consistency in storytelling, the primary task of the life history researcher is not to establish an alleged “truth” but to describe—as stated earlier—how each particular life story assembles a specific situational truth. (p. 21)

Intuitively, one might be inclined to view an account labeled as a story to be absent validity. Life historians contend that individuals can no more disprove their accounts than they can prove them. And to dwell on fact or fiction ultimately misses the point. For regardless of what happened, individuals regard the essence of life uniquely and this interpretation forms the identity they choose to hold (Roy, 2006).

Therefore, context is critical. The act of recording life history is functionally concerned with understanding why lives have unfolded as they did (Presser, 2004). Additionally, the life history approach seeks to understand the way individuals are linked to each other and to what extent such linkages shape generational obligations (Heinz & Kruger, 2001). While ultimately incomplete, the resulting life story is a composite of who the person is, how life experience has shaped meaning around who the person has become, and how the participant has been asked to recount his or her life experiences. The meanings of such experiences are created through the process of interpretation of the context and interactions (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher and the participant become intertwined, the participant reflecting on the questions posed and the researcher interpreting answers through his or her world lens. The process in itself facilitates reflection, meaning making, and accounts perhaps not previously envisioned or known to bring forth a life history.

The purpose of this project was to study the social process, nurtured over time, which led participants to engage in social justice work. The life history method is particularly relevant because of its capacity to reveal “the interplay between structural fact and personal experience” (Connell, 1991, p. 143). Messerschmidt (2000) affirmed, “That is, the method demands a close evaluation of the meaning of social life for those who enact it, revealing *their* experiences, practices, and social world” (p. 17). The focus therefore became to describe the details of how each participant experienced his life and to uncover the meaning extracted from that lived experience as each saw it, then and now.

Specific to this study, by holding privileged identities, study participants would not have theoretically been aware of injustice, let alone have been engaged in work to disrupt that systemic reality. Using the life history methodology allowed for the documentation of

the conceptual world of these participants and how these conceptions were represented through practice, thereby linking the social and historical context (Messerschmidt, 2000, 2004). Connell (1991) noted, “Where the research is based on a theory of social process we may speak of the *theorized life history* as a specific method” (p. 143). Emphasis was placed on in-depth interviewing designed to reveal more than was immediately obvious in the individual life (Dowsett, 1996). Dowsett (1996) confirmed, “This is not a process of theorization by generalization, but a systematic method of investigating the question of social processes through the recounted experiences of individual lives” (p. 50). The chosen methodology, as discussed later, provided insight into the social process of why privileged college students acted counter to how their dominant social scripts dictated.

Participants

Selection of participants was completed through a purposive nomination process, given that the focus of this study was on college students holding privileged identities who were engaged in social justice work. In all, 14 potential participants were identified through two waves of professional contacts. The first wave of outreach yielded 7 participants via professional, faculty, and staff contacts who have written about and researched men, social justice activists, or both. The second wave of contacts yielded the final 7 participants through colleagues who collaborated on an annual professional social justice conference. Participants were identified from a broad geographic area and were identified based on their perceived identity and active work with social change initiatives. Once identified, I personally contacted each individual recommended, either face-to-face or by phone, to arrange a screening interview. During that interview, I discussed the nature of the study I was conducting, verified their privileged identities, and reviewed their involvement in social

justice work to confirm the congruence of who they were and their social justice engagement within study parameters. I also reviewed what their participation would entail and answered any questions each had at the time. After the screening interviews, I summarized my conversation and reviewed the outcomes with my major adviser before extending an invitation to participate in the study.

Of those screened, one was disqualified for being outside the age range and two were disqualified for holding oppressed identities revealed during screening. Additionally, two participants were approved but declined to continue given life circumstances that developed. Nine screened and approved participants chose to continue with the study and persisted to completion. Ideally, participants were selected based on holding White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper middle class, and Christian privileged identities. Participants also ideally were of traditional college age and engaged in work for social change, or met those criteria when they first became engaged in justice work. Rapport was established through the screening interview. Participants were provided with consent forms outlining the study, per institutional review board guidelines. Each person who agreed to participate was asked to sign the forms and select a one-name pseudonym to facilitate confidentiality while allowing for identification. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time and for any reason (see Appendix A for Informed Consent Document).

Data Collection

A list of initial questions to frame each conversation was sent approximately one week prior to each interview session (see Appendix B for interview questions). Questions were also forwarded prior to subsequent interview sessions for the purpose of reflection prior

to data gathering. Interviews were scheduled at mutually agreed upon times and occurred by phone due to distance. Participants were encouraged to choose a location for the call that would afford uninterrupted privacy and maximize comfort for candid discussion. Interview sessions lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in length and followed a semi-structured format so as to allow for additional questions and, more importantly, the free flow of salient discussion deemed important to the participant. Each participant was asked to complete three interviews with agreed upon time in between to allow for participant reflection and memory recall.

Specifically, the interview format was semi-structured to allow participant autonomy and free flow of meaningful commentary. The first interview established the context of the participant's life experience; the second fostered the reconstruction of life experience within the context of participant values, and the third facilitated deeper reflection on the meaning of the social justice ally experience (Seidman, 2006). All interviews were audio-taped using two recording mechanisms: Audacity recording software on a laptop computer and a handheld digital audio recorder to ensure the discussion was captured. Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed by the researcher or one of three transcriptionists. Transcripts were assembled and delivered to the participants for review and editing. Final transcripts were used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Once transcripts were member-checked and edited, an inductive review process of each transcript was conducted (Merriam, 2002). First, transcripts were reviewed using an open coding method to allow for the emergence of common themes (Esterberg, 2002). From this open coding, a set of codes was developed and employed to conduct a focused coding of

the data. Coded data were then arranged into two distinct matrixes for the purpose of identifying influential moments in the participants' life courses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first matrix was constructed to identify key critical incidents that marked moments where participants noted significant events or transitions that they felt led them to engage in justice work (see Appendix C for example). The second explanatory effects matrix (see Appendix D for example) focused on life "turnings," or moments that marked transitions in thinking for the participants (Mandelbaum, 1973). Data were placed into explanatory effects matrixes (see Appendices E through H for research question analysis) to verify common themes from these moments and to organize the interpretation of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Trustworthiness

The design of qualitative research was predicated on the assumption "that there are multiple, changing realities and that individuals have their own unique constructions of reality" (Merriam, 2002, p. 25). Thus, revealing individual lived experience cannot arguably be replicated or verified. Nonetheless, sound methodological techniques were employed by the researcher to produce trustworthiness. In this study, I employed the techniques of member checking, peer review, and researcher reflexivity as a means to demonstrate how interpretations were made after data were collected.

Member Checking

Once data were compiled, printed transcripts were sent to participants for review to affirm accuracy. Explanatory effects and critical incidents matrixes were sent along with each of three transcripts to all participants for review and confirmation of accuracy (see Appendices A and B). All documents were affirmed by all participants. Additionally,

completed participant profiles were also sent to participants for confirmation and review. As Merriam (2002) noted, “While you may have used different words participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p. 26). Using this technique helped to insure overall trustworthiness and that the researcher lens used to view the lived experience had congruence with the participant lens.

Peer Review

Similar to member checking, peer review involves the use of a different set of eyes to review techniques used and interpretations of data. Beyond the use of my program of study committee, I identified Dr. Patrick Archer, who completed his doctoral degree at Iowa State University in sociology, to assist with peer review. I asked Dr. Archer to review transcripts and analytic instruments to consider the overall interpretations I formulated. Additionally, I established a meeting with Dr. Archer to discuss the research experience, review findings and alternative interpretations, discuss researcher reflexivity, and examine other issues he felt were germane to the qualitative research process and my study. Adding the extra set of eyes through the external review helped to increase identification of concerns. While Dr. Archer did not conduct a comprehensive analysis of my work, he was able to review data sets and findings, and affirm my overall direction and thinking. This additional step helped to insure trustworthiness of interpretations.

Researcher Positionality

Given that participants were identified and selected through a purposive approach, the potential existed for participant feedback to be incorrectly filtered. Therefore, I found it necessary to be cognizant of how my approach might impact the outcomes and my

interpretations. Per Jones (2002), I made efforts where appropriate to distinguish this qualitative study as substantive and trustworthy by faithfully using the qualitative research techniques of prolonged engagement, sound methodological selection of subjects, and being cognizant that my lens could shape overall interpretations rather than revealing a situational truth that was authentic to the participant (p. 464). Given the nature of the study, I am confident that satisfying the latter two issues was accomplished as noted in the participant selection section. Participants were screened and given information regarding the nature of the study and the characteristics of desired participants I wanted to include in the study. Care was taken to assure that all participants understood their participation to be voluntary and that they understood they could withdraw their participation at any time. Further, I systematically and thoroughly reviewed data to alleviate any assumed conclusions, allowing the data to speak for itself. I did find it necessary to reflect on and acknowledge my inclination at times to protect the participants, finding myself hesitant to reveal any outcomes that might be seen as negative. In the end, I do believe the data presented participant authenticity.

Prolonged Engagement

Regarding prolonged engagement, the interview protocol facilitated the development of a substantive and professional relationship over an eighteen-month period from initial contact to the completion of member checking. Developing this relationship began with the researcher having a clear understanding as to the motivation for the research. Often the motivation to give voice, to understand lived experiences, or to explore that which is mostly understood stems from a socialized desire to help. Men in particular are socialized to take control, to trust their instincts and, above all, to fix things that are broken (Longwood, et al., 2004). As the researcher, I remained cognizant of my own tendencies in this regard, taking

care to allow participant responses to be what they were and not manipulated by my interpretation. Those claiming privileged positions or identities in some way adopt a similar perception of their purpose in life. Knowing that participants understood my research purpose, it was necessary for me to be mindful that participants were speaking with candor and making meaning of their experiences as the process unfolded. I do not believe that at any time they felt compelled to assist in what they perceived would be a successful outcome for my research.

However, Hannon (2004) posed, “The researcher must struggle to try to bracket her [*sic*] preconceptions and the desire to have the research support her [*sic*] agenda—theoretical, political and otherwise” (p. 138). Ethical practice would suggest that the researcher must take steps to listen intently and to consider comments carefully, especially those that contradict an anticipated response. Throughout the interviews, I used reflective listening and the semi-structured format to insert clarifying questions so as to confirm data shared. Participants were thereby able to correct my statements, offer additional commentary then, or provide correction through the member checking process. In the end, I believe the data were thorough and articulated both as participants intended and affirmed over time.

Researcher Reflexivity

Recognizing how the researcher, researched, and context collude to influence lived lives, it is particularly critical for the researcher to reflect on the interpretive experience and how biases may be at work (Hannon, 2004; Presser, 2004). For the life history researcher, reflexivity is a cornerstone to empathetic awareness, positional understanding, and operating with an ethic of care in the research setting (Cole & Knowles, 2001). By being aware of oneself, and what influences perspective, the researcher is better able to comprehend the

respondent and the sum of the researcher-researched relationship. Cole and Knowles (2001) emphasized, “Research looks distinctively different from either side of the microphone. As researchers, it is important to understand that fact—experientially as well as theoretically” (p. 30).

Knowing that possibility, I acknowledge that the data collection may have been influenced by my presence. Further, I acknowledge that the construction of each participant’s life story may have been influenced by my perspective, and the reader of these findings should consider that possibility (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, I have taken steps to limit such influence through trustworthiness measures and through appropriate reflexive commentary included within the data analysis section. Particular care was also given to overtly comment on bias and assumptions I may have used to view data.

Fundamental to a researcher’s ability to recognize his or her influence in data collection and analysis is a sound understanding of what he or she brings to the table. This understanding requires honest self-reflection and candid awareness. Bloom (1998) asserted, “The real task for researchers in self-reflection is to take responsibility for our identities, particularly by learning how we are related in society to others” (p. 149). This process includes a deep understanding of and respect for power differentials that exist within the social structure and among different identities. Taking the time and care to critically analyze how the role of researcher is influenced by one’s social identities (Bloom, 1998) must occur to understand how data interpretations will subsequently be influenced. Therefore, I completed research memos to review and reflect on the social identities I brought to the table and reflected on how my lens may have had influence on the overall findings.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the unique and intimate nature of qualitative research, ethical considerations were reflected upon initially and revisited frequently during each stage of the research process. As this project largely focused on promoting and affirming the participants, I encountered few, if any, ethical concerns. However, as Schram (2003) noted, “Even under the most collaborative of circumstances with study participants, you and they are walking together on separate paths” (p. 101). As ethical issues arose I took care to discuss these with my major advisor and to make note as the study progressed.

First, when establishing rapport I was careful to demonstrate professional decorum at all times so that participant rights and welfare were maintained. All interviews occurred by phone, allowing participants to select the times and spaces they occupied during those calls. I conducted interviews in my professional office with the door closed and in most cases after work hours. Care was taken to outline the nature of our relationship and the duration thereof in the disclosure form that each participant signed. Given that the relationship was maintained over the duration of the study, I took care to minimize any potential conflicts regarding care for the participant, such as a desire to protect participants against unfavorable findings. Finally, clear boundaries were established at the onset and maintained throughout the duration of the research relationship. Given the interview format, and the fact that the methodology was not an immersion approach, I believe that appropriate boundaries were managed throughout the study.

Disclosure of information also becomes an element of concern. Again, given the largely positive approach to this project, disclosure of the true intent of the research was facilitated. Care was taken to consider any hesitancy to report findings as they were

articulated. To my knowledge, I did not withhold or alter findings out of care for the participants. Further, each participant selected a one name pseudonym to protect his anonymity and given that participants were not in geographic proximity to me, the potential for casual contact was non-existent.

Data access was limited throughout the study. Digital audio files were stored on flash drives in a locked home office drawer when not being transcribed. Transcribed work documents were stored on my personal computer that is passcode protected by passwords known only to me. Each of three transcriptionists used signed confidentiality documents outlining their expectations that they maintain standards as noted above and that all products were to be returned to me. Digital audio files were destroyed once the project was complete. All recordings and documents were labeled with the participant-chosen pseudonyms known only to the researcher. Consent forms and pseudonym identification information were maintained in a locked file drawer, or on a locked computer, at all times.

Delimitations

Qualitative research reveals individual lived experience. As noted above, the theorized life history approach considers the context of participant-lived experience to reveal an experience unique to the individual. The collection of data involves the interplay of the researcher and the participant, which serves to bring voice to an experience previously untold. Individual participants were of traditional college age when they began justice work and held similar privileged identities. Yet each deemed the salience of said identities differently given the context in which they lived. In this study, I compiled life history accounts of selected participants, the product of which is the portrayal of unique lived experiences.

The scope of this study was delimited to selected participants, all of whom were chosen through a purposive selection process. Care was taken in preliminary conversations to screen for oppressed identities but this information was delimited by participant candor and understanding. The number of participants selected for the study was nine, eight of whom reported holding all privileged identities. The additional participant disclosed recent identification as bi-sexual. The circumstances that led to the selection of this individual are discussed in later sections of this work. Finally, interviews were qualitative in nature, and subsequently not generalizable beyond similar individuals and settings.

Additionally, my chosen audience assumed a United States and dominant culture perspective. As such, this study did not entail a critical approach. Participants were selected based on their engagement in work that met the definition of social justice work. Participants' activities were not critically analyzed for the quality of the work or the outcomes brought about by their initiatives. Therefore, it might be argued that doing work that negatively impacts or further colludes with injustice is not working for social justice. I accept the potential for this criticism and anticipate such awareness may be a recommendation for future study.

Pilot Study

As a requirement for my program of study, I enrolled in a HgEd 690 Advanced Special Topics course, spanning the summer of 2008 through Fall 2009. Guided by Dr. Nancy Evans, I conducted an independent research project designed to serve as a pilot study for the project proposed in this document. Using a simplified version of the life history methodological approach, I interviewed four Catholic priests noted for their work on social

justice issues. Interviews were conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted as summarized below.

The purpose of the pilot study was to interview White privileged men, in this case those who also held identities as Catholic priests, to understand what led them to work for social justice outcomes. A basic interpretive approach was used to facilitate understanding as to how the participants made meaning of their experience over time, as mediated through inductive researcher interpretation (Merriam, 2002). Specifically, the phenomenological life history approach holds that every life experience is unique and thus this project offered the opportunity to more deeply know the meaning each man made of his lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Interview narrative was intentionally collected in such a way as to ask the participants to reflect on the influences that shaped their life courses. The act of recording life history is functionally concerned with understanding why lives have unfolded as they did (Presser, 2004). The meanings of such experiences are created through the process of interpretation of the context and interactions (Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, the purpose of the life history approach is not to report the truth but to describe how each particular life story reveals a specific situational truth (Messerschmidt, 2000).

By focusing less on fact and more on what was perceived reality for each individual, the life history process facilitated awareness of self for each of the participants. The participants were able to reflect, understand, and acknowledge who they had become through their life experience. While one of the participants had been asked to do such reflection before, the other three had not and found the experience enlightening. Upon analysis of the interview data, family of origin, mentoring relationships, educational institutions, life experiences, and situations requiring a decision to act or not were revealed as having the

most influence on the direction in life these men took. Further, there did not appear to be one time or place but a series of influences in different settings and at different times that influenced them over time.

Findings in the pilot study both affirmed methodology choices and revealed need for protocol modification. While a life history approach was taken in the pilot study, interviews were conducted in single settings given the abbreviated nature of the study and thus affirmed the need for a longer, multiple session, interview protocol as noted above to allow for reflection on questions posed and additional exploration of important points. Further, three of the four men interviewed grew up in homes described as low income and this identity was noted as having an impact on their life work. Given that the purpose of this study was to reveal the life history of privileged men, this finding affirmed the need to pre-screen participants for privileged identities and to eliminate any participants holding oppressed identities, however insignificant such identities might appear. Finally, these men noted the impact mentors had on their chosen course and, in fact, that this impact led to their emergence as mentors themselves. Therefore, the interview protocol in this study explored how participants were mentored, if at all, and what impact those relationships had, if any, on their engagement in social justice initiatives.

CHAPTER 4. PROFILES

In this chapter I provide a profile of each participant in the study and offer composite information about the collective group. The individual profiles were constructed using data from the three interviews that I conducted with each participant. Actual participant remarks are either quoted or indented to clearly identify their own words. Member checking to confirm the accuracy of the profiles was conducted and each participant has approved the content included.

Individual Profiles

The profiles of 9 participants are included below. At the time of the interviews, participants ranged from 19 to 28 years-of-age. Participants were born throughout the United States: one in the West, two in the Southwest, two in the Midwest, two in the South, and two in the East. For purposes of the study, all identified as White, male, middle or upper middle class, able-bodied, and Christian during the screening process. All but one identified as heterosexual, the exception being Charlie who reported a bi-sexual identity. Charlie was selected for the study given that he only recently came to identify as bi-sexual and that he noted a belief that his identity did not drive his decision to engage in racial justice work.

Of specific interest to this study, all participants reported having been engaged in social justice work at some point during the time that they held student status. At the time of the interviews, three participants held undergraduate student status, two had just completed their bachelor's degree, two held graduate student status, one had just completed a master's degree, and one was in transition after completing a post-graduate teaching certificate. All remained engaged in justice work or committed to advocating for justice in their daily actions. Current geographic locations also represented the United States spectrum: one

currently resided in the West, one in the Southwest, three in the Midwest, two in the South, and two in the East.

Andy

Born and raised in the Midwest, Andy was a 21-year-old college student active in social justice work at the time of the interviews. He was enrolled at a large Midwest state university and mid-way through his junior year, double majoring in the sciences with double minors in leadership and the sciences. His student club involvements on campus included rugby, tai kwon do, and body building. He worked in the campus business office and volunteered at the local hospital.

Upbringing and influences. Andy was born to young parents. His father worked multiple jobs to pay bills while his mother attended college. Therefore, his grandparents played a significant role in his upbringing. Andy reflected,

So family structure was a little strange. Both my parents were very young. My dad was 22, I want to say, and my mom was 19. So both my parents were pretty young. And being born in a small town, my dad worked a couple jobs and then my mom was going to school at [a large Midwest state university]. And she was floating back and forth between full-time and part-time and working so, most of the time during the day, I was raised by my grandparents. And then at night, it was either my mom or dad, depending on who was home because my dad worked about 80 hours a week to pay bills and everything. And then my mom was going to school and then working part time, trying to get her degree done. And as for my child life, in '96 when I was about 3, I think I was 3 ½ or 4, my mom graduated from college, my parents started having marital issues. They ended up divorcing in '96-'97, somewhere around there.

And my mom got a job offer in [a Midwest city]. And we lived up there. And then that's where I started having actual memories. It was a two- or three-bedroom apartment for the two of us. That's pretty much how that was growing up. So I would go back and visit my dad every other weekend. Then I'd see my grandparents usually about once a week. The reason why I keep saying my grandparents, my grandparents had a huge involvement in my life.

Andy's life progressed, offering changes to the family structure that influenced where he is today. He continued,

And then after, I'm going to say after I was probably about 6 or 7 years old, my mom ended up meeting a gentleman who worked at the local hospital. They started dating and I took very well to this guy; he was cool. And then they ended up getting married while I was in third grade...And then when she ended up getting married, we sold that house and we ended up moving to an upper middle-class neighborhood. But my mom and the gentleman, I still call him dad today even though it's been almost nine years since their divorce, they divorced and we were still in the upper middle-class neighborhood.

They were living comfortably and Andy was going to school. However, life for Andy changed abruptly when the family experienced a house fire. Andy explained,

When I turned 15, my house, it ended up burning down, which was a huge, a real eye opener for me. A huge deal for me. Because we had, my mom had taken out the smoke detectors actually, or had taken the smoke detector batteries out, so we didn't even hear the smoke detectors going off until my mom [received] a random phone

call at 1:30 in the morning that woke her up, and she was able to come and wake me up. And we got out of the house in time.

Due to the displacement caused by the fire, it forced his mother to make some decisions about location and schools for herself and Andy. He shared,

Then my mom ended up moving in with her boyfriend in a town called [city, state] about 45 minutes from where I lived. And I lived in a small condominium apartment as the house was getting rebuilt. And I stayed there for about 8 months, give or take. And then my mom was floating in and out between being with me and being with her boyfriend. And then the house got rebuilt; we moved back in there. Slowly but surely, my mom was gradually moving out to her new boyfriend's, which I saw it coming but I wasn't completely 100% sure. So I, pretty much my whole entire end of my sophomore year and junior year of high school, I lived by myself in a very big house, which was kind of interesting because I was definitely lonely. And then, I want to say second semester of my junior year or right at the end of my junior year of high school, my mom told me she was selling the house because she was essentially moving in with her boyfriend. And I couldn't figure out why but she was trying to get me to move...I was in the top 5 of my class, in the running for valedictorian. And I knew if I would leave to move to a new high school that would have messed up my high school...The high school my mom was trying to get me to move to was only about 800 [students] and it didn't have as many advanced placement classes. So I didn't want to go to a rival school and also because I would have had to sit my whole entire senior year out from all the sports I played. So I didn't want to lose any of that either. So after talks and argument all the time with my mom, she didn't want to deal

with, I guess, a teenager who wasn't happy, she said if you can find an apartment, then you can move in there. So I was dealing with two issues. One, being 17 years old but I can't sign a lease by myself. And my mom says she'll go in and sign a lease for me. So those are a couple things I was dealing with before. So I was searching around for about two or three weeks and I ended up talking to one of my friends who was Vietnamese and they said they had a shop and their shop had been having some problems like break-ins and people trying to come in after closing hours. So they said if I would go watch [the shop], I could stay there.

Andy's mother consented to signing the lease, opening up the opportunity for him to stay in his current location and finish high school.

In addition to Andy, there were six additional siblings comprising his immediate family structure. He reported,

So I have six little siblings. I have two on my dad's side that are both girls and they're 12 and 10. And then on my mom's side, I have three steps and one half. And they are 18, or my oldest sister's 18, my brother's 15, then my sister is 12, and then another sister who's 3 now. So, that's how my siblings break down.

As he noted, filling in the gaps for his mother and father were Andy's grandparents from his father's side, who ultimately played a significant role in his development. Andy explained,

A lot of times they would come over and look over me. I would get told one thing by my own parent family and I was shown one thing by my own parent family growing up except for my grandparents. My grandfather was more so the hands on type with not talking to people as much. But he just like would do really good at building

things. So that's why I became interested in like science and building and I'm very good at fixing things, especially things that are broken. But my grandma was, out of all the people, my grandma was extremely open-minded and still has a lot of the same values that my family has but she tried to teach me and definitely keep me more of an open-minded instead of a close-minded person.

Reflecting, Andy credited who he had become to the modeling his grandparents provided.

Andy recounted,

My grandfather, like I said from watching him he would never give up until something was done. So I kind of got that from him. And my grandma gave me this patience with people all the time. I would get very irritated very fast when people weren't making common sense. And my grandma gave me that patience... That had already been installed [*sic*] in me [by them].

Throughout his early life, Andy received messages to stay in school, work hard, and then come home. At home, he received stereotypical representations of what life should be and the values he should hold. Andy described his family as an “extremely right winged, conservative family.” However, clearly one dissenting voice was provided by Grandma.

Andy explained,

Out of all the people, my grandma was extremely open minded and still has a lot of the same values that my family has but she tried to teach me and definitely keep me in more of an open minded instead of a close minded person... My grandma always said treat people how you want to be treated. So that was a big thing that stuck with me. So I definitely always treated people with the, pretty much, no matter who you

were, even if I had these stereotypes, I pretty much still treated how I wanted to be treated even regardless if [my family] had taught me differently.

Such messaging resonated deeply as his interests grew.

Andy credited family influence as well with instilling a sense of values that he continued to carry with him. In particular, education and involvement were emphasized during influential conversations, his family encouraging him to continue with his engagement in both. Reflecting about the focus on education, Andy recalled,

My family drove education but they didn't really say go straight off to college or anything. I had to actually more instill the college thing in myself. Because originally, my dad said, "If you graduate high school, great job, son." My mom was like, "Well, let's get you to the community college, get you an associate's degree." That's how my parents were with that all the time. And my grandparents, both of them have their high school diplomas. My grandfather had a few hours of college but nobody in my family had really been exposed to college. My mom did have her bachelor's degree but it took my mom, I think, eight years to get her bachelor's degree which, I mean, she actually still got it through everything. But it was not like I need to go straight to college. If I do, I need to go to community college.

The family also felt that it was important for Andy to be busy and involved. Thus, Andy was encouraged to be active throughout his time in middle school and high school. He shared,

My family, it was more so work hard and not smart necessarily a lot of times which, I've come to realize, that you should work smart over working hard. Ever since, pretty much, I was about 12 or 13, I was encouraged to get involved in stuff, whether that be

anything from playing basketball to being on the scholastic team...So I was always encouraged to be busy, not necessarily work hard but just be busy more so.

Andy's father remained present in his life and in the geographic area, serving the community as a police officer. While not always present, his influence impacted Andy's approach to life. He explained,

And then my family, being a military family, a lot of times, my dad wasn't in the military but my dad's brother was. My dad was a cop so it was if you're going to speak to him at all, it was, "Yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, no ma'am." And my dad never said, "Only do that with white people." So anytime I saw somebody who was even say two years older than me, I would say, "Yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, no ma'am." So that's where our huge respect came in. I found that I was able to connect a lot better to people just by using those phrases.

Building on the messages he was receiving at home, Andy noted that his experience in the school system served to affirm his academic maturity, significantly shaping his growth and development. Teachers and staff who recognized his abilities, along with a diverse group of peers, encouraged him to honor his interests and gifts. Andy remembered,

I went to three different elementary schools. All of them were primarily middle class elementary schools and like nothing too high, nothing too low. But it was pretty much how you do your multiplication tables and stuff, basic things. And then sixth year, the way the school worked, I was still being raised in a middle class neighborhood but the school was primarily a lower socio-economic kind of school with a lot of problems. I went there and never really felt like I fit in much. And then I went to a magnate school for my last two years, 7th and 8th grade, and that's where I started getting

challenged academically a little bit more and my grades kind of fell a little bit. And then 8th grade year, middle school or the high school I went to, we split to the different high schools in [the city] and I knew I was either going to go to the west high school or the east high school... Eastern school said, "You've heard all these rumors. Yes, we're the troubled school. We have a lot of people who get in fights and low graduation rates. But I guarantee every single kid who went to school or this school is actually real. They don't try to be something that they're not." So I thought that was really cool.

Andy felt that his teachers enhanced the messages encouraged at home, thereby influencing his commitment to learning. He observed,

I think that was based upon, from a number of my teachers throughout school, which I don't know how I got handpicked. That's just one thing I think my teachers just wanted me succeed. It was based, I think, on my teachers actually installing [*sic*] that drive in me.

The presence and nurturing that his teachers provided offered Andy an opportunity to excel. One in particular, his guidance counselor, stood out as being directly influential at a critical juncture in his life. Andy explained,

And then it was, like I said, about high school when I started developing a strong work ethic and actually reading my textbooks, so just like trying to look stuff up on the internet and everything... I just remember like I had a variety of different teachers who really, my guidance counselor for high school was definitely a big factor in my life. She was one who shaped me and said, "You can go to college, you can do this, you can do what you want." And she said, "I'll let you know no matter where you go

to high school, if you set your mind to something, and you drive, if you set your mind to something and you work hard, you can achieve that goal.” And that really installed [sic] me and she said she was going to be my guidance counselor and I chose to go to the east side school, which had a very low graduation rate.

Peer influence. The change of living locations and schools created a bit of instability in Andy’s life. Therefore, peer connections became important and ultimately influential. One relationship in particular emerged that became highly affirming and encouraging for him.

Andy reflected,

But my best friend from high school until now, he sat down and he would tell me about all these different things. How he was oppressed from when he was born to the time he moved. He was very accelerated, very intelligent. He was in a lot of AP classes with me. Even though we were in a predominantly African American school, even in the upper level classes, there was [sic] usually 15-20 white kids and usually only two or three African Americans, or two or three Black kids. So he would tell me how that was growing up this whole time because I had just gotten involved in the gifted program when I was in high school. And he had been involved in this [program] since he was in elementary school. He went to the elementary annex school, he went to the program for middle school, and he was always telling me how the kids were not just like his peers but also how older adults would treat him as if, “Here’s this little Black kid here. You’re not going to do much outside of or what a stereotypical African American would.” And he had a different view, “No, I’m going to be different. I’m going to be wealthy one day. I’m going to get out and try to change the world.” He and I sat down and we made a pact together our freshman

year. We said we'd always make sure that we put God first and then we said well, that's what he told me... My religious affiliation was born Catholic and then I took a couple years off where I wasn't sure if god actually existed. And then, during my sophomore year is when I really got back into my religion. But, I mean that pact, and then we said that we'd both graduate in the top ten of our class and we'd both go to the top 50 universities is what we said. But, most importantly, we would always make sure, no matter how good or how far we got, we'd always make sure we'd always talk to people with the same respect that we wanted. And we'd always make sure that we'd always bring people up, even if it meant that we had to put ourselves down to help them out. Because my school did not have a very high graduation rate and we had to make sure we helped out as many kids as possible while we were going to school... But just hanging out with him definitely reconfirmed that we'd always watch each other's back, going back and forth and stuff like that. Even though we go to different universities now, we still call each [other] every day and make sure, "Hey, are you getting your stuff done or did you get your goals done for today, how's everything going?" So we're always 100% honest with each other.

Defined identities. During the screening interviews, I affirmed that Andy claimed his identities to be White, male, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied and Christian. When I asked him to describe which of his identities he found to be most salient, he responded,

I would probably say my ability is actually the most salient because I don't identify as able-bodied. I identify as differently-abled based on 1) I have a sister who has cerebral palsy and she's been in a wheelchair her whole, entire life. She's almost 19 now. But that, being out with her has made me a lot more aware of my being able to

get up and walk around and taking that for granted at times. And then also based on injuries that I've had because I play rugby and I've done a lot of contact sports like martial arts so I've broken a few bones in my life and just being for that temporary amount of time, not being able to use whatever appendage or whatever thing that I broke, it's definitely made me realize a lot more.

Holding privileged identities, Andy articulated that he felt his justice work has in fact contributed to his growing awareness and overall identity. Andy explained,

[The work] contributes to my identity more based on realizing the privilege I actually have because even until probably about 18 months ago, I never actually knew what some of these privileges were. I took them for granted and didn't even think about it until I was being, I was just being uneducated on my own, by my own self. So I would definitely say like doing work as an ally has definitely made me a lot more aware of privilege but it's also contributing more to allow me to self-reflect on my life too and like how I've been treating others sometimes.

Combined with a strong work ethic, responsiveness to authority, and desire to be connected, Andy set his sights on transcending the environment in which he had been raised. Andy reflected,

My family isn't very accepting of what I do, especially within social justice work wise. [My Dad] hates when they act out based on everything so like he says he doesn't hate gay people but when you go out and try to explain to him and whatnot, he says that's one that, it's too excessive. He says a lot of times with African Americans and Africans, he likes African Americans and Africans, but when you

walk around and you start yelling really loud and stuff like that, he says that's where the cutoff is.

Though many messages seemed to send Andy in one path, he reiterated that his grandmother also worked on him through her words and actions to consistently instill a sense of values that might encourage him to see things differently. Andy commented, “My grandmother likes [my social justice work] a lot...She tells me different things [than my family] and she's always trying to help other people.”

Values and beliefs. Through his experiences, Andy was forced to focus on what was important, each experience helping him to clarify what he valued. Andy recognized that what he believed was shaped through his environment, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Asked to reflect on what his values and beliefs were at the time, Andy discussed,

Key values are that I would try and go off of, at least for me personally, is strong work ethic and hard work. But the first thing that I look forward is making sure that I would treat others how I want to be treated. And one big challenge I've had in my life a lot of times is dealing with stereotypes of--like stereotypes for myself but then also stereotypes that I've heard about other people and whatnot. Especially because I grew up in a predominantly White area until I was in, basically, high school. I had a lot of stereotypes built up from what the media portrayed about different people with different social identities. And then also what the media portrayed about me with my specific social identity, that and my whole privilege.

Long term, Andy remained uncertain as to what he wanted to do specifically after completing his college degree. However, clearly undergirding his career interests was a desire to be genuinely helpful. Andy shared,

I know the biggest thing that I know I want to do is help people and understand to which aspects or what way I'm going to go about doing that. Right now I have several different options. I'm mostly majoring in science so I can do something medically related if I wanted to. I'm minoring in leadership, and the also social justice work that I do, I may go into student affairs. So right now, I'm just exploring my options to see what I want to do. I know I want to do something though that helps other people. That is my big goal in life I know.

As he further reflected on narrowing his focus, Andy explained,

The big thing that I definitely wanted to do is that I want to work with lower socioeconomic status individuals because I haven't really experienced any poverty in my life. Before I go on to graduate school, I'm looking at doing either the Peace Corps for a couple of years or I'm looking at doing Teach for America or something like that where I can go into an underrepresented community and try and help out in whatever way possible for a couple years, at least, while I'm younger and still have a lot more energy. Also, I've been educating myself for the past couple years to be able to work with people who have social identities other than mine.

Potentially seeing health care as an area of interest, working with diverse populations emerged as an area of focus for Andy. Though still developing, he was clear on his commitment to engaging in work that valued and served the needs of others, ultimately creating a greater sense of justice.

Social justice work. I selected Andy for participation in the study based on his reported engagement in social justice action. I asked Andy to describe the work that he felt defined his commitment to social justice. Andy shared,

Dealing with justice, I'm in charge of a bunch of other different groups that I overlook [i.e., supervise]. I overlook a Black student union group in the university housing section that I'm part of. I also overlook an LGBTQ aid group and then I'm also part of the social justice student organization... And then other jobs that I do is [sic] what's called a [diversity position] at university housing so I overlook about 400 students. And, as a [diversity position], my job is to build an inclusive community and social justice community where everybody is able to express themselves but just as long as that, with expressing themselves and not hurting any other group. Or so when like confirmed bias comes up, I deal with that and sometimes when oppression comes up, I deal with that.... So with [the diversity] position, I work with confirmed bias and help to organize in educating residents on different social identities, some that are the same as theirs; others are not the same. It's just to educate them on the differences.

I also asked Andy to reflect on what the mechanics of social justice work looks like on a daily basis. Recalling his own journey, Andy responded,

So for the first mechanic I had to change was breaking down the stereotypes and then actually stopping or actually more so making a life change to where I didn't make jokes like that. Because they may be funny sometimes when somebody doesn't have that social identity but it doesn't mean that somebody who is around me doesn't hear me. That, that could affect even if I'm in quotes, well you never know if somebody's listening or this one person who you tell it to goes and tells it to somebody else, I really don't want to be offensive or anything. So the first mechanic I had to do was change just my lifestyle in general and how I spoke and presented myself. And then [I] just made sure that I gave everybody a fair chance based on, no matter what I had

heard or no matter what I'd even seen from somebody. [Even if] I'd progressively seen it over and over again, [I] always make sure to give them a chance.

Recognizing the need to do his own work, Andy felt he needed to address comments that he overheard among his peers or those around him. He noted,

Instantaneously, any time I hear some type of negative connotation about somebody or something like that, I almost take a deep breath, think about what I'm going to say for a couple seconds, and then I normally jump in. It used to be very intimidating for me to do that, especially with other people who had different social identities than me because I was kind of worried like they were going to be judging me. But if it is somebody who, well the White male, it was a little bit easier for me to go in and talk to them because we didn't really have much cultural difference or much identity difference I felt. So I was more comfortable maybe in doing justice work with somebody who was more so cultured or culture assimilated as the same identity to me.

As he engaged in social justice work, Andy realized he had much to learn and that he had to adjust his approach over time if he wanted to be effective. I asked Andy to describe how, if at all, he operated differently now than in the past. Andy articulated,

And so actually sitting down and having a full, in-depth conversation that means, I don't know, it didn't necessarily come across attacking but I know it could have been a lot more successful if I would have had more patience with people. So my approach has definitely been to, like I said, take a deep breath and realize that it's not, I feel like 95-99% of the time, it's not somebody's fault for what they're doing. It's just how they were educated or raised. I mean, unfortunately, I'm afraid we're always going to have

some people who will intentionally be oppressive or whatnot just based on like their identity. Even if people are educated and I don't know if you can actually ever change that, but a lot of times, people who are uneducated will say stuff that they don't actually mean to be offensive.

Andy saw the value in his work from the reactions that others demonstrate after he had a conversation or engaged a learning opportunity that had gone well. I asked him what motivates him to engage in the work he does. Andy responded,

Just seeing the change. That's the big thing right there. Because like the biggest thing that I like is that “aha” moment that I've seen where I'm talking to somebody... So like just seeing that “aha” moment when somebody tells me or somebody thanks me for something that I've done. That is one of the big rewards that I like.

While unclear about his future career path, Andy was quick to confirm his commitment to making a difference through efforts to create a just environment. Andy confirmed,

There definitely is a sense of purpose. I'm not 100% sure if I am ever going to become--like with a career path--if I'm going to actually do something like when I go out and do full on social justice work, whether it be student affairs or public speaking or a motivational speaker. I'm not sure I'm going to do something like that. But one thing I definitely will do is, whatever community I am in, I will definitely become involved with and making sure that I'm doing some type of work, whether that's something on a volunteer basis or an educational basis, whether that may be, I know I'm always going to do something social justice related.

Brandon

Brandon, 28 years-of-age at the time of the interviews, had just completed his master's degree in education, with an emphasis in social justice, at a large Eastern university. Prior to engaging in his program of study, Brandon had graduated from college at a large Western state university, where he studied management and economics. After graduation, he worked for a couple years before returning to a student services position at his alma mater. It was there that his awareness of the need for social justice was raised and led him to pursue the master's degree that he did.

Upbringing and influences. Brandon was born and raised on the West coast. He attended college, lived, and worked near home before leaving for graduate school. Sharing about his family structure, Brandon explained,

My parents were 19 years old when I was born, so shortly out of high school, and so raised me from a very young age. Four years later we all moved to [small town in area], which is located in [middle of Western state]. And the reason we did that was because my parents were interested in the opportunity at that time of owning a home and raising a family. Shortly after moving into that home, my sister was born. And the four of us lived in that same house all the way through my high school graduation. My dad worked for, or still works for, a family-owned electrical contracting company. He's been working there for the most part since he was 19 years old, with the exception of a couple years when he had a different job. And my mom was primarily a housewife during the entire time, all through our youth, up until I went to college. So, I guess with that said, you know, I suppose you could say my family was what people might say is a traditional, you know, nuclear unit. You know, a couple

kids, own a home, dad works, my mom stayed home. The town I grew up in, [small Western town], is a fairly small agricultural community made up of mostly White, Latino, and Chicano residents. And we only had one school district because it was a small town. So I went to school with mostly the same people all throughout school. After high school I attended [large Western state university], and then worked in [large Western city] for four years. So after I graduated I worked initially for [a business] for a couple years and then ended up coming back to [the university] and working for the [housing office], which is one of the 600 undergraduate colleges at [the university].

With the middle class upbringing he experienced came a certain set of values that were encouraged and instilled for Brandon and his sister. Brandon shared,

Yeah, you know I think, for me growing up, as I mentioned, my parents were very young when they had me. They were 19; they had high school diplomas; they didn't have the opportunity to really pursue any kind of higher education because they were raising a child and then eventually two children, and so for me growing up they always really instilled the value of education and how hard work and education and getting good grades and all that could result in going to college, which would result in getting a good job which [*sic*] paid well, and was able to provide for your lifestyle.

Reflecting on how these values were instilled, he shared that his family made strategic decisions both verbally and non-verbally. Brandon explained,

Yeah, a lot of it was verbal, that message was kind of delivered over and over. But I was reflecting on this last night and was realizing a lot of it was non-verbal too because my parents had strategically been setting up conditions for me to kind of

follow this narrative. And I was thinking about that; for example, when I was young I remember my mom sitting at home with me and drilling me with math flash cards, having me go through these math flash cards over and over and over again until I could respond to them instantaneously, basically. And then I remember we initially had one computer in our household but by the time I was in high school we had two, maybe three. And having those physical things in the household because my parents wanted both my sister and I [*sic*] to become computer literate because they felt that it was something that was necessary to succeed academically, professionally, all of that. And then even offering to pay me for getting As in all of my classes as kind of a way to incentivize me to do well in school. So, you know, I mean I know they definitely did that out of love because they wanted me to have or pursue opportunities that they didn't have the privilege to pursue themselves.

Peer influence. I also asked Brandon to reflect on peer influences and how those may have shaped his life course. He responded,

The messages that were kind of tossed around to my friends seemed congruent from [*sic*] those that I got from my family. Since I grew up in a small town there really was this desire to get out of the town and the biggest vehicle for doing that was getting into college... You know, for a lot of them, some of my friends from high school and undergraduate years, they have various social identities. Some have, like me, mostly privileged identities, some have some privileged identities, and then some that are historically marginalized or oppressed social identities. But I think the combination of having mostly privileged identities and then with the messaging that all you have to

do is just focus on me, work hard, do well in school, get a good job, and not have to focus on my community or what's going on around me.

Among his peers, conversations on justice issues typically did not materialize with friends from home or in college. Brandon articulated,

It's something that never really came up in conversation among either of those [high school and college] groups. And then even now I've decided to go on this other trajectory and I stay in contact with most of them, some of the friendships have kind of fizzled out. But most people I still continue to maintain contact with, many of my friends from undergrad. And it doesn't really come up in conversation and when it does it's very difficult to have that conversation because I would say the conditions aren't there for it in the sense of it's not going to be a dialogue. It turns into some sort of heated debate. And I also feel very outnumbered at the same time. I'm one person in a group setting and I would say my friends growing up didn't really influence my decisions.

However, the schools he attended played a role in shaping who Brandon had become. With respect to that school influence, Brandon also noted little influence toward social justice; the curriculum tended to reinforce his privileged background. Up through primary and secondary school, Brandon reported curriculum reinforcing messages from home about doing well in school. College, he felt, simply followed that pattern. Brandon explained,

I think one thing as I said about [my university] was that it was [a] research-heavy, research-focused university. And I think because of that focus, that kind of permeates throughout the entire university culture. And I also studied [business], which is in the Division of [business], and a lot of the classes I took and messages I got about

success and opportunity were a lot about cost benefit, logic, game theory, things like that. The opportunity cost of doing something versus not doing something. That informed who I was personally as well because I viewed a quick cost estimation of something and decided 'is this something I want to do or not?' And coming from someone with a privileged identity, so often the answer is no because it's not going to affect me adversely.

Coming from a family committed to education, the curriculum further supported Brandon in believing that benefits were to be gained through doing what he perceived as the norm.

Defined identities. Brandon was selected for the study due to his privileged status, identifying as White, male, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and Christian. Reflecting on those identities that seemed most salient to him at the time of the interviews, Brandon articulated,

I think the two that have been most salient have been my race and my gender, which are White and Male, respectively, and there's a couple reasons for that. First, they are the most visible social identities that I have, so you know, as soon as I walk in the room it's very clear that I'm a White male. But there's also a lot more I've learned about historically and presently [about] the amount of privilege that comes along with being a White male. Not all the time but the majority of the time. Especially if you're middle or upper class, that kind of adds an additional level of privilege to it as well. I've essentially been the beneficiary of that privilege and will probably continue to be a beneficiary to some extent. So, since these are the most salient identities for me, you know they're usually underlined, especially whenever I enter a group situation. There's [*sic*] a couple of things I've thought about for that. So, for example, if I'm a

member of a group and I've been assigned a task, you know whether it was for a class, or my professional organization, or any kind of civic engagement or social justice organization as a student, I think about how maybe my thoughts or actions or body language are projected or received by the other group members. Because those social identities not only frame, or inform, my viewpoints of the world, but it's also how I'm received by others. On the other hand, my thoughts and actions and reflections are also a result of those social identities, and other people receive them through those lenses as well.

To deepen the consideration of his identity, Brandon was asked to consider how being an ally contributed to or detracted from his identity. He reflected,

I would say that I strive to be an ally and for a while considered that to be part of my identity, who I was, someone who is becoming an ally and who was an ally. But then, interestingly, a few months back I read an article and it said, "Ally is not an identity." And one of the points was that, the title ally can't be self-appointed. And after thinking about it, that makes total sense to me. You know, why should I, as someone who already has privileged social identities, to be able to self-appoint myself as an ally, in general. The article said it's not that you self-appoint, but rather something that people who are marginalized or oppressed groups would identify you as. I think that makes a lot more sense, so much like my goals that I mentioned earlier—that I continue to educate myself about justice issues and becoming more active around justice issues, these are goals that you can aspire to achieve but you may not fully achieve. I started looking at ally, or allyship, in the same way. It's something that I'm striving to become, but may not always be. Or it may be something that I continue to

do work in, whether that's through education, or skill-building. It's just something that, it's not a title I can give myself. It's something that I can strive to become, put that out there, but know that other people have to identify me as [an ally].

Values and beliefs. The experiences in which Brandon has engaged led him to develop a set of key beliefs. When asked to describe what those were at the present time, Brandon recalled a leadership experience during which he was asked to write down a quote about being an ally. Brandon described,

So I participated both years. But the first year I participated, 2012, the statement that I wrote down was "This is more than my community; this is our community." And, the reason I wanted to share that story and that statement is that it really kind of summarizes my key beliefs and viewpoints. First, you know, I think it's important for people to take care of themselves, different dimensions of wellness...taking care of yourself physically, emotionally, mentally, and intellectually, all these things. But then I also think it's important for people to think beyond themselves as well and start thinking about larger issues, community, social issues, and even start taking more of a participatory role in addressing some of those issues. Really kind of embrace the complexity and diversity and complications that come along with trying to tangle with some of these social issues. I also think that there is a connection between what, the extent to which you think beyond yourself and larger community issues and the amount that it comes back to you and positively impacts your individual well-being. So I think there's also that personal benefit to really thinking beyond yourself. And secondly, I think that statement kind of suggests that we shouldn't just passively exist in community or society, and we should all kind of take more of a participatory role,

take ownership of the fact that we live in a society where we are all kind of able to mutually shape what that society looks like, instead of allowing maybe a few people to speak for the masses. So I feel like that statement captures some of the key beliefs I have.

Brandon reported not only an awareness of his responsibility but also a duty to use his privilege appropriately to benefit others. Recounting a conversation with a co-worker, Brandon illustrated his deeper beliefs. He noted,

There's this quote that my co-worker had told me after I had gone through, observed the whole [university] event and gone through the [leadership training]. And it's by bell hooks and I'm gonna get it wrong, but it was something like, "It's not about the amount of privilege you have, but what you do with that privilege." You know, because a lot of times, I think especially people with privileged social identities, there's this talk of having guilt once we realize we have privilege, and then it starts to go down that path of guilt and sympathy. And that's one way to look at it. But you can also look at it like, "Okay, these things exist. You may have been born into it, you may not have had any control over it, but it's not about feeling guilty over it, but what are you going to do with it?" Now that you have it, what can you do to advocate for social change or to seek out equity in the community that you are a part of and how can you be an effective ally in that process?

Recognizing the privilege he held, Brandon came to see it as his obligation to be mindful of whom he is and to use that mindfulness for the common good. Yet he agreed that being mindful was only the first step. He felt that congruency was needed between who he said he

was, what he valued, and what was demonstrated in his daily actions. Discussing what those actions looked like on a daily basis, Brandon stated,

It can really look very, very differently depending on who you interact with or who you talk to. I mean, first it can take place on a variety of different levels. It can take place through grass roots or advocacy work, or public service and non-profit work, or involved in policy and law or even people who maintain leadership positions, a lot of organizations and capacities. Despite all the different environments in which it can take place, I think there are some commonalities across those different areas. So, for example, there's one thing in social change and social justice work and that's that it can't happen in isolation. It wouldn't really make sense, so it's not something that's a solo effort; it's always done in collaboration with others and I think it's important to utilize a cycle that's somewhere along the line of something I've heard...: "Think. Act. Observe. Reflect." And [in] this cycle, basically the first stage is you bring people together and discuss the issues and [what the] needs are of certain people and brainstorm ways to address those different needs. And then based on those conversations you can take action. And then during your observation phase you can observe what the outcomes were and then what your thought process was going into it. And then during the reflection phase, you are reflecting on whether you think your intentions were consistent with the actions that you took. You know, if they were, what was the result, and if they weren't, what can you do differently the next cycle around? So I think those are the things, the two key things are not working in isolation, obviously, and then kind of going through this iterative process where you're thinking about what you're doing, you're observing, and you're reflecting on

the results. Reflecting upon what happened and deciding whether or not to keep going along those lines or to make changes to meet the needs you are advocating for.

Brandon was asked to offer details about congruency between what he says and does in his life. He shared,

I think the one thing that I could say really defines the congruence between who I say I am and what I do is really in the people who I surround myself with. They kind of represent that, over the past few years, I've started to kind of make these active, intentional changes, for lack of a better term, for myself--beginning to educate myself and talk about social justice issues, organization, pursuing graduate studies. I think at the same time, as that's the direction I'm headed, it's really more than something I just do academically or professionally; it's part of my life. So a lot of the people who are now my friends, peers, colleagues, etc. I really think are a fairly pluralistic group of people, and also interested in social justice issues to some extent. So I feel like that kind of demonstrates that congruence between the person that I am, or think I am striving to be, and what I do in the personal, professional, and academic dimensions of my life.

Social justice work. Growing up in a privileged situation, it was Brandon's experience working after college, specifically at a university, that sent him on the trajectory into graduate school and more importantly into his commitment to social justice work. Selected for the study because of his engagement, Brandon was asked specifically to talk about the justice work he was doing. He shared,

So, my academic background is in education, more specifically educational leadership. I've also been more personally and professionally involved at the

university level during that time, so most of my diversity work, social justice action work, has actually taken place at the university level as well. However, sometimes that work also extends beyond the boundaries of the university. An example of that is that I've been involved in the [social service] organization for the past few years. It's a service learning program that exists at a lot of universities across the country and the whole focus of the program is to create an intentional experience for students to immerse themselves in learning about a particular social justice issue by traveling to another community, whether that's domestic or internationally, and learning about the social justice issue and how it impacts that community specifically. Then at the same time providing a community service related to that social issue. And all of this is done in an effort to inspire students to become more committed global citizens who are taking action against certain social [in]justice. And so, in addition to just being a member of this organization, I've also maintained leadership positions in all the years I've been involved. Some of those roles aside from just providing the actual service, I've also been able to co-facilitate dialogues about social justice, develop training materials for supportive student leaders and also advise student leaders in their development. Outside of that program, I was also a facilitator for the [dialogues] program. And that program is a course that brings together students from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and bring new knowledge, things like that. And in that role I had a co-facilitator who really had those same principles, you know focused on participatory, inclusive not only on individual, social, and cultural analysis of race, but also action-oriented in the sense that her participants were required to create a project in which they could implement, in their own spheres of influence, a

dialogue or raise awareness about issues, or challenge misconceptions about race. And so those were kind of the extracurricular and academic things that I was involved in. And professionally, I've tried to infuse social justice into my different roles as well. One example was with an educational non-profit that worked with under-resourced schools and one of the goals of the student opportunity teams was to connect these students with meaningful experiences outside of the classroom. So mentoring programs, internships, pre-college programs, all in an effort to essentially just get them prepared holistically for college and careers. And in another professional role, I often facilitated workshops on micro-aggressions and advocated for the students I supervised to develop their own programs with a focus on social justice issues. So like I've said, a lot of it has taken place at the university level, but I feel like I've tried to make it a part of everything I do personally, academically, and professionally.

Brandon remarked that he viewed his life as having two distinct chapters; the first being before he returned to work at the university and the second beginning with his immersion in the graduate school experience just completed. The second chapter in particular he noted as providing significant gain to him personally. Brandon asserted,

I think I've gained quite a bit in the last few years. When I'm thinking about the amount of information and knowledge that I've been exposed to over the past few years and the different organizations and the people I've met, and all colleagues and mentors I've come across, and all the people that have become a whole new wave of friends. Those are all things that I would not have otherwise gained had I not chosen to kind of go in this direction and so I guess really, I hate to look at it as these are all

the things that I've gained, but it is true. So I guess in the end these are things that I just hope I've been able to contribute as much as I've gained. And to think about what you're giving versus what you're taking in a situation, and so, I'm taking all this knowledge and all these experiences and I've gotten all these new friends and relationships and mentorships and things. So I hope I've been able to give these back at the same time.

Possessing a desire to impact the social structure positively, Brandon was encouraged to comment on his goals and what progress he had been making toward successfully achieving those goals. Brandon articulated,

Last time I talked about goals of the past few years, about social justice issues, and becoming a more active community member and enrolling into a program where I could broaden not only my academic person but also my professional thing as well. And I've been able to accomplish one of those things; I just completed my graduate program in May. So I know one of those things is accomplished. I'm hoping now that those goals that I've set over the past few years, [and the] resulting outcomes that I've had, will continue to kind of inform and direct me in this new chapter of my life I guess. And I can continue to educate myself about justice issues, becoming more involved in my new community, personally and hopefully professionally, around justice issues and just kind of continuing on that same path where I left off at the end of my graduate program.

Brandon candidly identified the transitional state with which he is confronted. Setting up in a new community, he found himself faced with the challenge of positioning himself to engage congruently with his values and life goals. To that end, Brandon reflected on where

he stood and on what he was currently facing as he transitioned away from the graduate program. He revealed,

I think one of the difficult pieces of that question is that I just finished my academic program and at the same time, when that ended, it was also the conclusion of the graduate assistantship that I had. Also the commitments to all the organizations that I'd been involved in and I relocated to a new city, new environment, new issues, organizations, so I'm still just kind of getting my footing at this point and I think it will be a few months before I get myself rooted a little bit more in my new environment, in my new professional role, and figure out what the landscape of the different issues are here, the different ways in which I feel like I could give back or add value or contribute my knowledge or experiences or anything like that. How I can begin to set a new, at least short to mid-term goals, I guess you could put it that way, so I don't, like you said, fall into that complacency.

Brandon revealed a genuine concern based on knowing who he has become, and what he has come to value, while facing the realities of a new environment that does not readily present clear direction for him. He stood face-to-face with the question of what will keep him engaged in justice work. As a person of privilege Brandon knew that he would not have the same opportunities as were available in the university setting. Yet he stood committed to making intentional decisions to continue his development and justice work.

Charlie

At the time of the interviews, Charlie was a 23-year-old, non-degree seeking, graduate student at a large southern university. He completed his undergraduate degree at the

university the previous May with a major in the social sciences, and a liberal arts minor. His plans were to enroll at the university in a graduate program cohort that fall. Charlie shared,

As far as campus involvements go, I'm a member of the [student political organization], the [national advocacy organization] chapter here. I'm also really involved in the [academic department] program so when I did my minor in that, I got really involved with bringing different speakers in and programs here for that. I'm also a mentor for international students through the [campus office] here. And then, not really an on-campus involvement, but something that's taking up a lot of my time is I'm working on the [political candidate] campaign. [The candidate is] running for governor down here. So that's a big time commitment now. And then also, as far as jobs go, I have two jobs. I work for [campus department]. We just staff special events like football and the other sporting events. And then I also work for the [campus university department] and so I have a group of [students] that I work on kind of a mix between a tutor, an academic advisor, and like a counselor, is the easiest way to describe it.

Upbringing and influences. Charlie grew up in a small southern community with his extended family. The combination of the small town and family values shaped the lens through which Charlie came to see the world. Charlie summarized,

So as far as my family structure, I live with my parents. I have a brother, a sister, and then my grandparents and great grandparents were very involved as well. So in the structure, everything, my mom was the primary income earner for the family. She made about twice as much as my dad does.

Charlie's mother completed an undergraduate degree in journalism at a large state university. He shared, "She was an investigative reporter for a while. But now she works for health and human services commission. So it's the food stamps and that office is who she works for now." His father retired from the Marines and worked as a guard at a nearby prison. Yet the family structure remained traditional. He explained,

Dad was, at the same time, like considered the head of the family in the very conservative, traditional sense. So he was like a school board president while I was in school, a church deacon in our church. And then my brother is four years older than me. And then my sister, we actually adopted her when she and I were in fifth grade. She's my cousin prior to adoption. Her mom died and we ended up adopting her. And then, like I said, with my grandparents, so my mother's parents pretty much essentially raised us growing up because of the amount of work that both of my parents were doing... They [my grandparents] raised cattle and have a farm. So my brother tended to drift off with my grandpa and I stuck around with my grandma. So she was kind of the figurehead for me growing up. And then my great grandparents were involved with us as well. So and that was my grandparents. They [my great-grandparents] were missionaries in Africa and so they spent years in Swaziland. And then he was a pastor so they had a very dominant role on me growing up.

The town Charlie grew up in supported his family structure and framed how he viewed life around him. Charlie recounted,

As far as the environment of [the town], it's, like I said, it's a town of 500 and so was very, very small, very similar like-minded people. So 100% for Republican. It's a very red area. There were no people of color growing up there except for the

occasional Latino family that came in and out. Religion was like the number one thing of [town] and it still is. So you were involved in church or you were not welcome in the town, pretty much.

The values instilled were conservative and consistent with the myth of meritocracy, suggesting success comes from individual effort. Those values especially came through when Charlie considered how opportunity and success might come about. I asked Charlie to reflect on what his family imparted to him about being successful. He summarized,

Really, you work hard, you succeed. That whole mentality was like pushed on me from a young age to today. I mean they're still very much believers in the American dream, that if you work hard, regardless of where you come from, that you're going to achieve and be successful and kind of that our success or our shortcomings in life depend on how hard we work and nothing else. Just that whole mentality.

Generally speaking, Charlie experienced a homogenous school environment that reinforced his family values. Growing up in a small town, his school was small as well and the number of peers was limited. Charlie recounted, "So I graduated high school. There were a total of 18 graduates and of those 18, 11 of us had been there from kindergarten through senior year." The general message in the schools was that students needed to graduate and then plan to go to work. However, Charlie received a slightly modified message. He explained,

So it was a very similar, the whole "you work then, if you wanted to, well then you have to work hard." The only difference that I really got was that it wasn't really an expectation of the school at all for us to go on to college. So we were, in high school, we were given talks on jobs in the area and what you have to do to get into the [local

industry], things like that. So it was more, “You're graduating high school. What's your job going to be?” How are you going to work hard to get that job?” That was more the message in the school, in general. For me, specifically, it wasn't quite the same. I had through [the youth development organization] received a lot of scholarships in my early, my freshman and sophomore years. And so for me, it was expected that I would go on to college but it was almost a mixed message. Mixed messages were being given to me because I'd go to these class talks on you're going to get a job, college is not realistic, but then I'd have these like side conversations going on of where are you going to college, that sort of thing.

Further differentiating individual students, Charlie specifically recalled noticing early on that the students of color were treated differently than his White peers. He shared,

So one thing that I had written down to be sure to talk about here is, like I mentioned earlier, my dad worked for the prison and he would come and give demonstrations and talks to my class every few years. I think I was a fifth grader and then it happened every other time that he came. So my fifth grade teacher this year, this is my fifth grade year, we had either one or two Latinos in the class at the time, that they had moved in for that year. They were gone by the end of the year. But I noticed that the teacher pulled them aside and said, “You guys need to be sure and pay attention to this presentation so what he's talking about doesn't happen to you.” And then that continued, like I said, with every other presentation that he and some of the other prison guards did. Or one of the other wardens would come and give presentations. That continued every year that it was the people of color, if there were any. Some years there were not. But if there were any, they would be pulled aside and said,

“Hey, I know you probably know someone in your family that's in a prison. Be sure and pay attention to what [our presenter] has to say.” These types of things. I don't think as a fifth grader that it clicked with me that she's only talking to the people of color in the room. I think it was later that this clicked with me. And then it was strange because there were some white students in the room that their dad had been in jail on and off or in higher life where their dad was in prison. But that student was not spoken to about be sure and pay attention. It was the new faces of color that were spoken to in this way.

Peer influence. Given the small town upbringing and going to school with many of the same friends his whole life, Charlie's peers served to consistently reinforce the messages from home in school as well. However, college presented an opportunity for new relationships that affirmed his growing questions about what he had been taught and the disconnect he felt as he learned more. One peer in particular, with whom he connected in his second semester, stood out as being particularly influential. Charlie shared,

So there's like a really good friend of mine. She has kind of been really, really influential, I guess, in me deciding to continue with this work, to do and go into. She and I, we've just had, we'll sit and just have conversations about experiences that she's had for hours. And just because it's all honky dory when you're a White male and you're not experiencing some of these things people of color are experiencing first hand. Just having her willingness to confide these things in me, to talk to me about her experiences, I think, has been super, super influential.

As a woman of color, his friend was able to share with Charlie what he was not getting from the peers with whom he grew up. The connection with her proved to be most influential, especially through her personal accounts. Charlie remembered,

[I] just formed a really great relationship with her and, like I said, have just learned a lot of, not first-hand but her recollecting first hand experiences with me. So it was like with Trayvon Martin and talking to her about basically the fact that I could not get why people could not understand why it was a big deal. She opened up and I think it was her nephew, no, her cousin, nephew or cousin, some family member, had been shot by a police officer in [large Southern city]. It was a similar situation. Didn't have a gun, didn't pose a threat, anything. And the police officer got off. And so what she was getting at is that yeah, it's Whites, we don't experience it, and we don't hear about this. But the majority of the people of color that you ask know someone first hand who has experienced it or has died as a result of it.

These powerful insights gained through close relationships also served to keep Charlie engaged in the work he was doing. I specifically asked him to reflect on whether the work gives him a sense of purpose. Charlie shared,

So that, reversing that is definitely one motivation. So whenever I was reading over this list, I marked out the word “what” and changed it to “who.” So who motivates me to do this work? And I think I mentioned my friend in the last interview. And she's one of the people of color, the people who come from oppressed backgrounds, I think, that are huge motivators for me to be doing the work that I do. And one thing that drives me nuts that [she] loves to say is-- she loves to make the statement that, “Black people always need a White voice.” And that statement, in itself, is a

motivator for me to do the work, not because I'm their White voice but, because I want that statement to be nonexistent. And that's another reason that I am very big on being up front with my privileges is because this notion that there's a need for a White figure or a White voice to speak for the oppressed. I think that should be done away with and that's a motivator that I have for doing the work.

Defined identities. In the screening interviews, Charlie identified as White, male, able-bodied, middle class, and Christian. He demonstrated an awareness of these identities, and the privilege gained in social settings by holding these identities. Charlie reflected,

So I think, and this is something that I find myself doing in my work, I think it's important that I first, that I identify and understand the privileges that I possess. So being a White, male, able-bodied person who was raised in an upper to middle class family, I think just being a person, specifically a person of privilege, is a key identifying trait about myself.

With respect to sexual orientation, Charlie identified as bisexual, an identity he had only recently come to claim. In the screening interview, we discussed the purpose of my desire to include students holding privileged identities. As he reflected, Charlie noted that he identified as heterosexual up until about six months prior. Moreover, his chosen justice work had focused in the racial justice realm and therefore he did not believe his recently claimed oppressed identity had any impact whatsoever on his decision to pursue that work. Given the conversation and his affirmation that he did not directly link his oppressed identity as a motivator to engage in justice work, Charlie was approved for participation in the study.

I asked Charlie to discuss which of these identities seemed most salient to him.

Charlie responded,

I was kind of grappling with how to answer this one. But I think being a White male is definitely the most salient just because of the privileges that come along with that. Being White in the U.S. where it's suppressive and oppressive. People of color being now in a patriarchal society. And then just not, I don't see my class upbringing with so much salience at this point, now that I'm out on my own to some extent. But I think definitely just being a White male is definitely the most salience.

Interestingly, though committed to social justice work, Charlie felt that the work he did served to detract from his identity, He explained,

I see it mostly detracting from my identity in the sense and, again, this is maybe in an intellectual sense, but I see it detracting from the privilege that comes with my identity. So the majority of White men are not engaged in doing scholarship and work that it's whole effort and purpose is to reverse the privilege that comes with being a White man. I mostly see the opposite where we're, not necessarily being strictly engaged in keeping the status quo, but definitely doing things that keep the status quo. So in that regard, I think that the work that I'm doing and the things that--I guess my beliefs and goals definitely detract from those privileged identities.

As such, Charlie found himself more comfortable in settings with those holding historically underserved identities. He continued,

And it's something that I've kind of realized as I've been engaged in things more and more. I have fewer White friends than I had in the past. My core friend group at this point are all people of color, people who come from low incomes or people who identify with LGBT. So and I do feel more comfortable there and not to say that breaking into these groups was easy or comfortable because it definitely wasn't. But

finding my place within them, I have much more comfort than being with the general White population or the type of people that I grew up with, the type of people that my family are. I definitely feel more comfortable with oppressed groups.

Values and beliefs. While shaped by his upbringing, Charlie worked to understand who he was and what that meant for him with regard to life decisions. I asked him to reflect on his values, key beliefs, and goals. Charlie responded,

So I think, and this is something that I find myself doing in my work, I think it's important that I identify and understand the privileges that I possess. So being a White, male, able-bodied person who was raised in an upper to middle class family, I think just being a person, specifically a person of privilege, is a key identifying trait about myself, not so much my beliefs and goals. A belief I have is I think that we should be straight forward with our privileges whenever we're working in social justice. And so from that, I think it's really important that I do something with my awareness of this privilege and my critical awareness of it and do something in a way that reverses the privileges that I was born into, that others are not. So that's definitely one of the goals in my life is to be an active force in reversing the privileges and removing discrimination and racism and oppression and suppression and whatnot.

Charlie also discussed his belief system and goals that he held at the time. He described,

I think also one of my key beliefs and goals is in the role that I see myself in becoming an educator. So my decision to be in academia, the beliefs that I carry into being an educator, and then tying those in with what were seen I think is a definite goal as well. And then just a key belief that I had is I think that it's my job, to some extent, to be an advocate and an ally for those who don't have the same privileges that

I was born into. To be, not a voice for them because I strongly believe that they should be able to be their own voice but, instead, to be an advocate and an ally for them.

Most prevalent was the fact that Charlie had come to view a significant gap between the messages he received growing up and the realities of U.S. culture that have been revealed to him as a college student and scholar. Charlie summarized,

So I think what I've come to learn or come to realize is that, as far as my decision to like go into like social justice work, go into researching and working in academia and racism, it's like the notion that we have to reject these messages and these ideas and reeducate and revamp. So I think that just rejecting my entire childhood, the entire way I was raised, has brought me here.

With the rejection of what he has been taught, Charlie framed a new set of values and beliefs that influenced his career goals.

Social justice work. Charlie was selected as a participant based on his active engagement in social justice work. I asked him to describe the social justice that he does. Charlie noted,

So as far as justice issues go, I focus on doing research and work on racism and Whiteness, looking at critical aspects of Whiteness, racism historically, and contemporary. So I plan on becoming a professor, going into academia. A few of my current research interests/projects include looking at the roles politically and ideologically motivated college and university student organizations play in reproducing oppression and racism in highly White spaces, as well as how they serve as “gatekeepers” in these spaces. I’m also grappling with how these groups have a

contemporary hint of hate group activity to them. I'm also grappling with the idea of "passing." The ideas of people of color passing as white and queer people passing as straight. I'm working on finding a connection between these two groups and exploring these ideas in more depth.

I'm looking at racism in the [local] industry. I'm also still looking at and exploring contemporary hate groups (like modern KKK chapters).

Charlie discussed what led him into justice work, taking care to articulate that it has been a journey for him to reach the point where he is now. Charlie explained,

Because I mean, I wouldn't really say that I had made a decision to go into social justice work until last December. And so just kind of the sophomore year, whatever, I kind of shifted gears in my ideology and everything and then the discussions that I have on the weekly or biweekly basis with people back home about issues of race and racism, I think, were very huge.

He further explained that the tipping point came as a result of all that he had experienced, the motivation coming from a realization that the messages he had received from family, through school and by peers to date, seemed unjust. Charlie reflected,

I think that kind of the overshadowing thing is where I came from. So the narratives and the upbringing that I've received from my family and people back home and the education system back home. I think just the complete contradictions and the narratives that were given and kind of what I was seeing in reality is kind of the big picture of what's brought me here.

Now fully engaged, Charlie recognized that working for social justice required consistency and effort. I asked Charlie to consider what doing justice work looks like on a daily basis. He responded,

So for me, I think that, first and foremost, it involves being involved and interacting with the people in the oppressed groups that you're working for social justice for. So I feel a lot of times, we have this notion of being involved in social justice but there's no real interaction between these oppressed groups and those involved in the work. So I think definitely just having interaction, involvement in people's life, hearing their stories and their experiences, I think is very vital and important. And then, obviously, just being engaged in activities for change, so clearly doing organized things, whether it be service activities, which is what we do a lot with some of the organizations I'm in, or as training and teaching activities, just research. I think that organized things are important. But also just small and individual opportunities that present themselves. I think it's really important that we don't overlook those opportunities and that we definitely take advantage of them as they arise. And then this is where the education kind of comes up for me. I think that we have to constantly teach ourselves and educate ourselves on a daily basis on the things that we're working for.

Otherwise, I think that we definitely fall back and fall behind.

Reflecting on his own work, Charlie realized his own development would be a process rather than an outcome. He discussed,

But in terms of the doing something with my critical awareness of the privileges in life that I possess and making attempts to reverse them, I think that that's not--I don't really see that as a goal that will be one day accomplished. I think it's going to be a

lifelong process. So that's something that I'm actively doing now, that I do daily with the work I do, with the conversations that I have with people who possess the same privileges as me, with the conversations that I have with those who don't possess the same privileges as well. But I think that's definitely something that I've been successful in terms of making it a constant process up to now. But like I said, I think that's definitely something that's more of a lifelong type of thing than a goal that can be checked off the list.

As mentioned, critical to Charlie's success and focus has been his work to develop himself over time. Reflecting on how his approach to justice work has changed, Charlie shared,

But also with the people that I've talked to and interacted with. I think also maybe my intentions have changed a little bit to where before, when I viewed things as more individual, I viewed myself as like a champion of being an anti-racist because I wasn't racist. And I think it was more glamorous for me, if that makes sense. And so now I see it more as, "Hey, I'm still a person who holds extremely privileged identities." And I don't feel like I see myself glorified as much as I did in the past, even though I feel like what I'm doing now is bigger picture and making bigger changes than the kind of approaches that I took in the past... I think that I'm more aware of it than I was in the past so, with that awareness, I think, I've made conscious efforts to not put myself in situations that would glorify myself in the ways that they did in the past.

As a person of privilege, Charlie recognized that he, too, gains from being engaged in justice work. Charlie discussed,

You hear a lot of stuff about White guilt and I don't feel that I'm relieving my guilt, if you will.... What I see as what I'm gaining from doing this work is that it's just a

rewarding experience. And that changes definitely need to be made and that having a hand in creating those changes, it's just rewarding. And so, yeah, I think that's one thing that I've gained. I think I've also gained just a greater understanding of people who come from different places than myself, which, I think, is priceless. To have the trust and the understanding of these other people is probably the biggest reward that I see in doing this type of work.

While the path ahead remains somewhat unclear, Charlie demonstrated both a commitment to justice work and awareness of a clear avenue through which he could do the work. Perhaps as importantly, he identified an area of need in which his interests and identity seemed to serve the common good.

Yet critical to being successful, Charlie felt those holding privileged identities needed to actively and collaboratively engage with those holding oppressed identities. Charlie expressed,

So for me, I think it's really important for groups that are trying to reverse these systems of oppression to have people who come from the oppressing group to be involved in the work. Otherwise, I don't think there's a full understanding of what's at play and what's at hand. But then again, I think if it was only white men who are involved or only people who come from privileged identities who are involved, I think that we wouldn't have a clue what to do because we don't know the experience of who[m] we're oppressing. So I guess for me, like in regards to research, I think my place is more to do work that's critical of Whiteness than to do work that talks about experiences of those that are oppressed. So that's what I tend to do. I do think that

looking at the oppressor and the situation, or being critical of Whiteness, while I'm still talking about the experiences of those who are oppressed [is my role].

Charlie embraced the responsibility he felt from his awareness. Putting his sense of responsibility into a productive frame, he translated his understanding into clarity for the role he could play in justice work. Charlie commented,

I think it all goes back to whenever I came to the awareness of the identities that I hold [that] are privileged for the sake of them being what they are, I think it seemed the injustice in that has kind of kicked me into saying, “Yeah, I could be doing other things but my awareness to [*sic*] these things has kind of become my life purpose in bringing awareness of that privilege itself [to others] and reversing it.”

Glenn

At the time of the interviews, Glenn was 19 years old and had just finished his first year of college at a large Eastern university. Pursuing a mathematics major, he supplemented his academic focus with two minors in creative writing and business studies. Complimenting his core academic work were his involvements outside the classroom. Glenn explained,

As far as [a] job, I really just have a work-study position for the money to get through basic school stuff but outside of that, really, I work weekly when I'm in [town]. Right now I am in a different spot because I'm back home for a few weeks. I work once a week with a group in a suburb, the name is escaping me right now. I'll look it up real quick, if that's okay. It's essentially a tutor program for lower income underprivileged kids who are looking specifically to get out of that rut, get out of that cycle per se, and it's not just for kids whose parents are looking to get their grades up. It's for kids who are actually looking to get a step up. So a lot of it is kids who are very bright, very

intelligent, who don't have a lot of opportunities and need help getting scholarship opportunities and getting reviews and edits and figuring out ways of how to get opportunities.

Upbringing and influences. While currently settled and living in a large city in the Eastern United States, Glenn had not always called the East home. I asked him to capture his life growing up, Glenn summarized,

I was born in [a Western city, state]. My dad was a pastor at the time for a small Presbyterian church there that he planted. So he was a pastor for a while; he had been in [the southwestern United States] before then, and [in the East] before that so he moved around a bit. And then when I was in elementary school, maybe first grade, he got a job in [a Southern state] as a pastor in [medium-size Southern city] and so we moved there and so then he was a pastor there for a while and another church and then I've been in [this city] since then until I got to [college]. So he's been doing that up until I graduated from high school when he started his own public speaking consultation business and then got picked up by a bigger firm where he just flies around the country and does seminars and teaches people how to speak in public.

Glenn's mother also worked while he was growing up. Describing her work and his siblings, Glenn shared,

She's done a lot. She was a speech pathologist before I was born. She has a teaching degree so she taught while I was in school, then she taught my siblings and I when I was homeschooled, and now when we went back to school she now works at a logistics company and she sells logistics to other companies...My sister is a year and a half older. She's going into her junior year of college at [large southern state

university] for physical therapy and my brother is going into his sophomore year of high school at the same high school that I went to.

The home environment was also noted as having an impact on how he viewed the world. I asked him to describe the environment in which he was raised and how he contributed to that environment. Glenn commented,

So that was a lot of my childhood—a pretty conservative Christian upbringing for a lot of it. It got progressively less so as I got older. The way my parents describe it is they made a lot of really firm commitments as parents when they first had kids and they kind of loosened as they got older. That's the best way to put it. They were fairly strict when I was younger and that loosen[ed] up when my older sister and my brother grew up...I have a bit of an oppositional personality that I've kind of realized for a long time. When we lived in [Western city, state], my dad was a big [basketball] fan, and you know I was maybe six at the time, and I ended up being a [rival team] fan because he was a [big] fan, and for that express purpose.

However, there were elements of his life that he did not find adamant objection to doing that profoundly shaped his understanding of culture. Beyond the traditional influences of family and schools, Glenn experienced the planning and facilitation of mission trips through his father's pastoral work. These trips offered significant insight to Glenn. Speaking about missionary groups working for the common good, he noted,

These groups can't exist without money and funding and stuff like that. As a kid I was briefed on a lot of missionary group happenings. I went on a couple mission trips. I even went to Romania to do a basketball camp and serve[d] a lot of underprivileged homeless kids for like a week and the only reason I was able to go

was because people donated money to me. So I think, especially for those people who are privileged, even if they aren't actively involved, they have money. They can make things happen. And if they're not involved they have resources, they have time... So I think definitely people of privilege can play an important role just as long as they don't try to make it all about them.

Within the family structure, Glenn recognized that his personality created some tension that he needed to navigate. These dynamics played out as he described working to sort out his academic focus with his career aspirations. Glenn explained,

I am still sticking to the creative writing minor, not a major because I can't do cross school majors. I think it's in the fine arts school. And I'm still sticking with the creative writing minor and to lessen politics. I don't know. I am agreeing with [my parents] that I need to get a job that is on a reasonable and respectable way. But I am doing my best not to actually affect my ability, what I actually believe in, the things that I think are really important, the politics, the philosophies that I think really affect the world. The actual reasons to help people. And I think as long as I keep those intact, that's really the way, with the oppositional way that I come at that. It is much different than how [my parents] approach it as they've got a fairly conservative mindset. So I feel fairly oppositional when I go into conversations with them about future careers. I am muted for simplicity sake and so [my parent's wishes are] still very present in my thought process.

Glenn's family seemed to be pulling him to explore and engage in a traditional career track. However, given his values, interests, and awareness, Glenn found himself unclear as to what his purpose and focus would be long term.

Peer influence. Peer influence was deemed to be influential by participants, and Glenn was no exception. Due to his philosophical ideology, Glenn found himself at odds with his peers in high school, as will be elaborated on in the findings. Moreover, he described the schools, especially his high school and college experiences, as having significant influence on him for very different reasons. Glenn explained,

[My high school] was a combination of the [instructors, peers, and the curriculum] really. I mean it was the whole atmosphere. I don't know if I can really explain it. I don't know if you have ever really been in a place where it is all really connected against you. Well it's really not that bad. It felt better for the last few semesters. Maybe that's because it was coming to an end...And it was one of those things where I saw a lot of ignorance, decadence, apathy, and then I realized maybe even incorrectly, I associated [those elements] with the philosophy and curriculum, with everything there. I don't think it was entirely incorrect, but I associated with them a lot of the philosophies that were present at that school and moved away from them and explored the other options.

Disconnect with high school peers fostered significantly into Glenn's displeasure in school. The strained relationships both influenced his experience and led him to select a more purposeful environment in college.

Defined identities. In the screening interview, Glenn identified as White, male, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. I asked him to reflect on which of these identities seemed most salient to him. Glenn noted,

At [college], it's definitely the maleness, the White maleness. I even got in trouble at a party once. One of my best friends in the whole world--she was just not paying

attention and she's going to the bathroom and I got yelled at for being a misogynist because I jumped in front of her when she wasn't paying attention. And I said, "This doesn't have anything to do with being a misogynist. This is because she wasn't paying attention." If she was a man I would've done the same thing. So at [school] it's very easy to step into that line. In my work with the left movements, the socioeconomic status is very present especially because it's something I don't usually even think about, even among my friends at [college]. I am one of the less wealthy people there. So when [I am] involved with the leftists, the socioeconomic divide is much more salient. I even have a friend who is having to drop out of [school] after this year and he has to look at another school because of the cost and there are other people involved in the movement who aren't at the school.... It's a lot different because then you're working with kids on the same educational level as you who are intelligent people but who are at a completely different socioeconomic level than you. And then when I am working with the tutoring center it's different. The educational level doesn't always feel like it's there because, I think I shared, a lot of the kids are very bright and sometimes there are some that really need a lot of help. And then I can definitely tell there's an educational gap there. And then I have trouble getting to some of the educational concepts. The socioeconomic status is definitely there with a lot of them, too, in terms of when one of them comes to me there with personal problems that I just don't really know how to handle because I grew up in a private, White, middle-class, suburban school. She's talking to me about--I'm trying to help her with her Shakespeare homework and she says, "I just don't read the books because then I get made fun of for not reading well. And so I figure why read the

books and get made fun of for not reading the books. So I might as well not learn to read them at all.” Well, I don't have the emotional capacity to deal with this. So I say, “Let's try to learn it in the first place.” So it's both an educational level and also a socioeconomic level. I suppose there's also even a racial divide there, too, with kind of a little bit of everything at the tutoring center because it is distinctly different. Reflecting specifically on whether he thought being an ally, engaged in social justice work, contributed to or detracted from his identity, Glenn responded,

I try to minimize the idea of making it part of my identity. I feel if you are making being an ally part of your identity or a predominant part of your identity then it might be important for you to evaluate why you are doing it. Is it something that you are doing so that other people can see that you are an ally or is it something that you're doing because you legitimately want to help some people? Because that's what I've noticed about people who are very outspoken. It's like, “I am an ally. Look at me. Look at all the gay people that I help. They're just kind of there for the praise. One of my good friends, she's gay, and she says, “It seems like a lot of allies want a medal for being an ally but they're not doing anything. They're just being decent human beings.” And that's not to say that being seen as an ally is a bad thing. But I try not to make it a big part of my identity because I don't want doing social justice work to be something that I do for praise because then I think the whole point of it gets distorted.

Values and beliefs. Glenn's values were significantly influenced by his family structure and upbringing. I asked him to reflect on and describe his long term goals and aspirations. Glenn shared,

So I know I mentioned last time that I don't really have a huge tangible interest in getting a lot of money. That's not one of my big goals and it just hadn't ever been quantified in that way and so I think a lot of my beliefs have revolved kind of around that I am not interested in a tangible worldly pursuit. I am much more interested on a personal level and, oh, what's the word I'm looking for? Betterment I think is a better word that I'm looking for and the pursuit of knowledge. So on a larger scale I'm more interested in absolute equality. This sounds perhaps a bit fragmented and that's part of it. I don't believe anything should be absolutely figured out. [In] fact, I think when something is figured out then there's probably a problem and that's not to say this is a philosophy, whether political economics that works all of the time or it's about life and as far as life goals, I am working through that.

Glenn expressed an understanding that congruence should exist between what a person says is valued and the actions taken to demonstrate those values. I asked Glenn to reflect on a time when he felt most successful acting consistently with what he said he valued. Glenn recounted,

There was a time when I was working in the food pantry. It was just a couple of days. I cannot remember why and I don't think there was even a reason why and I think that was the biggest part of it. I remember there was a call for participants and they were like, "Hey, there's a big storm coming" and they were like, "Can we get some extra volunteers before the storm hits?" My friend and I were like, "Okay, hey, we will go there and work for a couple days because they need extra volunteers." So we went out there and it started snowing. We were in [the city] and it started snowing pretty hard and I don't think they expected us even to show up but we just came. We started

working for like eight hours that day and I think that was a time that I felt like the greatest stewards. I want to live with the ideal that if I have the time and the ability to serve--time and effort to give to someone--that I give it to them without thinking about it because they need it more than I do. Because I'm doing well. I don't need, I have food and I have shelter, I've got money, I have leisure time. But if someone needs your help, then you'll help them. Getting that email from my friend saying "Let's go do this" and then going and doing it no matter what. We got lost on the way out three times because it's this little hole in the wall to get there. And I think that's the biggest point. I'm making it sound like the biggest trek to get there, but it wasn't really that big a deal, dangerous or anything. But I think that was a point where I realized this is probably what I should be doing. This is probably what I should be trying to do. Actually taking time to help people. There's not a reward for going there, but people need help.

Social justice work. Participants were identified based on their engagement in social justice work. Glenn articulated that his involvements were guided by a combination of his beliefs and interests while he worked to figure out his clear direction. What became apparent was that his involvement in social justice work allowed him to evaluate where he could best focus his efforts. When I asked him to describe what social justice work he was currently involved in, Glenn responded,

I remember hearing about this study because [I received] an email calling for people to participate and asking for all stuff that I fit into such as White, male, heteronormative, religious as well, middle class, and social justice activist. So that's why I got the email about it. So the work that I do, and I guess we've talked about this

for a couple of weeks now, primarily tutoring kids [in town] in math and English for several hours a week. Kids that [*sic*] are trying to pull themselves up and get out of their current economic cycle, get to college, get to a higher socioeconomic class. And also then some work with Occupy, far left groups, mostly in large protests in kind of a tangential role.

Glenn focused commitments and engagement in ways that ultimately made him feel useful as he worked to define where he was most called to engage. Regardless of setting, Glenn noted that being aware of his privileged social status served as an internal driver to engage in change work.

Though well meaning, Glenn was also cognizant that some actions do not bring about social change. I asked him to define social justice and discuss what he did on a daily basis to bring about such change. Glenn stated,

Any actions that are working to bring about a positive change in the world. And that's even hard because the positive change is difficult to decide on. Different people have different opinions on what exactly is positive. So with Occupy, for instance, there are a lot of people who say that's positive and there are a lot of people who say it's negative. So really I guess maybe people who fundamentally alter the way things work rather than just putting a patch on it. To change the source of the problem rather than to give it a cover up in a way that will be beneficial and in which it's hard to figure out and be successful and beneficial in which the party believes themselves to be beneficial to all parties involved.

Both inherently and pragmatically, Glenn realized that there was something in the work for him as well. I asked Glenn to consider what benefits he received through doing justice work. Reflecting, Glenn asserted,

Personally, I actually enjoy it. I enjoy the work. I actually do. I like doing it. I really don't know what else to say. I mean that's really the big benefit. If I was miserable doing it, [the work] would be harder to do. But there are opportunities for everyone to work in something that they at least enjoy doing. You know, I worked at the food bank putting food into a plastic bag, but it was really fun because I worked with a friend, and I worked [with] this other guy Earl, and we listened to Sly and the Family Stone radio on Pandora and danced around a little for eight hours. And it was enjoyable because we were guys goofing around for a while. I think there's a way to find satisfaction in everything that you're doing. I kind of inherently find it in the tutoring center through the tutoring.

Reflecting on what drew him to engage in justice work, Glenn discussed the idea of feeling a civic duty. He remarked,

At this point I feel like it's the correct thing to do if that makes sense. I don't know if it's the right thing to do is almost a moralistic way of putting it. But I feel like it's along the lines of the definition that I gave for social justice work. I feel that I can help better society and I can help people to help themselves and I can eventually bring about change in society for everyone's good. And I have free time, I have the ability, so I feel almost a civic duty at that point. It's a very strong urge to do so.

What Glenn learned is that bringing about social change is an extremely complex issue. I asked him to discuss how his approach to justice work had changed over time. Glenn admitted,

I really started out in the Occupy stuff, or at least when I got to college. So I think it was probably more aggressive. Let me think. What's the word? Reactionary. I don't know. It's gone from a position of completely overhaul the system, which is admittedly likely a naïve position to hold and it's at least an extremely difficult thing to accomplish, essentially when Occupy has such a small backing behind it. Now to much more of a position of you take kids from within the system and you get them through it in a way that will benefit them. I could try and put this into--it would be going from trying to take down the entire system and realizing that that's not gonna work in any length of time that makes sense, to work around the system or get kids or give kids extra work to get them through the system that's just not working for them. And so give them extra help so that they can get through, if that makes sense.

And admittedly, Glenn found he had much to learn to be an effective agent of social change. I questioned him about whether he thought he was idealistic in his approach. Glenn admitted,

Yeah, absolutely. I think I was definitely idealistic for about a month during September, until September 17th. I kind of thought all this is happening so fast and then I came to realize that I've never been this idealistic in my entire life. I don't know what happened. Especially as I got into a campaign group, I realized there are 12 people behind us and there's no way this is going to happen. Then I started gravitating even more towards a solution or not a solution but work that would allow me to work

change directly with people within the system it wouldn't have aided. Yes it's definitely become less idealistic.

While the issues he sought to address remain yet unresolved, Glenn had successfully learned a great deal about where he might contribute. Being young, Glenn continued to search for the way he could best contribute to social change. I asked him to share in what ways he felt he had been successful. Glen concluded,

I think I am moving forward substantially in what I've been searching for as far as my personal goals, you know, or career goals I guess that would be. I have been working during the summer program with writing. I have been in touch with banking groups about internships and as far as assuring my beliefs I've been working with the tutoring center. I was there three days ago. I think that has really been one of the biggest places where I've felt most successful where I've felt genuinely helpful. You know those instances where you give somebody a meal and they come back hungry? In this case I feel someone is actually moving forward and I feel like I can actually see these kids making progress and moving on to a better stage in life. That's where I feel like I've had a fair amount of success.

Graham

At the time of the interviews, Graham was 23 years old and had just completed his undergraduate degree at a medium-sized university in the Southeast. While in college, he majored in religious studies, with minors in political science and [social justice]. Graham explained, “And so I, basically, studied how religious political views influence social movements.” Upon graduation, he obtained a job in his home town coordinating service opportunities at the local university. Graham explained,

And with that role, my job is, basically being from the community, is to help understand and meet community needs by intersecting the community needs with students' times, abilities, and passions through direct service but also through some small level of activism, depending on the issue. I didn't want whatever I did to just be a job; I wanted it to be more towards a calling and work location, even if that wasn't necessarily what I'll do for my long term. I wanted it to be towards something that was congruent in my values and everything else.

Graham found university and service work to be consistent with who he was and how he aspired to approach leadership within social justice work.

Upbringing and influences. Born in the South, Graham led what he described as a privileged life. He shared,

So I've grown up in a very, very privileged household. I grew up in a two-parent home. My dad is a professor and now an administrator at [local college], the university I work at now. And my mother has always been in the education system as either a substitute teacher or, she's recently, for the last 10 years, she was the administrative assistant for an elementary school. And so both my parents are involved, highly educated, in the community.

While educated, Graham felt that both his parents led by example through their dedication to the task at hand and concern for those around them. Graham noted,

My family, my father in particular, worked incredibly, incredibly hard... So I adhered to the three rules but what I saw the most is the hard work aspect. And it wasn't necessarily, well, this is what it takes to be successful. It's more of like this is what you do. You're always working or you're always helping, you're always serving or

something of that nature. In regards to what is opportunity and what is success, I sort of followed my sister's footsteps while, at the same time, being the rebellious, younger brother that was part of my own path. But [my sister] was always very successful and bright and loved learning and loved reading and so when I just started school, I sort of saw that and modeled that but then, as I went through, it became this unique internal, "I'm going to form my own identity." And so part of that also turned into a brotherly/sisterly kind of, in essence, "I'm going to do better than my sister did. Or I'm going to make sure I'm going to be the writer and she can be the mathematician or something." But yes, so I think that the message was, again, never towards necessarily material status or money or things, achieving that way. But the message of what is success or what is opportunity, it was very involved around this: "Don't waste your time or your opportunity, like always be working, always be doing something."

Each of his family members contributed significantly to shaping the manner in which he chose to approach life. Graham summarized,

Well, my dad taught me to question and my mom taught me to be present. My sister's always taught me to sort of look toward those issues and look at your community and what's affecting them and how can you be involved and influence that and shape that. So that's the ways I think my family has shaped me the most and kept me on my toes, helping me to grow.

The pivotal moment in Graham's life emerged when his dreams from youth intersected with the realities that life often presents. Graham recounted,

A big part of my story I haven't gone to is, when I was in first grade, I won a go-cart rally, which is a raffle for kids who made As and I'd won a \$1,000 scholarship. And when they interviewed me as a first grader, they asked me what do I want to be and I said I want to be the center fielder for the Atlanta Braves. And for the longest period of time, baseball very much was this huge part of me, athletics especially... Junior year of high school, I had developed such a strenuous workout plan that I developed an eating disorder for a male which is rare... I had my dream sort of die because my coaches didn't really think we were going to do anything. And then I had this other segment of me, I had friends and family and people at church who were also pushing me more towards looking at bigger, broader issues. What did I want to do outside of baseball in my life?... And so when I was 17 years old, after I finished my junior season of baseball, I quit baseball. And as a person that [*sic*] was one of your identifiers your whole life, to have that, just make that decision, and to step outside of myself and look beyond the sports, was a huge moment.

Peer influences. Complementing his close family structure, Graham also felt he was significantly influenced by his peers. Together from early on in life, his closest peers were also the ones who were with him during the pivotal time in his life when his dream to play professional baseball ended. Graham continued,

If I had not had the experience of having a dream pass away in regards to baseball and the eating disorder and everything else, I would not be who I was and who I am today because I think, for me, what that seriously allowed me to do was to step back and look at the narratives I had been ingesting and to critically analyze and recognize

within my own self that I was enough and I was worthy of love and everything else outside of my identity with that, without my identity with baseball.

Providing support, Graham's high school peers were present to foster a deeper focus on social justice action through his church youth group experience.

Similarly, his college peers emerged to play a significant role in shaping what Graham came to value and pursue. He explained,

I think in college one of the things that also changed for me or modeled success was I learned quickly that my model, what I'd been told as what was success as a man, was very harmful and patriarchal and oppressive. And particularly by being friends with people who were of the LGBTQ community and also who were just really strong feminists in thought, [I realized] I don't need to grow up and be the main income or I don't need to have the main job in the family and I don't have to necessarily go out and get married...I think going and being around so many female friends, who were social justice minded in a lot of different ways, had me quickly check that the idea of manhood that I was being fed by my friends, by a few around me at [the university], was wrong and false and that being a strong man means you could cry and you could be vulnerable and you didn't have to be macho.

In college, Graham found himself involved with advocacy for a climate of inclusion that equitably served Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer students. Reflecting on his active engagement, Graham reminisced,

So because I had friends who were out and who were gay on campus and who were experiencing various forms of prejudice and oppression every day, I couldn't just sit back on my privilege and rest because I saw their pain every day or they challenged

me every day.... I'm really proud of in the sense they always felt they could challenge me or call me out on my stuff if need be. And so I think it's sort of this beautiful thing in regards to, when walking in a crowd, you're always bending forward because you have people all around you who are continuously helping support you.... And I think in college, I was real lucky that the crowd I was walking with was a crowd of experiencing and advocating for a diverse amount [*sic*] of issues who kept pushing me forward and walking towards supporting them as an ally in the work.

In effect, his peers modeled the essence of humanity, thereby helping Graham on a path to becoming authentically human. At the same time, his peers also transmitted an understanding that they were flawed and that their flaws did not diminish the value they, and he for that matter, provided to those around them.

Returning to work in the same community in which he was raised and achieved early recognition, Graham found he was cognizant that being well regarded had advantages about which he needed to keep himself honest. He reflected,

And what I've recognized for myself is, in the area of both congruence and incongruence I battle every day, is how much do I abuse that? Because I can walk into a room with secretaries and older women and I can have them laughing in like three minutes. I know it sounds bad but I know how to play the game and it's really sort of a messed up thing that it is a game. And it's even more messed up that I know how to play it. But I think, for me, I have to recognize sometimes, too, is like I know how to get in the door, or I know how to get to the table, or perhaps I'm just more confident going into the room because I know they're not going to discriminate against me or not say as much because I'm a White male who dresses up. But at the

same time, the better question is “But am I, at the same time, am I lifting up the voices of my female colleagues? Am I helping get other people into the door who are quieter but have been here longer and know more than me? Do I have humility to also recognize and say, ‘You know what? I don't know.’” I think for me, that's also a continuous struggle because where do I draw the line between, yes, I know I can get into the table but does that mean necessarily that I should take a seat?

Complementing those influences, Graham found that the schools also played heavily into shaping his approach to life. For it was in high school and particularly in college, that his teachers emerged to reinforce the messages from church and peer influences. Graham highlighted,

Through sophomore year of high school, it was still very much pound things into your mind, like pound fundamentals. But junior year was sort of when you got into the theoretical reading and debating them and the questioning and things of that nature. And I think what happened was just the teachers made it such a comfortable, critical thinking environment that I gravitated towards that because I'd been longing for it over time. But then, once I sort of had been briefly exposed, again, through the leadership class and other things, like the issues going on with the school board and county commissioner and everything else, I just sort of caught fire. And they were the people who I would ask critical questions and come up with things and want to go do something about it. Again, I just had this early on, ever since I was a kid, like there's just a conviction of you can't just sit here and hear these things and know these things and not do something. You can't act like you're not seen and not heard. And I think

that that was just sort of when the critical thoughts analysis started, since junior year of high school.

His family structure, peer influence, and educational experience led him to pursue a similar and more intense collegiate learning environment. What he found was a transformative community that blended in class learning with out-of-class experiences. Graham commented,

[The university] definitely helped me in a lot of ways. But yeah, again, I chose [the university] for that reason. It was the active. And that's what drew me there. And then, I think for the most part, while definitely not perfect and there are some really horrible, boring— not horrible but just boring—not really helpful classes in there, I mean there's some but there were the classes where certain professors definitely helped influence and just shape me further... The reason I was in religious studies is partially because I had a department and professors in Christian ethics and they were doing work outside of their scholarship, which is actively engaging in the community. They were the people who would...show up to these meetings that are talking about issues of inequality in the community or at [the university]. That's what I think really convicted [*sic*] me and nurtured me because what it allowed me to do was it forced me to go beyond a surface level understanding of certain issues, which then heightens what I wanted to do. But the other, bigger aspect was it forced me to start to embody some of the things I was learning, some of the, you know, learning--really looking at what does intersectionality actually mean, what does it actually mean to question and look at the bigger structure and the capitalist structure and analyzing capitalism from a standpoint of seeing it as extractive and abusive.

To ease the transition from high school to college, Graham also benefited from a scholarship program that allowed him to attend college and encouraged him to continue his leadership development. The experience effectively facilitated a process that tied his high school, college, and new work experiences together. Graham explained,

They will pay up to \$30,000 a year in any type of collegiate expense, any tuition, room, board, study abroad, whatever it may be. And then, in return, after that, you, basically, sort of commit yourself to coming back and living in the region and investing and working there at minimum for one year for every year of your scholarship... And so as a college student, coming home at Christmas break, most people would come home and just sleep. But I would come home and then go to a two-and-a-half to a three-day training and I'd sit in a room filled with other young leaders interested in investing in [the region] and who would hear speakers and other people doing work, fascinating work, throughout [the region] and the world. It's just sort of a big inspirational thing which [*sic*] helped accumulate into me recognizing and really wanting to invest in the work that I do now.

Defined identities. Graham identified for purposes of the study as White, male, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. When asked to describe which identities seemed most salient for him, Graham reported,

I think for me, the personal identities that come to mind, the biggest one for me, I think, right now it's to get the time and the place of where I am in that in my [regional] identity, being from the region, is sort of claiming it. Just because I can commute on a daily basis, I'm reminded of two things, of well, really three things.

First off, (a) this is home. This isn't like a pit stop. This isn't me doing an analysis of

some outside place or it isn't anything like this, this is my home. (b) There are very, very serious gifts of the community that I'm going to recognize but there are also very serious needs not being met.... I think the second [identity] and, again, is sort of the nature of where I am because we are a very homogeneous community, racially; the second identity that I recognize now that I uphold is that as a male, in regards to females are still very much get in the kitchen sort of mentality. Yeah, as much as it drives me insane, like there are young girls within the community as well as at the university who are there to find their husband. That's their goal. And there are times when I'm in meetings and the guys that have absolutely nothing to say because they didn't read or didn't come up with anything or they haven't been doing any of the work but then the girls will still look to them to speak. I think it's just very prevalent in regards to just gender roles that you will still fit into and go towards here.... There's [sic] just a lot of things I'm recognizing every day as a challenge. And I think the last identity which, for me, that I recognize but it's also harder to, I'm not going to say more of a challenge. As a heterosexual male, I'm continuously reminded of how not hostile, per se, it's almost worse than hostile.

Additionally, Graham also found his class status to be salient given the circumstances under which he was living and working at the time of the interviews. He continued,

I think the obvious one for me too is economic because, while I don't necessarily make a lot as an individual, I have the privilege of also having a supportive family. I'm living in an apartment in the bottom of my parents' home right now. And the fire's going on and I can do my budget at the end of the year. And I think, I don't really need a lot of things. And I sort of listed like I have a job and I have warmth and I

have clothes and I have all these sorts of things. And I think, for me, one of the places I don't put necessarily as congruent is that, as a young professional, money's a tricky thing. Because idealist-wise and everything else, I would be living extremely simply and I would be giving away a lot of a portion of my money and everything else but then, at the end of the day, it's interesting when you start adding up your bills, and your health expenses and everything else.... Sometimes, I feel like I'm separating myself from other members of my community.

Recognizing his privilege, and drawing from his principled background, Graham felt a strong duty to educate and advocate for greater critical thinking that allows a more just world to emerge.

As identity and ally work overlapped, Graham came to see the two as interdependent. Asked to consider how his justice work might add to or detract from his identity, Graham asserted,

For me, it's an integral part into really all three of the goals we started talking about in regards to interdependence, a sense of presence and home, and then also the needs of the community. Because for me, the one part I keep going back to is--I don't know if I said this, but someone once said, "The hardest part is not seeing and hearing. The hardest part is having to do something about what you've seen and what you've heard." And for me, that really strikes me because, as an ally it should be tied into one of my goals because for me, I can't go back. I can't go back and act like I've not heard the stories. I can't go back and ignore the fact that I can see prejudice on a daily basis enacted towards my African American students or towards my female friends or my LGBTQ friends. I can't go back and not know or not see the exploitive nature of

certain economic systems I contribute to. For me, it's one of those, in order to be true to the passions and the joys in my life, and in order to honor the home and the place and the people that nurture me, and in order to honor my internal recognition of interdependence, I have to like be an ally. It's something I have to do. For me, it's like I can't sit still.

Values and beliefs. The combination of his family and the environment in which he had grown up profoundly shaped who he had become. When asked to reflect on his values and goals, Graham shared,

I think the general guidelines that I try to live my life by are a certain sort of principles that are found in quotes. And one of the quotes is by Buechner and it was “Your deepest calling in life is the intersection between your greatest passion and the world's greatest need or the world's greatest hunger.” And I think, for me, that if somebody would say, “What's the pull towards the baseline of your life and your goals?” It's sort of living truest to that statement.... And I'm also a big believer in-- one of the values that guides my life is the importance of presence. But also the idea of home and what that means, in the sense of making sure that when you're in a place, you are working with and among the people there. I don't fully always believe it but I just grew up with the phrase, “The right people at the right time, doing the right sort of thing.” While I don't think it's universal by any means, I really do believe whoever's in this room or whoever's in this place at this time are the people who are supposed to be here.... For me, as long as I am living true to those two things in regards to I'm doing something that makes me come alive and meets the need, and then I'm also being very constantly present to the idea of where I am and what has

come along at that time, I think those are things I try to live my life by. Another big value for me that I've realized over the years is that I operate under a fierce belief of interdependence. I fiercely and deeply believe it. And the more I get into activist work, these types of communities, and also reading on it from some scholarly perspective, I really believe the interdependence at its height, that's when we're doing activist work the best, when we're recognizing that, and we're helping other people recognize that we're working across issues and across identities.

Social justice work. Graham was identified to participate based on his engagement in justice work, which I confirmed through the screening interviews. In addition to his current job promoting service initiatives, Graham served in roles that promoted justice initiatives.

Graham discussed his involvement:

And then I'm also currently serving on the board of directors for a nonprofit in [the East] called [activist organization], which works to revitalize activists who are experiencing burnout on an individual level on the organizational level. And I'm also currently on the steering committee, which is a different work for the board, of a group. And the purpose of that group is to form a space for central [regional] youth, led by central [region] youth to allow youth to connect to each other, to see the activists' work they're already doing in the communities, and to allow them to have a voice at the table in terms of activist groups and justice work going on in [the region]. And that's sort of the mix of the organizations that are helping to bring some of the services, youth voices, and also encouraging people to stay in their [local] homes, specifically, [in the region]. So that is a little bit of what I am doing in life and some of the activist work I've done.

Graham possessed an awareness that being part of justice work was a process that required regular, if not daily, action. Asked to reflect on what he believes those working for justice do on a daily basis, Graham shared,

I think the first thing that comes to mind for me is that the first thing you have to do on a daily basis is you have to set aside and devote yourself to disciplines to do the internal work first. Before you go out, whether it be--I've known activists who have a meditation practice, some people would do something maybe spiritual practice, some people may just go and have a reflective time. But I think for me, on a daily basis, the first thing I think activists have to do is sort of check your own internal thermostat and see where you're at. What are you struggling with? What are your intentions or goals going throughout the day? Just sort of having a good grounded self-awareness, both the good and what's going really well and what your strengths are but then also what are you struggling with. Because I feel like, as an activist, one of the biggest things is that for me, at least, activist work is grounded in both the humility but also in openness in regards to you're aware of what you're carrying with you, both the baggage and the blessings. You're aware of that. But I think in order to sometimes be aware of that, especially in nonprofit or activist, or any type of work you do, and especially busy schedules, we don't always set aside time to do that.

Graham also felt daily justice work encompassed community engagement. He continued,

I think the other thing is that with activists, on a daily basis, is you're always engaging with your perspective community. So now that doesn't necessarily have to be in person community. It can be if you're doing some sort of interstate work or globalized work. It's connecting with the community that you serve and that you're a part of. It's

sort of doing check-ins with that and to--not only to see how their own personal needs are but then also to sort of catch up on what communal needs are being met and not being met.... And then I think for me also then it's also at the end of the day, again, coming full circle is ending your day and making sure you're creating space to also do the necessary self-care work to where you can be reinvigorated. And whether that self-care is coming through reading and connecting to your community and doing a community meal or talking and spending time with your family or doing something else. But it's sort of allowing yourself space at the end of the day once you have done the internal work, checked in with your community, done that action to reflect on what's gone on and then also to reflect on where you're wanting to go. But again, doing that internal thermostat work to a certain degree to allow yourself to be able to get to the next stages again. And that's an idealized version, obviously.

Over time, Graham found he adjusted his approach to become more effective with the work in which he was engaged. I asked him to describe how his work had changed over time. Graham responded,

One is the sort of, the scale of work which [*sic*] I try to do. I don't want to say it's naivety. I'm still an idealist and I believe in it. But large, systematic change on a national or local or whatever level to coming and being grounded into what systematic changes I can do in a small town...I think for me, the scale of impact, partially because I think I got rid of my ego a little bit.... What I realized, I think, was I can't change all these laws and these systems but I can start with something small within my own little community. And then I think the other thing that I've struggled

with within and I still struggle within activist work is, does change come better from within the system or outside of the system?

Graham was careful not to regard justice work from a glorified perspective, as he realized that the true work was often anything but life changing. He explained,

What I've realized is that sometimes the core ally work, where I knew I did something really well, is when I've done something and either no one necessarily knows about it or something very, very quiet.... I'm not going to get an award for it, I'm not going to do something else but it was something. It was presence and it was work that no one else wanted to do.... It's not self-glorifying. But it does mean that you're recognizing your interdependence with others and you're a part of the group.

Recognizing that as a person of privilege he could decide to engage or not engage, I asked Graham to reflect on what would keep him engaged in social justice work. Graham stated,

I think, in the long run, at least to a certain degree, at least I would always hope is that I always make sure that I surround myself with the community that holds me accountable, but then is also actively engaged in the work as well. What will ultimately keep me in it is the fact that I don't plan to be the lone ranger of justice work. I keep people who are in the midst of struggle and doing this type of work but also will hold me accountable to where if I worsen by sitting too much on my privilege or ignoring the work or the needs around me that they would call me out on that and hold me accountable.

Much as he saw the need for work to be done in community rather than in isolation, Graham also asserted that he leaned heavily on the activist community for accountability.

All things considered, Graham maintained a vision that his values, interests, and abilities would provide clarity that even the seemingly most mundane tasks would contribute to a purpose-driven life focus. He noted,

And I think for my deepest passions and my deepest gifts and the world's deepest needs, through that, while they're not fully being used every day because a lot of times I'm doing stuff that's like making copies or sitting in meetings or going to listen to a community partner talk about her poor dogs, it doesn't necessarily seem like this is me coming alive. I'm not necessarily reading or writing or speaking or feeling like a hundred bucks. I still believe in the process and I believe in the value of small steps and I believe in the value of sitting with people every day through things. And I think that my job allows me to do that. So those instances, I can feel I'm slowly, I guess, inching towards my goals to inching towards a better congruence, where I want to be.

Through his work for the common good, Graham realized as well that the experiences ultimately benefitted his own development. I asked him to consider what he gained from doing justice work. Graham revealed,

I think the bigger thing for me is, at the end of the day, these people are also my friends or they're my colleagues or they're my church members or they're just the person down the street. But it's important for me, especially as a White, privileged person to know that they know that I'm there. But at the same time, I'm not just there being a savior, white savior complex, like I could save you, I could fix everything. But just knowing that I see and fully validate and recognize who they are as people and, even though I can't fix everything, I can do something. And even though we may

not figure out all this shit together in one night, we're going to sift through each other's stuff and struggle with that.

Lincoln

At the time of the interviews, Lincoln was 24 years old and working as a substitute teacher and a tutor at a local center. Previously, he had graduated from a large Southwestern state university and completed a teaching credential. Lincoln explained,

I majored in history, minored in political science. That was back in 2011. Or December 2010. And I then attended [a regional Western state university] for my teaching credential. And so I have my single subject teaching credential, and I'm authorized for social science and English currently.... For work right now, I work as a tutor at the [local teen center]. So it's not really the [national organization] but it's an affiliate. With them I am a group tutor there and I do individual tutoring on the side with some students that I was contacted [by] through a friend. And then I am also a substitute teacher. I'm just kind of starting that up, so I've had one day of that so far and I have more planned for the future. Career goals--by next year, I want to be working at a school as a teacher and the kind of school that I want [to] work at would be a school that has a high need and there are not a lot of people that I think are capable [of] or who are interested in providing a high-quality education at that [type of] school.

Upbringing and influences. Lincoln was born in the Southwestern United States but moved around several times due to his father's educational requirements and desire to own his own practice. Lincoln shared,

My family, I have a dad who is an ophthalmologist, an eye doctor. My mom, for most of my childhood, was a stay-at-home mom. She took care of us. I have two younger sisters; they're both spaced out two years from me, so my younger sister is two years younger than me and then my next sister is four years younger than me. So I was born in [a southwestern United States city] and I stayed there until I was about probably first grade, I think, and then from about first grade to third grade we moved to [southern state]. That was where my dad did his residency. It was in [southern city], and then we moved to [a large city, state, in the South], for I think that was his fellowship. That was only for one year. And then my dad started looking for businesses that he could take over and to have his own practice.... By that time--that was through 7th grade and then 8th--we move[d] to [another western city and state],... and that's where I stayed for five years through high school. That's where my dad eventually did succeed in taking over a business of his own, which he now owns and he is still working there. When I was a senior, or a junior, my mom stopped staying at home because all of us were pretty old by that point and we could pretty much take care of ourselves. She started working at my dad's business. She does the billing and accounting for the business.

With life growing up dictated by his father's education and professional pursuits, Lincoln found the impact of that dynamic to be quite significant in his life. Lincoln discussed this time period:

The decision that my dad [made] rather late in his life, late 20s, to become a doctor, that had a really big impact. You know he had me when he was still in medical school, so that's pretty--if I think about my own life in terms of that--that's a really

huge thing to do actually. So that definitely had an impact. For a while that meant that we were really poor and had to move around a lot and I think that had a huge impact on the way my life has progressed. But also later in my life that's meant now that he has a relatively high paying job. That means that I have been afforded opportunities that would not have otherwise come about.

The decision also meant that they would move around and that impacted the degree to which Lincoln was able to establish friendships. With the prospects of moving at any time, he found himself living in a constant state of uncertainty. Lincoln revealed,

You just never know. Should I even bother making friends? Are we just going to be gone again? Yeah, it was not good. But eventually we found somewhere where things worked out and you kind of get over that. But it took a while. Because every time, and it's not like they intentionally did it. They thought it was going to work in all of these places and it just happened that it didn't.

Upon graduating from college, he was offered an opportunity to participate in the Peace Corps, though the duration was brief. Lincoln shared,

Right after college, I joined the Peace Corps before I graduated and it took them so long to send me there that I had met my future wife already. And so I tried to go. I went on to Africa, and I really loved it and I was there for about 3 1/2 months. And then it was just really too hard for [my now wife]. So I made the choice to come back. She didn't really ask me to come back or anything but I just decided that was what I prioritized and when I came back it was really hard to find a job and I didn't have a job for a long time. So my family supported us. Well for a while we lived in a car while I was trying to find a job. That didn't really work out that well, as you can

probably imagine. It was quite an adventure for a while and I didn't mind it but then it started getting cold and it wasn't so fun anymore. And then we moved into a terrible little apartment and I got a job at [a department store]. And that was fine for a while but then the holidays were over and I lost that job. So I went back to school and the only way that I could've afforded that was because my parents ... gave us a loan. And [my wife] was working at the time because she had had connections in [the city] for a long time.

Peer influence. Because they were moving around so much early in his life, Lincoln reported not having many friends prior to high school. Issues of opportunity and success were not discussed among his high school friends, though Lincoln did believe assumptions existed about how each would proceed from high school. Lincoln commented,

I don't think we really ever talked about opportunity. I don't think we ever put it in those terms. It's me really looking at it myself that I see that that obviously afforded me opportunities that they didn't have. But I mean there was not a kind of tension in a bad way but we knew that I was gonna go to college and that they weren't, at least right away. And we didn't talk about how that would influence our success but I think it was kind of known I guess.

While still close to his high school friends, Lincoln did not feel they had much influence on his desire to engage in justice work. As for his college friends, while none of them pursued social justice work, Lincoln deemed the interaction and impact that they had on him to be significant. He explained,

Yeah, so then I went to college and that was a very different subset of people because all those people took AP classes and honors classes and everything like that. And then

they were able to scrounge up or valued college enough that they were willing to take on debt to attend the university. So I think that there is some selection process there.... Honestly I think I'm probably better friends with my high school friends than [*sic*] my college friends but they also definitely had an impact on me. I don't know if they had much of an influence on whether I decided to engage in justice work or not. That's not, I don't think any of them are.

Lincoln noted little recollection of his primary school experience, other than moving around the country. Reflecting on high school, he felt that experience offered little in the way of influence on his decision to engage in justice work. Lincoln shared,

I think that when I got to college I realized how poorly my school had prepared me for college. I mean, I got there but it wasn't because I was the smartest cookie in the book. I mean I got to college and I did get into all the [state universities]. I'm proud of that and I definitely think hard work played a factor in that but other factors had to do with that as well. My school didn't offer many AP classes but I took, that is advanced placement, but I took all of them. So I was able to write on my admissions thing, "Well, I took all AP classes that were offered at my school." I think that probably helped me and the fact that I'm from a region that's not very economically wealthy, or whatever. Those things count for admissions officers.

I asked Lincoln what drew him to work for social change when he might be doing otherwise.

Lincoln responded,

I think, what allows me to do that is my education. I understand I could fit into a lot of different parts of society 'cause I have my choice of where to go. That's true. I don't feel forced into this. But what allows me? I have the education to get where I

want to go and I've decided this is where I want to go, if that makes sense. I guess that allows me and I don't have a lot of student debt that I feel like I need to pay off. I don't have any student debt because my parents were able to pay for me.... So my ability to do this kind of work is partly because I'm fortunate enough to not have to pay back huge loans, when it comes down to it. So that's why I'm able to. I also have a really supportive family and they are totally cool with me being a teacher and not being paid well. So is my wife. I found someone who is very supportive of my decisions to do this because she gets it, too. She understands why. And so I guess moving into why, I guess now those hurdles have been cleared, I don't feel like I'm held back by money or other people's expectations.

Defined identities. For purposes of the interviews, I confirmed that Lincoln identified as White, male, heterosexual, upper middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. When I asked about which of those identities seemed most salient to him at the time, Lincoln responded,

I think that I've made peace with a lot of my identities so I wouldn't, I mean, they're definitely relevant but I'm no longer really thinking about them or conflicted about them or really exploring them as much. It's just I've kind of decided that that's kind of the way it is and it doesn't cause a lot of tension anymore. So I would say that heterosexual, I've pretty much made peace with that. That's just kind of who I am. Just my identity is just who I am. And same with like religion. I've done my time debating and thinking and talking about it and reading and I've kind of decided that it's not really for me. It doesn't really come up a whole lot. Male, I think that's one that I've been thinking about a lot lately and what it means to be male. I don't really

identify with male culture as much but, definitely, it's something that has benefitted me. Even as I go into education, which is kind of a women's dominated field, it will actually turn out to be a benefit for me because of the fact that there aren't a lot of men and all. Female teachers always tell me that they're really happy to see me in the field because I'll be able to relate to boys or, at least, they'll be able to relate to me more readily than to them. So that'll probably end up being an advantage to me, even though I don't maybe identify with sports and all those kind of male-centered things. So that's probably going to be a salient identity. It's not really one that I think about a lot but, if I had to choose. And able-bodied. I mean, that's definitely a benefit to me but I don't think about that. In fact, I think about that one the least. It's just, I think it's [taken] completely for granted. And so I guess the two that are most salient or that I think about and interact with on a daily basis would be socio-economic status and race. Probably, if I had to choose the one that was most salient would be race right now 'cause that's what I think about the most, although I think, probably, money is more important to some degree.

Given his desire to teach in an underserved school district, Lincoln wrestled with racial identity and how that impacted his interactions. He commented,

So if I had to choose one that I was wrestling with the most, [race is] what I wrestle with the most and a lot of it is because you don't ever know what's in someone else's mind and so you have to rely on whatever you know. And what do you know? It's from the media, and the news, and your own personal experiences and that informs what you think the other people are going to be doing, most likely. And I think that the element of this course, at least in this country, if not everywhere, is that you don't

trust people like that and you're kind of a little bit on guard. And so I've been kind of thinking about that and that's going to be really important for me in the future as I want to teach in urban schools. I mean, I can't even remember the last time I taught in a school where there were any white people. So that's going to be something that I have to struggle with, as I go forward and how to relate. And I think that that's a common thing for White teachers teaching in urban schools. The teacher that I spoke about last time said that after she was teaching for the first year and she did a diagnostic assessment and kind of broke it down by facts and numbers, she realized that all the African American boys in her class were failing. And [she thought] there's no way that can happen unless it's kind of on you. Why is this specific group of students failing? It's the way that she treats them and tracks this down so she did things in her practice to change it.

I asked Lincoln in follow-up to reflect on whether the work he was doing contributed to or detracted from his overall identity. Lincoln rationalized,

Sometimes it can contribute and sometimes it can detract. I think I'm cultivating a new identity. I mean, there are certain things that I'm not going to be able to get rid of. Like I can't change the fact that I'm white. That's going to be with me forever. But I don't think, culturally, I'm as White as I was before, if that makes sense. Like I identify more with my students now than I would have ever as a high school student, for sure. And I think, as I continue on, I'm sure I'll always identify with White culture. I don't know if you've ever heard of "Things White People Like?" Like that's me. I like classic rock and all these like quote/unquote White things. But I don't see myself as a part of what White culture values all the time. So that's changing. And I think

also that being White can hinder my work sometimes. There's a big push right now in schools to recruit teachers from the community and to recruit teachers of color because there's a huge discrepancy between who we're teaching and who we are. It's not the same and it makes a difference, for sure. And I think that's something that has definitely come up in job interviews. I remember I went to one job interview and I was the only White person who would have been on staff and I don't want to say that that's the reason I didn't get the job but I think that that was part of it. They weren't looking for someone like me. They were looking for someone who could relate to the kids and someone who the kids could see themselves in and I don't think that they totally saw that with me. And that's not wrong of them to do. That makes sense.

Given his privileged social position, I asked Lincoln to reflect on what drove his desire to teach in an underserved area, even though he was at the time less active, and whether or not guilt was a specific factor that contributed. Lincoln explained,

No, I think I've actually gotten over [the guilt]. It was definitely part of the turning point, I guess. But now I've, more or less, made my peace with it. I'm, partly it's probably because I am, I do feel like I am trying to be part of the solution now so I'm kind of like making amends of the work. But also I really can't help these things. They're bigger than me and I was lucky enough to be born into a privileged background and then in a privileged country and all these things. And none of that's really my fault. And really, it's a privilege and it's not that it's a privilege but now I have a responsibility to make sure things go better.... So you have to resolve it one of two ways. Either you have to not care or you have to do something about it. You can't really go on in your life feeling that way forever.

In effect, Lincoln was working to live authentically by respecting his privileged status, concluding that he had some obligation to contribute toward positive change, and then using his awareness and skills to impact the environment around him. To Lincoln, his call was to contribute in the classrooms of the school system. He asserted,

It's very easy to hold yourself back and to kind of not even want to think about those kind of thoughts [making mistakes]. So it's becoming more comfortable in my own skin. Definitely over [the] past even six months, it has been a really good experience so who knows where I'll be ten years... So that's what I'm thinking. If I can create that kind of safe environment for kids to really want to be themselves and to realize that that's okay and to celebrate diversity. That's like a really complex and difficult thing to achieve but if you can do it--if I can provide that for my students then what a great thing that would be. Anyway, something to work towards.

Values and beliefs. Lincoln's life experiences have congealed to shape his perspective on life. I asked him to describe his core beliefs and values. Lincoln responded,

I would say that I think that belief in the egalitarianism thing, that's very central to my belief structure. That [not every]one is born equal in terms of what they have access to but that everyone should have the same opportunities; a belief in fairness would be really important. Or that all people are capable of great things. I think that's something really important to what I believe. It really bothers me when people are mean. If I had to choose one group of people that I just can't deal with or work with, it would be mean people. I don't know why but it doesn't cost anything to be nice so it really bothers me when people aren't nice. If that's a key belief, I don't know. It's not

one that's normally talked about but--so the equality, fairness, and just being nice and helping people.

When we spoke, the avenue Lincoln pursued to be helpful was through substitute teaching and tutoring. Reflecting on why he wanted to teach, Lincoln clarified,

I think that we talked about why I was motivated to teach. And I think I said because it was something, like that's how I could have the most impact. And I think that that is definitely in part true but it's a little too idealistic. I mean, I also just like kids. I like being with them and if I didn't like hanging out with kids, then I wouldn't have gone to teaching this late [just due to] the fact that I think it is a good place to have an impact.

With his values and interests developing, Lincoln had begun to formulate goals for the future. I asked him to reflect on his goals and he shared,

My main goal is to help people and that could look like helping teach your kids, my kids. That could be one thing and do kind of a stay-at-home dad type thing, kind of like my mom did. And I think I would be very satisfied with that. But it could also look like helping out my students, volunteering, and being a good member of the community. I mean, it can kind of encompass a lot of things but that's kind of the general goal. And I think a specific goal is to get to someday where I could have my own family that I would come home to in the early afternoon after teaching a couple periods and then I feel like that's kind of the best of both worlds. So that's what I'd really like to accomplish.

As he considered his goals, Lincoln shifted to embracing the duty he felt from all that he had been given. Lincoln discussed this concern:

Maybe another part of it would be I feel like I am so privileged and I've had so many opportunities and I recognize that not everyone has those same opportunities so it seems fair or right of me to give back because I've received more than my share and it seems right to do that. But they're [*sic*] kind of like a fairness aspect to it as well as personal satisfaction element but it seems like I have gotten so much. It's not really right to just take what I've gotten and get more. And when I see people that [do not have] the same identities or privileges that I've had, that I can help to [*sic*] easing that out a bit. And maybe there is an ego involved, but I think that I'm the one to do it. I have received this great education and I know I'm smart and I know that I can do something worthwhile. So you have to really believe in your own abilities to get through to these kids and just help them because if you didn't think that you could help, then why do it?

Wrestling with why his efforts fell where they did, Lincoln clarified his basic purpose and values. He expressed,

It's not like super altruism or something. It's what I like. I like doing this and I feel very good about myself and about other people when I do stuff like this. And I see other people who are working hard for other people's benefit and there is always that kind of self-interest that's part of it but that's okay. I don't know. I took a class on altruism once and we always had these long discussions about like well, are you really doing it for yourself or are you doing it for other people. And I come down on it like I don't really care why you're doing something, as long as you're doing something good. I don't know. In the end, what matters from a public good standpoint is what's happening, right, not really the motive behind it.

Social justice work. I confirmed Lincoln's fit for this study with regard to his background of engagement in social justice work. His experience in college was a turning point, fostering an awareness of the privileged life he led and to the needs of those around him. While his membership in a service fraternity helped raise his awareness regarding the community, an internship with the local court system most significantly helped shape his focus. Lincoln explained,

I did justice court and I did a lot of work in the court, helping people who really couldn't deal with these things and they were super disadvantaged. Oftentimes they couldn't even read. I felt that I was making a difference in that work. But I also felt it was too late for these people. Now that sounds too bad.... But these people were going to have children taken away from them or they had domestic violence against them or they were getting evicted. But, if you talked to them and looked farther, you can see and they might see it, too. But the problem isn't really the eviction; the problem is they can't read. And that's the real problem. So I always looked at that and I felt somewhat like I was helping but I was only helping the immediate cause. Really, what I needed to do was to get them to learn how to read. So I always brought it back to education and really reaffirm my belief that education is where you need to be spending your effort and time and money.

Lincoln knew he was called to work for positive change and the internship experience helped him to focus where that commitment needed to be.

To illustrate further, Lincoln compared his commitment to teaching with his work during his service in the Peace Corps. He reflected,

On a small level, I think that's why I was involved in the Peace Corps; it's still empowerment to me. It wasn't as powerful but you're helping people to take care of their problems. And to me, I guess that would also go to the meaning of social justice work because I felt that was less empowering because I felt like I was definitely helping them to resolve major issues but it was that immediate issue and not at the fundamental root. Whereas, the teaching, I feel more invested in it because I feel it could have a bigger impact than if they had education. Then they could solve a lot of different problems rather than just immediate ones.

Recognizing that such vision addressed social justice work from a big picture perspective, I asked him to reflect on what social justice work looks like on a daily basis. Lincoln commented,

But if I had to say what people who were working for social justice do, I'd think it would just really boil down to empowerment. I think that's what it comes down to. That's the word that I really like. Because even for me, like helping people, it sounds like it could be really superficial or it could be very open to interpretation like what does that really mean? It could be something as simple as like giving a homeless guy on the corner some change and that's helping people but is that really helping them? But empowerment, to me, says more like that you're helping people to help themselves. And that's what I really see social justice work as because then you have kind of a much bigger effect and it seems like a fundamental change that can really change someone's life for the better in a big way rather than in a small way....

Because if we're empowering them to take ownership of their community, it's that

ripple effect, that maybe that they could go, in turn, and empower other people or make the community better in some way.

Admittedly, these goals created a tension for Lincoln that he had not fully sorted out this early in his career. Lincoln revealed,

But it also speaks to the tension between my kind of more selfish or personal goals and what I think I should be doing for others or for the community. Because I want to be happy, too, and that's always kind of a tension between doing for others and doing for myself or how much you should give. There's no rule that you can really cite like, "Oh, good I have accomplished this; now I've given enough." I mean, if you're the type of person, you could always give more but so you always have to negotiate that with yourself. How much money should you make versus how happy should you be with your career? How much you should be giving back or even like donating? We don't really give a lot of money. We don't have a lot of money to give right now. But even in the future, I don't think that we'll be donating a lot of money but we give back in other ways and it's always a question of, "Is that okay? Are we comfortable with that?" So there's that tension there between your selfish individual wants and needs and others. So we're always very conscious of that.

A desire for equity and positive change continued to prevail for Lincoln and to drive his future goals, specifically those that empower those around him to experience life as he has. Since the barriers were absent, Lincoln felt as though he was able to proceed in a direction that functionally offered him a deep sense of purpose. Lincoln explained,

For me, I think that it's the personal relationships and feeling like that you're doing something that matters and that I'm helping other people. And I think teaching is

really great for that because you get to build such close relationships with your coworkers and the students. It gives your life a lot of meaning. And when you work with students who are disadvantaged, you can feel really good about what you're doing because otherwise, what would they have? And you get to be someone who really helps people in a concrete and tangible way. You can really see the difference. When you started, they didn't know how to read and, when you ended, well they might not be reading Shakespeare or something. But they're definitely on their way. Or that maybe they weren't prepared for college and now they've gotten into a state school. And those kinds of things are really affirming. [They] make you feel like you are doing something worthwhile....Yeah, that's what I gain. That's why I do it. And, I mean, there's definitely the public good part of it; but I'd say, equally important, is I'm personally gratified by doing this.

In addition to the personal satisfaction, Lincoln also felt part of a community by engaging in his chosen work. Reflecting on what would keep him engaged in justice work, he made note of the value he gains through the sense of community. Lincoln stressed,

My friends are teachers. [My wife is] a teacher. I'm in that network now. It would be weird to leave almost because those are the people that I like. I've made a lot of strong connections and have that support network that also kind of keeps you there. I don't know what I would talk about with them. That's what we talk about. So I think that's going to be a big factor. Being a part of the community.... It goes back to why you're doing it and I think I can only justify this admittedly small impact I'm having if I believe that I'm part of something bigger than myself that can be successful. A whole school that's committed and really wants to help these kids, that's the only way.

Because otherwise, you'll go there for another day. There's no way you can make a change unless everyone's working together. I think that's [*sic*] the external factors that really openly motivate me.

Ray

At the time of the interviews, Ray was a 24-year-old second-year graduate student at a large Midwestern state university. Immersed in the pursuit of a master's degree in education, he was actively working to apply his justice interests. While hesitant to describe his current work as justice related, Ray remained mindful of a desire to engage more fully and that justice work often entails mundane work as well. Ray reflected,

I have an assistantship in the college [of education] at the university, serving with career services within the college. Campus involvements that I'm currently affiliated with are with the graduate [student] association. I'll be advising [a first year program] with a practicum and that will be throughout the year. I'm also on the graduate [education advisory] committee. And I'm also helping out advising the upcoming [campus] event this October. [I'm] maybe even looking into adding another practicum with the [campus], but either way, the kind of work I do with justice issues is not as involved as in the past. But, where I'm at is kind of making meaning with the program I'm in and how I can facilitate that learning or outreach to the students that I will be interacting with professionally, hopefully, at the end of this coming academic year.

Upbringing and influences. I asked Ray to describe his upbringing. Born and raised in the Midwest, his roots clearly influenced his desire to stay in the region. Ray shared,

I was born in [a small Midwestern town]. I stayed there one or two years, the first two years or so my life, and then moved about until the age of five where I--four or five I believe--where I grew up in [a nearby Midwestern town], which is right where the [two rivers] meet. And so the environment there that my family lived in was kind of this ranch house, middle-class neighborhood, was again middle-class, White, and the town was mostly White, too. The surrounding areas were very agricultural. [My hometown] is only the size of 6000 even now and I believe I arrived around '91.

Ray described his upbringing as positive and what he perceived typical for a small town with one exception: he attended private school in his town. Ray remembered,

Oh yeah. Pretty positive. Actually with one thing to note. I did go to private school as opposed to public. From preschool to eighth grade I went to the one and only private school in the town. It's not necessarily the stereotypic Catholic school where everyone is in uniforms. Other privileged backgrounds, more the dress code, but that did include religion class every day that we didn't go to mass and we went to mass two days a week, three if it was around Easter time, and then also my family went on Sundays as well. So basically religion every day, except Saturday. High school was public only because the former Catholic high school was converted to [another use]. It used to actually be a college at one point, too, a Catholic college, and so it wasn't really an option and frankly my family was proud that I never went there even when I could.

Additionally, messages from his family clearly shaped how he viewed the world. Ray captured,

I think the biggest value that I can still recall easily enough being thrown at me was always put in the largest effort with whatever you do. So they encouraged me to work at a younger age. I started working, and haven't ever actually not held a job, since from the summer before fourth grade. I had a job as an onion peeler for a hamburger stand.

When I spoke with Ray, he had chosen to pursue a career in education, though his family had encouraged otherwise. Ray reflected,

In terms of, let's talk about the education thing a little bit. My family, mostly because of my mother, pushed me to consider a major that would be appropriate for the health field. Actually all of my father's side except him actually works in healthcare and specifically for the [Midwest hospital]. And then my mother, she is an RN, and so is her sister, and a lot of our family is in the health field and so they pushed me to [go into it as well]. Really during the first semester of [college] classes it was that I realize[ed] the natural sciences were not something for me and so I changed it up where the second semester was more social science.

The decision proved more fitting for Ray and set him on his current trajectory. However, what he also found is that he distinguished himself not only by his interest in education but also social justice. Discussing the disconnect between him and his family, Ray lamented,

At times I would take it as a point of pride, but now looking back on it, it's kind of frustrating because even then it would be great to say that most of my family is aware of issues and people suffering and how to go about ending that or even solving the big problems of the day. But in reality they are, well, maybe they're more honest about

what they know they can address. Or maybe those issues are not something that they can or want to answer or solve.

Peer influence. As Ray reflected, he did not feel his friends growing up had much influence on his direction, other than simply to reinforce what he knew to be the norm at the time. Ray shared,

Okay. With grade school and high school it was mostly with neighborhood groups. So you know that onion peeling job was pretty pivotal. My first friendship group, really that started with the other kid that I was working with was the son of my first grade teacher. And he and I were also friends with my next-door neighbor and we would do just the typical grade school boy activities with our social group. Run around with bikes downtown or on the other side of town. It wasn't very big in terms of physical space or population but run down by the river or go to the gas station and grab a snack, a video game, that type of thing. Never really anything other than just trying to have fun. Most of us were actually of middle-class background. I think [one friend] was from a family of lesser means than my own and most of the group. But then there was also a friend that was from a family of greater means than anyone and you could tell easily enough. If you've ever heard of [regional business], his grandfather is the owner and founder. And so I mean there would be moments where you would kind of see that but it never really was stressed with the group and really in terms of any other kind of identities they're really kind of homogenous to that end. One of us did eventually come out after college as a gay man but prior to then our friend group kind of disbanded around college time.

College served to narrow his peer group based on interests. Ray found spending time with peers of similar interests also served to reinforce strong relationships. Ray commented,

So when I was in college, most of my friend group was people I got involved with through residence life activities like community council, things on my floor. So fellow [student leaders] who were also involved in community organizations. And so through the clubs and organizations end of it, I was kind of competing with each other to try to get some projects going, in competition with other budding organizations. Going to war against student government, trying to get better constitutional rights for smaller government groups in housing, that sort of thing. Never really centered around any justice issue. However, a friend and I did go to the [student organization] trip freshman year. We wanted to get involved in that. We were involved with the club. A couple of us were kind of scattered here and there with some more activist groups. Like one of us was involved in [a student service organization] for a little bit. But, yeah, just more or less keeping involved on that end.

While community involvement was encouraged, Ray never felt compelled by his peers to engage in specific justice-related issues. Ray acknowledged,

I think [their influence] was neutral. I never felt power from my friend relationships to address the issue of justice. I think the best contributing factor of my friend groups that helped with me addressing justice is continuing to be involved whether it was with the job or an organization because my friend groups, whether they were involved with residence life or some other department or not even a department at all, some aspect of campus life, they were always heavily involved. And I don't think I ever really had a lot of friends that were not involved with campus life in some way. And

even those who had just a job and classes, they had some sort of aspect or commitment that they had that was them contributing to some sort of community.

And it was a positive emission [*sic*] of that community.

Defined identities. Ray was confirmed for this study because he identified as White, male, heterosexual, middle class, and able-bodied. While he did not currently identify as Christian, Ray felt his Catholic upbringing and influence significantly shaped who he had become. Ray explained,

I would still consider myself a Christian if the two main role models that I had at that moment were not taken from me, and that was my two grandfathers, one being my sophomore year and the other one being my junior year of high school... So when both of them were gone and, that was also around the time that the country was still in that patriotic mode, life was shut off and I certainly couldn't blow my horn for help or as a voice. It was a little bit of a trying time in terms of how I saw the world and where I should go. Actually even if I didn't have difficulties with belief in God I wouldn't really be able to go back and cling to--well not cling to, cling is not the right term. To be part of that Jesuit community because for some reason the Catholic Church decided to pull out that order and become more of a diocesan parish. So something that I drew a lot of pride from before that darker time was gone. It was now just diocesan. Maybe it shouldn't matter in terms of belief with respect to my spiritual identity, being part of the Jesuit parish. So religion if I wanted to go back to it wasn't the same as what I always thought and what I was always taught.

However, Ray certainly felt the faith perspective reinforced his privilege. I asked him to reflect on which of his identities seemed most salient to him at the time of our interviews.

Ray revealed,

My class is very salient. It has always been one of my top identities that I've always thought about but when I actually learned the concept of an identity, a social identity, class has always been my number one. And I suppose the reasoning for it, at least now, is the impending debt that I'll have to be paying off and then also the realization of the type of living, the lifestyles, of the positions that I hope to gain, again being in the middle class. I'm going to be staying in the middle class that I was born in and then also being able to see the differences in those students that I interact with day-to-day and the different ideas that poke through those interactions, they collect maybe the approach that certain students have that are more privileged, or I assume have more privilege than others, that are a little more maybe less expressed when interacting with me and how that falls along the different indicators or maybe images of those who are less fortunate.

Given his identification of class being salient to him, I asked Ray to consider and discuss whether or not he felt that awareness drove him to engage in justice work. Ray responded,

In terms of how it drives, its continual frustrations... Yeah it's definitely a motivator. It's almost on occasion that I'm obsessed with the idea. I even wonder what it [would] be like if I never have to worry about something like that and what would the world be if social class wasn't an issue. What issue would I be more passionate [about] than this one if this issue was solved? What would come to be after?

Engaged in efforts to promote justice, I asked Ray to consider what, if anything, he had to overcome to be successful in the work he was doing. Ray reported,

I don't think I've ever really had to overcome anything. Overcome maybe barriers placed from other people or I guess maybe internally what comes to mind is trying to overcome the self-conscious kind of view of trying to be legitimate with this combination of identities is not necessarily the greatest to have when you're trying to facilitate diversity dialogue. You'd probably be the last picked. Now that's certainly not a complaint of mine but it inhibits my abilities by at least what a lot of people see first off the bat. Maybe there's this disconnect of who's the audience. Is the audience really going to be a bunch of White people? Maybe. Then who is the better speaker on that then if ability was not a factor?

Values and beliefs. I asked Ray to share his key beliefs. Without hesitation, Ray responded,

Okay, so in essence I take a Marxist approach to it. Capitalism is the machine that propagates suffering on people and just rips into the environment for the profit of the few. But it's full of distractions, too, that blind a lot of people to its perpetuating damage to everything that it takes advantage of. So I'm definitely very economically left.... And for spiritual beliefs, I'm moving in towards I guess the idea of humanism in that sense. So, according to some people's beliefs anyway, everyone is a humanist. Atheism is humanism. But I don't want to argue that.

What Ray argued in our discussion was his belief that movements are easily derailed by those in power. He gently ranted,

I think a lot of movements get co-opted, and this may be a little bit of a rant, but I do think a lot of people get shortsighted in their passionate work and thinking that everyone is on their side, that certain individuals who start speaking the language that they are familiar with all of a sudden is the center within their tribes or they definitely want to go in the same direction, when maybe in reality or at least in my reality, these people, or these powerful people, are really just there to bring them into their own kind of machine. And it really kind of works against the issue at hand.

Such dynamics enhanced the value that Ray placed on direct interactions with those who are different. I asked him to reflect on what drives him to continue to engage in efforts that are less leisurely than what his peers might choose. Ray noted,

I suppose one end would be the end of adventure.... In a lot of those opportunities to take that [service trip] or likewise, [there] is the potential to meet people, not necessarily the potential, the high probability of meeting people that are very different from you or have a very different aspect and also teaching you something. And that could be told at you but there's also the great probability that you're gonna learn something through your own experiences by doing something for someone. There's this abstract thing that you're going to gain from it--a greater understanding of the world. You are extending your community, in a sense; you're not necessarily staying in your little square footage of what you know.

Nonetheless, Ray reported himself committed to working in education and fostering opportunities for students not only to be affirmed for who they are but also to advocate for a just environment. I asked Ray to comment on his goals. He shared,

Well short-term certainly is to graduate by the end of May next year with a Masters of Education so that I finally do get to work as an educator and hopefully I'll be working for [a] good department in [campus life]. I'm not necessarily sure where in the country, but longer-term I'm thinking that I can really channel that disdain for authoritarianism and then also some more of the other experiences that I've had and transfer all that to student conduct and maybe become a conduct officer or the head conduct officer or maybe just a director [in student services]. As far as that goes, those are kind of my long-term goals at the moment.

Regardless of the place or topic, Ray valued those moments when he identified what he perceived to be injustice. Speaking about the duty he felt to engage in justice work, Ray commented,

I think if there is an element of surprise or outrage that is something that brings me toward the end of engagement in the work and then also thinking back on my own personal experiences where what has been not as great and kind of how twisting both of those together and realizing that life is definitely a lot more difficult for others. So using my own memory of emotional pain or physical pain and trying to imagine someone experiencing something completely worse than that and more or less coming to the realization that if it was so painful for me at the stage and thinking of others experiencing that in a lot worse way. Something must be wrong and something must be done. I find that I should more or less pay back the comfort that was afforded to me whether I ask for it or not.

However, he expressed skepticism about the issues ever really being resolved. So I asked him then what he gained from doing justice work. Ray revealed,

I personally gain from proving people wrong with that combination and also I think as an adult that I personally gain from my obsession of sticking my thumb up at, or sticking my nose up at, the elites by working toward those ends by building those relationships with those who have been separated from me by socially constructed barriers that have also been created or encouraged by those elites for their own profit or gain, maintenance of their own power.

Social justice work. Criteria for inclusion in the study also included active engagement in social justice initiatives. As noted above, Ray worked to incorporate justice work into his daily duties and routines. I asked him to share what justice work he was active with at the time. Ray reflected,

And, right now, it's through [campus department work] and I am kind of seeing how to address social justice issues, kind of how it prepares students to meet the market, as dehumanizing as it is. So there are certain issues that are laced with issues of social class awareness of the economic boundaries that they may have, human aspirations they might have for that. Which further down the line wasn't the greatest connection that I thought I was getting and was passionate about.... As recently as of a January service learning trip, I got a hand in being an advisor for a group, going to [Midwestern city], addressing the issue of ableism.

However, Ray quickly shared that he was simply in transition, both having engaged more fully in the past and developing a focus on what future opportunities might offer. Ray clarified,

But some past experience that I have had with some social justice issues are working with [a national service organization] with the learning disabled. Also working with

[a national activist organization] during my freshman year. A lot of my undergraduate education was related to justice in various context[s] and then also a lot of my student affairs experiences as a student [leader] or academic advising. I had a focus through programming or being able to be just more sensitive to the different identities of people with whom I may have interacted with and serving them.

Ray agreed that justice work was as much a daily practice and it was creating a momentous occasion. I asked Ray to share what he felt justice work looked like on a daily basis. Ray responded,

So with these individuals I'm seeing someone of competence within their work that pushes their day-to-day task towards righting wrongs in any kind of small or big way. They're role models for others and again that's in a humanistic way of interacting with others. In particular, actions I think that should be measured are how they oppose certain isms, whether they be big or small, and within those actions whether they are subtle or public. Public in making a stand at a rally, maybe off the job, I guess. Or subtle in a way that you may guide a student when they come to complain about some sort of drama within a student organization and how that might be encouraged by misunderstanding of a social justice issue like maybe some innate racism that may come about. I guess innate is the wrong type of word.

To ultimately be successful in the work, Ray found it best to develop casual relationships that allowed the opportunity to delve into substantive dialogue. He explained, I think asking questions... So striking up conversation, it always starts with small talk. I'm not too big of a fan of small talk, especially with people that I know, and trying to balloon that into an issue, whether it starts first with some type of humor to

get them thinking that I'm really going to try and get them riled up but then really getting serious at one point in trying to make a dialogue out of it... So usually like all the issues that usually should not be discussed at the dinner table, those are the types of issues that I bring up in that type of conversation.

Over time, Ray came to see his role in justice work focused in the educational setting. I asked him to share what had helped him to understand his role in justice work better. Ray replied,

The friendships that I have been able to achieve with people who have one identity or more different from my own. That has given me the best understanding, the best support, or sustained me for continuing on. I have a lot of male friends who are gay, or at least not heterosexual. And how those friendships continue to go on and not be affected in any way. I see that they accept me for who I am, beyond just the social identities that I hold. They know that I accept them beyond what they hold. And that's kind of the brew that I'm trying to tap. And mass-produce, if I could ever do it.

Hopefully I'll be able to soon, but on to other people, maybe onto other White males, other White, straight, males, Christian, or maybe on to people so different than I.

When it really comes down to it, it's not being courteous, or being nice, it's being a friend to that community member. That's really what it means to be an ally.

Committed to work on a college campus, Ray also articulated a vision for what justice work might look like for him in the near future. Ray envisioned,

I wasn't necessarily seeing [my current assistantship] as part of that but even now in the recent past and hopefully in the future I'm seeing residence life will also be a great opportunity to kind of expand the issues that come about through challenging the

students in increasing their awareness on different issues beyond economic ones. So, for instance, maybe through programming environments, the gender issues, including sexual orientation, race, and likewise, and even maybe through conduct, too, I hope that I'll have opportunities to help students address those issues, understanding those different than them in different categories.

Ray admitted that his skills had room to evolve given the challenges presented by justice work. I asked him to discuss how his approach had changed over time. Ray commented,

I'd say it is a lot more--a little less hands-on but it involves others. More towards the end of including others in that work. Others being students rather than I going through a program where I am getting that experience, I am working toward that issue. I am now making the meaning in a different way by bringing in others and encouraging others to do the kind of hands on role. And I find that it's the educational part of it. I still have that opportunity to get hands-on with this new role. It's making a louder impact as opposed to if I carried on with just doing the work on my own and on an individual basis.

Ultimately, what drew Ray to the work were the moments when he saw the process of learning at work. Ray described week long immersion experiences that confirmed for him that being part of such transformative processes was what he was meant to do. He noted,

Seeing the way that the student's reactions were kind of not so deep in the beginning but then, even day-to-day, it was easily measurable how deep they were making that experience. It was almost to the point where I and the student leader responsible for leading the reflection on the last night, it was taken away from us by the group

because they had their own idea of what they wanted to do and what they needed to do to end [the experience]. It was a great kind of experience, how they took control of this learning opportunity.... Seeing growth and awareness among others, like that new role I was talking about where I'm a little less hands-on but more bringing others in. That has become a large source of motivation toward this work. And then even seeing my own personal growth, whether it be more confidence in getting people more engaged with the issue. Finding ways to work around certain barriers that people bring or put on themselves, to escape the day-to-day interactions where they wouldn't have to think about these ills.

Because he believed in the work, seeing people move from hesitation to being fully engaged created the energy in Ray to keep him working for the next opportunity to experience such a moment again.

In follow-up, I asked Ray if he felt his engagement in justice work gave him a sense of purpose. Ray concluded,

Yeah, I believe I am serving some sort of purpose with the work. With every opportunity I am also meeting a personal need. That personal need is finding friends, finding friendships with individuals who are at least like-minded on those issues. I am feeling a community or participating in a community at least, and it's shaping the world in a way that I am thinking it should be. So I guess there certainly is a personal end to it and I certainly don't mind using social justice as that outlet to serve interpersonal needs and whatnot with others.

Samson

Samson presented as a 22-year-old recent college graduate, having just completed his undergraduate degree the previous May from a large private eastern university. At the time of the interviews, he had just begun a teaching fellowship experience in the Midwest. Viewing his work in education as an act of social justice, Samson had situated himself to begin a career as a teacher. He shared,

So right now I'm in [the city]. I've been here for almost a month and actually this is my first week of teaching students. First day was August 5. I've taught for three days and I am teaching freshmen in high school in the [neighborhood school] where the enrollment is 100% black males. So I'm working with black male freshmen this year. And this is kind of my line to hopefully be a teacher. That's right now my plan and [it] might shift.

Upbringing and family influences. I asked Samson to reflect on his family and upbringing. He shared,

I was born and raised in [eastern city and state]. It's a town right next to [city] about a 40 minute [trip from a large eastern city]. I lived there my whole life. The first time I moved was to my freshman dorm in [an eastern city] when I was 18. So my family structure--for most [of] my childhood, I was raised in a two-parent household, my mother and my father and my sister, who is younger than me by four years. When I was a junior in high school my father left the household. He was still living in my town but I was primarily raised through high school by my mom. My father was involved in my life but I didn't live with him anymore.... So my father is a musician, a professional musician. He is a jazz trombonist and he plays various gigs at bars and

jazz clubs and weddings. He gives lessons pretty much whenever he can get them.

And my mother, she's probably the biggest influence on my life. She's had several jobs [in social justice non-profit work] throughout my life.

Samson attributed much of who he was and who he had become to his mother and to his upbringing in his home town. In fact, his home town was quite diverse and ultimately shaped his understanding of diverse perspectives. Samson commented,

So in terms of location, [my home town] is kind of sandwiched in between. To the east [city], which is predominantly black and is the largest city in [state] and, in addition to being very black, is also very Caribbean. And then [my town], and then to the west is [city], which is predominantly white and Asian and is much more affluent. So [my town] is kind of this hybrid of the two towns in that it's a very racially diverse town that's also very racially segregated as well.... So that's where I am from and so my high school was racially diverse and public schools all [the] time growing up were very much racially diverse, socioeconomically diverse. I believe my graduating class was about 50% Black, 40% White, and then a minimal amount of other, Asian, Latino. Looks like very much Black and White.

Without hesitation, Samson credited his perspective and drive to engage in social justice work to the influence from his family. He stated,

But what effect do I think my family had on my choices? I mean I don't think it's even quantifiable. I think I very much tend to my mother's style with the early influences of my father. I think I wouldn't be in [the Midwest] right now, I wouldn't be wanting to teach, if it wasn't for my mother.... And my mother, she's probably the biggest influence on my life. She's had several jobs throughout my life. My earliest memories

are traveling with her to work.... So she traveled a lot for those jobs and she's very much been in the field of social justice, which has led to shape my feel of what I wanted to do.

Given the diversity in the schools, Samson's learning experience was significantly enhanced through the activities and interactions he had. He explained,

I explained a little bit about [the high school] where I came from. It has a different very diverse student body and even like in middle school and grade school before that there was tracking started in 6th grade, my middle school was doing some placement testing to level 3, level 4. So it was apparent if you walk into a classroom you could tell which level and what track you were for the most part. You know the level 4 class had predominantly White students and the level 3 or remedial level had predominantly students of color. And here I was, in all honors throughout high school as well. And it was like being in that climate where I can visibly literally see inequality occurring in my school. This was something I was surrounded with every year in grade school. This whole issue around tracking, it was in-school segregation. And I think that really had an impact on how I see the poor and inequality of all students receiving a quality education.

Admittedly, Samson believed the curriculum content was less influential than the teachers themselves and how they modeled their work. He recounted,

I don't know if it was curriculum as much as it was teachers that I had. I mentioned before the teacher who passed away, and I had her when I was in third through fifth grade. And just the way she let me rewind. She taught a class called exploration which was for kids who were gifted and talented in school. And so her curriculum

existed outside the regular curriculum. She would pull people out of class twice a week for a couple of hours each day. I remember we were with these five and we were learning about civilizations and marketing. I remember eating macaroni and cheese in her classroom and we were relating it back to marketing of these different companies. So her flexibility in her curriculum really allowed me to step outside of reading workshop and writing workshop and what we're learning in the math book for a few hours a week. And then in high school I was in AP government and politics. I had a teacher who--and also an AP class as well--so he satisfied the curriculum, too. Just like the way in which he taught our class to engage in comparing the governments of China to the governments of France and talking about the U.S. government in the 1820s or whatever. It was very captivating. So I attribute it more to the better teaching, the teacher and how they're [*sic*] able to convey the curriculum. Building on his high school experience, college significantly reinforced the direction that Samson was headed. Being involved not only nurtured his inclinations to learn more but also allowed his perspective to develop and change. Samson discussed,

As far as key decisions that've brought me where I am today, again, and so the whole idea of not only talking about what a good teacher is but also the factors that surround the classroom such as poverty and inequality outside of the schools that have an immense effect on the education that students receive. And so then in college I was an education major and I came across this [student] organization, which I talked about earlier, and so again I guess a little disclaimer. Right now my views on education [have] radically changed from when I was a member. A lot of their ideology and the way they approach things, I don't really agree with. But in terms of when I talk about

my experiences with them I'm going to try to portray them through the lens of me still being involved, if that makes sense. I will probably report how I felt when I was doing it but I think it's also important to note that I don't necessarily agree with the decisions that they've made recently and since I'm out of school I'm no longer affiliated with them. But toward the end there was a weird severance from what I saw myself and the organization, what I value and what they value. But that goes without saying that the issues that they address and that I addressed through them I still wholeheartedly see as very important issues. It's just most of the policies and methodologies in which they took [part], I do not see as necessarily the best way. Samson immersed himself within an experiential learning environment through the student organizations, thereby facilitating greater awareness and understanding.

Perhaps most compelling, Samson articulated a substantive belief that teaching was an active demonstration of social justice work. He stated,

And so the reason I want to say this is because I think teaching is an act of social justice. Whether you are in a very well-to-do neighborhood or a very poor neighborhood, all teachers are social activists in that they are helping, at least in my ideal world, they are helping to craft a more perfect world by enlightening their students. Well, do I think all teachers do that? No. But I think the ideal teacher is a social activist in that they're charged with equipping students with tools to go out and change the world.

Peer influence. Samson felt the aggregate of his family, the city he grew up in, and his peers shaped both the way he came to see the world and where he was at the time of the

interviews. I asked him to specifically describe how his friends influenced him along the way. Samson summarized,

But I think I'm going to kind of mold my friends here and peers into one group because people who I am friends with also shape how I see the world as well, too. Sometimes in terms of my friends back home, I don't think there were any clear messages that I received. No one said, "[Samson] this is what I believe, or what I think." It was more just daily interactions with friends coming to know my friends as people, multifaceted people, and kind of seeing how they see the world was what I took most from my friends.

One way he and his peers both connected and shaped each other was through their active involvements. As Samson reflected, they were always doing something. He recalled,

Well, in high school I started working my sophomore year of high school and I worked at an afterschool program in my town, which also—well, I don't know if my job was shaped by the fact that I wanted to teach or if the job shaped me to want to teach. Thinking, they seem to kind of go hand-in-hand. But all my friends, I would say, were either working at the mall a few towns over or they played baseball. Most of them had cars, it was part of being in the suburb where public transportation was not helpful, really, at all. But, yeah, people were always doing something, whether it was a sport or also... I don't think they were always up and out, people were relaxing as well. But people were doing stuff.

Defined identities. As stated earlier, I selected participants based on their reported identities. During the screening and interviews, Samson identified as White, male,

heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. I asked him to share which of these identities were most salient to him. Samson offered,

Well, I mean I think by virtue of working at an all-Black male middle school, being White stands out a lot. The students are all Black males and the staff, there was a pie chart that I saw, it was 50% male and most of the males were African-American teachers and faculty as well. So I think about my student teaching as, well, I've never been more aware of my Whiteness then throughout the first few weeks of working here, just because I see there are also other staff members who are young, just out of school, White guys, other fellows.... So yeah, it's like visibly being in a predominantly Black male area and being a White male you can see that difference. And also my whole race is a privilege, too. Also, my whole middle-class upbringing in a school where 95% of the kids are free or reduced lunch. And so actually right before you and I were talking, just now the grandma of one of my students called me and she's having trouble paying the \$200 fee and so I felt like, well, that was never an issue for my family. So just seeing these kids are coming into their freshman year and each kid has their *[sic]* own story but many of these kids who are in my class are coming with all this baggage around issues like poverty, such as not being able to pay the student fee. This one student is in foster care and this one student was telling me about this song that reminded him of his friend who was killed last summer at 14. And this is just stuff that I couldn't fathom undertaking or having to worry about when I was going in[to] the freshman year. I think the biggest thing I had to worry about was whether I was going to get a ride to school or walk to school. So, it just put things into perspective for me to realize how privileged I've been and continue to be

for my first 22 years. It is very eye-opening. So I definitely think race and my middle-class standing are two identities which [*sic*] are very visible to me.

Samson also highlighted his religious identity during the interviews. Commenting on how religion resonated in his upbringing, Samson reported,

Before I go into that, you were saying my faith, too? Growing up, so, my mother was raised Jewish, my father Episcopalian, and when I was six or seven we found the Unitarian Universalists in a town nearby. The UUA was a very liberal-based faith, very open faith, that draws from many creeds, many different texts. Any given service might draw from the Bible, or the Koran, or various other types like that. And so my parents had this very open mind on which I was raised.

While not a prominent identity in terms of salience, Samson's religious identity aligned with and reinforced the values present in his family structure. As important, those values were imbedded in the core of who he was becoming as an individual.

Given his commitment to the work, I asked Samson to consider whether or not he felt his justice work contributed to or detracted from his identity. Samson reflected,

What I'm doing here teaching right now, my identity here is so visible to those with whom I interact. And so I wouldn't say that it doesn't detract, going back to that whole burden of privilege. And if you think that it does detract that's still being just stupid and petty. These might be strong words but I think it will only detract as much as you let yourself allow that to play into that, does that make sense? I don't feel like I'm being concrete enough.... I just think that wallowing in one's privilege just helps no one at all. It's a waste of energy for all who are involved. And so I don't think it should detract at all.

Values and beliefs. I asked Samson to consider his values and goals. Samson discussed his belief in helping others and facilitating equitable access to education. He articulated,

Me [*sic*] working with kids can help me to get better, which in turn will help me to better help the kids that I work with, which in turn will help me again get better again, and it keeps going on and on. And then tying that back to more the things that I did in college, I truly believe I live in a better country when all youth, whether they are documented or undocumented, have better access to education. I think that makes our state or the country a better place to live in. And so I think I would benefit from being in, like, a more perfect union. However small piece of the pie that passing the [legislation] would be, I think that's still something that you could have pride in where you live, and who you are.

Samson felt that simply being himself was critical to being a successful educator. Expressing a determination to learn through each experience, Samson noted,

Well it's like someone was telling me before the kids came, "Don't try and be somebody you're not. These kids--they are so smart, and you have to be smart to survive in the [city]. They know how to play the game. And so if you try to be anything other than yourself, they'll call it out on you. They'll call you out. They'll see that and they'll rip you apart for it." So I've always been myself and so that wasn't an issue. I was never thinking I was gonna put on this character, the tough guy. No, I'm going to be me. I'm very confident in who I am and that these kids are going to except [*sic*] that. And so I think it means being genuine and it's such a crucial thing because these kids will sniff out any BS. Like one of my co-workers, she was co-

teaching a class, and this one girl she had like a little monologue and what my co-worker told me was (by girl I mean this other teacher). And so my coworker told me this other teacher said she was acting out of her mind. She was trying to be a tougher woman than she is and the kids started laughing because they know that that's not who you are.

Samson also demonstrated a desire to see the people around him in a positive light. I asked him if at any point he had moved in the direction he did over the course of his life because someone had told him he was not capable. Samson responded,

The majority have been very conscious decisions to stay away from negative sentiments toward people. I don't think so. I really try not to speak or feel ill about people. I think I've done a good job in my life of stopping relationships before they become toxic. So I don't think I have any I'm going to do it in spite of the moments or anything like that.

Thus, Samson felt that the daily actions that an individual demonstrates are shaped by a mentality that derives from one's values. He explained,

I don't think it's so much these actions as it is just having this mentality that I firmly believe that I do what I do for good reasons and I think that it is pretty important that I know that I'm not doing anything to save the world, to be seen as this benevolent, heroic guy. I truly and firmly believe that about myself. So I think it's more of a mentality than the different actions, if that makes sense.

For Samson, with that mentality came a joy for working with students and incorporating his work into his lifestyle. Samson discussed,

I just truly enjoy teaching and watching students learn and being able to foster that and to say that I'm a part of that learning curve is great. And I've been doing that, whether it has been working at an afterschool program in high school or through summer camps, student teaching, and now here. It's like watching the growth of students. It is an amazing thing being able to say that you help yield positive actions in the world. It is a great feeling. And so I have no interest in doing anything business related, or law related, or no, that was never fascinating to me at all. I never imagine myself in a 9-to-5 job because, well, teaching is like a 7-to-5 job but that's something that has never been in my life plan. I never thought I'd do otherwise.

Samson had also come to believe that it will be exposure over time, much as he experienced in his life, which would have lasting impacts on U.S. culture. Sampson reflected, I think to an extent it is something that is embedded in someone. I think you can find people who do have this desire but they don't necessarily have an outlet in which they can express their desire to help, or be engaged. I think it is something that not everyone has, for sure. I think they're afraid to allow for this cultivation of the desire to be involved in social justice work or social action work. I just think that exposing people to resources that surround them is the biggest thing. Like when you're on a college campus, the club directory, I'm sure that most schools have a variety of clubs that rally around issues of social justice. So I think it's helping people access resources [that] is the biggest thing to getting someone involved. Reading. Reading a lot of books that you can learn. Being knowledgeable, I think making people knowledgeable of who they are. People like me being a White male from a middle-class family being exposed to what the world has to offer for various people, I think is

very important. I think I'm fortunate enough to have grown up in a town. But some towns that are predominantly White, all they saw were people that look like them, who have houses like them, drove cars like them. And it's easy to not to be exposed to other areas of the world, even like just a few towns over. My mom has a friend who grew up [in a large city] and he didn't see a White person in real life until he was 12. And so it's easy for people to grow up only knowing who they are and not other people, not knowing others in the world. So I think allowing an individual to learn about the injustices of the world is very important as well.

Through the awareness he gained, Samson felt people of privilege must come to understand the advantages they have had. I asked him to consider what role privileged people had to play in justice work. Samson commented,

I think a lot. Especially if you have the desire for the world [to] be a better place you can't be content until the person next [to] you has what you have or has the opportunity to have what you have, whether that's economical, or whether that is quality-of-life, whatever it is. If you truly think that the world should be a better world then you have to acknowledge that not everyone is afforded the same opportunities and so the fact that you being in a position of privilege have had those opportunities is not a gift that should be wasted necessarily. I actually think that privilege is a privilege to have and you should act on that, not just reinforce it.

Because you do think that creating a better union or better country, a better world can be strived for.

Being new to the teaching profession, Samson was not completely clear about how he would measure success over time. When I asked him about keys to success in justice work, Samson related,

I know keys to staying sane and remaining positive but in terms of success, I think I mentioned we talked about this earlier, too, how do you measure success? I think the one thing about a lot of this work is that success is never immediate. You might not ever see the end result of what you're fighting for. For one thing, you know, if you're working on trying to get gay marriage legalized then you do have an end result once we legalize gay marriage. Then that's success. But I think, but in terms of what I'm looking towards, working for, I do know that success is not as immediate by any stretch of the imagination.

Social justice work. To highlight engagement he felt constituted social action, I asked Samson to describe the justice work that he was or had been involved in. Specifically, Samson reported,

I guess the large umbrella is issues around the access to education and quality education. Right now I just finished a week of school. I just graduated from school from [a large eastern university] in May and now I'm in a teaching fellowship in [the Midwest] teaching [high school] and this is the first full week of classes. So right now I am teaching freshmen now. When you and I first made contact back in March or April, I was a senior at [college] and I was engaged primarily in two groups, one of which was [an activist organization] in which we worked more on the policy base side advocating for [education] policies going forth, and also part of the [political action movement] which fought for rights for residents in the [state], whether they

were legal or not (I don't like using the term legal or illegal, I like to say undocumented) to make sure they have the right to access state financial aid for going to college. So I would say those three things have covered--they all fall under the umbrella of education.

Involvements entailed group meetings, rally attendance, and preparation work for each. Consistently of interest, the work Samson chose to engage in subsequently encompassed different angles through which to address challenges gaining access to education for students, thereby furthering his commitment to advocacy for strong educational experiences.

Samson also spoke to his engagement in social justice work by emphasizing both his life growing up and his time in college having shaped the actions he pursued. Each experience deepened his desire to teach and cemented his view of teaching as an act of social justice work. Samson explained,

I guess for the vast majority of my, I don't mean my upbringing but my coming-of-age from like sophomore year of high school until now, I've wanted to be a teacher. And that is the long-term goal. Other than that, I feel both because I wanted to be a teacher and because by virtue of my firm belief in the importance of a high quality education in terms of what that can provide an individual in terms of access to improving low quality of life and to lead the quality of life around them. So I feel that by being a teacher I have the most direct access to helping others achieve that. I think my whole, well, firmly grounded belief in the ideal of an education box. And it branched out into other methods, too, in terms of what does it mean to allow others to have the access to a better quality of life through education, through safety, through

moral well-being? So I think that's all rooted in the essential belief in a quality education. I believe it can really open doors for anything else. So I really think that what I strive to do is based around that for sure.

Through his work, Samson identified that the daily actions of those in justice work required a demonstration of persistence and commitment. He explained,

I think it's the acknowledgment that one's effort is something larger than oneself. It's not necessarily a self-gratuitous thing to do, or action to take. And I think actions, well, what do they look like? I think it's a combination of that you recognize that work is largely selfless but also very persistent, too. And I think it's one thing to go to a rally or to go see somebody speak but another thing to continue to do so day-in-and-day-out. It might not be day-in and day-out, but over the course of a period of time with the same attention and mindset in place. So, I think to summarize the actions of those working for social change, I think it looks like a wholehearted investment and belief in what you do.

Driven by his desire to positively impact the lives of others, I asked Samson to discuss how his approach had changed over time. He shared,

Well, I think we talked briefly about how looking back on my involvement with [student organization], and what I was advocating for or pushing for, is not necessarily what I would push for today. We talked about that [during] the first interview a little bit. So I think how has my approach, I'll just answer the question. I think now it's a job versus it being an extra-curricular. So that's a huge change. My livelihood is me being with these kids as opposed to going to meetings after class. So that's a big difference. Now I'm dedicating 40-50 hours a week to it. But I think that

would be the biggest difference. But in terms of my mindset, I think now that I'm not in school, not that school is a distraction, but I don't have other things that I have to be concerned with. I don't have to worry about school right now, for myself I don't have to worry about finding a job because I have a job. So I'm really able to focus on my school and my teaching.

I asked Samson what kept him engaged in justice work when, as a person of privilege, he can opt to do otherwise. Samson responded,

This is not something that I think. When people from positions of privilege do engage in this work it's with an understanding that this is work that they have to opt into doing. Their world wouldn't be affected. So I'm not fighting for my immediacy but rather for that of others, if that makes sense.

But one thing was certain: Samson remained committed and realistic about what he could expect over time. Reflecting on what helped to sustain him in teaching, Samson explained,

And so it's the small victory, the small joys, that make it worthwhile day-to-day. Being fully aware that these are freshmen and four years from now you'll see them going to college and that's a very long time away. So I think keeping that end goal in sight and like being able to anticipate that even though it's a long time away I think keeps me going, definitely. But even going back to what I was doing in college. This one rally that I went to and they were talking about the [state policies] and I was standing side-by-side with students as they came out of the closet saying that they were undocumented, watching them like having this weight off their chest and me not knowing what it's like. But recognizing that and seeing that I was able to help and this was a visual, feeling comfortable to say that they were undocumented. It feels good

and feels like I've been able to help somebody out. That's the best feeling in the world.

With his realistic outlook, Samson maintained a sense of hope as he worked to identify where common ground might be forged with the young men in his classroom and how his presence might make a difference in their lives. Samson reflected,

And so I guess my life experiences will always overlap but, if anything, it takes more of a challenge for me to find these commonalities.... I find those similarities and finding these commonalities that not to compensate but to acknowledge that, "Okay, I was never where you are, but let's find what we think we can talk about and use that as a basis to form our relationship as the year goes on."

Steve

At the time the interviews were conducted, Steve was a 20-year-old undergraduate student at a large state university in the Southwest United States. I asked him to describe his life at that moment in time. Steve began,

Well, I'm a junior at or in school. And I am a Biology major. I have no minors. I currently am an RA so I live in one of the dorms on campus and maintain an environment there which [*sic*] I consider to be pretty social justice work in itself. I also work at the front desk of my building every Saturday morning. I currently am involved with [campus organization], which is like our on-campus group that focuses on how men can prevent sexual assault as well as understanding what masculinity is and why we are who we are and what we do and how men feel different pressures from society than women or transgender individuals. Anything like that, like how is it different for us. I also am a part of a fraternity on campus that I joined last year,

[through] which we're working on being leaders on campus. Most of our members are involved in three to four different organizations. On top of those, I also am planning [campus event] again, for the second year in a row. I'm an executive member of campus [organization], which because they needed someone to plan all the paperwork to get money for our account, I volunteered for that. And so I spend a lot of time with gender equality and sexual assault issues as well as some issues on race.

Upbringing and influences. When I asked him to describe his family structure and their influence on him, Steve offered,

So I was born to my mother and my father, who are still married today, very strong familial connections. My parents both came from a more middle-lower class kind of family, middle-to-lower class. So when I was born, they swore that I would never have the childhood, I would have a better childhood than what they had. So it was pretty tight. Both my parents really wanted children. They'd been trying for about a year before I was born or conceived. So they both were really, really determined to have kids so I was very much planned. And then my sister came along a couple of years later, three years.

He described his family as both loving and placing high expectations on him to excel.

Expectations included applying his ability and getting good grades in school. Additionally, beginning when he was a teenager, his parents emphasized gaining work experience and working hard. Steve explained,

My parents, especially, are very driven with financial success and financial stability. Not that other people are not driven by financial stability, but my parents put heavy emphasis on it. "You're going to college so you can get the job so you can provide for

yourself and you can make money.” Maybe, and I talked to them about it before and they say that's not the case but they tell me that, “No, that is we want you to be happy. We want you to be happy.” And I think that they firmly believe that happiness comes from not having to worry about money and I think it's a difference in generation where, my parents as children did have to worry about money. My dad told me a story about remembering when his parents were cutting up credit cards because they were in debt and they couldn't use the credit cards anymore and knowing that my parents have never cut up credit cards. They've never missed a payment on the house, never missed a credit card bill.

Steve’s parents worked hard to instill a work ethic that emphasized commitment and financial stability. Those values resonated for Steve throughout his early upbringing. He continued,

Another thing that they were very determined for me to do was [to] have a job by the time I was a teenager. So I started working between, I want to say I was 14. So I think between my freshman and sophomore year of high school I started working full time in the summers at a retreat center about a half mile away from my house. So I did that for a very long time. I actually worked there for three years. And I really didn't enjoy it. My boss could be very critical and very harsh. The place I worked was a different kind of religious institution than what I was brought up with and what I believed and so it was very difficult to kind of go there and we'd have Bible studies on our breaks, which was fine because I needed the money. But, at the same time, I really didn't want to work there. I was, “I don't want to be here.” I struggled because none of my friends were working.

Expected to hold one job until he had a replacement, Steve eventually found another work opportunity that presented a different experience. Steve recounted,

And then I found another job at a completely different institution. It was still a food services, but I was a busboy. I wasn't working in the kitchen anymore so that was really different. And that was a very shocking change because I was used to like a very close knit [experience]. [From] a boss very involved with my personal life, and was very involved in spiritual growth, to a place where my boss really didn't care what I did and, as long as I showed up to work on time and worked my butt off, he didn't care.... Though I did have issues with my first boss, he did help make me into the worker I am today and showed me a lot of really new stuff that I really value and think that he helped teach me. So, that was good.

Looking back, leadership began early as well for Steve. In addition to holding a job, his parents signed him up for an experience in the community. Steve recounted,

I was involved with social justice work even then. I spent a lot of time at this [community program], which my parents also forced me to do because they wanted me to do another resume builder. And this one I loved. It was essentially for youth who commit first-time misdemeanor offenses from the age of 12 to 18. They'd get sentenced for something, or they'd get charged with some kind of offense. So it could be smoking marijuana or vandalism or getting into a fight. They would refer to us and we would hear their case and then we, as students and children, would give them a sentence. So I did that from, it would have been eighth grade and the senior [year] of high school, so from 13 to 17, I was very involved with that.... And what's

fascinating about [the program] is it comes from a standpoint of students are the ones who--teenagers are the best to judge teenagers.

From that experience with the community program, Steve gained a sense of confidence and valuable life skills. Steve concluded,

So I just think it's really, really, important and I apply it to everything I do in my life. It has just shaped me as an individual and I really value that. [And it] started out as something my parents wanted me to do to kind of build a resume.

Family continued to influence Steve heavily. Steve reflected on how he was encouraged to form opinions but to be mindful of how sharing those perspectives may impact him. Steve reflected,

And I remember like arguing with people in my elementary school because my views and my family's views were completely different from a large majority of my friends and people I went to school with. And so it's always been like, "Stand up for yourself but also stand up for what you believe in and stand up for people who don't have as much and work for them. But also don't rock the boat. If you're at work, do not talk about it, when you're at school, do not talk about it. There are times and places and you need to talk about them and schoolwork and all those places are not one of them." And so it's been very kind of conflicting. "Be passionate, have your beliefs, but don't talk about them except in very special circumstances."

While he didn't always agree with what his parents were suggesting, he drew values heavily from them and looked to their guidance as he weighed the choices with which he was wrestling. Steve commented,

[My parents] are so driven and they work hard and my dad, he'll talk to me. Me and my dad have the biggest arguments about what I want to do with my life because I want to work with social justice for the rest of my life and I want that to be my job and I want that to be my career, to some extent. And my dad is very adamant, "That is not a career. That is a passion. That is a hobby. You cannot do this for a job. You need to do something else. You need to have a job. Your passions do not have to be your job." Which I do believe is true. I do agree that my passions don't have to be my job but I want to find a way to make my passion my job.

I asked Steve to consider how the schools and curriculum shaped how he saw the world. Reflecting, Steve quickly pointed to the environment created by the teachers, noting his recognition of and appreciation for the value of the learning process. Steve shared,

And my favorite teacher...really shaped me. [He] made me question my beliefs and it made me wonder, "Why do I believe what I believe?"... I had to really challenge my beliefs and I think that, while it did solidify some of my beliefs, it also morphed others of my beliefs. So while I do have very liberal, I hate to say liberal, Democrat tendencies, I also definitely understand some of the more Republican ideologies and can definitely agree with some of them.

Steve also found that the demanding teachers were both the most influential and the ones most open to a broader curriculum. Steve explained,

Look[ing] back at my life and look[ing] back at my high school experience; the [math teacher] scared the crap out of me. He just intimidated and he was sarcastic. He was mean. [But] after every test we had in his class, he would lecture us on something else. He would lecture us about why corn is the worst thing that's happened to the

United States. He would lecture about space and time. He would do all these kind of things and they were phenomenal conversations and he still taught me math.

Steve credited school, specifically high school, with offering rich opportunities for him to grow in ways he had not imagined possible. A study abroad experience his sophomore year was one such example. Steve summarized,

I studied abroad in Paraguay between my sophomore and junior year of high school.... So we hosted a kid from Paraguay before I went. And then I went and lived with him for a summer. And it was probably the best, most conflicting time of my life. And like that was fascinating to me and then like being a part of something where it's a third world country and then coming back to a first world where the schools are very structured. I don't think the schools necessarily had anything to do with me going there or like me learning something but I think the teachers that I've had have done that.

His college experience followed a similar pattern, creating opportunities for him to engage and be challenged both socially and intellectually. Steve noted,

And then getting to college, being an RA, like being a part of residence life has affected my choice to be part of social justice work.... And while at times, I have incredibly resented it, like I sometimes even now resent it more than I can believe and like just do not want to do it, the fact of the matter is that I can have these conversations and I can talk to people and I can have thoughts and know that they won't agree with me and they will challenge me and that is fantastic for me. Because I love the challenge.

Peer influence. Steve reported that his interactions and connections with peers had been mixed throughout his life. Several instances in particular shaped where Steve was at the time of the interviews. Unfortunately, many of his general experiences were at odds with those around him. Steve revealed,

And I don't know what the case was or why it was me but, for some reason, I was the one that people didn't want to hang out with and wanted to pick on and stuff like that. So I remember one of my other good buddies, he stuck with me throughout all that and he was a good guy all through elementary school and then we got to middle school and fell apart.... I kind of bounced around to different groups and then sophomore year I started to kind of get some better friends. Junior year, I remember going to a year book signing junior year, and I just didn't have anyone sign my year book because there was just no one I knew to sign my year book... But my senior year, like I got a friend, and he was an awful influence on me.... I was trying to fit in and then I realized halfway through it, "Wow, this is bad." So we stopped hanging out.... And so I got some good friends in the second half of my senior year who I still keep in touch with and I hang out with but, pretty much, I feel like through 7th to 11th grade nothing really happened in terms of friendships.... And I think probably it was just I worked a lot and my friends didn't and during my sophomore year I went to Paraguay and studied abroad for a summer so I was gone for an entire summer. I just think that I've always been more of a quiet type.... But just kind of being different and never really being that outspoken has just kind of [what] made it difficult for me to have tons of friends.

The transition from high school to college allowed Steve another opportunity. What he found is that connecting with like-minded peers emerged through venues that gathered them around similar interests. Steve articulated,

Most of my friends aren't involved in justice work at all. The only person I know who's involved with justice work right now, like really involved, is my girlfriend and that's cause we met doing justice work together. But I mean, I have relationships with people who are involved with justice work but I wouldn't consider any of them like close friendships or anything like that.... I think my negative relationships with my peers have probably affected me more than the positive ones and that's like really sad to think about.

Defined identities. During the screening process, I affirmed that Steve identified as White, male, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. As such, I asked Steve to comment on which aspects of his identity were most salient to him. Steve asserted,

I think it's a tie between White and male, and to a lesser extent heterosexual. But also because I'm a White male. I think because the work that I've done has been so focused on masculinity, I'd have to go with being a male because I spend a lot of time with that. I spend a lot of time with my groups. I'm part of a fraternity. I'm in a group which [*sic*] focuses on working with gender issues, so it's very salient. But then I went to the White Privilege Conference and that was just like, "You're White. You're all these things. Not just race and ethnicity." And I was just like, "Holy crap. I haven't thought about this to this point because my school is predominantly White, so I don't have to think about it." There are lots [of] women, there are lots of transgender students, there are lots of people who I do see on a daily basis and that makes me

much more aware of my gender identity and my sex and what I do with that and how I show up. And so I think, to answer your question in a more roundabout way, I think that it really depends on where I'm at and who I'm with as to what identity I'm most aware of. But generally, right now, I think about being a man and how that affects how people view me.

Steve's awareness contributed to his broader understanding while at the same time creating questions that drew him deeper into the conversation. Regardless, as his understanding of how his identity intersected with the world around him grew, Steve developed a deeper commitment to social justice.

I asked Steve to consider how his work in social justice efforts contributed to or detracted from his identity. He asserted,

I think they contribute to me immensely because they allow me to grow. I honestly don't think they detract from my human experience at all. I mean, it's difficult to go out and have a conversation with someone and know that you might offend them or know that you're coming from a place that is privileged and you don't have to worry about how you're offended because what you're talking about really does not offend you because it's not your identity. But it's also an amazing experience to go out and talk to someone and have them say, "You just offended me." And you're just like, "Holy crap. I did not even realize that." It's like a light bulb going on.

Steve saw the value offered to him through interacting with those holding diverse perspectives. Through each opportunity to deepen his awareness he was becoming a better person and more consistent with his values.

Values and beliefs. As I spoke with Steve, his beliefs were clearly shaped by his family and those substantive life experiences. I asked him to describe his key beliefs and goals. Steve responded,

One of my key values and key beliefs are that family does come first and will always come first for me. And making sure that my family can grow and change through things like partnership in relationships but, knowing that like my mother, my father, my girlfriend, my sister, my grandmother, all these people come first to me and knowing that I have to take care of them. And then that circle where it's like first you have to take care of yourself, and then you have to take care of your family, and then you can just start working outwards into society. I also believe that everyone deserves a fair chance, deserves to be treated equal, and deserves to be treated how they want to be treated.

Steve expanded that thought further and explained,

The platinum rule is something that I've been thinking about a lot. And it's treat others the way they want to be treated rather than treat others the way you want to be treated.... I firmly believe that nine times out of ten, people are not trying to insult you or make you feel disrespected; they just don't know you. They don't know what makes you comfortable. And I think that it's my duty, as someone who is a part of society, to realize that and want to make sure that I'm meeting people where they want to be met and not expecting them to come meet me all the time.

Steve developed a commitment to hard work and quality work from his family guidance and personal work experiences. Complimenting that influence, Steve's strongest source of evaluation of his efforts and performance became himself. Steve commented,

A lot of it is who I am. I'm very much a perfectionist. I want to do everything right and I want to be perfect. I don't want to ever mess up. I don't want to ever offend people. And so those times where I do, they weigh heavily on me and I think about them a lot. Which isn't good at all. I need to focus on the positives more. I'm trying. I'm actively trying to talk about good things I've done and think about that. But it's hard when you know that sometimes those things you've done and things you've said are really hurtful.... So I remember specific details like that but I know that when my actions hurt people, those are the ones that weigh on me the most and those are the ones that I think about the most.

Fortunately, in addition to the conscientiousness that drove his self-evaluation, Steve also possessed a love of learning and the learning process itself. He continued,

I love school. I think education is like the key to success of society. Like if we don't educate people, then there is just no point. Education is the way to change the world. I think that educators, in themselves, value that but I think education as a system does not.... School doesn't teach for life, they teach for education. Math is an important science like all those things and becoming a science major, I love math. I love all of those things. I love history, I love English. Those are beautiful things but we need to teach, we need to do more. We need to teach more about life. We need to teach who human beings are. I just think that if you're not exposed to other beliefs and other viewpoints and other thoughts, you will never grow.

Having revealed a glimmer of his desire to pursue becoming a teacher, I asked Steve to comment on what his goals were at the time. He responded,

My main goal is I want to essentially live a happy life. I want to be happy. I want to be able to provide for our family, provide for my family. I want to be able to work with people to make their goals achievable. So a big thing for me is I'm still, career wise, not quite sure what I want to do. I'm still working on that.

Social justice work. Reflecting on his engagement, I asked Steve to share what work he was involved in that he felt qualified as social justice work. As a student, Steve engaged on campus in a variety of experiences that he felt represented advocacy for social justice. Beyond his role as an RA, he summarized,

I currently am involved with [a men's student organization] which is like our on-campus group that focuses on helping prevent, how men can prevent sexual assault, as well as understanding what masculinity is and why we are who we are and what we do and why men feel, how men feel different pressures from society than women or transgender individuals, anything like that. How is it different for us...I also am planning Take Back the Night again, for the second year in a row. I'm an executive member of [a campus organization] which, because they need someone to plan all the paperwork to get money for our account I volunteered for that. And so I spend a lot of time with gender equality and sexual assault issues as well as some issues of race.

Steve described the co-curriculum of his residence hall community as rich with, and focused on, inserting questions of justice. Likewise, his interests have led him to engage with student organizations that advocate for a more just social structure.

Above all, Steve recognized that he could choose not to engage in justice work. I asked him what kept him involved in the work when he could be doing otherwise. Beyond feeling his efforts were consistent with his values, Steve noted the small acknowledgements

of appreciation from others that helped him feel as if he was making a difference. He highlighted,

There was a post on [social media] I remember because we have our [student organization] shirts that gives us some unity and representation. I was writing it one day and someone posted on my page, “Whoever was wearing the [student organization] shirt today, you made me smile because I am a victim of sexual assault and it makes me feel good to know that there are men out there who do stand up for women and individuals like myself.” And I remember thinking, “Wow. That’s so cool...” It's fun and amazing and you get to watch people grow and change and you get to see your impact daily. I can't think of a greater gift.... I can't think of a greater honor than to see how you affect another human being.

Steve also recognized there was work yet to be done, especially being aware of how his language communicated attitudes that were harmful. Steve reflected,

I remember reading an article my supervisor sent me about feminist men and how there are things they say that are very non-feminist, such as saying “I'm attracted to strong women.” I said that. I still say that sometimes. But from the article's standpoint, it was, “You're saying that the only reason women should be strong are [*sic*] so that they can attract you.” And I don't intend it that way. I don't mean it that way. I don't mean to say, “Oh, you need to be attractive to me for me to like you” but I say [that phrase] and I can understand where it's perceived that way.

Steve demonstrated the first step to be gaining an awareness of different perspectives, so as to understand the impact of his actions. The second step was to then act consistently with one’s stated values.

Recognizing the challenges inherent with justice work, I asked Steve to consider what justice work looked like for him on a daily basis. He remarked,

I think a lot of it is just being prepared at all times for having those tough conversations and kind of being on your toes. Because you never know when someone's going to come to you and be, "Man, this happened to me." And it's going to be an issue where you have to kind of look deeper than just surface level.... I'm always kind of thinking like what's going to happen if someone comes from here? What's going to happen if someone comes from there? Where can I come from? Because it was very easy for me to slow into that mind set of, "Okay, we're going to have a real conversation. It's going to be really difficult. It's going to be harsh. There's going to be a lot of discomfort [*sic*] and stuff like that." How do we have these conversations...? I think I try and think really critically of everything I hear and see, for the most part.

While Steve recognized he had room to improve, his love of learning coupled with a belief that people should be treated the way they want to be treated drove him to continue his presence in justice work. Steve asserted,

I do feel like an outsider. I feel like an outsider who wants to be on the inside. Because I remember going to WPC and sitting down and we were in this group and we were talking about ways to get food to people.... And I didn't know that that was an issue. It's never been even remotely on my mind.... I think that we can beat these problems and I think that we will but that the issues we're looking at transcend [our] identities and until we start to acknowledge that, we're never going to really do any work.

Over time, Steve's engagement and learning led him to believe in the priority and power of justice work. As he did so, the role he and other privileged people play in advocacy for social justice also began to materialize. Steve articulated,

And I think that ability to choose is a huge privilege and a huge power that some people don't have and I should tap into that. I think that, while the deck is rigged in my favor, and I want it to be less rigged, I think that the best way to de-rig the deck is to convince the people with the rigged deck that it needs to be de-rigged. And people from those identities that are subordinated or whatever, they cannot convince me as well as other people of my identity could have convinced me.

Steve's optimism served as a source of hope, believing that fundamentally to see a positive change required us to affirm each other. Steve concluded,

Yes, men, White men, have all the cards and yes, they have a leg up from the day they're born. But society is changing, albeit slowly. And we're not crediting men. White men want to deal with it. And while I'm not saying that our plight is terrible, I'm just saying that we need to realize that this is going on and, that for every social movement there will always be backlash for people of privileged identities and there'll always be a backlash for people of unprivileged identities. It's just like we have to look at the issue as a whole and see that these social justice movements are phenomenal and they need to have happen. But we need to look at how it affects everyone. I think that [my mentor] was the first person who really showed me that, and showed me that no matter who you are or what your life is or what cards you were dealt, your experience is valid regardless. And I'm sure other people share that and I think that is a very rare quality anymore.

Summary

In this chapter I have provided a life history profile for each of the nine participants. I captured the profile data into five broad categories that included participant comment on their upbringing and influences, peer influence, defined identities, values and beliefs, and social justice work. Each profile contained direct participant narrative, used heavily to portray the essence of who each person was in his own words. The purpose of the profiles was to place the participants' perceptions within the context of their lived experiences.

The aggregate profiles revealed participants were shaped by their upbringing and their educational experiences. All participants came from homes that valued the pursuit of education beyond high school and all but one came from homes where at least one parent had completed a college degree. Their families included six two-parent households, three where the parents were divorced, and two with extended family members who lived with their family or in close proximity that had significant influence. All had siblings; however, one lived essentially as a single child given the age and location of step-siblings through remarriage. Parents consistently encouraged active engagement, hard work, and doing well in school. Also, six participants talked about their parents modeling service to their respective communities. Additionally, two participants recalled direct conversations with their parents growing up about inequity that shaped how they came to see the world. Experiencing clear messages that contained racial bias was interestingly reported by two participants. Schools were noted as providing positive influence, especially from specific teachers or role models.

Feedback from peer influence was also interesting. With one exception, all reported that peers from high school and college in general had a neutral or negative impact on their engagement in social justice work. Few reported any conversations about opportunity or

success. Interestingly, all reported that the interactions they had with diverse peers helped them to see the world differently than they had been led to believe, for which they were quite grateful. Three participants reported that they tended to have more friends who held social identities different from their own, and feeling more comfortable among such unique individuals. Two participants reported that the adversarial relationships they generally experienced with peers encouraged them to remain engaged in justice work. All participants, in one way or another, noted that directing their work within their privileged peer groups was the arena in which they might have the most impact on injustice. Finally, three individuals found themselves inspired and held accountable by their peers.

Of their defined identities, participant race and gender were noted as most salient to them. Also mentioned frequently was their class identity given that many were situated in or had chosen to focus on economic justice issues such as access to education. Likewise, all had chosen to frequently situate themselves in settings where holding the privileged identities they did was not the norm. That being the case, most felt a sense of belonging and discomfort with the recognition that came along with their presence. Therefore, regard for their identity as allies was mixed. Generally they viewed their ally work as allowing them to fulfill what they felt was their purpose in life, given their privileged status. However, several mentioned that being an ally was a duty rather than an identity or badge of honor. Likewise, several felt at times being allies detracted from their identity as they wrestled with or felt disconnected from others holding privileged identities or the vision of being successful they were working to reframe.

With respect to values and beliefs, participants consistently championed hard work, education, being helpful, egalitarianism, and being concerned beyond themselves.

Additionally, authenticity, fairness, equal access to opportunity, and being treated with dignity seemed to resonate consistently. Participants who were teachers noted a belief that all people are capable of great things. Several participants noted that they valued listening as a means to respect others and to learn more deeply about how others see the world. Finally, all believed that the world could more consistently be a better place for those holding historically oppressed identities and expressed a commitment to action that might make that possible.

Finally, the dominant context in which participants were engaging in social justice efforts was education. Participants were engaged as educators both specifically and broadly, working in the schools, planning to become college faculty, or engaged in awareness raising activities among their college peers. Five participants were engaged in racial justice focused work, two directly in gender equity work, one in economic justice efforts, and one predominantly focused on environmental and ability issues. However, all of the participants worked on more than one justice-focused issue and several discussed the intersectionality of identity and injustice, thereby demonstrating how issues of injustice are connected and have broad impact.

In Chapter 5, I provide the results of the data analysis in relation to the four research questions, identifying the primary themes that emerged through the aggregate participant data review.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings that emerged from the research that I conducted. Specifically, these findings have been refined to focus on participant perspectives that offer direct answers to the original research questions posed. What follows are the findings arranged within themes that emerged through data analysis, as described in the methodology section, of the interview material I obtained. Participants provided responses over three separate semi-structured interviews. The first interview centered on their family, upbringing, school influence, peer influence, and what experiences they felt most shaped their lives. The second interview focused on participants' reflections about their values, goals, salient identity, what they gained from justice work, as well as what challenges they needed to overcome to be successful. The final interview included participants' thoughts about their justice work, what factors drove them to engage, how they had changed over time, and what factors motivated them to stay engaged for the long term.

The analysis of the interview data is presented below, organized by research question. Themes that emerged regarding how participants came to understand their social position revealed that their family of origin played the dominant role through three distinct narratives that participants experienced. I have categorized those below as "The Right Way," "The American Dream," and "The Dream is Just That." Additional less prevalent themes included community, school influence, and dissenting voices. Regarding how participants gained awareness about the need for social justice, themes that emerged were a search for authenticity, experience as other, critical events, and environmental influence. As privileged students, participants reported barriers to engaging in justice work within themes of lack of awareness, not knowing their respective role, other's lack of awareness, undeveloped skills,

assumptions others held of participants, questions of commitment, discouraging voices, and the absence of others like them in the work. Finally, participants cited the most significant influences that led to their engagement in social justice to be the educational institutions they attended and the general environment in which they grew up. Secondary themes including life experiences and family of origin served to influence their decisions to work for justice. What follows is my comprehensive review of the findings that support these themes.

Understanding Social Position

The first research question I set out to answer in this research project was, “How did participants come to understand their social position?” Specifically, I wanted to understand how participants were led to believe opportunity was offered to each individual and what that required of each of them to obtain a successful life. In response to the interview questions, all participants described themselves as emerging from what they perceived as a middle or upper middle class upbringing. The first theme emerging was that each participant noted that the major influence shaping their understanding of U.S. culture, and their position in it, was their family of origin. Upon reflecting, participants interestingly experienced a relatively full spectrum of perspectives that included conservative, moderate, and progressive awareness of and stances on U.S. culture. Several additional themes of note emerged, revealing that participant understanding of their social position was also shaped by their community, schools, and dissenting voices, described as an adult voice in their lives offering a counter message.

Family of Origin

The primary source for children as they begin to understand the world is their family of origin. I was not surprised to hear that participants felt their families provided instruction

about the world around them, what was expected of them, and what was necessary of them to be successful in life. What I found interesting was that participants received different messages filtered through their family of origin and often based on experiences within the family structure. Data revealed that participants received what I have categorized as three versions regarding how opportunity is distributed in U.S. culture and what individual actions lead to the greatest level of success. What follows are the data that support this theme and the three viewpoints noted.

The right way: A conservative viewpoint. Several participants reflected about coming to understand their social position through growing up in a family where there was clearly a right way of doing things. This conservative viewpoint held that there was a correct way of doing things, that opportunity was offered to certain people who followed that way, and that success came to those who respected that way of doing things. Charlie, Glenn, and Andy each reported being raised in conservative homes and communities. Each of their fathers held service positions within local churches or the city structure. Specific to his upbringing, Charlie noted,

My Dad was the deacon of the church so I was given the whole notion of the very conservative, Christian ideology of how you should be in the world. Obviously-- helping others. But also the whole American dream still was very imbedded in me to where if you work hard, you'll be successful and you'll achieve things. Now that's not something that I agree with anymore. But it was definitely something that was imbedded in me from a young age. And then also through, just throughout my own development, I've learned that very racist attitudes and messages were taught to me from a young age, whether it was deliberate or not, conscious or not, by my parents,

my family, my friends. Those messages were definitely imbedded in me from a young age.

Clearly immersed in a very conservative religious community, Charlie was led to believe that there existed one truth that was valid for all. His family contributed to that ethos and passed along the perspective to Charlie.

Similarly, Glenn's father served as the pastor of several churches from early in Glenn's life through Glenn's graduation from high school. Glenn shared,

So it went from these very, not hyper-biblical, hyper-fundamental thoughts to don't let anything change our worldview, to--and as I got a little older it got a little more secularized and it ended up working really well as I got into high school--developing into the idea if you are going to look at something and think about why then [not] look at both sides of it...I mean my parents are still very conservative. They are still big proponents of you go to college to get a degree that will make you money and then you will get a job that will make you moderately successful and [allow you to] have a nice life. That is their track record and right now that is what their goal is for me.

Clearly passing on a conservative foundational perspective, with a defined understanding of how life worked, Glenn's family shaped a perspective on life similar to that which Charlie experienced. Once the foundation was set, his family did provide the room for Glenn to consider questions and to look at social elements from different angles.

Unlike for Charlie and Glenn, Andy's family unit changed early when his parents divorced, allowing for influence from his extended family. However, Andy noted receiving a

clear understanding from the majority of his family about who he was and how society worked. Andy explained,

So family structure was a little strange. Both my parents were very young. My dad was 22, I want to say, and my mom was 19. So both my parents were pretty young. And being born in a small town, my dad worked a couple jobs and then my mom was going to school at [large Midwest university]. And she was floating back and forth between full-time and part-time and working, so most of the time during the day I was raised by my grandparents...It was more so work hard and not smart necessarily a lot of times. ... I've come to realize that you should work smart over ... working hard.... And then a bunch of farmers, military men, and cows is what my family grew up as, extremely right winged, conservative family. The only thing like extremely upset [them was] when Obama got elected. Different things like that. They've never really said, [came] straight out and said, "Oh, well, White people are better." They've never said that but that's pretty much the values that [were] installed upon how I looked at it a lot of times...My family is like well, "If you can't speak English before you come here, don't come here. If you're going to come here, learn to speak English, learn how to drive," all these different things, that is what they say. So like I said, I was told, "Hang out with WASP people, white Anglo Saxon protestant," and that's who I was supposed to date so I was supposed to (1) find a White farmer girl to date. I was supposed to find a White Christian girl or something like that. My family is all still, "If your sexual orientation's anything but heterosexual, get out of our family." At least that's what I've been told and I've had cousins who have come out as either bisexual or homosexual and I have not heard from them for a very long time.

Andy understood from his family that everyone had a place in the social structure, and that the way his family operated was the correct way. As importantly, he also understood that he was expected to progress within those guidelines and perspectives as well.

The American dream: A moderate viewpoint. While experiencing a less conservative upbringing, several participants reported also gaining a clear understanding from their family unit about where they stood in the social structure. Receiving a moderate viewpoint, participants learned that opportunity was fairly distributed to everyone and that success came through the pursuit of education, hard work, and helping those around you. Brandon, Lincoln, Steve, and Ray each recalled being instructed on how the path to success worked and told that some people were not as fortunate as others. Specific to his situation, Brandon reported,

Yeah, I think, for me growing up, as I mentioned, my parents were very young when they had me. They were 19; they had high school diplomas; they didn't have the opportunity to really pursue any higher education because they were raising a child and then eventually two children. And so for me growing up, they always really instilled the value of education and how hard work and education and getting good grades and all that could result in going to college, which would result in getting a good job which [*sic*] paid well, and was able to provide for your lifestyle. So that was the linear progression, I guess. So if you want to look at it that way: You go to school, you work hard, you get good grades, you go to college, and get a good job and then you would live happily ever after, that kind of thing. So that was the messaging that I got as I grew up. It was fairly consistent with the dominant message that's out there,

that this is the land of opportunities and those that are willing to work hard will get opportunities and so that was just the message.

Brandon recalled being drilled at home by his mother with flashcards, and understanding that education was the vehicle to success. Growing up in a small town, he was also encouraged to hold onto the possibility of moving on to something bigger and better than what his family currently had in life, education being the primary vehicle.

Lincoln remembered receiving a similar message about education being the road to success, a theme that significantly shaped his interests and approach to life. Demonstrating that message, Lincoln's father made the decision to pursue an Ophthalmology degree in his late 20s, and his parents had Lincoln while his father was in medical school. Lincoln highlighted,

Education was something that was always valued in my family and that was something that was very prioritized. I mean it was just assumed that I would come home and do homework before I did anything else. My mom was very active at school volunteering for field trips, in the classroom, and we always made a big thing about the first day of school. During the summer we did reading; we loved to read.

And so all those things were how we thought about how you would have success.

You would have it through school; that was important.

To illustrate, Lincoln further discussed a moment that the value of education crystalized for him, along with the reality of where his family stood financially. At Christmas time one year, he remembered the family wanted to contribute to the church they were attending through a recommended formula, which included adding the number of years you had been in school.

Lincoln captured this memory:

And so I remember we were sitting around the kitchen table adding up all the years of school that my dad had gone to school because he went to all those years of undergrad and then went to nursing school first and then he went to med school. And then my mom went to college and then we were all, there were three kids, we were all in second and third grades. So that added up to be a whole lot and they said, “Wow, we really can't afford this.” So I think of that time. I realized kind of two things; one, that we must really think school is really important, and two, we don't have a lot of money right now. I don't think I had really ever made that connection before and never felt poor as a kid. But looking back, I think we had a lot of debt because of school. My parents were not fortunate enough to have someone like I have in them to pay for their schooling so they have a lot of debt that I was never really conscious of. But that's when I realized we didn't have a lot of money to spare.

Looking back, like Brandon, Lincoln perceived that the lifestyle he enjoyed was middle class and that the family was not concerned about where the next meal was coming from. Because of that family environment, he saw education as an important vehicle to success. Further, Lincoln's parents shielded him from knowledge of any concerns, thus enabling him to focus on doing well in school. Reflecting, he saw these dynamics as demonstrating clearly the method that would lead to his ultimate success.

Comparable to Brandon and Lincoln, Steve received messages about his social position and forging success that entailed an emphasis on hard work and education. Steve articulated,

My parents both came from a more middle-lower class kind of family.... My parents, especially, are very driven with financial success and financial stability, not that other

people are not driven by financial stability but my parents put heavy emphasis on it. “You're going to college so you can get the job so you can provide for yourself and you can make money, you can have awesome [happiness]....” My parents always were very determined that I would make something of myself and that I would be able to get a good education and they pushed me very hard in school to be the top of my class. I worked very hard. I spent a lot of time at school and a lot of time on my studies. Another thing that they were very determined for me to do was you have a job and by the time I was a teenager, so I started working, I want to say I was 14. So I think between my freshman and sophomore year of high school I started working full time in the summers at a retreat center about a half mile away from my house....

They have always instilled when you go to a job, you work your hardest, you put your heart and soul into it, you make sure that you get a good job.... Ever since I was little, I've kind of always remembered, “Watch out for your sister, watch out for others, treat everyone how you want to be treated.” The golden rule.

Reflecting on his upbringing, Steve was taught early on that education and hard work allowed people to achieve social standing and stability. Perhaps as important was the value resonating that he should treat all people as he wanted to be treated.

Finally, Ray, too, developed an outlook on life from his immediate and extended family. Raised in the Catholic church and attending Catholic school, the messages he was hearing in church and school were reinforced at home as well. Ray recounted,

More or less, it was always from my personal end of it, my parents always said, “If opportunity came definitely consider it. Don't ever try to squander it just because you are comfortable where you are at. That could lead you down the line to something

better or something that you have never considered.” But they've also talked about, “Be thankful for the opportunities that you do achieve, whether it’s by your hand, or what you can see by your hand, or if someone brings it to you.” Our family has had, they keep on bringing up issues from our family history where opportunities have been squandered.... I think the biggest value that I can still recall easily enough being thrown at me was always put in the largest effort with whatever you do. So they encouraged me to work at a younger age. I started working, and haven't ever actually not held a job, since from the summer before fourth grade.... But either way, one of these social values that was instilled on us was along the lines of the golden rule, really. I don't ever recall my mother or father trying to relate what was said in church or private school in their own words or correcting them.... But other than that it didn't feel like the stereotypical conservative values. I don't ever recall them commenting on gay and lesbian. Of course it was always that expectation that everyone was heterosexual, but it was never anti-anyone in a sense.

Ray essentially received messages consistent with the American Dream: that if you work hard, treat people properly, go to church, and serve the community, you will live a good life. While aware that there were those less fortunate, Ray also received a clear view of the path to success that was based on his individual effort and that he believed was by and large available to all.

The dream is just that: A progressive viewpoint. Unlike the participants mentioned above, Graham and Samson experienced an upbringing that included a view that achieving social position was more challenging for some and that the road to success was inequitable. These participants received a more progressive viewpoint that shaped an understanding for

them early on that opportunity was distributed inequitably, that their family was fortunate to have received that opportunity, and that it was important to advocate that others in the community receive opportunity more justly. Each coming from families working for or associated with community non-profit agencies, these gentlemen were positioned to see disparity from an early age, having full knowledge that the American Dream was a façade for many. And as they recounted, such an upbringing inherently shaped how they saw the world.

Similar to several of the other participants, Graham grew up and was educated in a small town. Doing well in school and attending church were important facets of his upbringing and how his perceptions of the world were shaped. Connected to his community in ways similar to Ray, Graham was influenced by messages of service, the importance of community, and the impact of being present to others. Graham remembered,

I grew up in the typical southern middle of the Bible belt environment. There were 150 Baptist churches in our community and only 50,000 people.... But we basically grew up, I'd say middle class, a long majority of the time because my dad was the primary income [provider] and he did not really ever see the professor raise, but we were also comfortable.... It was never to the extent of I don't know where my next meal's coming from. And we were very cognizant of that and grateful for that so we didn't really ask for a lot of things. And so that was sort of the environment I was born into and, again, it was a small town environment as well. Community was emphasized very, very early on in regards to you knew your neighbors, you knew the people who went to church with you, who went to school with you, and there's this sort of general feeling of it takes a village to raise a child and that's sort of how it seemed, I guess.... My parents, actually, never set a clear, American dream state or

type of thing. I never had any sort of pressure to be anything or do anything or believe anything. I was really given much ability and support to sort of grow up my own way. But with that, there are a lot of subtle messages that I received from my family and one of the ones, the family goals I sort of lived my life with was my parents told me three rules my whole life growing up and the three rules were, [first,] have fun. Make sure you're enjoying and experiencing life in a way which [*sic*] you're enjoying. The second one was pay attention, always be cognizant of those who are around you and all of the opportunities around you as well as what are the needs. And the last one was work hard. If you're going to do something, make sure you're putting your full effort towards it.

Graham reported that both his parents demonstrated those three rules through a selfless approach to their daily lives, often helping those around them. While he was encouraged to work hard, and knew hard work to be a key to success, he was not hampered with expectations to overcome that which had not been given to him or a previous generation.

Similarly, Samson's awareness of social position was also shaped by where he grew up and by his family of origin. Growing up in a diverse setting where his mother was active in community non-profit work, Samson gained understanding of his social position through a lens greater than his own. Samson illustrated,

Growing up, so, my mother was raised Jewish, my father Episcopalian, and when I was six or seven we found the Unitarian Universalists in a town nearby. The UUA was a very liberal-based faith, very open faith, that draws from many creeds, many different texts. Any given service might draw from the Bible, or the Koran, or various other types [of religious books] like that. And so my parents had this very open mind

on which I was raised. My mom had many viewpoints on racial equality and racial integration. And that became this framework from which I begin [*sic*] to see the world from a very early age. And her messages and her work and her efforts. I would attend, when she was with the [community organization], I would attend various community events that the [community organization] would put on. And so that came very much from my mom. I remember they used to have these monthly book clubs. And this one book I remember, ‘Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria?’ by Beverly Tatum. I remember going to this event, it was a forum discussion, and it was the first time that I was made aware of the academic achievement gap. Now I know they call it the academic opportunity gap because the word achievement places the blame on students whereas opportunity places the blame on the system failing to provide opportunity for its students. So those early experiences, paired with some of the teachers that I had, really made me want to focus on education especially. So that was one of my earliest memories. I was probably in middle school and I could read those books at that age.

As Samson noted, he was positioned at an early age to see the world differently than many. What became clear was that he was both privileged to be in his position and that not everyone was afforded the opportunities that he was enjoying. As importantly, he saw firsthand the value of coming together to resolve issues of community concern.

Community

Several additional themes of note emerged from participants regarding how they came to understand their social position. For three individuals, the role their community played in shaping their perceptions was significant. Whether in their church, school, or the

city itself, each of these participants reflected on the combination of what they were hearing at home and experiencing in community networks as instrumental in helping to reveal a greater understanding of the discrepancies of social position and the privileges they enjoyed.

To illustrate, Graham's family emphasized connection to and involvement in the community. Family, community, and church all seemed to blend together. Specifically, the church community of peers and youth ministry instruction was particularly influential in shaping the lens through which he understood the world. Graham elaborated,

And then I had this other segment of me. I had friends and family and people at church who were also pushing me more towards looking at bigger, broader issues. What did I want to do outside of baseball in my life? And that's where social justice came into play for the first time was because I got involved with the bent to activism with the local school system.... But then there were also the people, [Friend, name withheld], specifically, when I was 16 or 17, we started reading and hearing about like the social justice work.... [She] was a big influence for me because [she] always was a person who I could feel safe with to ask really hard questions and really challenge, well what are we doing in our community, what are we doing, how are we serving other people with that?... And I do think the other person... [who] had some influence, who I was talking to early and young adult influenced me, would be [name withheld], who was my youth minister because he was the first person who taught me that church was not just a feel good time that you went to please your mother and sit in the choir and look pretty. That there was also this radical message within the physical text, the context that said Jesus also looked at injustice and he turned up tables and was talking about doing justice and walking humbly with God. Going back

to high school, [he] met this very early on with that the American dream was harmful and both false in a sense when we talk about success is not material at all and it's not this capitalistic gaining of status in that there was actually large injustices going on through human trafficking and through other larger issues in regards to economic injustice that we, as Christians, were contributing to and we never questioned.

Complementing the latitude offered by his family, the church community of his youth minister and peers helped Graham to see the normative message of the American Dream as needing to be questioned. Through that process of questioning, he began to understand his social position and contributions to community as much more complicated than he and others had come to perceive.

Ray reported a similar experience in his community where he saw the values emphasized at home both complemented and influenced by the messages he received in church and through his school. Ray offered,

More or less what they said in the church or school, [my parents] said as values [at home] and luckily the parish and the schools that I was affiliated with was the Jesuits and so--and a lot of their work and emphasis is directed on social justice issues, predominantly the poor. So we would hear a lot within sermons about making sure that you are providing care for others who can't provide care for themselves, donating to charities, and even visiting folks that don't have connections anymore, such as the elderly in assisted living homes.

The values that the church advocated were consistent with what Ray's family believed. Therefore a consistent message was embraced and modeled at home, as well as in the community.

While drawing significantly from his family environment, the unique nature of Samson's hometown served to both expose him to a diverse lens and to illustrate what his mother was sharing through her guidance and work. Samson remarked,

And so I guess I should talk a little bit about [my hometown] because I attribute a lot of how I see the world to [town in East]...So [my hometown] is this hybrid of the two towns in that it's a very racially diverse town that's also very racially segregated too as well.... I explained a little bit about [my] high school in [the town] where I came from. It has a different, very diverse student body and even like in middle school and grade school before that there was tracking started in 6th grade, my middle school, which was doing some placement testing to level 3, level 4. So it was apparent if you walk into a classroom you could tell which level and what track you were for the most part. You know the level 4 class had predominantly White students and the level 3 or remedial level had predominantly students of color. And here I was, I was in all honors throughout high school as well and it was like being in that climate where I can visibly, literally see inequality occurring in my school. This was something I was surrounded with every year in grade school. This whole issue around tracking, it was in-school segregation. And I think that really had an impact on how I see the poor and inequality of all students receiving a quality education.

Coupled with the early exposure to the readings and community discussion events he was included in by his mom, attending high school in a diverse community allowed Samson to see equity and opportunity concerns first hand, further emphasizing the need for community action.

School Influence

Several participants also mentioned their respective schools as providing influence that they now attribute to helping them both understand their social position and their ability to make a difference. Through the academic instruction, and as importantly through the interactions with peers, Glenn, Lincoln, and Steve each reported instances that led to their increased awareness. Each interaction supported messages provided on a foundational level by their family of origin.

Coming from a conservative family background, Glenn also attended a conservative Christian high school that he attributed with shaping who he had become. Glenn commented, So the Christian high school was very conservative, very oppressively so, oppressive might be, well oppressive might be a strong word but deliberately so might be a better way of saying it. And so they left very little wiggle room in their argumentation and their rhetoric. So as I went through these five years of this school and I started to do outside work on my own because I was getting [one option] and no other option, I started looking for my own options and the way it was bottled. It was this middle upper-class White conservative Christian school and by conservative I mean conservative like Republican Libertarian.... And I'm not saying that some of my decision to join [activist groups in college] has just been entirely this sort of spiteful spat at my school, because I definitely agree with a lot of the leftist politics, but I think it's definitely what led me down that path to looking into it [social justice work] and discovering it.

Lincoln likewise, while attributing his outlook to his family of origin and their commitment to education, noted that such commitment led to him being in the college

environment. As he reflected, Lincoln felt the combined learning environment of curriculum, peer interaction, and experiential opportunities served to reveal the privilege he did not want to own. Lincoln recounted,

And then besides that, I think the only other thing that could have contributed was the transition from high school, and not understanding my privilege fully, to half understanding and half believing that it must have been because my dad was a hard worker and he worked hard but these other people they didn't work hard so that's why they are [where they are]. I never really thought about it like that, maybe that's how I rationalized it to myself. Anyway, I never really thought about that much, but then when I went to college I realized my privilege and how that shaped how my life is and had been lived.

For Lincoln, the college environment offered a place where critical consideration of his social position could occur, thereby expanding the foundation provided at home. Clearly being in such an environment facilitated his deepened awareness of his social position.

Like Lincoln, Steve attributed the foundational awareness of his social position to his family of origin. And like Lincoln, Steve experienced a learning community comprising his involvements that helped him to fully understand the social position he held and enjoyed.

Steve commented,

While it's been hard and while sometimes I just cannot stand the people [within the university] that have challenged me and they make me so angry, I think that they have really, strongly, influenced my choices to get involved with this. Two years ago, my freshman year, I would not talk about this to anyone. I remember the only thing that I would not tolerate was when my friends used the word fag. I was, "No, use something

else. It offends me.” Because that was the only thing that I ever really pushed and then being a part of res life pushed me to have deeper conversations. “Well, why do you not do this? Well, why is it wrong?” I was just, “It offends me.” And then it was, “Okay, well how do you have a conversation with someone about this? How do you learn about this? Why is it that we don't understand why it offends you? Why didn't your friend get it?” That kind of thing. And so that really pushed me and it was, “Well, why don't you go to WPC, why don't you try this out, why don't you read this book, why don't read this article, why don't you study this thing, why don't you join the movement?”

While Steve drew on the foundation his parents provided, he also attributed time, place, and environment to making a difference. The aggregate of the learning experiences within which he had engaged caused Steve to consider the reality of his social position in a way he had not comprehended before. The experiences deepened his understanding of privilege through what proved to be an unsettling and revealing process.

Dissenting Voices

For those participants raised in the more conservative and directive environments, some elements existed that catalyzed their awareness of their social standing. It is interesting that dynamics arose that allowed each to emerge from that environment to gain a greater awareness of social inequity. For three of the participants, there existed a dissenting voice that quietly but clearly opposed aspects of the family's norming behavior.

In our discussion, Andy noted hearing a dissenting voice from his grandmother. While messages of place permeated his family structure, it was his grandmother who

remained steadfast with messages that supplemented and contradicted what he was hearing so loudly from others. Andy explained,

Out of all the people, my grandma was extremely open minded and still has a lot of the same values that my family has but she tried to teach me and definitely keep me in more of an open minded instead of a close minded person.... My grandma always said treat people how you want to be treated. So that was a big thing that stuck with me. So I definitely always treated people with the, pretty much, no matter who you were, even if I had these stereotypes, I pretty much still treated how I wanted to be treated even regardless if they had taught me differently.

His grandmother's messages, while subtle, served to emphasize and deliver alternative family perspectives that drew on an inclination seeded in Andy's core. Such messages built on the family position that they serve the community through the military and law enforcement realms. Andy believed that his grandmother's voice was pivotal to allowing his inclinations toward justice work to emerge.

Charlie, in similar fashion, received support and encouragement from the quiet presence of an alternative voice. Though encouraged by the majority of his family to take and maintain a certain social position, a dissenting voice emerged for him. Charlie noted,

My grandmother always said, "You're going to move away and do bigger things".... I think she had a better understanding that there are other things that affect... if you're successful or not, it's not just about the work. But I think she held to that tightly, as well.

Charlie's grandmother provided an unyielding presence in his life that helped him to formulate his future plans. While messages from the family drew Charlie to stay within the

family hierarchy, his grandmother quietly affirmed his exploration of greater opportunities that became available. Doing so empowered Charlie's development, sending a message that it is okay to think beyond limitations of perceived family expectations.

Finally, the negative culture for Glenn personally in high school pulled him to explore other possibilities and interests. In particular, he also noted being influenced by four teachers, an AP Art History teacher in particular, who provided dissenting voices within an otherwise challenging environment. Glenn revealed,

I had an AP Art History teacher who was this phenomenal woman. She had four kids. She was a very devout Christian woman. One of her sons was an atheist and she didn't hold it against him. That was actually a very big deal.... She didn't hold it against him. She said if he comes back, he'll come back. He's living his life. One of her sons is a good friend of mine but the last couple months of AP Art History she left for Uganda to adopt a teenage boy because he needed help and she came back at the end of the year and she was a good enough teacher that we all ended up passing our AP exam and it is one of the hardest exams.... But the AP Art History teacher, more than I even realized now that I'm thinking about it, gave me that mindset about helping others.

For Glenn, the AP Art History teacher modeled what it meant to be Christian, quietly supporting his emerging perspective. This dissenting voice, coupled with his parents' evolving openness and the presence of teachers who met him where he was, had a lasting influence on him as a person and the choices he was making.

Raised Awareness of Need

Through this research project, the second question I sought to answer was, “What participant life experiences raised awareness of the need for social justice?” During the interviews conducted, participants revealed the uniqueness of their respective personal journeys. However, participants seemed to derive their awareness of the need for social justice work through four common patterns that are best described as a search for authenticity, experience as other, critical events, and environmental influence. What follows is a general description of these patterns and specifically how each participant fit into a specific pattern of development.

Search for Authenticity

For four participants, a common thread that emerged from the analysis of how these men became aware of the need for social justice was that their engagement in social justice work was motivated by a desire to move toward achieving a more authentic sense of self. Andy, Charlie, Glenn, and Ray each reported finding themselves on the margins in their families, schools, or both. Each held to principles instilled by their family as they worked to forge a unique path that affirmed what they believed to be right. Through a combination of experience, reflection, and understanding, each became more aware of the need for social justice work and their role in it.

Reflecting, Andy sensed he was different but could not put a finger on what that difference was until a move to another school provided insight. Andy explained,

But I didn't actually even like any girls until I was probably 14 or 15. So my family was always asking me, “Why aren't you talking to any girls?” I was looking at a lot of different White girls and it was nothing. I guess I wasn't attracted to them. But I don't

know if they were attracted to me and so I kind of questioned my sexual orientation for a while if I was actually asexual, that's what I was thinking. Because I couldn't find anybody I was attracted to. And then my mom moved to [city]; [it's] not super diverse. It's about 80% Caucasian and about 20% African American and the other very small Hispanic and Asian population. But my mom moved me to a new school and this new school [has a] higher percentage of African Americans, especially African American women. And I saw this one Black girl and, I'm not going to say her name or anything like that, but I was actually very attracted to her and that was, "Gosh," because that was the first time that ever happened.

Caught off guard, Andy reflected on his attraction. He openly wrestled with the realization that his attraction was in opposition to his upbringing and perceived expectations. Andy reflected,

But that's one thing like I've never really figured out. Why is it that I'm attracted to African American women? I'm not sure if it's because I was bullied when I was younger by White kids. I'm not sure when it was but [as far as] for attraction wise, I'm attracted to darker skinned women. I have dated a couple White women before but it's nothing too serious. My serious relationships have been with African American women. And then friendship wise, I have White friends but most of my good friends, I have a group of about four good friends. Two are Indian, one is Hispanic, and one's Black. I'm not sure if it was just based off because when I was in a group of a majority White kids I, for some reason, seemed to be able to talk to somebody of dark color compared to me better. I don't know why that is. But that's just, I'm not sure. Like I said, I'm not really 100% sure why, but I have a tendency to, a lot of times, go

and talk to somebody who is different than me as compared to somebody who has the same social identity as me.

While uncertain why his interactions were as they were, Andy embraced the tension between what his family had taught him and that internal drive to be himself. Andy presented as feeling more authentic and affirmed in communities of color than in those dominated by those of his racial identity. And his youth group experience in church continued to affirm that reality. Andy shared,

But my church was about 95-98% African American and the other 2% was different races. So out of a huge group of 150, I was the only White kid. There was one mixed kid, then everyone else was Black. So I walked in there and I'd never experienced anything like that before so I kind of like became like a deer in the headlight type thing when I walked in for the first time into this huge group. And my best friend walked up to me and he was like, "Let's go play basketball," 'cause he knew I liked to play basketball and stuff but it was kind of like an interesting thing. And when I got there, a few kids were like, "Oh, he's White. He can't play basketball." So that was kind of an interesting thing, too. I was like, "Wait, what?" Because my family would always say, "Well, they can't come over because...if he's Black, he can't come over." So I was like wait, that's versus what I'd been taught. That's what I was sitting there thinking. And my friend talked them into letting me play basketball. And we had a really good time and I came back every single week. It originally started off, I'm this White kid with all these African American kids and it was a shocker and then probably after my sixth or seventh time going, I had assimilated into the group.

Making connections that felt more authentic led Andy to discover how the lives of others in similar situations unfold. Through these interactions, Andy was confronted with reconciling the perceptions he had in his mind of those with diverse identities with the reality of what he viewed first hand. What he found contradicted family messages and altered what he thought to be true.

As his developing peer relationships continued, Andy began to see the world around him through a new lens. Specifically speaking about how his best friend influenced his life direction, Andy related,

Individual person-wise, there is one person in my life who has actually really engaged me, which has been my best friend.... And just like hearing his story though especially; he tells me every single day how somebody, they may not intentionally; are being racist, but he's seen racism, especially within every single day. I can't say that I do see that with me every single day. I am more observant now of how other people are doing it to somebody else. So, on a daily basis I might see something where somebody's, may not intentionally be, oppressing somebody, but they are still doing it. But just hearing him and he's always motivated me to just make a difference, at least within race. And then he started actually taking social justice classes and him [*sic*]and I talk now usually, probably five or six hours a week just about what he's learning and what I'm learning and we're comparing with each other. He's been the person who's actually motivated me. But then I'd also say my family's beliefs have actually motivated me even more to train, to help out my family to realize how their thinking can actually be oppressive to somebody else.

Ironically, Andy found that his family of origin also pushed him to seek spaces where he developed and felt more authentic. Having a best friend who identified as African American helped Andy to see and understand racism. Seeing someone he cared about treated poorly served as motivation for him to seek learning opportunities. Through substantive relationships with friends of color, Andy began to recognize issues of injustice within his own life and to forge a commitment to addressing those issues.

Similar to Andy, Charlie found his awareness of social justice heightened at junctures where what he was coming to know seemed in conflict with what others had told him. While not serving as periods of significant shift ideologically, a series of events led up to what became a pivotal moment for Charlie in college. First, Charlie remembered vividly moments growing up that served to shape his impressions of others. Charlie highlighted,

So one of the big things we hear about that's kind of not blatantly taught is the clicking of the car door when a person of color walks by. So I can remember vividly seeing the clicking of the car doors and I can remember asking, "Why are we locking our doors?" And my dad said, "Well, those people are not safe so we have to lock the door to protect ourself [*sic*]." Things like that. Some of the more blatant things, I think I was probably in the eighth grade whenever [*sic*] I was digging around in my brother's closet and I found a KKK hood. At the time, I was an eighth grader, so from that age is when the more blatant things started coming in and that was more from my brother than from anyone else.

Charlie found the behaviors he noticed to be troubling. Reflecting back, he could see how these experiences shaped his perspectives. While insignificant at the time, in retrospect each event contributed to a narrative that Charlie needed to critically confront. Moreover, each

blatant event provided a message he could either choose to embrace, remain neutral with, or actively oppose as his understanding of unjust practices grew.

Another such event that stood out to Charlie occurred during his senior year in high school and illustrated to him the margin between himself and his fellow student council peers. Charlie noted,

So one of the--a big thing that I still talk about with a lot of them is when we were seniors, which was when Obama was elected to his first term, and I was president of the student council and then, at this point in my life, I considered myself a Republican conservative. Very different than where I am now. But the rest of the student council, who I was all very good friends with, had a secret meeting and made this decision that if Obama was elected, the next day the entire school was supposed to wear black to symbolize the death of America. And they went behind my back because they knew, even though I had the same ideology with them, that I would have an issue with that. And so just these things that don't seem of any importance at all, I think just have really influenced how I look at these people now, how I look at other people now.

Charlie, based on internal values known to his peers, found himself drawn to a course of action that set him apart from his peers in spite of his ideological alignment. Though subtle at the time, his stance put him at odds with their actions and the general school environment.

While not fully cognizant of his diverging development at the time, Charlie's growing awareness of inequity and racism would continue to develop in college through the academic curriculum. Charlie shared,

I think some of the classes I took my freshman year started to bring to life some of the things that I think had been buried in my mind. So I took a class with a professor of color that was on diversity and public administration. And so I started getting these notions of, “Oh, there's some issues going on historically and currently.”... And so the sophomore year, whatever, I shifted gears in my ideology and everything and then the discussions that I [had] on the weekly or biweekly basis with people back home about issues of race and racism I think were very huge.

Building to a crescendo, notions, conscious and unconscious, were percolating in his mind and being reinforced through the college curriculum. Charlie was directly confronted through course content with the discrepancies of equality that many around him saw in the U.S. culture. As he reflected, Charlie became more aware that there was more to the stories than he had been told. His interests drew him to pursue greater understanding of what he perceived had been left out. Finding himself holding a new intellectual awareness, a leadership experience in a student organization the next fall reinforced his classroom experience. Charlie elaborated,

And so on top of taking the classes that I mentioned last time and some of the other things that were going on, I think [the organization experience] played a really, a key role in introducing me to different people and continuing... the process that had been bubbling at the back of my head as well.

Participating in a typical leadership experience, Charlie’s involvement facilitated interaction with people from diverse backgrounds and exposed him to a multitude of diverse perspectives. Each new experience provided new information that affirmed how diverse people, with different social identities than his, viewed and experienced life. These

experiences revealed to Charlie a deeper understanding of how others see the world and convinced him of the need for social action.

Similar to Charlie, Glenn found himself at odds with the conventional practices of his family and peers while in high school. Fortunately for him, several teachers emerged as encouraging voices who modeled acceptance of diverse perspectives. Additionally, the transition to a new college environment allowed him to connect with like-minded peers. That combination served to gradually foster the development of his values more authentically. Glenn recalled,

I feel if I was able to boil it down to the top influences that I have had I think it was the trail of events that led to me realizing that I couldn't start a political dialogue at my school, and meeting that series of very politically active friends at [large Eastern university], that led to a lot of the [protest action]...The [protest action] movement was more because I have a lot of friends who are there and they are the ones who introduced me to it. I got into it because one of my friends came up to me one day, "Do you want to go to [a university student organization] meeting today?" And I said okay and that's how I got involved. So my involvement in that has definitely been heavily influenced by my peers.

Glenn longed to engage with a more productive environment that affirmed his awareness of injustice. Connecting with peers in college who advocated similar perspectives placed Glenn at ease and allowed him to develop a deeper sense of direction. It was through these involvements, such as volunteer tutoring, that his awareness was heightened about the social realities for people different than him. Glenn commented,

It's a lot different because then you're working with kids on the same educational level as you, who are intelligent people but who are at a completely different socioeconomic level than you. And then when I am working with the tutoring center it's different. The educational level doesn't always feel like it's there because, I think I shared, a lot of the kids are very bright and sometimes there are some that really need a lot of help. Then I can definitely tell there's an educational gap there and then I have trouble getting to some of the educational concepts. And the socioeconomic status is definitely there with a lot of them, too, in terms of when one of them comes to me there with personal problems that I just don't really know how to handle because I grew up in a private White middle-class suburban school. She's talking to me about, I'm trying to help her with her Shakespeare homework, and she says, "I just don't read the books because then I get made fun of for not reading well. And so I figure why read the books and be made fun of for not reading the books well? So I might as well not learn to read them at all well." I don't have the emotional capacity to deal with this so I say, "Let's try to learn it in the first place." So it's both an educational level and also a socioeconomic level. I suppose there's also even a racial divide there, too, with a little bit of everything at the tutoring center because it is distinctly different.

Given his family upbringing and background, Glenn knows intuitively that he desires to serve and to make a difference in the lives of others. What he has only begun to realize is the proven challenge of helping others improve their lives. Seeing the challenges faced by an individual not fortunate enough to have grown up in a situation similar to his own affirmed his understanding about the need for justice work and presenting a daunting reminder of how challenging it is to achieve that desired end.

Finally, Ray also experienced a series of life events that illuminated his awareness of the need for social justice. For him, awareness was initiated through a Catholic Jesuit educational experience. However, while his upbringing set a foundation for justice, social action remained disconnected from daily life for Ray. Fortunately, he had several experiences that led him to feel differently. Asked about how those events had shaped his life course in social justice to date, Ray noted,

I can think of two right off the bat that I take feeling and thought from when I try to put myself in other people's shoes who maybe have been discriminated in different ways. And of course the ways they are discriminated against are not the same as these two instances that I always pull from. Two instances that I'm thinking about, one is when I came to what I want--I like to call political consciousness and that was around 9/11. So when that event happened I was almost, I was just about to turn 14. My birthday was about one to two weeks after that. Everyone knows how that changed the country in different ways, for different groups, too. But the whole bit about we must be patriotic, united we are, we need to go to war and more or less get these terrorists. I never really held the joy of the idea of war because that seemed to be blanketed throughout the country and of course I watch the news media and didn't know better that those are sources of social control and propaganda. I just thought that I was sort of a minority--that I wasn't a true American--and so maybe I should just remain quiet and allow the country to do what it needs to do to heal, which was to kill people in a different country. And so I think about that. As you know, when the anti-war movement became more pronounced and the unpopularity of George Bush began to gain some traction, people started talking. I always think back to how I

didn't feel I was part of it, of this great White America, that we need to go ahead and go to war. And then the other instance was my falling out of religion and how a couple people reacted negatively to me being open with that in terms of my disbelief or my being in the middle when I was trying to think of something, trying out things in terms of spirituality. And so those are negative experiences that hold the same type of messages that I was not part of the larger community. In a sense I was othered. I was somewhat of a pariah that had to be cured, or my voice wasn't valued and I--and I shouldn't really issue it.

Ray articulated that gaining some sense of what it is like to feel different really moved him to more deeply consider the impact of being oppressed. The events mentioned moved Ray to a deeper level of awareness about being marginalized and ultimately contributed to his motivation to actively work for social change.

Experience as Other

Also emerging from the data, four participants experienced marginalizing events that were of significance to their life experience. Through interviews, Andy, Charlie, Steve, and Graham all reported distinguishing themselves in some way different than the norm while growing up, thus affronting their sense of dignity and worth.

In addition to the awareness of difference through having a sister with cerebral palsy and a grandmother with a pacemaker, Andy himself grew up with a speech pronunciation pattern that caused him to stand out. Andy stated,

And then, when I was saying, when I was born, I had like a slight weird formation on the top of my mouth so when I speak, it's still somewhat pronounced but not as bad but my tongue actually hit that formation and I just have a really bad lisp because of

it. So I went through years of speech [therapy]. But I remember in grade school I'd get made fun of because of the way I talked so speech [therapy] really helped me out. Most people don't realize it now unless you're a really good friend of mine and then you can notice it.

If effect, Andy grew up with some awareness of what it meant to be different than his peers. Because he was different, he learned quickly how others treat those who are different. While not life changing in his mind, Andy noted that experience as significant in heightening his sensitivity to those around him who might experience similar instances in their lives.

Charlie also experienced physical limitations. Due to size, he found himself at a physical disadvantage when compared to his brother and other boys. Growing up in a rural setting where men and boys proved themselves through physical labor, Charlie found himself under-sized and a distant second to his older brother. Charlie commented,

So my brother and my relationship has been interesting from a young age. He was constantly doing the things that big brothers do to a younger brother. And so I think that grandma saw that and also my brother's probably two times the size of me. I'm a very small person. And so I think she saw that and almost saw it as that she needed to come in and kind of rescue me. And so that happened from a young age but then I don't know if it was a socialization with her as being in the kitchen with her and doing the more feminine things of the household, if you will, that I got to where I didn't want to be outside doing manual, physical labor. I wanted to be inside, was more interested in cooking and learning about that, more interested in fashion than in doing the other things that [my brother] and my grandpa did.

Being smaller and more interested in traditional women's duties, Charlie early on experienced what it felt like to be on the margin. While Charlie did not identify the time period as such, these interests may have been the early emergence of his bisexual identity formation. Regardless, the experience served to heighten his awareness of what it feels like to be different and placed him under the guidance of his grandmother who embraced him for who he was while creating a counter message.

Steve likewise experienced bullying at a young age. But in his case, the marginalization came at the hands of his peers, the impact of which took a significant toll. Steve recalled,

I had three friends in elementary school that I really remember like hanging out with consistently through fourth grade and then one of my friends decided that, and I remember this very vividly, he came to me on the playground and told me that he couldn't hang out with me because I wasn't cool enough. And it broke my heart. And I remember crying on the playground and just being so upset and so hurt. And we ended up going to little counseling things together with my teacher. Because I don't know, for whatever reason, I was different from everyone I guess. I don't know.

Early on, Steve somewhat innocently experienced the impact of being marginalized by his friends. Such an event made clear to Steve that he was different and intensified his awareness of that fact dramatically. Arguably, as he moved through life such an experience also allowed him to better appreciate how challenging being different can be.

Though Graham was not bullied, he found himself at odds with what he thought it meant to be a man and his own internal drive. Admittedly, Graham exhibited personality traits that championed commitment and hard work. Combined with encouragement from his

coach, his work ethic and determination fueled a damaging regimen that led to health issues he struggled to overcome. Graham related,

And for the longest period of time, baseball very much was this huge part of me, athletics especially. The one key decision going into, as I said, that aspect was when I was 13 years old, I joined a travel baseball team...and the reason that was such a big moment in my life was because that was the first time I had a tangible thing of success. I wanted to play college baseball. And I wanted to win the state title and I wanted to do all these things. And I had a coach who was very nurturing in a lot of aspects but he had two slogans which [*sic*] were sort of detrimental to me over time and one was you never get outworked and then one was push yourself and do whatever it takes. And athletics, I was getting swung around a lot, but it was really sort of harmful as well.... And then at age 17, the reason I bring that up, is because at age 17, I'm within this major shift. Junior year of high school, I had developed such a strenuous workout plan that I developed an eating disorder for a male, which is rare.

What started as a life-long dream materialized into a life-threatening situation at a very pivotal time in his life. The coaching style and Graham's work ethic nurtured extreme habits that went unchecked and placed Graham's health on the margin. Through these dynamics, Graham experienced an identity crisis and quit baseball to preserve his health. Experiencing a void, he turned to his peers who with him engaged in justice-based leadership. The pivotal moment positioned Graham with an openness to exploring his community and its true social needs.

Each of the events shared by these participants shaped who they had become. While the intensity and impact varied, each moment placed participants on the margin. Their

experiences sent Andy, Charlie, Steve, and Graham on a new trajectory that heightened their sensitivity regarding what life is like on the margin when you are different. Though their social justice commitment did not emerge specifically because of these experiences, each event altered their life course, raised awareness, and fostered their interest in what later became working for the common good.

Critical Events

However, three individuals reported that their awareness of the need for social justice work emerged abruptly. Brandon, Lincoln, and Steve each grew up believing the life trajectory they were on was normal. Yet a particularly memorable event, or series of events, served to dislodge their perspective at pivotal times in their development, thus sending each on a path not previously envisioned.

For Brandon, life unfolded as he was led to believe it should. He graduated from high school, earned a college degree, and secured a good job. After a couple years of work, he transitioned back to the university he had graduated from to work in an administrative role serving students' educational needs. But in February of that first academic year, life as he knew it fundamentally changed. Brandon remembered,

In February of 2009 while I was working at [university] in student affairs, there was a small group of students at [university] who were affiliated with a university fraternity and they coordinated an off-campus event and invited other students to attend this event on Facebook. The event page described how attendees should dress, behave, etc., but all of these descriptions had a lot of racial and ethnic and class-based stereotypes and undertones in them and, at [the university], as I'm sure a lot of people are aware, there are a lot of marginalized racial and ethnic groups at the university

and so this event was the last straw for a lot of them. In response to it, they organized a protest and protested, demanded action from the leadership, all the way up to the chancellor, to not only respond to this individual situation but to really take more preemptive measures to create a university that was more inclusive, more socially just than what currently existed, because in their opinion it was anything but that. And this event kind of demonstrated how that was the case. So I was working at the university at the time and observing all that was taking place and all this unfolding and I really saw the impact that this event, but also the attitudes and perspectives, and later on what I learned was a level of privilege that informed this behavior and this event. What kind of impact this had on not only the university as a whole but also these individuals, these students, a lot of whom I worked with and knew. So it really served as this kind of catalyzing moment for me, where I decided that I needed to take action but really start by educating myself because I really didn't have an understanding of what was going on myself, probably as a result of having privileged identities. I didn't have to think about these things. And that's the result of having a lot of privileged identities is that I didn't have to think about these things.

The reality that Brandon had known until that point in his life was inextricably altered, fundamentally changing his life course. As he articulated, the experience sent him on a new trajectory that was continuing to unfold at the time of the interviews.

Like Brandon, Steve too experienced an impact event that raised his awareness as to the need for social justice work. Reflecting on a moment that provided clarity, Steve commented,

There are lots of them but there's one and this was the one that was the first thing that ever made me really, truly analyze my privilege. I was walking in the mall with two women. One of them was a woman of color and the other one was--I don't know how the other identifies. I just know that she identified as a hetero woman, among other things. And we were walking through the mall and we walked past a Windows store and it was right after Christmas and I'd just gotten a Windows tablet, a Windows phone, and had Windows on my computer. And I remember being like, "Wow, I have a lot of stuff in there. I have all the major devices that they offer in there. I own that." I was like, "That's interesting." I just made some comment. And one of the girls, the girl, the White girl told me, she was like "privileged" and coughed it. She made this comment and I looked at her and I didn't understand what she was trying to do. I'd heard the term privileged before and I heard it used in RA training but I hadn't really applied it to myself until that moment. And while I was so angry at her for just seeing that and pointing it out to me and embarrassing me like that, I don't think I would have been as willing to push this as I have been. And I think that, while I do not like this girl, I have other issues with her, I totally think that that moment for me was where it changed. That was the moment that it changed.

Steve found that his knowledge, beliefs, and actions challenged at that fundamental moment. Confronting his fundamental yearning for equity and fairness, Steve began to consider his own privilege and the presence of an inequitable social structure. For him, that original impact event opened him to a new awareness that he could no longer overlook.

Similarly, Lincoln came to believe that the key to a successful and fulfilling life was a common path available to everyone. However, a series of related events in college served to

dislodge the reality he had come to know and altered his path. Admittedly, Lincoln lacked awareness regarding his upbringing and how that was, for some people, simply not a reality.

He revealed,

And if I had to think of an event that illustrated that, even though I knew my high school friends and the limits to their opportunity, when I got to college I still didn't really realize that and so freshman year when I was talking to people, I remember one conversation with my friend and he picked up very early on the fact that my dad was a doctor and it was like, "Oh, you're a doctor's son." And I was like, "Whoa, I'm not rich. I don't consider myself rich." We didn't honestly live luxuriously or anything. We did have two cars but they're not anything special. I guess my parents, they don't quite own their house but they are paying it down. So I didn't consider myself rich and so that kind of bothered me. It bothered me that I felt like he was categorizing me as someone other than him, someone very privileged, and that really bothered me because I didn't feel that way. I didn't associate myself with that. I guess everybody in America sees themselves as middle-class. But I didn't really realize at that point how much more privileged I was. And looking back, he was probably right. I mean I was that ignorant about it. I didn't realize the fact that I didn't have to worry about my college bills. That was a very different thing than their realities.

That event set in motion for Lincoln deeper reflection and critical thought about what he had received and what that meant for him. Subsequently, he began to consider his experiences through a different lens. Lincoln reflected,

And then, especially when I started volunteering in the community, and honestly I just did it to look good on whatever I was doing and maybe because I was interested

in it and I like being around kids. I didn't do it out of any noble kind of thing. It was self-interest, honestly. But doing that made me see very quickly that not everyone's lives were like mine, and my students' lives were so different than mine and it was very hard to believe that we had equal opportunities. Because we definitely did not have equal opportunities and they were working really hard but they were at a huge different disadvantage because they were illegal and they would never be able to get a job where they needed a Social Security card. Or because their parents didn't speak English and worked all the time, at three jobs, but at places where they were taken advantage of and were never paid a lot of money. Or because my students at [the school], they would be on the bus for two or three hours a day because they bused them in from all over. I was just really impressed with their dedication. And then they would work hard at school and they got great grades. They got way higher ACT scores than me [*sic*] so it wasn't that I was any better than them. If anything, objectively speaking, they were much stronger than me. And really, [the students] they did get into the university but they were a special case. But seeing the differences in how our families and how our lives have brought us to where we were was really eye-opening and really painful.

Lincoln suddenly found that his understanding was being furthered from many angles: first, by his peers, and then through his volunteer experiences and, finally, through his classroom engagement. Lincoln offered,

And so I guess there was maybe one class. It was about Africa, it was an African history class, and it was very painful just seeing how people's lives were so much different than my own and how my life was not only totally different but it was

different for a reason and the reason was because we had exploited them a hell of a long time ago really, really, badly. And it wasn't anything that they did. And the reason why we were so well-off is because of that; not just like that, those were two facts. We exploited them and then we're fine now and they should be over that by now. It's long-term. So I guess that class also really got, yeah, it was really painful to realize all those things but it's good.... So the combination of my classes and my peers and the conversations, we talked all the time freshman year about things like that. So that definitely had a huge impact on me. I can't say that there was one conversation that is super memorable but the cumulative effect of all of those conversations definitely pulled me much further to the left than I would have [moved] had I not attended college.

For Lincoln, the series of peer interactions, classroom discussions, and volunteer experiences exposed him to a deeper awareness of his privileged educational opportunities. Combined with a fundamental belief in fairness, Lincoln realized the need for a commitment to change. More importantly, Lincoln realized the role he could play given his awareness of true social inequities and his emerging interest in education.

Environmental Influence

Finally, for two of the participants, the data revealed that social justice work had simply been a way of life and that ultimately their engagement in such work was fulfilling their duty. Each individual, through the work of his parents and regular exposure to the concept of injustice, had come to know life as being about questioning practices, advocating for just environments, and engaging in work to bring about positive social change.

Participants saw an array of adults in their lives model positive regard for others, service to

the community, and advocacy for just practices. Participants reported being exposed to ideals of justice through celebrations, how they were treated, and the stories they heard told by those who had experienced injustice. As such, each grew up in an environment that nurtured an expectation of and commitment to a more just social structure.

Graham grew up in an environment that nurtured the way of life in which he is now immersed. Reflecting on the perspective his family environment bestowed upon him, Graham summarized,

Well my dad taught me to question and my mom taught me to be present. My sister's always taught me to sort of look toward those issues and look at your community and what's affecting them and how can you be involved and influence that and shape that. So that's [*sic*] the ways I think my family has shaped me the most and kept me on my toes, helping me to grow.

That foundation, reinforced by his youth ministry experience, set the stage for his college experience and ultimately his current life trajectory. Graham shared that the relationships he developed with college peers significantly influenced his understanding of the injustice faced by those holding diverse identities. Graham explained,

And I think leaving [home] and going to college at [Southeastern University], I met a lot of friends who had different identities, different gender identities, different sexual orientations, different racial identities as well, and I think that helped push me because that is like a continuous lesson in learning how to check your privilege and then, at the same time, also learning how to best support them in their work and hearing them. And not also only hearing them as their identity. Right? Like my friend, particularly, we did a lot of activist work together in college; she wasn't just

lesbian. She was a [woman] who loved cats and the color green, and could rock out and dance as good as anyone. But she had this identity that wasn't respected on campus. And so I think, looking on those [friends] in college, who were all three of my friends, female friends, who I think, over time, through their own lives, through our friendship, modeled activism to me, as well as modeled always approaching things to the critical ends. That they really were sort of like the supportive environment who helped me have the courage to be an ally and to do hard things and to question systems and the people in power.

Graham intentionally surrounded himself with friends who were activists. His friends continued to enlighten and motivate him to act justly and to use his privilege to advocate for justice. In effect, Graham was both drawn to and expected to fully engage in a life he had come to know as authentic.

Samson, too, credited his family structure and community environment for significantly shaping his awareness of the need for social justice. As highlighted previously, the model his mother provided through engagement in community non-profit work, the Unitarian Universalist church he attended, and the diverse community school setting all exposed Samson to an awareness that many people did not experience of social justice.

Samson recalled,

I think by virtue of being raised around a wide array of people from different walks of life, whether they were rich, poor, White, Black, big family, small family, one parent, two parent; I think by virtually being in the influence of [my hometown], no two of my friends are that much alike and that really allowed me enter into [an Eastern city], which I don't think really had anything to do in particular. I think it allowed me to

enter into living in [Eastern city] with a much different outlook on life than I realize a lot of my fellow [large Eastern university] students had.

Life in college continued to enhance his awareness, particularly through the student groups in which he chose to get involved. Groomed with a deep interest in the need for social justice advocacy fostered by his family, Samson intentionally chose involvements that would result in action. He joined a student organization committed to advocating for the equal educational opportunity for all people in the city. As a result of his involvement in this group, which had goals that were both intellectual and action-oriented, Samson quickly saw the power gained from community action. Remembering his experience with a rally for education reform, Samson remarked,

Just to see the product of weeks of effort and planning was, “Wow, okay. So we got out people who would not normally think about the issue of the budget that we were talking about.” Seeing these students who would not normally be involved in a discussion, or out in the cold wearing jackets and hats, because of the efforts of myself and other [student organization] group members. So just seeing and being able to wield power in numbers for this cause that I thought was the right cause was a very reaffirming moment and I was like, “Okay, there are people who when given more information and given the opportunity will walk out and have their voice heard.” And in this case that was in the form of this march or rally.... I think seeing that rally that I mentioned...with the leaders that range[d] from 15, freshmen in high school, to juniors in college. They were coming out and saying, “I am not legal.” Just seeing that and feeling a part of this overwhelming outcry of support of these individuals and what that meant for the work that we were doing; I think that was great. Because it

was, it doesn't matter who I am, these kids are being very courageous.... It wasn't their choice to be born in another country, just like it wasn't my choice to be born here, and here we are people from different backgrounds but we can still work together for a common goal. And it gave me a good feeling to know that I was part of something that was bigger. And even in that rally, in particular, it didn't matter what you looked like. It didn't matter that I was a White guy. And, you know, half the speeches, they would begin in English and then have some Spanish and then a little bit of English and people would go wild when they made some comments in Spanish that I had no idea what they were saying, but that didn't matter though. That was great.

Samson's engagement revealed to him the importance of these issues, the need to take action so as to raise greater awareness, and the benefit of doing so. Samson continued to experience examples that confirmed his heightened awareness that greater efforts remained necessary to provide all individuals with the same opportunities that he had experienced growing up. Each subsequent experience moved him to think critically about what he was seeing. The aggregate of these experiences created an intense understanding of the need for social action and a desire to advocate for all people to experience equity.

Barriers to Engagement

Through my research project, the third question I sought to answer was, "What barriers to engaging in social justice work did each participant face?" The intent of considering this question was to understand what social dynamics might inhibit the involvement of privileged students in social justice work so as to inform recommendations on how their presence in justice work might be supported. Participants had little trouble

responding to questions designed to answer this research question, offering significant introspection into their own journeys. Major themes emerging from more than half of the participants included not knowing their respective role, their own lack of awareness, the absence of others around them who were aware of social justice issues, and their own lack of skills. Several minor themes that emerged from at least four participants included assumptions others made about them, doubt about their commitment, discouragement from those around them, and the absence of peers like them doing justice work.

What is My Role?

Many of the participants shared frequent confusion as to what role they should play in justice work, recognizing that their lives represented the reason justice work needed to be done in the first place. One way the concept of role emerged was through discussion of the spaces in which justice work was occurring and in what spaces privileged social justice workers felt welcome. Understandably, participants questioned whether it was appropriate for them to be in a particular space at certain times. Glenn framed the tension in this way:

The only other major one really is the identity divide sometimes that make things weird.... I have one transgender friend who complains that we have this transgender group and it's a trans kind of support group and they love to have--they technically have to have it open to allies for inclusion reasons. But sometimes they want a group where they can, in his words "bitch about trans issues" and other times they do want to have a group where they can have allies come and support. I think one of the big deterrents is that I and some other allies are unsure what group it is we're invited to because I never know which ones allies are really welcome [to attend] because we have to say the allies are actually welcome. Otherwise it would be either rude or

cause us to lose our money. Actually if you come you can sometimes just plain feel weird if you're the only ally.

As someone desiring to be helpful, Glenn did not want to exacerbate the dynamic of concern, noting as discussed above that sometimes navigating those waters is challenging. Ray similarly mentioned a desire for feedback and understanding regarding his efforts, citing an internal tension that also created hesitancy and doubt as to whether he should fully engage.

Ray explained,

Sometimes it's knowing whether I'm doing something right or if I'm doing it for myself or if it really is kind of appreciated. I'm not necessarily looking for affirmation all the time but a little guidance would certainly help with the work. I mean you get a smile or two or "That's so nice of you" from maybe a family member, but it's always surface level. Then you might get the same reaction from a friend but you don't really have that meaningful conversation.

As Ray noted, his driving interest was to do purposeful work that would be seen as helpful. Ultimately, the issues and people involved were complicated, making partnerships more challenging to develop. Similarly, Andy reflected,

That sounds like a lot of times privilege can help but I also feel, too, depending on the group that I'm around and the group that I'm trying to help, I've had times when I felt like my identity has been way out there and people haven't really given me a chance to try and help out based on my identity.

Andy openly questioned how best to help and whether or not his help was needed, let alone appreciated.

The question of role also emerged as participants wrestled with how best to apply their own interests, motivation, and leadership skills. Participants reported that a product of their privilege was having the confidence that they could and should become a successful leader. Leadership to them included feeling that they should speak up and at times take charge in meetings. However, becoming more aware that social justice might mean privileged students leading differently fostered an uncertainty as to what role they could best play in a justice-minded group. Graham commented,

Partially, I think I'm scared of exploring my gifts and passions or whatever I can really because (a) I may fail and then, (b) at the same time, recognizing that I'm still cognizant of the times when I've been in a room and I've taken up too much space or said too much or hinder[ed] other people participating, that sometimes I could see myself more wanting to take the back seat rather than over the taking of space. And so I think, for me, it's like this weird balance of how do I become my full self and my full gifts and abilities and all that. But then, at the same time, doing that in a way that's not hindering anyone else in participation.

Graham recognized that his privilege had facilitated the development of his abilities that often were beneficial and necessary to a group. Nonetheless, tension was created by such a reality when in a space where justice came more from full participation than leadership participation. Thus, Graham recognized that his role needed to be focused on using his privilege to offer less privileged but equally capable leaders the opportunity for success.

Uncertainty of role likewise emerged as participants reflected on being allies in the struggle for justice. As seen above from others, Brandon similarly questioned how best to use

and apply his skills in each setting with respect to what was needed and what he had to offer. Brandon shared,

One of the challenges is just figuring out where is the best place to apply my experiences, skills, resources, all that I've gained over the past few years. It's a really difficult balance because on one hand if I assume a leadership role, it's one fewer leadership role for someone else to assume, someone who might be able to do a better job, be a better fit for that role. But at the same time, having someone with privileged social identities and I'm trying to draw in others who have that same set of social identities. I think it's also important, to some extent, to put yourself out there as a role model and leader so that others who are physically like you can kind of see you in that role and break down that barrier. So it's not just something that is for this oppressed group, or for people from this specific racial group, because actually there are straight White men who do this work too.

Reinforcing the perspective of Graham above, Brandon illuminated a barrier that privileged activists must negotiate, noting that competing interests at times require setting aside their own aspirations and goals for the common good. As importantly, *when* they exercised self-interest might be as important as *how*.

Finally, reflecting on role, Charlie also discussed concerns about clarifying his role as an activist. Originally drawn in to help and solve problems, Charlie realized that each person brings something to the table and has something to give. He realized that perhaps the biggest challenge was figuring out what each had to give, what the true need was, and then dedicating service in that manner. Charlie discussed,

Over time I've realized a few things, so my approach has drastically changed. As I've said before, I reject and hate the notion of the White savior, so I've definitely rebuked that conception. Bigger than that I think is that I've realized what my "role" or "place" is. My role and place is not to save people of color or even ask people of color how I can "help" them. My role is to address Whites and Whiteness. I think I've demonstrated this in my life and my work. With this understanding, people of color have trust in me and are able to come to me and tell me what I can do, if anything. With limited direction, privileged students like Charlie must find their role by trial and error, which can be challenging at times. As these participants revealed, to maintain a commitment to remaining in the struggle required persistence to find role clarity. However, as has been shared, the absence of awareness and mentoring through the role confusion can create a barrier to their engagement.

Lack of Awareness

All the participants in this study were aware of their privileged identities. However, many of the participants reported that they did not have understanding of their privilege growing up. As their awareness of that privilege grew, each began to see the need for justice work. Upon reflection, participants noted that their lack of awareness about social inequity was a direct barrier to engaging in justice work. As will be discussed, each individual gained greater understanding about U.S. culture differently through his life course. Yet regardless of how his awareness materialized, each felt understanding of his unearned privilege was critical to influencing his active engagement in justice work.

Reflecting, Steve identified his time in college as providing a pivotal awareness of his unearned privilege: benefits available to him but not to all his peers. Growing up in a middle

class household, he came to believe that hard work, discipline, and education were the keys to success. Moreover, he also held the belief that all of his peers had the same opportunities if they were simply willing to put in the same effort. Steve explained,

I never was confronted with these ideas until I got to college, until I got out of my comfort zone a little bit and went out and explored the world and saw that how we do things and how my family does things is not the norm, necessarily, which was incredibly difficult.... And I think that ability to choose is a huge privilege and a huge power that some people don't have and I should tap into that.

Steve came to realize that his family structure was not only unique but in fact uniquely positioned for success. Because in his mind his life growing up was typical, he was not able to see the uniqueness of his family dynamics until coming to college and interacting with others from different backgrounds. Through interactions with peers, Steve gained a profound awareness that many did not have access to the same opportunities that he did.

Lincoln also described his time in college as pivotal to heightening his awareness about his privileged upbringing. Like Steve, Lincoln entered college with a belief that his life experience was typical and normal. Subsequently, as he began to understand otherwise, he became quite unsettled by the true benefits he enjoyed while growing up that others had not enjoyed. Lincoln shared,

I'm definitely going through it in my work but it started in college, for sure. I think when I came to college I didn't want to believe in it, I didn't want to believe that I was privileged, and I didn't get that everybody could be like this [i.e., unjustly privileged while others were disadvantaged]... It's probably a combination of the media and school and my peers and my parents but I think people of privilege want to pretend

that they don't have this privilege or that we are all the same and that we all have the same opportunities and this is America and you can get anywhere you want to get. But I think I've had to unlearn a lot of that in order to do this. Sometimes it is still hard because you want to believe it. But we're not all the same and we're not all born with the same opportunities and privileges and while people understand that as a fact they don't understand what that really means.

What Lincoln heard growing up was the American middle class rhetoric about the land of opportunity gained through hard work and perseverance. This message served as a barrier that inhibited his awareness of a broader perspective. To open his mind to the world of justice work, that belief was not only challenged in college but essentially dismantled so that he could begin to see and understand the realities of the U.S. social structure.

Brandon, too, shared a similar perception growing up. In fact for him, it was not until an incident in a post-college work setting that he realized that the social realities experienced by many people were different than his own. Fostering his lack of awareness were those with whom he surrounded himself, as they held both a similar awareness and set of beliefs.

Brandon articulated,

Well, I think one thing that I've noticed as a challenge is that really up until a few years ago, like I mentioned, none of this was really a concern or a priority or a focus for me. So with that in mind, that means that the people that I surrounded myself with up until that point in my life—friends, peers, family members—it wasn't a focus or a priority for them either. But now I have discovered that there [are] all these injustices that I want to learn more about and take action against them. I feel as though I now

have these kind of distinct chapters in my life. One chapter that I'm in now and I've been in for the last couple of years, and the ones before this time.

Looking back, Brandon saw how the early chapters in his life lacked understanding or concern about injustice issues or the impact of our social structure on those different than him. Such lack of awareness served as a barrier to identifying concerns he now viewed as something he is not only focused on but committed to working to change.

Samson, on the other hand, grew up with a deeper understanding of the discrepancies around access to opportunity. For him, the challenge became embracing that reality and then determining what to do about it. Further, he was also able to see the absence of understanding among those like him. Samson commented,

I think there [are] a lot of people, people who I work with--White or wealthy individual peers in [professional service organization]--who have this mentality that they're just going to go in to save the world and I think that's just such a counterproductive way to look at your work. I don't know if it's unlearn as much as it's coming to be able to acknowledge who I am and acknowledging the privilege that I'm surrounded by and what that affords me or affords others around me or it doesn't afford others around me. I don't know that it was so much unlearning but I'm a very firm believer in the statement, "To be ignorant is to be blissful." I think shedding that ignorance is a very important thing.

Samson reflected on seeing in his peers a misguided sense commonly held by the privileged: that they have in some way more to offer the community than others do. Assessing his experience and limitations, Samson came to see that privilege shielded the awareness of

many like him from the realities about injustice that exists. Understanding those realities was something he saw as a critical life lesson for those from privileged backgrounds.

Glenn also noted needing to shed a commonly held belief that he was no different than most people. In fact looking back, he realized that he once held a perception that everyone had the same opportunities to lead a successful life, regardless of who they were. Speaking about what he had had to overcome, Glenn noted,

Especially the leftist stuff and having to come to terms with the privilege that I have, assuming that everyone is just pretty much gonna come out the same way. Because coming out of the high school that I did, they come at problems the same way that I come at them and realizing that everyone has completely different perspectives or opinions most of the time because of their situation. And given the type of dynamics, theirs are probably more valid than mine and, even though I am well-educated and very intelligent, I really do not have the grasp of what is going on in these situations as much as the people who have been experiencing what has led up to these movements. And that's the biggest thing that I've had to unlearn is that I'm not always the best to be in charge of these things. I'm not the best to know what is going on. I mean really getting rid of a lot of the privilege [i.e., assumptions that come with privilege] and realizing that it doesn't make me automatically a better person to be in charge of stuff. Because I am educated doesn't mean there are not a lot of people better positioned to lead than I am. There are people much better prepared to be doing this work than I am and I think that's a huge thing.

As with his peers in this study, college revealed to Glenn that his experience, though it seemed typical, was unique and simply not the case for many around him. Led to believe that

education and hard work were critical to success in life, Glenn's experiences in college provided an awareness of the gaps in his understanding and perception of others. Likewise, once he began to better understand the cultural realities, Glenn's interactions revealed a much more complicated social structure than he had previously comprehended.

Andy, being at a similar developmental stage as Glenn, reflected on his state of growing awareness, which also placed him in a tenable position as he immersed himself in more diverse settings. Reflecting on the obstacles and challenges he faced, Andy revealed,

Also another thing is just my privileged identities at times can be helpful but also, a lot of times, they can be definitely difficult and hurtful because I can sometimes come across as this person who has power. Over the years, I've become a lot better at it but it's also too realizing that with, especially with my White privilege, that I have a lot of times—I don't want to say arrogant or ignorant—but a lot of times I'm not educated on the fields and a lot of stuff I can say does or has come across as offensive. Not intentionally, but it's just I need to recognize and it's very difficult to actually realize that until somebody calls me out on it. Unfortunately, very few people will actually stand up and call somebody out on something like that.

While his intent might be good, Andy also had to deal with the impact of his comments or actions. Yet he recognized, and remained open to, his flawed understanding and sought to present a genuine interest in overcoming the barrier that his lack of awareness had created for him. As participants' awareness of their privilege expanded, that knowledge also created additional anxiety about the work they were doing and the settings within which it was occurring.

Others' Lack of Awareness

Another theme emerging from the statements of several of the participants is the deterrent created by the lack of awareness of individuals around them. Citing issues with fellow justice workers, friends, and family, participants noted that a barrier to their engagement was the need to constantly explain their work and its purpose.

For Brandon, the dynamic played out within the realm of who he was before he became aware of the need for social justice work and who he became after gaining that awareness. Brandon shared,

And even though I'm living in this present chapter, I still have to go back and revisit the old chapter. And what I mean by that is that I'm still connected with many of my friends; I've known a lot of my friends since middle school [and] I have a lot of friends from undergraduate school. Obviously I've had my family for my entire life. And so whenever I reconnect with any of these people I feel challenged to maintain that balance between preserving the connections that we had in the past, while also feeling comfortable maybe engaging with them in a dialogue about justice issues or kind of pointing out what their orientation is towards people or groups or things like that. And, so I think it's challenging... because I'm connecting, because I'm maybe back home visiting or they're visiting me, and we have a very short period of time to actually reconnect with one another. So getting into that type of conversation is probably not going to result in anything that is going to be a sustained, ongoing dialogue for the most part. And also because you have such short time. It's like, "Well, maybe we should enjoy each other's company while we have it."

Being a relational person, Brandon noted a strong desire to maintain relationships with those whom he has come to love and care about. However, given the development he had undergone, an internal struggle existed between maintaining those relationships of his past and fearing the tension that his work may cause in those relationships. To maintain integrity, he felt a need to address issues that arose with his peers but he also knew his comments might not be perceived favorably, thus straining the relationships.

Steve also found that being confronted with inappropriate actions and statements by his friends was an on-going challenge. Steve explained,

I have friends who call women bitches and say really nasty things about women and I'm like, "you cannot say things like that." But they are not ready to have a conversation as to why they can't say it. And I can try and tell them to but they're not going to listen and it's going to hurt my relationships and so then I have to decide: Do I want to hang out with these people even though they say things like this? Even though they say things that offend me, I think that they're good people still. They just don't know. They haven't been through what I've been through; they haven't been through these experiences and so I'm not going to stop hanging out with them. But if they say stuff like that, I'll keep correcting them until, maybe one day, they go, "Why do you keep telling me to not say this?" And then they're ready and they're saying, "I want to have a conversation with you; Why is this offensive to you?" And then maybe I just start a conversation. And it's not a huge deal. I mean, it's just a conversation. But what could come from that conversation could be life changing for that person or for people around them. You want to have fun with your friends and no one wants to hang out with a guy who's constantly trying to talk about social justice.

Similar to the feelings Brandon experienced, Steve felt the frustration of interacting with friends who had not gained his level of awareness, especially when he had had conversations with them before about social justice issues. Internally, Steve too struggled with a belief that his work could be life-changing, his commitment to acting with integrity, and a fear that engaging in the work he knew was needed would result in his isolation from people he needed most for support and affirmation.

Experiencing a slightly different circumstance, Charlie's primary tension derived from within his family of origin. Taking an approach to the dilemma similar to that of the other participants, Charlie anguished,

But I think, personally, a huge challenge that I've had to deal with and kind of am constantly and currently dealing with, is the attitudes of my family about the work that I'm doing and the conversations that I'm having with them. So I think I mentioned last time that my brother likes to go back and forth on disowning me and not disowning me, of accepting me and of ignoring me. That has been an extremely challenging and difficult thing to deal with. And, like I said, I don't think that I'm fully dealing with it even. I think it's something that's going to be a constant struggle. It's just wanting my family's approval for doing things that they're not going to approve of. I mean that goes back to kind of the messages that they were giving growing up, that if I work hard, they're going to be proud. But if I'm working hard to reverse the privilege and the things that they have, they're not going to be proud. They're going to be in a state of denial. And so I think coming to grasp [with] that is definitely one challenge.

Charlie carried the internal conflict and tension created through the work he was doing. While believing social justice work was the right thing to do, the energy needed to negotiate his relationships with those about whom he cared was quite challenging. Moreover, frustrating as the relationships were, his family was a group about whom he cared deeply and looked to for approval.

Aligning in similar fashion with the challenges expressed above, Graham embraced the work with those his age while feeling tension from family and friends. Graham articulated,

I think for me, it's also just the need of having to cultivate other people who I've shared equal privilege with in regards to my other White, male, heterosexual friends. I think sort of explaining to them the work I need to do or why I do it.... Because there's a lot of people like me around here but I think for me, it's the barriers and sometimes explaining and challenging that. Now I don't have a hard time doing that with people my age or younger people and I don't have a hard time doing it in the passive/aggressive way towards older people. Where I have the harder time doing that is sometimes with close family or friends or acquaintances, where I've found myself balancing at what point is it about your tongue and at what point do you need to sort of let yourself loose even if you lose a relationship or two.

Graham, like Brandon, had identified his need to begin building a base of folks like him who were addressing issues of social justice. However, similar to others, he expressed the tension created by the potential for losing relationships as a deterrent in certain circles, ironically perhaps those where he least suspected or desired the resistance.

Finally, Ray offered a slightly different spin on the tension created by those in his near circle of friends and family. Ray expressed,

But then how it becomes a deterrent is that ability to form relationships or strong relationships with people who are passionate about the more traditional issues of social justice are not there. You are kind of seen as the rogue or maybe that quasi-social justice advocate or ally. I guess really just that frustration of not being able to get that relationship down and getting people to at least humor your side rather than remaining silent on an issue when you are giving a bit of a manifesto in your words, or a rant in their words, on those issues. But then when they do their own next kind of exercise of rants or manifesto, they are getting all sorts of engagement from the instructor or classmates who hold those social justice views, or at least hold those issues as priorities.

For Ray, the resistance came from within the social justice community itself; he noted the perception of hierarchy among the issues of social justice need. While the friends from his past did not serve as a source of tension, his justice peers did. Already facing some anxiety around being a person of privilege working in social justice spaces, Ray encountered an additional barrier when working on justice issues not deemed to be most important or pertinent by his peers. Yet he experienced an equal level of frustration and tension as those who felt their views were not accepted by their peers and family who were uneducated about social justice in general.

Lack of Skills

Participant interviews revealed that each person recognized that to be successful their skills needed to ultimately improve. Beyond just awareness, understanding to what degree

their current approach to justice work was effective or not became critical. As they gained greater insight, several participants reflected on and acknowledged needing to overcome their limitations so that they could fully develop the skills they needed to be successful at social justice work.

For Ray, the limitation serving as a barrier for him took the form of the language he was using and how he had come to use it. Ray explained,

For instance, with [service organization], I had a little bit of trouble and I still catch myself a little bit of not using people first language. So for instance, before, and occasionally now, I will say that autistic guy rather than maybe Brian with autism. By not defining that person by the disorder or reflection or what have you of what they have but merely of who they are. They're not defined by that. And then I guess that was, maybe, because of the lack of experience of seeing and interacting with those types of people.

Speaking from a place of privilege, Ray's awareness had been shaped so as not to see the world beyond his own perspective. Therefore that lens also shaped the manner in which he spoke about and addressed issues. Unknowingly, Ray's language served to marginalize others. But as his awareness grew, Ray began to realize that subtle adjustments could make a significant impact on his ability to be seen as honoring all people and being committed to social justice.

Similarly recognizing a need to improve his skills, Lincoln wrestled with his awareness of balancing the needs of those with whom he was working and his own assessment of the outcomes needed to achieve success. Lincoln shared,

Those are the main barriers that I'm going to have to overcome, just trying to be really empathetic and understanding and teach with an open heart but also to kind of be the tough person I need to be. You [have] got to be tough when you're a teacher, especially when your kids aren't used to doing difficult work. It's going to be hard for them and they're going to push back. And so it's sort of weird; you have to be really open to hearing them but you also have to be tough and have high expectations for what they can accomplish. It's the weird balance of being open and loving and caring but also not letting it get to you, which is really hard.

In his role as an educator, Lincoln realized that listening and empathy are critical skills that he must not only develop but also master. As important was developing within himself the fortitude to maintain a confidence in the identified outcomes toward which he was working. What emerged was a realization of the stamina and skill required to balance the two complex, sometimes competing, priorities.

Feeling a similar internal conflict, Graham also found himself working to find peace with where he was while acknowledging that he needed to further develop. Graham expressed,

I think at the end of the day, I sort of hit on that earlier, I want to go home and turn it all off. And I think, for me, it's the balance between at what point do I need to learn that it's okay to turn it off because I can't do everything and I don't need to do everything? And there are other people who can do it as well. There's a certain value of self-care that I really need to adhere to. And then at what point am I turning it off and I'm just resting on my privilege? I can't handle it anymore. But then I have friends who they can't turn off the fact that because of their sexuality or their race or

something like that. So I think that's the hardest thing for me. At what point do I stop reading the New York Times articles? I can stop reading the New York Times. I can turn that off pretty quick. I can actually get out of that screen. I can put off this to do list, I can go on a vacation. I can do all these things. I have privilege and can do, but then I think, just for me, the hardest part is that balance of when are you turning it off and making sure you're keeping it on.

Graham wrestled with the difficult balance of caring for himself and maintaining initiative. At issue was training himself to recognize the difference between when he physically or mentally needed to rest so that he could be more effective in his work and when he needed to push through moments when unmotivated. The skill came with knowing the difference between a physical need to rest and a psychological inclination to be drawn toward what his privilege offered. For Graham there existed recognition that how his effort would be viewed by others was critical to his overall effectiveness and integrity.

Comparable to Graham, Charlie identified the need to develop skills that allowed him to achieve an appropriate regard from those with whom he desired to work. Charlie explained,

But in regards to the other things, I think just learning how to approach oppressed groups when I'm wanting to do work is something that I've had to learn and be able to overcome, their concern and their worrisome [awareness] of me coming at them. And same with my family, just having to learn ways to deal and cope with their non-approval or their denial in order to be successful in what I'm doing because otherwise I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing if I put all my hope in their approving of what I'm doing.

Like those above, Charlie revealed the need to develop skills that were effective both externally with others and internally within himself. Similar to Graham, Charlie noted that working with others in service, rather than doing for them, was a critical orientation that affirmed the dignity of people. Likewise, developing skills that fortified his self-confidence was an equally critical element to achieving the outcomes he desired and overcoming the barriers before him.

Finally, Brandon identified the need to develop skills that would allow him to effectively broaden the base of privileged folks who choose to engage in justice work.

Brandon highlighted,

And I think the other orientation or change I'm learning now, after having studied this work, collaborating with others around social justice work, I'm now focused on not only personally getting involved, but also focused on bringing in others who might be expressing an interest in social justice work, or who may be on the margin of being interested in social justice work, and really kind of passing along any knowledge, any skills, any resources that I've been fortunate enough to gain over the past few years to pass that along to others as well.

While he recognized a need to continue his own development, Brandon noted that the need to reach others like him who might not be choosing to engage in social justice work was of equal importance. Critical to his own journey, Brandon saw the development of such skills to be an opportunity to create a point of connection between those currently lacking awareness and the work that needed to be done. Having experienced what served as his own barriers to active justice work, he could identify the tactics to help others see those barriers as well.

Assumptions Others Held of Me

Further creating barriers to their engagement, several participants spoke of the assumptions that those around them made about who they were and what they are doing. Specifically, their identity as privileged students forged perceptions among friends, peers, and fellow activists that everything in their lives had come easily. Each participant had found that while relationships might mitigate some of these assumptions, there were certain stereotypes that they had to work through to fully engage in work that was consistent with who they had come to know themselves to be. Andy remarked,

A lot of the other times, too, people assume since I am--especially because I'm White--a lot of times people will assume that I've had these other different occasions in life.

One that I get that surprises me a lot is that I grew up or that I never had to buy anything in my life and so I don't understand what it's like to work hard, is one thing that I get. I've been, basically, spoon-fed; which... actually hasn't been the case.

That's one stereotype that I get a lot of, that people don't really seem to--or that seems for me are hard to break down until I actually can sit down and tell my story.

Because he was walking into predominantly minority settings, Andy found that many people simply assume that he had had a good life simply because he was White. However, through development of relationships with others, Andy shared a bit about his journey, which reduced the hesitations of peers to work with him. Much as he had learned from others, there was always more detail not initially revealed and that included him as well. Andy acknowledged the creative tension between having benefitted from privilege but also having had some unique circumstances that created common ground between him and others who had not benefitted from privilege.

Ray also highlighted assumptions that people made about him based on what they saw, whether in the classroom or in a group meeting. Ray noted,

So half the time being seen as a White, male, Christian, at least on assumption, and middle class, I felt to be the punching bag. But then also through my work showing that to be true, not completely true, that the identities I hold are not--not everyone who holds these identities or those who hold this combination of identities are the great oppressors of the world or scourges of the world. And even those that do have that combination of [identities] and do work against social justice or are causing problems that social justice is trying to address, providing that role model or helping provide a possibility they could see within themselves. It's easy enough to do some sort of work.

Ray commented on the tension between being privileged, having enough awareness to work against that privilege, and being received based on his privilege. Ray's experiences in diverse settings had challenged his position and put him on the defensive at times, as he did his own internal work. Yet he also saw the opportunity created by the assumptions to transcend the stereotypes of his ascribed identities, which served as a motivating factor.

Having experienced similar unhealthy assumptions based on setting, Samson also affirmed the barrier such tension created for him in his attempts to engage in social justice work. Samson articulated,

I really think, going back to my [student organization] days, there was this very heavy push back on some of the work that we were doing, which is kind of ironic now because I almost align now more with those who were pushing back. But at the time when arguments became more personal, more and more on the attack, I was like,

“Why is this person, you don't know me, why are you trying to speak bad about what I think is the right idea?” The whole thing about the issue of the educational policy reform debate is most people on both sides are in it for the right reasons. They just have different visions of what it takes policy wise. They want the same outcomes. So when I was in that argument, or having email exchanges, or even in a face-to-face argument, those are always hard because I want to say, “I want what's right but being called corporate pawn, a pawn of a billionaire.” It's tough to hear someone call you that.

In that instance, given the setting, Samson and others were left to their assumptions based on impression and lack of relationship with those who appeared to be in opposition to their position. Clearly Samson recognized that engaging in justice work could become counterproductive, and deterring, when people approached issues of resolution with only their own interests in mind. And for Samson, the self-centeredness became quite discouraging at times.

Steve likewise reflected on feelings of being assumed to be more the problem than the solution. Initially these feelings served as a barrier, but over time Steve was able to reframe his perspective of what he was experiencing through these somewhat deterring interactions.

Steve explained,

I think the biggest thing is that when people critique my identity, they're not critiquing me, necessarily. They are, but they're not trying to hurt me in saying 90 something percent of men are perpetrators of sexual assault. That's a fact. That's not saying that you are going to commit sexual assault, [it's] saying that people of your identity, generally, are the ones who perpetrate it. It gives you an opportunity to go

and work with those people because they're going to listen to you because you share the same identity. And I think that that is something that's so hard to learn and so hard to get rid of is realizing that your work with your social justice and people talking to you, having these hard conversations with you, they're not necessarily attacking you. But what you're talking about is super, super, super potent for them and super hard for them and it's something they deal with every day. If you've never experienced that before, while, yes, you are good for talking about it, you also need to realize that they're going to be, not necessarily angry at you, but upset, not because they're upset at you but because they're upset that people like you still don't understand. We're in the 2000s and people still don't understand that racism exists.

Steve could empathize and understand where others were coming from with the concerns they raised. He articulated some understanding that being addressed directly by others with whom he did not have a deep relationship could be off-putting and serve as a deterrent to engagement. However, similar to Ray, Steve's inclination was to affirm the perspective of others and to turn the concern into an opportunity for dialogue, to highlight the facts, and to engage others like him in an effort to bring about substantive change.

Questioning Commitment

As these men reflected, another internal barrier that emerged was one that each participant had to ultimately admit and wrestle with--his commitment to justice work. Taking several forms, the common denominator that emerged was a combination of values, a vision for what they viewed to be success, and the voices from those to whom they looked for guidance. As will be discussed, several men openly wrestled with what they believed, how

those beliefs played out for them pragmatically, and how to merge beliefs and actions in such a way as to maintain their sense of integrity and authenticity.

One emerging barrier to their engagement in justice work was the fact that men of privilege had to wrestle with giving up their privilege or with the possibility that the benefits of their privilege would be lessened by the actions they chose to take. When advocating for justice, each person was in charge of his own decision-making. However, when looking for employment, that reality changed. Glenn shared,

A lot of it has been keeping this off the record so that I won't have any media attention that would keep me from getting a job. That's probably not really part of it. I can't really be involved in Occupy Wall Street movements and then go get a job in financial management. They would not be down with that.... Yes, it's definitely some kind of a deterrent. It might be I've got to choose another area to focus. But I think ultimately I'd like to get back to this type of work in the future even if I don't end up doing it as a job or something. If I am not making money I'd like to bring that back ultimately. So I'd like to think that it's not a complete barrier, maybe a detour... Yeah, I mean really it's more been on a personal level balancing what I want to do in the future with work and trying to make sure that I'll be able to get a job and seeing what I can do with social justice work although I think that's an incredibly selfish thing to say that I think the biggest challenge in doing social justice work is to make sure that I can get a job when I'm done, when the actual social justice work is helping people who actually need help so that is really the biggest obstacle.

While Glenn advocated for a more just social structure he still had to come face to face with the reality of his own existence. As a privileged student, he can stop and start his social

justice work; he can walk away from activism at any time. However, as he noted here, his chosen area of interest could come into direct conflict with his work on justice issues, forcing a critical moment for reflection and decision.

Steve shared a similar reality, separating his desire to do justice work from the pragmatic issues that come with being a student. Steve considered,

School, wanting to get a career. That gets in the way a lot of the times because you want to live for other people and you want to do work for other people, but you got to do work for yourself. You've got to be a student, you've got to get that job, you've got to be able to provide for yourself so you can survive. I don't think that makes me a selfish person to want to have to work and to take advantage of the fact that I can go to college, which is a huge privilege. But the fact that I want to do it and I need to do it because I need to be successful. It's a goal for me, success is a huge goal, and not that it's not a goal for other people but success for me looks so different than success for other people.

By recognizing his privilege, reflecting on that tension, and then immersing himself within the advantages of that privilege, Steve offered an example of what many privileged students face. Being new to justice work, he saw his engagement and daily focus as a student to be disconnected, sometimes in conflict. More importantly, while he recognized the conflict his hesitation created between his values and his actions, Steve candidly reflected a wavering ability to demonstrate his commitment to social action.

While experiencing comparable tension, Samson explained the commitment barrier a little differently, regarding his barriers to commitment as being primarily derived internally from his own interests and motivations. Samson reported,

Obviously it's personal. Well, this whole thing is personal. But my overall work ethic isn't the best in the world. So I've been working constantly to make sure that I put my all into it and that I give myself enough time to do what needs to be done. But to continue to push that along, I think is very important. So I think any obstacles are really self-imposed and that I should just spend more time organizing a rally. Or I should dedicate my Monday to going to these meetings that I only go to once a month. I think that if I was able to commit myself more fully to an issue, or to the event, it would be a lot better in the outcome. I think my work ethic has been forever lacking and I could really stand the benefit from having a better work ethic.

For Samson, his privilege afforded him the ability to disengage. He recognized that one must be internally motivated and driven to stay in the work. Yet ultimately, he acknowledged that he had a choice and that latitude could be a difficult barrier to overcome. While driven by a belief in equity for all individuals, Samson also recognized the reality that he has the privilege to give in to his internal inclination to pull away from engagement.

Experiencing a related but slightly different reality, Lincoln also found himself challenged by the demands of justice work. Lincoln offered,

I think that right now the biggest challenge that I'm facing is the level of work that's required of me to do the things I want to do. Because that is a really big deterrent for me and it is so consuming and I feel like I'm losing my life in order to do this. I end up feeling like it's not fair. It's not fair to me to have to do this but I know it's what is required in order to be successful. I did my student teaching last year and I chose not to teach this year because I knew how much work it was going to be and I didn't think that I was ready for that level of commitment. And so I think that is a big barrier

because it is just a crushing amount of work. And I know that the stakes are high and I know that if I fail, it would have serious consequences for my students and for me psychologically. And so, I would say I'm much more comfortable with failing now than I was then but that's why I didn't rush to become a first-year teacher this year because I knew it was going to be totally consuming and I didn't know if I was up to the challenge. And as I look forward, I'm still not sure if I'm up to the challenge, honestly.... So I have to be that person for them. I know that that's important and necessary and needed. But also, it's that tension between what I want for myself and my life and feeling like I'm a good husband and a good partner and a good person in the family, a good son or a good brother and a good teacher. That tension is really--I still don't know how to deal with it or what I'm going to exactly do.... So that's a huge barrier for me right now.

Lincoln realized the realities of teaching in an underserved area would require him to be fully committed. Yet he wrestled with what his vision for life entailed and the tension present when mixed with the values he held. Externally, Lincoln knew the demands of teaching would be overwhelming if he did the job as he felt it should be done. Internally, he struggled because he perceived that to do the job he wanted to do would mean stepping outside the norm and denying himself and his loved ones the life they had come to regard as desirable. Essentially, success and integrity seemed to be at odds for Lincoln, leaving a daunting barrier through which he had to maneuver. Similar to Glenn, he openly struggled to find a clear understanding of what social justice work might look like day-to-day in his chosen career. In effect, like Glenn, Lincoln openly wrestled with knowing that a decision to walk away from

the benefits of privilege might be counterproductive to his vision of what an authentic life would entail.

Discouraging Voices

Contributing to the internal questions these men had were the discouraging voices that emerged around them as they began to engage in social justice work. Although sometimes internally generated, the majority came from critical outside spaces such as family settings, learning environments, and among peers. Each participant found himself faced with having to reflect on the voices and how those voices could be deflected so as not to derail the purpose participants felt called to carry out.

For Lincoln, the discouraging voice manifested itself internally through his own misgivings, which were reinforced by an awareness of the reality around him. Lincoln reflected,

But also I think one of the things that we haven't talked about yet as a challenge is definitely feeling really hopeless and feeling like you're wasting your time. So I think we've kind of alluded to it, but I feel like this problem [of injustice] is so big and so just pervasive, I guess. It's like there's so many different things and how do you ever confront that or really feel like you're making a difference? Hopelessness or feeling like you're too small is a huge obstacle...to continuing with this kind of work.

Because I'll compare it to the work being done with the environment. I feel the environment is hopeless. That sounds really terrible, but the reason why I didn't go into that was simply because I felt like it was too late and people don't want to change.

Voices on a broad scale pushing against environmental change, coupled with his internal voice, which was wrestling with the sheer scope of the problem, weighed heavily on Lincoln. For Lincoln, his internal voice fell prey to the external realities that he saw when he could not see tangible positive impacts. While less distinct, these dissenting voices of an intangible nature served to undermine his confidence about the work being done.

Several other participants, including Andy, expressed more defined dissenting voices, which they were faced with overcoming. In particular, Andy noted that his primary discouragement came from knowing his family of origin did not support his work, and at times verbally opposed it. Andy offered,

One is my family not supporting me. And the work I do is, even though I've known even [for] years now that my family didn't, I'm not going to say raised me wrong but say uneducated or they educated me incorrectly on many different aspects. Not having their acceptance, except for my grandma. My grandma loves what I do but nobody else in my family really accepts it. My dad always tells me, "You're doing, a lot of times you're trying to help out the world but you're not going to change anybody's being negative." That's been one thing.... But I've also seen too where, at times, people don't necessarily take me seriously with my work. Because a lot of times I get told, "Oh well, you're just doing this like a hero. You're just doing this for good and you're doing this for [your] resume." That is what I've gotten a lot. So it's made me realize a lot that the challenges, I'm going to have to make people realize I'm not doing this more so for a personal gain. Because I've had job offers where I could go make a lot more [money] working in different fields, helping people, but I've denied [*sic*]those jobs because I want to sit down and actually help people out. I

[have] been volunteering now and I do the same stuff as people get paid to do for the past two and a half years but I haven't accepted payment for it, not because I don't want payment or anything like that, but because I feel like then I wouldn't be doing it for the right reasons, is how I feel.

Andy's family dynamics served as ongoing discouragement to his engagement in justice work. Similar to Lincoln, enduring these voices and criticism caused him to reflect on his values, why he was doing the work, and then to consider more directly how direct action might make a positive impact.

Similarly to Andy, Steve too experienced discouraging voices through the work he was doing. Those like him who identified as privileged, and those who identified as different from him, questioned from opposing angles what his purpose was for being in justice work. Steve revealed,

I have to overcome people of my similar identities who think I'm a dumbass for wanting to do this and who will tell me very openly that I'm a dumbass. And then also having to overcome other people's creative, quote, opinions of me. Like when I go to WPC and I have people who are, "What are you doing here, why would you want to be?" What we talked about. "Why are you doing the work you're doing?" They don't know, they don't want to [know]. They think they're like, "You're the White man. You're the guy who is essentially benefitting from all of this." And having to overcome it and say, "Yeah, I am but do you not see how this betters my life?" And having to wait, wanting to jump in and be, "Let me be your ally. Let me do things for you. Let me be your champion through the White world." Which sounds messed up. And then realizing that they probably don't want you and you have to earn it and you

have to come in and you have to prove that you're working for their cause and that you can help them and that you need them more than they need you.

Recognizing the discouraging voices for what they were, and affirming their reality, Steve turned internally to his moral compass to drive his efforts and motivation. Steve grasped his compass optimistically, using the voices of dissent to establish the bar that he had to climb over in his commitment to the justice work.

Similarly, Charlie acknowledged the impact of the voices of folks of color who questioned his presence and commitment to the work. While certainly discouraging, they also helped him to gain clarity and perspective as he engaged in action for the common good. Charlie clarified,

Another challenge that I've noticed is just people of color or oppressed people's wariness of me doing this work. A notion of, "Why are you here? What are you trying to gain from this?" And I think that that's been really hard for me, for oppressed people to not just understand right away what I'm doing here but having to work at that. So there's one professor here. He's in the philosophy department and he--in his mind, White men have no place doing race scholarship or research whatsoever. And that's something that I fought with for multiple semesters because I had classes with him and I just couldn't understand where he was coming from until I finally sat down and listened to him. And so, yeah, just gaining their trust has been more challenging than I expected it to be.

Charlie, too, had been questioned on his presence and the appropriateness of his being in justice spaces, especially those inhabited by people of color. The external voices, in turn, triggered his internal voice, which caused him to hesitate while reflecting on his direction.

Yet the experiences also seemed to offer some hope and clarity of direction--something important to Charlie's journey.

Need for Others Like Me

A final barrier that inhibited privileged student engagement was an identified need for others like the participants to be present to them and with them in the work being done. Participants shared recognition that justice work is challenging and at times lonely. As noted above, many of the participants struggled internally to remain focused and motivated. Each person seemed to be afraid that they might be turned away as a result of their work. As a result, they needed other privileged people with whom to feel affirmed, create community, and build confidence.

In our interviews, the absence of others like Ray was evident in his chosen spaces of work. Moreover, that absence clearly served as a deterrent. Ray noted,

Well, a little bit of a deterrent comes from the lack of the "mes" in that work. There aren't a lot of straight White guys, middle-class, Christian, who run about in social justice issues. So that's a deterrent in that whenever I do step above and try to do some of the work, I know that I will be working with different people. But then it's also comforting in the sense that I know that I'm doing something right, there are other people like me, that I can easily talk to and talk about the social justice work, not necessarily just on the issues that are against that good work. Just being able to relate.

As Ray shared, he had not found a community of peers who identified as he did and that served as a deterrent to engagement. If these issues were being talked about in his friend groups during dinner, working out, or hanging out on the weekends then engagement might

look different to him. Paradoxically, or perhaps simply optimistically, Ray saw the fact that he could connect with groups that come together to work on justice as partially filling that void. In other words, he found comfort with like-minded people, regardless of their identity. What they did and how they thought became more important than who they were.

Lincoln echoed a similar message when reflecting on the type of environment he needed to flourish in his chosen area of justice work. Lincoln explained,

I loved that work because of my coworkers. They were so great and it made coming to work so fun and engaging personally, not only the actual work. So I know that I'm going to need that. So finding a group of people who believe the same things that I believe about education and are willing to work hard for it. People that care about my success and are willing to go the extra step to insure that I'm successful. That might mean watching my classroom and giving me feedback or helping me to deal with experience[s], [develop] an action plan for a specific student, or just being there to hang out with.

Lincoln saw not only the value but also the need to form and be part of a community of committed individuals. Implied is that the absence of such a dynamic can make the work difficult and persistence in such a work setting even more difficult. The absence of a support network of colleagues working toward a common outcome would serve to reinforce the hesitancy to commit that Lincoln discussed above. Like Ray, Lincoln affirmed wanting to feel connected to others and be part of something bigger through those connections.

What Led to Social Justice Engagement

Each of the first three research questions were pursued to understand the social dynamics experienced by privileged college students in the context of social justice. As

shown in the findings to Question 1, privileged college students came to understand their social position in unique ways. For the majority, they came to understand that social position was earned through education and hard work. However, Question 2 revealed that each participant had experienced moments that challenged their understanding of how success in life was obtained and therefore presented the decision of what to do about their new understanding. Finally, Question 3 findings reported participant reflections on elements that deterred them, even given their knowledge that they received unearned privilege, from working to create a system that offered more equitable access to opportunity and success.

Therefore, the process of reflecting on the first three questions was critical for the process of creating greater participant clarity about why they chose to engage in social justice work. The primary question I sought to answer through my research was, “What triggers, key moments, or life dynamics led privileged college students to work for social justice?” To facilitate the answers, participants were asked directly through the interviews conducted to discuss what aspects of their lives most affected their choice, and contributed to their inclination, to engage in social justice work. While answers varied, their responses revealed that both the educational institutions and the general environments they grew up in were significant factors. Additionally, several cited their family of origin and certain life experiences as having had significant influence on those decisions. In all, each aspect of their lives served to weave a complex developmental path that had brought them to a certain level of engagement when the interviews were conducted.

Educational Institutions

Many of the participants spoke about the influence that their educational institutions had on shaping who they were and who they were becoming. Steve experienced a curricular

environment in high school that served to nurture and ignite foundational elements within his belief system. For him, while the curriculum itself did not uniquely stand out, the opportunities connected to the curriculum did. In particular, the opportunity to study abroad provided a life-altering experience for Steve. He shared,

I studied abroad in Paraguay between my sophomore and junior year of high school. And it was probably the best, most conflicting time of my life. Because I went down there and I went to a place where I went from being the norm to abnormal. I'm a redhead and I had people coming up and I had longer hair at the time and I had people coming and pulling on my hair. And that was fascinating to me and then being a part of something where it's a third world country and then coming back to a first world where the schools are very structured and everything like that. I don't think the schools necessarily had anything to do with me going there or me learning something but I think the teachers that I've had have done that. I can think of one moment that was a big one with a first world application to it. When I was in Paraguay, I remember this boy. And he couldn't have been more than three or four years old, super malnourished, super extended stomach, shoes that were meant for a man with a size 8 foot, a holey shirt, raggedy shirts, and I remember he walked up to me and he tugged on my shirt. He just tugged on it and asked me for pennies, literally asked me for pennies compared to--that would have been a meal for him and also a couple of quarters. What they would consider a quarter, he asked for that. And I said no and I did that because my teacher told me to say no to him and to not give him money because that's how we do it. That's not how we fix the problem. That I do agree with, but it was what he did afterwards and it was--I just looked at him. I shook my head

and then looked away. And it was that moment of--I didn't treat him like a human being. I just treated him like a bobble. I did not, I remember to the depths of my soul the shame I felt. I remember going home and crying because I was so upset.... And the guilt I feel for that and the disappointment and how I wish, with all of my being, I could go back to that moment, turn around and, not necessarily give him money, but sit down and just talk to him for two seconds and show him that he was a human being to me, because I treated him like less than a human being. And for that, I will always, always, always feel guilty.

In a space where Steve was vulnerable, yet maintained with distinct advantage and privilege, he directly had his humanity challenged and in his mind failed to respond appropriately. He did not immediately move into justice work upon his return. But the event served as a moment that forced him to consider more fully who he was. As a result, Steve reflected on his values, what those ultimately meant for how he treated others, and what that ultimately meant for his future choices.

Like Steve, while the curriculum was somewhat indistinct, Glenn found that his high school teachers created opportunities for learning through the approach they took to their work. Glenn noted,

I am looking for the speech just so I can remember what I said but they're really those four people; my English teacher, the art history teacher, the calculus teacher, and the director. The four of them all very moving and very pivotal role models for me. But the AP art history teacher, more than I even realize now that I'm thinking about it, gave me that mindset about helping others. What's really mind blowing is she has four kids, she has a job, she has stuff of her own, and yet she has this organization, as

I've heard, in Uganda that runs a home for orphaned kids. But then she realizes this one particular kid is having a really rough time so she adopts him. She's going above and beyond what is humanly and reasonably helpful and socially, just by adopting him, that's probably a huge influence on me perhaps more than I realize.

The model that his Art History teacher provided emerged upon reflection as a lasting impact regarding how he ought to carry himself and share his gifts. Coupled with his upbringing, the teacher's model resonated with Glenn's values and fostered reflection to help clarify his purpose in life.

Complementing the impact of the teaching staff on Glenn's development, the general high school environment created a marginalizing atmosphere for him. Though somewhat adversarial in nature, he credited high school with shaping his direction in justice work.

Glenn remembered,

When I was in school there you could either be--I ended up calling myself Libertarian because you could either be Republican or Libertarian and I liked being a Libertarian more because it was better than being a Republican. Everything there was intertwined so it all ended up leaving a bad taste in my mouth about all of those things for a little while, which led to a lot of sentiments about conservative politics and the upper class and that even at one point I got in a little bit of trouble at school that almost led to a suspension.... Well, I started writing for the school newspaper. They have a newspaper block on your schedule and I kind of came on as a guest writer in the political column as the token Democrat because I was the only one that they could find. So I wrote a column.... I tried to write as unbiased as possible but I probably failed to write as unbiased as possible. I tried to talk not about politics but only about

what way they presented themselves, the way statistics are shown. And then the girl who writes the Republican column, the conservative column, responded with a very bitter, not bitter, emotional editorial about it.... And it was at that point that I realized that I felt like I was speaking on different terms and I was just trying to look at some numbers and to talk about statistically why things will happen and that the school taught in an anti-democratic, anti-leftist trap and there was no dialogue to be had. I was feeling that way for a long time that I couldn't have a dialogue.

Glenn's peers, and perhaps the administration, created an environment that moved him into a somewhat conflicted and disenfranchised state of mind. However, the nature of his experience left Glenn at graduation developmentally ready to transition from high school to college. The transition also positioned Glenn as open to, if not yearning for, an atmosphere that allowed him to be more authentic. Glenn reflected,

Well my high school and [university] have definitely been pretty big. My high school in forming a lot of the views that I have and [large Eastern university] actually giving me the tangible opportunities--having events sending me emails, having student groups different than high school.... I think there was a point where I--maybe it was the summer between high school and college, the transition phase--I got pretty bitter during high school for understandable reasons and probably unnecessarily too bitter. And then I got out and relaxed a little bit. And then I got to [college] and I was in a place where everyone was as left as I was, relaxed as I was, and didn't hate the gays. It was totally different. Then all that anger kind of washed away and I got very calm and relaxed and I realized that that anger had not accomplished anything. So when I got the email about the tutoring center, I thought, "Okay, the anger did nothing so

why don't I just help some people?" And I sort of realized when I had been thinking about it more, I realized that getting angry doesn't accomplish anything so you might as well take that energy and put it toward something, anything. Take all of that energy and put it towards something, anything, really. It will do a lot more good to try to create anything other than trying to fight with people in an argument that will really accomplish nothing. So I don't know if that serves as an actual event but I feel like that was a big transition point where I got out of the school for a while and had a time of reflection or a time to let it all out and sit back and think on it, that I was able to realize that I hadn't gotten anywhere with it and I could actually put that energy toward something productive.

Glenn subsequently realized the value of surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals who were working to think critically about life around them. Further, he also acknowledged that doing what was right often required different approaches and skill sets to be successful in the long term.

Unlike Glenn, Graham encountered college peers who were socially engaged role models and had a positive influence on his social justice activism. Moreover, Graham noted that the presence of certain peers had a nurturing and challenging influence. Graham articulated,

And then when I went to [college], I was part of two groups, a leadership fellow cohort and the service learning community, which is an additional community of freshmen living together who love to serve in the local community that really, really shaped me.... And I quickly realized that what I saw as leadership as a high school senior and what leadership actually was, was completely opposite. And I learned,

leadership to me was more about community members and students and unconventional leadership and it wasn't this savior theory, athlete, golden boy type of thing. And the service learning community influenced me because it gave me an intentional structuring community where every day we lived and breathed, serving and working on and amongst each other but also alongside our community and asking questions about that.

Graham not only found that college expanded his understanding about leadership but also provided the mechanisms to become active in leadership. Demystifying misperceptions, the combined college environmental factors of the leadership cohort curriculum, fellow students, and opportunities for activism deepened his commitment to activist work.

Comparable to what Graham experienced, Steve found the co-curricular programmatic offerings in college to have a fundamental impact on his development and ultimate decision to engage in justice work. Choosing to pursue a role as a resident adviser, Steve found that the co-curriculum proved to be challenging. Steve reported,

And then getting to college, being an RA, being a part of residence life has affected my choice to be part of social justice work. I was afraid to take that step into this whole social justice thing. "Oh, I don't hate people. I love everyone. I don't see color." That whole thing. And realizing how backwards that was by being an RA, seeking that out and having people challenge me. While it's been hard and while sometimes I just cannot stand the people that have challenged me and they make me so angry, I think that they have really, strongly influenced my choices to get involved with this.

As was evident, the process for Steve had not been easy but one he knew was the correct course for him. Steve elaborated,

Res Life really pushed me into the social justice thing. And while, at times, I have incredibly resented it, I sometimes even now resent it more than I can believe and just do not want to do it, the fact of the matter is that I can have these conversations and I can talk to people and I can have thoughts and know that they won't agree with me and they will challenge me and that is fantastic for me. Because I love the challenge.

Through this intense learning experience, Steve encountered a wealth of emotions, some of which were at times contradictory. Rather than running from those experiences, Steve chose to embrace his natural inclinations in recognition that the experiences were helping him to become a better person, more congruent with who he held himself to be.

Similarly, Lincoln's college peers played an equally significant, and yet more fundamental, role in his social justice engagement. Coming into college, Lincoln admitted that he was simply not aware of his own privilege and how that made him unique. But through the college environment that combined thought-provoking curriculum and peer discussions, Lincoln came to more deeply understand his background and what that meant for him as he developed. Lincoln offered,

And I wouldn't say I was super Republican but I did buy into some of the "work hard, pull yourself up by your boot straps" mentality, and it really wasn't until I got to college and I met other people with different ideas that I started talking about those kind of things and seeing how opportunity could influence your outcome in life and that it wasn't all hard work. That there were other things outside of your control that have a huge impact on where you end up. So the combination of my classes and my

peers and the conversations, we talked all the time freshman year about things like that. So that definitely had a huge impact on me.

Admittedly, what Lincoln perceived to be normal was in many respects unique to him, and those like him, rather than for everyone. Reflecting on what he learned as a history major, and how that expanded what he learned growing up, Lincoln articulated,

In high school, you learn it but you don't really think about how that affected other people. But when you're in college you look into those things at a high level. I think I came away with it really feeling bad about a lot of the things that we had done and I saw how our foreign policy and our domestic policy, to some extent, that has really hurt other people. There were a couple classes in particular where I thought that what was going on was one thing, but when you look at more of the facts that are less popular facts, you realize that that's not the whole truth and there may be other ulterior motives at play. So I think it would be inaccurate to say that our sense of, our deep sense of guilt was really, definitely a major factor. I just remember feeling so bad about, there wasn't really anything that I did but just that, I don't know, that I felt like I had been a part of something. I needed to make up for it or to just be a part of, part of the solution instead of just continuing on with the status quo. So that was a big deal, a major factor as well.

Once recognizing the advantage he had been given, Lincoln's internal values of fairness began to drive his perspective. In fact, to some extent he found the information being provided hard to believe, thus requiring him to reframe that which he felt he knew to be true.

Lincoln expanded,

When I was living in college and I learned about how other people live, it was just so shocking to me. And that it was normal for them. And then that that was allowed to continue. Things like that really shocked me and made me feel like I needed to do something about that because it wasn't okay and I didn't see anything being done to really address the situation. So just the people I talk to who are so committed and knowledgeable and great at what they do and they're in it for the right, quote/unquote, reason. They know what they're talking about. They know why they're doing it.... Things like that have been very enlightening for me, I think. The kind of events that I've seen. And a lot of that is because of my privilege, because I had the opportunity to go to college and get internships that are unpaid in order to do this work. Those aren't opportunities that everybody can do. They don't get a chance to see those things like I do.

Lincoln realized the true privileges he received that were simply not available to others.

More importantly, he understood the impact that each opportunity had on his life trajectory.

Lincoln summarized,

If I didn't go to the college that I went to, if I'd studied business, then I don't think I would have been the person I am now. I wouldn't have been interested in the same things. If I went to [Western University], well I hear that it's a very materialistic college, would I have been the same person? I doubt it. Maybe. So I think my college had an impact on it. My major definitely did.

Having considered that any experience may have turned him in the same direction, Lincoln was quick to honor his college experience as fundamentally shaping his chosen career path in justice work.

In contrast, Samson entered college with a fundamentally different understanding of the need to do justice work given his mother's work on racial justice issues. However, as Samson quickly found, overcoming college norms that left little emphasis on and time for engagement in justice work required his initiative. Reflecting on critical moments in college, he quickly credited peers and activist group opportunities available in college as significantly nurturing his focus and commitment to justice work. Samson related,

Well, physically through [my university] I was literally able to engage through [a chosen student group] by finding the organization in which I could exert efforts. I thank [my university] and I thank [that organization].... To be honest, it was kind of around sophomore, maybe junior year, mid-sophomore year, when I was thinking I'm not doing anything really. I'm going to class, and hanging out with friends, but I'm just not. And everyone says that college was just flying by and I thought "Am I doing the best I can to take advantage of my time as a student?" And that's when I began to look at the on campus organizations and that's when I found [student organization], which in turn I got more involved in that aspect. And so it's not a knock against my friends. It was just seeing the stagnation in school, which irked me a bit.

Growing up with an activist mother who served the community, Samson realized that he needed to engage in a more productive way. Therefore, through intentional investigation he was able to identify organizations that both allowed him to become active and also to further his knowledge base and skills around important issues.

In addition to the active student organizations, Samson also deemed his curricular experiences as equally pivotal. Reflecting on his student teaching experience, Samson served two differently situated educational settings, thereby causing him to consider the root causes

of the difference. As such, the contrast further cemented his commitment to working for educational equity. Samson observed,

So when I student taught in my junior year of college it was an amazing experience and that made me really want to jump into the more political based things as opposed to just the pedagogy and being a teacher in my classroom. In the fall of my junior year I was placed in a fourth grade classroom in [a school], which is a school in the [neighborhood], predominantly Caribbean and Hispanic kids. It's a Title I school. And then in the spring I was placed in [another school] which is in [the area], which is a more affluent neighborhood of predominantly White students. And so my experience working in those two schools was very, very different. Whereas [my first school]--they had a new teacher, TFA teacher which is Teach for America, and resources were just so hard to come by. The parent involvement was very minimal. I maybe met one or two parents throughout my whole semester there and then you juxtaposed that with my spring semester at [my second school] where every Wednesday afternoon the kids play soccer at [an affluent recreation area]. I met every parent multiple times. The teacher could just call the parents and ask for something and they would probably bring it to school. There was never an issue to have a resource if they asked for it. As you can imagine, the aggregate outcomes were very different between the two schools. In [the city], class was 29 students and I want to say, in the 4th grade, 6 of them were reading at a fourth grade level. So the majority of students were behind grade level in reading. One thing I noticed early on is that it was at no fault of the kids. The struggles with test scores and whatnot are not because of the lack of effort of these students. Because the why, going back when I was talking

about the achievement gap versus the opportunity gap, the achievement gap places the onus on the students. But I wouldn't attribute it all to the students. The opportunities that are afforded to them through the community and through the schools, they had the largest impact on their academic success or lack thereof. So seeing these stark day and night contrasts furthered my desire to look into issues of why this is. Why are two schools in the same city—I can get to one with [public transportation] in an hour—why are they day and night different? And so it allowed me the platform to develop [*sic*] into these issues a little deeper and work into these issues in an actively engaged place.

For Samson, seeing the stark contrast cemented his commitment to the pursuit of justice. As noted, the combination of the curriculum and outside student organizations provided the medium through which he developed.

Comparably, Ray identified the college curriculum as making a significant impact on him. In fact, Ray shared that the pivotal moment, ultimately leading to his decision to engage in social justice work, occurred on a day during his sophomore undergraduate year when a guest lecturer presented in class. Ray recalled the moment,

That pivotal moment is--it happened during my Intro to Sociology class. It was structured quite well for a freshman class, looking back at it. Each week or so we would be on different chapters of the text and in the middle, maybe March or April, we had a guest speaker, which [*sic*] was a different professor.... It is an interdisciplinary institution. They sell the entire institution, it centers around that--an issue is not necessarily the territory of one major or field and you can look at it from different angles. [My major department], if you really want to boil it down to a

specific term of understanding, was social science but there's a lot more edge to it. I think there's a lot of history and social context to it, different voices, that aren't necessarily heard. But--so the speaker spoke on crime and deviance and his take on it completely reversed what I ever thought of crime and how I've always understood it and been told about it in a way that before meeting him and listening to his talk I went down the line that there are bad people who do bad things. And then the way that he was really explaining it was that certain groups define what is good and what is bad, what is legal, and what is illegal. And with those lines drawn, there is always some sort of intent or agenda behind those lines, whether they are moral or immoral, from the policymakers. And so he talked a lot about the drug war and how we put so much emphasis on street crime--the crime that I was more--that I knew so much about just from various sources, like the media. If ever people talk about crime, they talk about street crime. But what he explained was really White-collar crime that was bringing about street crime because of the income inequality. And then also how that feeds into notions of racism and homophobia and even discrimination against those who are less able, all working toward the end of building up capitalism, forwarding the machine of capitalism. And you can get just from that statement that the professor was a Marxist, and that was certainly not taught by the Jesuits in private school. In a sense if you want to think about what they talk about, Marxism and what Professor [name withheld] was speaking about, was a lot more edgy and a little more stark of points than what the Jesuits ever talk about in my opinion. But that got the gears going with social justice.

While perhaps the foundation had been established for Ray through Jesuit teaching, it was that moment when he saw reality differently than he had before. Ray considered the significance of the moment:

The most significant event hands-down was that lecture. Even though certain things were changing, more or less going away, that brought something to fill that growing void. I don't feel that void anymore. It brought in a different world when the world at that moment for me was crumbling. It didn't necessarily replace it, but it certainly, it brought a different way to interpret all the difficulties that I was having and still being able to get somewhat of a connection with the old understanding of justice.

That pivotal moment, in effect, created the clarity for which Ray had been searching and sent him on a more intentional path. As he noted, while dynamics were such that he was positioned to be influenced, the material helped him to see the social structure more critically and facilitated greater understanding. Subsequently, that lens revealed for Ray the direction that he knew he was meant to pursue.

While Ray's college classroom experience occurred on a given day, it was the breadth of a course that proved the tipping point for Charlie. What he took as simply a means to meet a requirement for graduation became a mind-altering experience that led him where he is today. Charlie captured,

I started getting these notions of, "Oh, there's some issues going on historically and currently." And then my second semester freshman year is when I took the intro [academic department] class for my humanities credit. I had a friend that had taken it and said that it was an easy blow off class and, of course, I jumped to that. And it turned into kind of like mind shattering, the things that we were learning and talking

about and bringing to light. And so it was end of freshman year, start of sophomore year, that things really started to roll.

That classroom experience changed how Charlie then structured his college learning experience. He then selected a major of study and that allowed him to engage in spaces that felt more authentic and affirmed what he intuitively knew and pragmatically understood.

Charlie clarified,

But I don't think that anything would have happened or would have prompted me to become engaged in this work if it wouldn't have been for the education that I received when I was at [large Southern university] in like with [major] department and whatnot. So I think that education is just of utmost importance to me and maybe I'm realizing that now more because that's what I'm planning on doing with my life, is being an educator.

For Charlie, as with many others, the college environment revealed a reality different than what he had been led to understand. The exposure to a new understanding engaged his values and interests thereby situating his focus to engage in justice work.

Finally, Brandon also noted his educational experiences as shaping his current direction. However, two elements existed uniquely with respect to his experiences. First, each learning experience occurred in his graduate program that was framed with a justice emphasis. Second, he intentionally chose to engage in justice work, responding to inclinations already developing within him. As a result, he immersed himself in an influential and powerful educational experience that the graduate program created. Brandon expressed,

My experience at [graduate school] was very different because I was going there for a very different reason. I was surrounded by people who believed much differently than

those I had encountered in high school and undergraduate. I was also involved in organizations that believed in diversity, equity, social justice. So [I was] surrounded by a lot of people who were having these conversations all the time. So that's where the messages I got from [them], they were much more congruent with what I believe now than the messages I got in high school and in undergrad.

Coming late to his understanding of privilege and the need for social justice, Brandon found it critical to have a community of peers and colleagues committed to common development. Brandon remarked,

I developed a lot of peers, colleagues, allies, that I got a lot of positive messaging from and a lot of support from after I decided to make changes for myself. And one of the things I thought of was as I made the transition to [large Eastern university], one of my classmates and eventually one of my friends, and colleague invited me to co-facilitate a workshop on microaggression. And she had invited me to do that because I had mentioned microaggressions a couple weeks prior and we both knew we had an interest. And while we were working together I realized that she had a lot of experience doing justice work at the college level. And I realized that her motivation for justice was really focused on the love element. Love of others, love of society.

That really had a positive influence on me.

Brandon realized that most important for him were the models who revealed themselves through the learning opportunities that his graduate school immersion fostered. In particular, the people with whom he interacted, and the breadth of opportunities, combined with the curriculum mission to create a holistic learning environment. Brandon illustrated,

And, at [large Eastern university] on the other hand, really the focus, the mission of the institution is to develop global citizens and [that mission] has permeated throughout the entire university, bringing different students together to learn as much as possible from one another. Academically, personally, professionally, et cetera. So all the different levels of involvement I had at the university really supported what I was trying to accomplish for myself but also continue to have opportunities to be involved in with diversity, equity, et cetera.

Brandon recognized that he both intentionally selected his route and was privileged to encounter such an environment. While graduate school shaped him significantly, he had chosen the program based on a belief that would be the case.

Subsequently, Brandon recognized that he needed to overcome his hesitancy and to embrace a variety of challenging experiences. Fortunately, his graduate experience presented several opportunities that he desired. When asked about significant experiences, Brandon highlighted,

The opportunity in [my assistantship]. I was very skeptical going into it because I had never had a residential job before and I hadn't lived in the residence halls since undergrad. So (laughs) I wasn't sure how it [would] work out. But my supervisor, actually the person who interviewed me, she was a big proponent of social justice, diversity, equity issues as well. She was not only the Hall Director, but also the [leader] for the entire department and the [area of focus] Coordinator for the [center]. And so I knew that we would have a great working relationship right off the bat and I also felt it was a great opportunity to receive mentorship and support from someone who I knew had a lot of experience in this area. So that turned out to be a great

relationship. The [social service] organization, again I was able to interact with so many different types of students who all bring a passion that [I] would not have otherwise had the chance to interact with. So that was a great environment to be a part of and I was glad that I was able to not only be a participant but also contribute back something to the organization. And then the [co-curricular group], I felt like that was the climactic moment of everything I had been working towards for the past two and a half years. I was selected to co-facilitate [a group] on race and that's something that I would have never seen myself doing prior to February 2009. Even when I went into graduate school I had no idea I would have felt comfortable putting myself in that situation. I have a lot of privileged identities, one of those being race, and I was worried how I might look or be perceived as a White male who's now in a leadership [position] and co-facilitating a dialogue with a woman of color. I definitely didn't think I had the skills for [doing it] prior to going to grad school, but I had a great experience and I'm really glad that I pursued it and was able to develop such a good working relationship with my co-facilitator. My professional experiences, my academic program, fused all of that into that opportunity as well.

Environmental Factors

While the educational environment clearly led participants to engagement in justice work, many also noted certain environmental factors in their lives that were meaningful. These environmental factors took the form of both influential dynamics and singular critical events that served to change their lives. Whether in their churches, communities, or among peers, participants highlighted experiences that significantly shaped their commitment and ultimately led to their engagement in justice work.

Influential dynamics. Several participants noted factors of a substantive nature that had lasting effects on their movement toward justice work. These influential elements in their lives served to change their awareness, cause significant reflection, and alter the direction of their development.

In response to that critical event discussed above, Brandon knew that he needed to do something to understand the dynamics he had witnessed. Therefore, after some discussion and reflection, he decided to pursue his own personal knowledge acquisition and development. Brandon shared,

Well, I feel like the initial moment was that [event] because that's when I made the decision to seek out ways to educate myself on justice issues, but the first opportunity I had to seek that out was, [the university] had an institute, called [title]. I believe they still have it. It's a week long summer institute for student affairs professionals, so I identify this as the first big opportunity to put myself out there and begin the learning process. I spoke to my supervisor about it and she was fully supportive so I applied and was accepted even though I had no experience in justice issues. And it turned out to be a very transformative experience. It was very immersive, brought together about 25 different professionals with all different backgrounds, social identities, lived experiences. So we went through this whole process where we started out looking at ourselves intrapersonally. And then transitioned into learning about one another and the theories around racial identities, student development, and then came out with a plan of how can we take this to our field of influence. What goals do we want to set for ourselves? So that was the big kickoff event and after that I only felt more inspired to continue looking into graduate school as an option, looking at more

opportunities for involvement. I don't know if that would have been the case had I not had that immersive experience to kick it off.

Once challenged, Brandon needed to take action. Critical to his response was the availability of and support for personal development. Fortunately for Brandon, his work environment championed staff development and also provided structured opportunities through which his development could occur.

For Graham, the environment around him was also important during a critical transition time in his life. The influential factors at play were his church youth ministry program and the peers who participated with him. These elements in his life proved to be life-changing. Graham relayed,

And I do think the other person [who] had some influence, who I was talking to early as a young adult and influenced me, would be my youth minister because he was the first person who taught me that church was not just a feel good time that you went to please your mother and sit in the choir and look pretty. That there was also this radical message within the physical text, the context that said Jesus also looked at injustice and he turned up tables and talking about doing justice and walking humbly with God. [He] was the person who, at the time when I was looking for something outside of baseball, he provided this: "There's other things you can do with your time, things that influence and impact other people."... So I think early on through [my friend], who--she was trying to better live that lifestyle of asking where your money is going and asking what decisions you're making and [youth minister], he sort of exposed to me this greater injustice that was occurring through the holiday season and through the purchases that we're doing and through just the local community, in

general, I quickly learned that the American dream and the success ... that we're taught as kids is not always what it is cracked up to be. So I think economic injustice, I was exposed to relatively early on.

While Graham entered the arena with openness, it was the combination of the youth minister and his direct peers that he looked to for guidance and that in turn had a lasting impact.

Those involved created an open environment within the context of his faith to consider questions centered on justice and what that looked like in their lives. Graham was shepherded into the transition to a justice-centered lens.

Comparable to Graham, the influential element for Andy also came within a church youth group setting. Andy had recently moved, changed schools, and connected with a church. Drawing him in were a friend and his school guidance counselor. Andy recounted,

We [best friend] also went to the same church too which is really nice and [an] interesting thing too. My church was about 95-98% African American and the other 2% was different races. So out of a huge group of 150, I was the only white kid. There was one mixed kid, then everyone else was Black. So I walked in there and I'd never experienced anything like that before so I kind of like became like a deer in the headlight type thing when I walked in for the first time into this huge group.... It originally started off, I'm this White kid with all these African American kids and it was a shocker and then probably after my sixth or seventh time going, I had assimilated into the group. And yeah, they would always joke around and like, "Oh, the White boy can shoot" or "the White boy has a jumper." But it worked up to where I had become one of the team leaders in the youth group. We started initially where we went out and helped out the homeless in [small Midwestern town]. And we were

actually getting our own building just for our youth group because our youth group grew so large, which was nice. So that was a really good thing or really a good part of my life because it made me realize, even though I was the only one, it still didn't mean that I was actually out of the group. They let me come in and so, which is a big, real eye opener for me too.

Andy encountered an environment that initially gave him pause, and then in turn altered his sense of reality. Those present dismantled the assumptions he held that he would not be welcome. What he found, at a time when he was most needing a sense of community, was a reality full of opportunity and in a setting he did not expect. That experience resulted in Andy feeling connected in an environment where he could contribute and grow authentically.

Finally, Samson noted that growing up in a diverse town, attending schools with a diverse student body, and having diverse friends both at home and in college helped him to understand that people do experience life differently than he had. Additionally, he felt that diverse upbringing led him to pursue teaching in an underserved school district, an experience he had begun at the time of our interviews. Describing his hometown and the environment therein, Samson explained,

So that's where I am from and so my high school was racially diverse and public schools all [of the] time growing up were very much racially diverse, socioeconomically diverse; I believe my graduating class was about 50% Black, 40% White, and then a minimal amount [*sic*] of other, Asian, Latino. [It] looks like very much Black-and-White.

Capturing the effect of the living and learning environments on his development, Samson summarized, "I think my number one thing is my mom and [my hometown] and [college

town]. I think those are the top three things that have allowed me to see the world as I do and then act on the world as I do.” While many elements comingled to influence his direction, Samson realized and affirmed the multi-dimensional settings within which he had been raised and gone to school. These factors, too complex to single out, complimented each other and fostered his drive to engage in social justice work.

Critical event. For two participants, singular events in their social environment had life-changing effects on their development. Specifically, each person experienced moments that dislodged their existing reality and sent them on trajectories that fostered a commitment to justice work. Reflecting on life events that made an impact, Charlie stated,

So about until probably I was in seventh or eighth grade, all of my friends were White. Like I said, there would be an occasional Latino that came in and out of the class so until about that age, all my friends were White. We were all receiving the same messages about people of color are dangerous. If you’re a Democrat, you worshipped the devil. It was Republican only. And so just--it was very clear that the messages they were receiving from their family were the same I was receiving from mine. And about that time I made my first friend of color, it was through [youth development organization] and I remember having a picture with him. My best friend at the time--I still consider her a really good friend--she made the comment, “Why are you with the N, with that N word?” And I said—I had heard the N word before from my great grandpa and through investigation—I asked, “Like what is that?” And so that has stuck with me through all these years, her saying that about my new friend, because she was my best friend and then the fact that she used this derogatory

language towards this new friend that she had no idea who he even was just really stuck with me.

The shock of the reaction from someone he considered a close friend, and looked to for affirmation, served to dislodge Charlie's sense of right and justice. Yet as Charlie reflected, the significance of the event intensified over time. He highlighted,

It's hard because I think that this encounter in seventh grade when my best friend used the N word about my new friend, I don't think, at the time, I realized the effects that it had. But, looking back, so as a sophomore, a few years back, looking back at that encounter, I think it was the moment, the fact that two people who I cared deeply about who had not met, one of them had been very racist, hostile reaction to the other one simply because he was an African American.

Reflecting in the interview, Charlie regarded that moment in 7th grade as an event that affected his sense of reality and his relationships with those around him. The event contributed to creating what would become over time significant dissonance for Charlie between how he felt others should be treated and how he saw people close to him treating those with different racial identities.

Different than Charlie, Brandon experienced a life-altering event after he had completed his undergraduate degree. Nonetheless, the event similarly had a significant impact in that it also completely dislodged Brandon's sense of understanding of the reality those around him experienced. Brandon recalled,

Well the initial catalyzing moment, or the motivational moment, was really that [cookout event] that I referred to in the first interview. And that experience again, and the impact it had on the university, and also on the individual students that I knew,

that I worked with, that is what motivated me to make this shift to learning more and getting more involved in this type of work.... And so I started with that, just looking for ways that I could begin educating myself, but also slowly looking for ways that I could become a more active community member and then this was kind of the moment that I decided that I wanted to really start looking into graduate studies and in particular a graduate program in which I could continue to build on that knowledge from an academic standpoint and so that's what started everything for me.

Abruptly, and clearly, life as Brandon knew it was dramatically altered. As a result, he could no longer continue the path he was on, knowing the affect such actions had on others for whom he cared.

Life Experiences

Outside the family of origin, participants further noted a variety of experiences in their lives that not only had an effect, but that influenced their engagement in social justice work. These experiences ranged from singular events to substantive relationships over time that revealed a more complicated social structure to the participants. Developmentally, participants reported that the experiences expanded their awareness of inequity and, once exposed to that deeper understanding, they could no longer ignore the work to be done.

Moments in time. Steve credited understanding his privilege as a key to shifting him toward justice work. And for him, he was very clear about the value of directly being confronted by a peer at the mall, who helped him see that privilege. Steve also found the difficult conversations with peers to be of significant value. Reflecting on those difficult conversations, Steve reported,

They're hard. It's difficult to go out and have a conversation with someone and know that you might offend them. Or to know that you're coming in from a place that is privileged and you don't have to worry about how you're offended because what you're talking about really does not offend you because it's not your identity. But it's also amazing. It's an amazing experience to go out and talk to someone and have them say, "You just offended me." And you're just, "Holy crap. I did not even realize that." And it's like a light bulb going on. I told you last week about the girl at the mall. That was a huge moment and it was super uncomfortable. I wanted to throw up afterwards, I was so uncomfortable. And I would not be who I am if she hadn't said it and hadn't expressed it to me. And yeah, it was harsh and, yeah, maybe there was a better way to go about how she did it, I don't know. To her, what I said was super offensive and super hurtful. And that was wrong and she taught me that it was wrong.

Steve's experience reinforced that for students of privilege becoming aware that they experience privilege is often the gateway to seeing and understanding inequity. For him, this was also the moment that Steve became not only aware, but also began to more fully consider where he stood in the social structure. Such awareness caused Steve to seek greater understanding as to what that meant for him going forward. But when he knew, given his values, he could not overlook this newly understood dynamic.

Andy likewise experienced a moment in time that dislodged his reality and irrevocably changed the way he viewed the world. Andy recalled,

I saw this one Black girl and, I'm not going to say her name or anything like that, but I was actually very attracted to her and was like, "Gosh." Because that was the first time that ever happened. And so I'm feeling, this is, oh, my freshman year of high

school when I also met this person who's now my best friend who is also an African American male too. That was kind of interesting, actually, because him [*sic*] and I very much disliked each other so that was definitely interesting. After about first semester, we didn't really talk much, we started hanging out a little bit but then second semester our freshman year, then we started hitting it off. But I had this problem, "Hey, man, I don't know what's going on here but I kind of like this girl, I think." I was like, "It's weird because she is Black and I'm white." That's what I was sitting there thinking so I'm seeing this race difference. And when I said, "Yo, man," he's telling me, "That's not really a big deal or anything like that, man. If you like her, go ask her out." And I got to thinking that maybe I should. And then I was about to go and ask her on a date and then I was like, "Oh, wait," I was like, "How would my family think about this?"... But probably the most motivational events, I would say, have been interracial relationships, whether that's interracial relationships as in friendship or intimate ones or whatever. Just seeing people with different, or interacting with different social identities just to see how people look at them, to see how people treat them, and whatnot.

Recognizing he had been socialized to consider only women of his same race for dating, the attraction to women of color caught Andy off guard. At that moment, he began to shift the lens through which he viewed the world and to lean on those who might help him understand what to do. What Andy found through persistence was that he was embraced, challenged, and, in time, welcomed by the community of color around him.

Finally, Graham also experienced a moment that ultimately altered his path, leading to his exploration and engagement in justice work. Graham reflected,

And so I had this interesting relationship of--I had an eating issue and body image issues going on. And then the obsession with working out. I had my dream sort of die because my coaches didn't really think we were going to do anything. And then I had this other segment of me. I had friends and family and people at church who were also pushing me more towards looking at bigger, broader issues--what did I want to do outside of baseball in my life. And that's where social justice came into play for the first time was because I got involved with the bent to activism with the local school system. And so when I was 17 years old, after I finished my junior year, my junior season of baseball, I quit baseball. And as a person, [when] that was one of your identifiers your whole life, to have that, just make that decision, and to step outside of myself and look beyond the sports, was a huge moment.... If I had not had the experience of having a dream pass away in regards to baseball and the eating disorder and everything else, I would not be who I was and who I am today. Because I think, for me, what that seriously allowed me to do was to step back and look at the narratives I had been ingesting and to critically analyze and recognize within my own self that I was enough and I was worthy of love and everything else outside of my identity with that, without my identity with baseball.

For Graham that critical moment came when he set aside his dream of playing baseball. At that moment he acknowledged the effect athletics had on his health and owned that he needed to take another direction. The moment required Graham to redefine who he needed to become.

Interactions with others. Another related theme that emerged from the interviews was the influence that interactions with those different than themselves had on the

participants. In particular, two participants felt drawn deeper into the work at hand as an outcome of interactions with people comprising areas of their justice work focus. These experiences served to catalyze for each person a sense of purpose, greater skill, and focused understanding of what they were called to do.

Andy noted those chance encounters with others that introduced him to a world he had not previously known. As importantly, he found quickly through two such instances that the time he put into relationships returned value beyond what he could have imagined. Andy offered,

But remember the apartment I told you about? ... Well the family that owned it was from Viet Nam. And their English was very broken. And it was actually bad enough to where their daughters would have to come in and translate between me and them. And they would also translate for the customers. But the daughters ended up moving away so I actually, at one point, had to sit down and I started trying to learn Vietnamese so I could communicate with them better. And I sat down and had a very broken Vietnamese, very broken English conversation for about four or five hours with the owner of the store that I stayed at and she actually was a huge influence. Well because from there on, her [*sic*] and I would, she would make me cookies every week. She would help hem my stuff because I was going through a change in weight at this time so my clothes were a little bit on the bigger side so she was actually sewing my clothes for free and we would sit down. We'd have conversations, like what a normal conversation for you and me, it would take 20 minutes, would take us two or three hours. But just her and me and me with her and her telling me the experiences. She was actually a really big transition history in my life too. Just

hearing how she had come over here, how people had given her a hard time about her English, and how people had yelled at her and assumed because she was Asian that she couldn't drive and things like that.

Through the time he took to listen and understand, Andy heard stories that he might not have believed or imagined. As such, he gained a deeper appreciation for people and, in particular, those who had been unnoticed. The experience allowed Andy to be better prepared in a future role as a kitchen worker. Andy remembered,

And then I was able to connect this back to when I was working in the kitchen and translating a lot of times, how I would see a bunch of the--not even just the White workers--but just the American workers coming back and they would yell at the cooks and the cooks don't understand them when they're yelling and cussing them out for getting an order wrong. And that was a big eye opener, seeing like wait, why are they being treated like that? I thought, they're trying to learn English but you should give them a break and they weren't getting the benefit of the doubt. So there were a lot of conversations I had with people where I'd say, "Hey, that's not right." So that was definitely an eye opener for me there.

Andy realized that seeing instances occur first hand had a much deeper impact. The encounters moved him to both stand up for his fellow employees, addressing the need for greater understanding and reconciliation, and to visualize the role he might play as a justice worker.

Ray similarly noted that immersion experiences had a lasting impact on his commitment to engaging in justice work. Ray expressed,

My experience with [social service organization] was a little bit changing in terms of justice. The core of that experience was, I had an Aunt who had some speaking troubles and unfortunately I am not currently aware in what way she was, but she had some speaking troubles in some way. That was also part of that family mantra of don't be, again, critical of someone different because our family reflects that difference, too. So with [social service organization] that experience brought about the issue of ableism and the personal touches of individuals who have those conditions and the family members who have those individuals...the issues that that life brings about and the different stresses they go through. And that made me a little bit more aware of keeping the justice focus broader. Back to how I lamented to you about how at [large Midwestern university] it's issues [centered] on [more prominent justice topics]. Like there's another issue of limited ability that doesn't get a lot of voice but even so [social service organization] still gives me a little hope that the system that I demonize sometimes and also the lectures like those that [university professor] has given also support some of good things that give me some positive hope with some of the positive social structures that we already have. It keeps me away from falling off the edge into being a complete anarchist and wanting to set the world on fire. So that drives the way that I want to approach justice.

As the relationships developed, the work became personal for Ray. Through his volunteer work experience he came to know people on a personal level. Additionally, his engagement in the work created links to his personal life and deepened both his self-interest and his commitment to social justice engagement.

Family of Origin

Finally, as mentioned above, several participants credited their families with having had significant influence on their decisions to engage in justice work. While the individuals and the degree of influence varied, the result was similar with respect to the influence. Participants reported that their families provided the foundational values and in some cases the support and modeling for the work in which they have chosen to engage themselves.

Alluded to above, Samson unequivocally credited his decision to engage as he had in social justice work to his mother, with some influence from his father. Samson proclaimed, I just can't understate the importance of my mom. I guess that's one take away from these questions and that's my mom, and her unyielding influence on me.... I would say that it is a culmination of everything that I've said before, seeing my mom bust her butt for the past 20 years. Seeing that effort is a motivation for me. She's had several jobs throughout my life. My earliest memories are traveling with her to work, so she traveled a lot for those jobs and she's very much been in the field of social justice, which has led to shape my feel of what I wanted to do.... But what effect do I think my family had on my choices, I mean I don't think it's even quantifiable. I think I very much tend to my mother's style with the early influences of my father. I think I wouldn't be in [large Midwest city] right now, I wouldn't be wanting to teach, if it wasn't for my mother. If I wouldn't have seen in my life over 15 years her work, her work for the issues. Running over many [positions] in different fields, whether it was the [government agency], or the coalition, or any of her other jobs. They're all different venues but still underlying being very committed to this type of work. I think that that's really aroused me to do the same. So family is the biggest thing.

Throughout his life, Samson saw a commitment to justice work modeled by his mother, supported by his father. He was witness often to what she did and how she did it. And that became highly influential in choosing his path.

Lincoln likewise credited his family with enabling him to achieve as he had. Though not modeling advocacy in the same manner that Samson's mother did, the general unyielding support from his parents proved critical to Lincoln. He relayed,

If I had to choose an aspect it would be my family because they put me on the path to where I am. And a lot of the other things, like what classes I took, or who I met, those are all a product of them because they taught me to read before school did. They prioritized reading, and they said education is important and they said you are going to college and they said we are going to pay for it and they held my hand the whole way and forced me until I became this person that could only imagine going to college. The rest of it is luck. But in the sense that my choices were super narrowed in the beginning. I was going to attend a university, and not just any one but I was going to attend a good one. So that already chooses my path to some degree. And then it's just a sense of luck of who I meet or where I go and what classes influenced me. But you're already put down that path meeting these people who are going to care about these things or talk about these things or understand these kinds of things.... Yes, I think my family has had a huge impact on me; in particular, our emphasis on education and the ability to afford that education. That's probably the single biggest factor of where I am today.

Lincoln recognized that the emphasis on education, philosophically and pragmatically, could not be overemphasized as allowing him the opportunities he had. Likewise, he also credited

his family with putting him in the position to pursue work that reinforced his values and gave him the opportunity to advocate a similar path for others.

Ray similarly regarded his family as being influential, with their efforts being complimented by the Jesuit educational foundation they provided while he was growing up. Specifically, that influence involved living in a town overseen by the Jesuits, attending Catholic church and schools, and transmitting similar messages at home. Ray captured,

What I really see myself how I was brought to justice work is first, the Jesuit upbringing. I think I am still hearing echoes of it. They still push, keep pushing me towards it.... With family, they always kind of reinforced what I said about Catholic school and the church encouraging people to be courteous to people regardless of who they are or what they do, and in terms of the issue of race, it was explained to me very simply in my opinion now that you don't judge anybody of a different color for your family is not exactly of one color either. And so I actually do have second cousins who are actually of mixed race background and I played with them at family reunions and I remember my parents making a point and wanted to talk about, not necessarily to address any misbehavior that I had done. But whenever they do, the rare occasions, they do mention certain ways to act in society.... But either way, one of these social values that was instilled on us was along the lines of the golden rule, really, I don't ever recall my mother or father trying to relate what was said in church or private school in their [own] words or ... correcting them. More or less what they said in the church or school they said as values and luckily the parish and the schools that I was affiliated with was the Jesuits and so a lot of their work and emphasis is directed on social justice issues, predominantly the poor. So we would hear a lot

within sermons about making sure that you are providing care for others who can't provide care for themselves, donating to charities, and even visiting folks that don't have connections anymore, such as the elderly in assisted living homes. But other than that, it didn't feel like the stereotypical conservative values.

Looking back, Ray regarded his childhood as conservative in scope. But he also noted the thread of justice messaging revealed through his education. What was important in retrospect was that the foundational family unit reinforced values espoused by church and school, emphasizing equal treatment of those who were different. Such modeling paved the way for Ray's later transformational focus on justice work.

Finally, Charlie credited his family as well with fostering his commitment to justice advocacy. However, unlike the other participants, Charlie's family provided an adversarial impetus that moved him into and kept him engaged in the work. Charlie revealed,

This is more why I've continued to go in the direction that I'm going. I constantly get in text battles or phone fights or Facebook fights with people from back home on different issues. So the whole Zimmerman being found not guilty for the Trayvon murder caused a huge split between me and my best friend to the point that she didn't come to my graduation [from college] because she was so angry with me. And so I think just seeing that the fact that I'm on a different page than these people on issues of race and racism and inequality and these questions, I think is a huge influence on [me]. And really why I've decided to continue my education and go to grad school and get in academia, I think it's just the fact that these ideas and notions are imbedded in them and that I'm still having discussions and arguments with them about these things, I think is a huge influence.... I don't think I mentioned it, but my brother likes

to go back and forth on disowning me or like reclaiming me back as his brother. And I think that has had a huge, huge influence. Just on a little thing that I'll post on Facebook about White privilege will turn into him in an uproar, sending me this crazy text, deleting me from Facebook and saying that we're not brothers. And so just things like that that have happened my sophomore, junior, senior year of my undergrad and that are still currently happening, I think, are really big events as well. Reflecting, Charlie has been in a gradual and steady move away from the conservative environment that he grew up with, both philosophically and physically. In particular, his brother created a constant friction as Charlie continued to question where he stood and how best to address issues with which he was confronted. Home for him represented a consistent reminder of not only the work to be done but also the importance of that work.

Conclusion: Summary of Findings

I presented the findings from my research study in this chapter. The themes that emerged from the data collected through participant interviews indicated that educational institutions, specifically colleges, had the most significant impact on privileged students' choices to engage in justice work. Environmental factors and life experiences also played significant roles for more than half of the participants. Finally, four participants noted their family of origin as significantly leading to their commitment to social justice work as well.

To answer the first research question, I presented findings regarding how participants gained an understanding of their social position in U.S. culture. I thought it important to first understand how privileged students came to gain knowledge of opportunity and success, presumably thereby knowingly and unknowingly reinforcing their privileged status. Though all participants reported seeing inequity in the social structure, they interestingly were

exposed to a range of perspectives. These included conservative, moderate, and progressive views that were passed along by their families. Three participants noted that the communities they grew up in and the schools they attended also influenced their understanding of how life worked. Also of note for those who experienced more conservative messages about opportunity, adult mentors who provided dissenting voices to counter the conservative narrative provided by their families encouraged participants to follow their instincts to reach beyond what they were hearing from others around them.

Data analysis for the second research question focused on understanding how participants became aware that a need for social justice existed. I felt it was important to understand what moments or events began to expose their privileged status to these participants. Four participants reported feeling they were drawn to pursue a personal search for greater authenticity that led them to situate themselves in diverse communities. Doing so exposed those participants to different positions on access to opportunity as viewed by diverse individuals, thereby revealing to them the need for social justice work. Moreover, four participants reported enhanced sensitivity that emerged from experience as other, instances where they became the other themselves. Additionally, three participants experienced critical incidents that served as a wake-up call, opening them to seek better understanding about those holding diverse identities that were different from their own. Finally, two participants came to understand the need for justice work through the environmental influences, primarily parent engagement in and modeling of justice initiative, in the communities in which they lived.

Providing an answer to the third research question, I presented findings that demonstrated barriers to engaging in social justice work faced by participants as privileged

college students. Dynamics inhibiting engagement were important to understand so that they could be reduced over time to allow greater involvement by privileged students. A primary barrier noted by six participants was their confusion due to a lack of clear understanding regarding what role they should play in justice work. Six participants also discussed simply being initially unaware that injustice existed as the element that kept them from fully engaging. Five participants cited the lack of others around them who were knowledgeable about social justice, and the subsequent need to constantly explain their work, as a dynamic that made their efforts difficult. Additionally, five participants mentioned that not having the skills to be effective interacting with diverse peers, or to advocate for a more just environment effectively, inhibited their full participation. Less frequent, but nonetheless worthy of note, themes about barriers that participants highlighted included assumptions others held about them (4 reported), questions about what commitment to justice work meant (4 reported), dissenting voices that discouraged their work (4 reported), and the absence of others like them in justice advocacy spaces (2 reported).

To answer the final research question, I presented findings about what privileged college students believed most led them to engage in justice work. The information gained in the first three questions led up to and offered insight into these findings. Participants believed that the educational institutions they attended were the most significant factor influencing their decisions to embrace justice work. Specifically, the college environment was cited most frequently by participants as offering curriculum, peer interaction, and experiential opportunities that encouraged their work for a more just environment. However, several participants experienced primary and secondary schools as well that significantly shaped their pre-college attitudes. Further, more than half of the participants, six total, cited

environmental factors, comprising influential dynamics (4 participants) and critical events (2 participants), as having had significant influence on their commitment to justice work.

Likewise, five participants also noted life experiences, including specific moments in time (3 participants) and interactions with others (2 participants), as being highly influential to them. Finally, four participants noted their families of origin as significant to their commitment in social justice work.

In summary, participants clearly reported that educational institutions had significant influence on their awareness of injustice issues and the need to advocate for change. Specifically, colleges were credited with revealing to participants the realities of inequity through the curriculum and experiential learning in the co-curriculum. Peers early in life were generally reported by participants to provide either neutral or discouraging influence toward participant work to change social dynamics. However, life experiences with peers holding diverse identities, and environmental factors such as interaction with people holding diverse identities, later in high school and during participants' college years factored significantly into providing positive awareness of the need for justice work and direct support for engaging in justice initiatives. Additionally, participants also noted families of origin as having had a significant influence, especially those demonstrating pre-college engagement in social justice initiatives. For all participants who noted their influence, the family of origin first set a foundation of values for their children and then provided the modeling of these values through community action. Paradoxically, those families that provided negative influence toward social justice values were revealed to be as motivating for participants as those that provided positive examples. Also, the environment shaping their upbringing had a significant effect on their beliefs and actions in regard to social justice. Those who grew up

in towns with diverse people, exposure to diverse perspectives, or that reinforced the need to serve others, cited those influences as significant. Finally, participants reported a general lack of awareness and engagement in justice issues by the privileged community. As such, many cited an understanding of the need and commitment to focus their work on educating those like them about understanding inequitable systems and how privileged individuals knowingly and unknowingly reinforced systemic inequity.

In Chapter 6, I provide a summary of the study and an analysis of these findings by overlaying the original theoretical perspective and previous research with what these findings support and do not support within the presented theory and research. I also discuss the implications resulting from my findings on nurturing and encouraging more active engagement by those students holding privileged identities. Finally, I provide recommendations for suggested good practice for higher education institutions and implications for future research to advance understanding on this topic.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I discuss the findings as they relate to the original four research questions that framed my research study. I also consider how the findings were consistent, or inconsistent, with the literature and theoretical framework. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How did participants come to understand their social position?
2. What participant life experiences raised awareness of the need for social justice?
3. What barriers to engaging in social justice work did each participant face?
4. What triggers, key moments, or life dynamics led privileged college students to work for social justice?

Each of the research questions was designed to offer insight into the process privileged college students experienced as they came to engage in justice work. The first question was important to understand because students holding privileged identities often do not see injustice. Specifically, I explored how participants were socialized to understand the world around them, how they were taught that opportunity was afforded to them, and how they were instructed to achieve success in life. The second question derived from Harro's cycle of socialization theory (2000, 2010a), which holds that at points in life individuals encounter a moment where they are led to think about and then make a determination of whether to continue on their current trajectory or to pursue a different direction. I was particularly interested in understanding at what moments in life participants became aware of injustice and what those moments entailed for each participant. The third question was important to understand given my desire to encourage greater privileged student engagement

in justice work. The fact that many individuals embrace the U.S. cultural values of fairness and opportunity for all presents an opportunity for educators.

Understanding the barriers faced by those committed to justice work may allow the creation of environments that foster greater willingness of privileged students to transition into justice work. Finally, I was ultimately interested in the reasons why some privileged students, unlike many of their peers, chose to go a different route in their life course and to pursue on-going justice work. Privileged students engaged in social justice work had been the subject of limited research in the literature and thus I thought it was an important contribution to understand the essence of why these individuals chose a commitment to engage in change work (Bridges, 2011; Brown, 2002; Loewen, 2003; Tatum, 1994).

Discussion

Having reviewed the literature, compiled the participant profiles, and analyzed the participant interviews, I use the discussion section to consider why the finding emerged as they did from my research. I have arranged the discussion as it relates to each research question.

Research Question #1: How did Participants Come to Understand Their Social Position?

The first research question I answered through this research project was, “How did participants come to understand their social position?” To understand the meaning derived from the findings to this question, I re-examined the literature on privilege and dominant group behavior outlined in Chapter 2.

Findings revealed that all participants acknowledged the awareness of social inequity at the time of the study. Interestingly, participant understanding emerged growing up from a

range of perspectives that included conservative, moderate, and liberal views transmitted by their families of origin. Some participants reported that the communities they grew up in and the schools they attended also influenced their understanding of how life worked.

Additionally, for those who experienced more conservative messages about opportunity, adult mentors or those who provided dissenting perspectives were reported by participants to have encouraged deeper understanding of inequity and the need for justice advocacy.

Family of origin. A focal point of this research question was to explore how privileged students came to understand aspects of opportunity and success in their lives and the lives of others. Participants reflected on how they learned to access opportunities that would lead to their success and whether or not they perceived that those opportunities, and subsequently personal success, were available to all people. Participants reported their families of origin to be the most significant influence in particular. Findings revealed that participants received three distinct narratives from their respective families, comprising liberal, moderate, and conservative ideals. While I found it interesting that students from such different family narratives could comparably become committed to social justice, the outcomes were consistent with the life course theoretical framework that asserts individuals have the human agency to choose their life course (Elder, 1995; Perun & Bielby, 1980). Likewise, using the privilege and dominant group behavior literature as a lens revealed that, in reality, participants were not that divergent from each other in what they experienced (Applebaum, 2010).

Specifically, Andy, Charlie, and Glenn, to a lesser extent, reported having to overcome a more conservative belief structure that asserted a right way of doing things.

These students portrayed clearly outlined and articulated dominant group norms established

by their families of origin. That narrative was reinforced through comments and actions, consistent with assertions in the dominant group literature (Fisher, 1997; Goodman, 2001). For them, success and opportunity was afforded mainly to those who feared God and worked hard, which was transmitted as simply normal (Goodman, 2001). Andy, Charlie, and Glenn were influenced to believe that those who did things a certain way were rewarded and that those experiencing hardship bore the burden as a result of their lack of effort. These three participants reported receiving incomplete, inaccurate, or missing information about opportunity and equity (Picca & Feagin, 2007; Kendall, 2006). Consistent with findings by Bridges (2011), this dynamic put each of these participants at odds with their families as they became more aware of the full story (Johnson, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Wise, 2005). Receiving a slightly less restrictive narrative from his family, summarized as “they loosened as they got older,” Glenn found it necessary to forge his own direction while continuing to justify his decisions within the more conservative ideology comprising his family belief structure. Charlie and Andy both reported being in conflict with their families and that the dynamic served as a motivator for them to move in the direction they had chosen.

Brandon, Lincoln, Ray, and Steve received moderate messaging, which held that anyone who worked hard, did well in school, and treated people right would have opportunities and be successful in life. In essence, these four participants were provided a more moderate, or neutral influence by their family of origin with regard to justice work (Goodman, 2001). Each individual worked from a belief that success came through individual effort and was largely unaware of any systemic injustice that existed (Kendall, 2006). However, their families did instill the foundational values of respecting others, treating people like you want to be treated, and honoring those who are different. These

ideals reinforced a generalized approach that arguably positioned them with an openness to future engagement in justice work (Munin & Speight, 2010). Nonetheless, the messaging they received transmitted a sense that they were largely like everyone else with respect to opportunity and success, similar to the conservative narrative in this regard.

Graham and Samson were instructed that opportunity and success were distributed inequitably. Each was led to believe by their families of origin that they were fortunate to have the opportunities and means they did and that with those privileges came a responsibility to serve the community, specifically those less fortunate. Graham and Samson each credited the honesty about social inequities taught by their families to be highly influential toward their understanding of their privileged positions, consistent with previous research findings (Munin & Speight, 2010; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). This finding is important to note as there are privileged students in the higher education system who have been shaped by a narrative that encourages awareness and advocacy for a more just environment.

Finally, influenced by emerging scholarship, the findings reveal that though participants received diverging ideals on the political spectrum, the narratives they were taught to live by did not differ all that significantly. Specifically, all were taught the U.S. cultural ideals of self-determination, hard work, competition, and the virtues of charity, volunteerism, and compassion (Wagner, 2000). All predominantly came to see themselves as individually able to make a difference through their efforts. Those whose parents modeled activism framed an awareness that others were less fortunate and that each person, especially those with privilege, needed to be part of the solution. However, as Kendall (2006) pointed out, people typically have little awareness of how social structures are separate from

individuals (p. 81). Thus, even activist families do not appear to have discussed their contributions to social dynamics through complicity to systemic injustice, which scholars argue is critical to recognizing and overcoming unjust systems of privilege (Picca & Feagin, 2007; Kendall, 2006). As Applebaum (2010) noted,

White complicity pedagogy is premised on the belief that to teach systemically privileged students about systemic injustice, and especially in teaching them about their privilege, one must first encourage them to be willing to contemplate how they are complicit in sustaining the system even when they do not intend to or are unaware that they do so. (p. 4)

Each of these participants was well-intended and exercised significant effort to promote a more equitable social environment for all. However, each struggled to identify and overcome the root causes of injustice and what that meant regarding actions to take, career choice, and how best to interrupt such an unjust system.

Community. The significance of the community influence was mentioned by three participants. Graham, Ray, and Samson each found the messages in their community to be congruent with what they were hearing at home growing up, which ultimately influenced their understanding of their social position. Most often, though, community became insignificant for study participants because their families of origin were providing the dominant messaging, as discussed above. Comparably, while some significance emerged for these three participants, the family unit mitigated the lens through which the community played a role by overlaying what it deemed right and normal (Goodman, 2001). In other words, participant families of origin filtered the impact on their children of any community counter-messages. To illustrate, Steve commented, “We'd be told one thing and then I'd come

home and my mom would be like ‘no, that's not what we believe, that's not how we treat people, we do it this way, we believe this.’” For Graham and Ray, the messages from their communities either reinforced messages at home, and therefore the congruence felt insignificant, or their parents emphasized and modeled community engagement as a value within the family of origin, thereby making that influence seamless.

School influence. Three participants remarked that their schools became the vehicle through which their social position was revealed most significantly to them. These findings compliment previous research that indicated classroom experiences and co-curricular programs enriched learning about social justice issues (Broido, 2000; Rice, 2009). For each, in particular, the interplay of peers factored significantly by helping to illuminate the realities of U.S. culture, also consistent with previous research (Broido, 2000). Additionally, the teaching staff was significant for Glenn, as they served as models through the curriculum and their own actions, which energized his reflective critical thought and helped him see a deeper reality. Developmentally, Glenn recalled that high school played a more significant role given his reported personality, a finding not unique to this study (Munin & Speight, 2010). Lincoln and Steve found their college environments to offer greater impact due to less filtering from their families of origin (Broido & Reason, 2005). The reported impact on each of these participants seemed most consistent with the timing being right in their life course. In each of these cases, the sequence of events and issues of fit contributed significantly to the impact the educational environments had on their enlightened understanding of their social position (Elder, 1995).

Dissenting voices. For those participants receiving more conservative messages regarding their social position, the emergence of a dissenting voice factored in as a sole

counter message within the family of origin. While it was not unique to see such voices present beyond the family of origin, which participants also reported in this study, I found this thread to be unique for two individuals whose lives became linked to individuals within the trusted family structure early on that affirmed these participants for who they were (Elder, 1995). Additionally, self-confidence had been shown by Broido (2000) to be linked to social justice engagement. Therefore, the voices of their grandmothers were critical for Andy and Charlie as they felt recognized for who they were becoming. Both noted that positive encouragement from a grandmother helped them to continue on their current life trajectory.

Research Question #2: What Participant Life Experiences Raised Awareness of the Need for Social Justice?

The second research question I pursued was, “What participant life experiences raised awareness of the need for social justice?” Considering the ally development framework outlined in Chapter 2, social justice allies need to understand their privilege and to see the oppressive nature of that privilege (Bishop, 2002; Broido & Reason, 2005). Participants reported that they primarily gained understanding about the need for social justice advocacy through either the process of pursuing a yearning to present themselves differently so as to achieve personal authenticity or the influence of the home and social environments in which they grew up. That search for authenticity, in particular, led these participants to situate themselves among communities of people who saw life differently, thus revealing a new reality to the participants about the existence of unequal opportunity. Additionally, several reported a significant event that occurred in their lives first raised their awareness of social inequity. Finally, several participants revealed that experiences where they felt marginalized placed emphasis on the many social issues that existed around them.

Search for authenticity. Andy, Charlie, Glenn, and Ray all reported that to some degree they sensed that they did not fit the norms presented by their peers. That feeling of being different then translated into an effort to find a location that fostered a more authentic sense of self. Andy's attraction to African American women, Charlie's feeling of incongruence with family actions, Glenn's reported oppositional personality and inability to find common political ground, and Ray's disconnect with being an American left each lacking a feeling of fit and a longing to find a more congruent community. Personality was a factor found in common among privileged college student allies by Munin and Speight (2010), but those common qualities did not include Glenn's reported oppositional personality. Political attitudes were found by Nilsson and Schmidt (2005) to predict social justice advocacy, which supports the reported experiences of Glenn and Ray. Finally, Bridges (2011) found, as Charlie reported, that conflict with family members facilitated social justice engagement. Having that feeling then moved participants to reach into different communities that would offer connectedness and congruence with who they were coming to know themselves to be.

Experience as other. Of note, Andy, Charlie, Steve, and Graham reported having their awareness heightened about injustice through experiences of being different or marginalized while growing up. This finding affirms threads found in previous literature, highlighting both developmental models and empirical data (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005; Munin & Speight, 2010). For those holding privileged identities, being able to understand how others might see and experience the world is particularly critical. Opportunities such as these, painful as they can be, may be most critical for privileged people so they can fully appreciate what others encounter on a daily basis.

Likewise, privileged people also often have a perception and expectation that they can change things by exercising their leadership and power, thus such instances may in turn motivate action (Howard, 2011). What becomes critical is then leveraging effort in such a way so as to work with, rather than over, those who are truly oppressed (Evans & Washington, 2010; Reason, Broido, et al., 2005).

Critical events. As had been found in other research with privileged people engaged in justice work, a sudden impact or critical event in the lives of the privileged can often make a life-changing impression (Brown, 2002; Munin & Speight, 2010; Warren, 2010). Brandon, Lincoln, and Steve each reported their cognizance of injustice being crystalized at a moment in time. Common to these instances for participants, the moments of insight emerged through an established relationship with another person who helped them see their lives from a different perspective. In short, for Brandon the impact event became personal because the occurrence directly altered how he viewed life for those students about whom he cared (Evans & Broido, 2005). Having a personal connection was critical to the impact, thereby diminishing the tendency of the privileged to be dismissive of accounts by the oppressed. Steve for the first time critically reflected on what to him was normal and felt judged by his peer in the process, thereby deepening his consideration of the comments. Moreover, the impact also became significant because the incidents caused participants to evaluate their own personal values. Confronted by a friend about being a doctor's son, Lincoln was bothered by the image conjured in his mind and for the first time saw how he was different. Such personal questioning moved participants to reflect more deeply on what they believed and how their actions were consistent with their beliefs.

Environmental influence. Interestingly, the two participants who identified this broad theme as important in their recognition of the need for social justice also came from environments that led them to seek out opportunities to engage in justice work during their time in college. Graham and Samson reported many instances in a variety of settings growing up that raised their awareness of the need for social justice. Their role models at home, dynamics they observed in their schools, the ways they were treated by adults in their lives, and interacting with diverse peers all served to form their perspectives. This finding tracked consistently with previous research, indicating that pre-college attitudes were important to ally development in college (Broido, 2000; Munin & Speight, 2010).

Research Question #3: What Barriers to Engaging in Social Justice Work

Did Each Participant Face?

The third research question I explored through this research study was, “What barriers to engaging in social justice work did each participant face?” For review, the primary barriers expressed by research study participants included being confused about what role they should play in justice work and a lack of understanding that everyone did not have the same opportunities they did. Additionally, participants reported realizing that though they had the desire to change things they did not have the skills necessary to be successful.

Participants also reported that the absence of people of similar identities involved in the work also served as an underlying deterrent. Finally, participants disclosed that stereotypes they held, assumptions made by others about them, discouragement by their peers, and a wavering commitment to engage all served as barriers to embracing advocacy for a just environment.

While I did not explore through my research why some students do not get involved in

justice work (Bridges, 2011), the findings provided some important insights about what might deter privileged students from advocating for a more just environment.

What is my role? The most consistent barrier mentioned by participants who deterred their engagement was confusion as to what role they should play in justice work. Overall, I found the participants overwhelmed by the complexity of justice work. Of those who articulated struggle with role confusion, participants generally emerged in two stages along the ally developmental models. First, those with less experience engaged in the actual work tended to fall along the developmental ally model stages of skill development (Evans & Washington, 2010; Washington & Evans, 1991), understanding how oppression touches individual lives (Bishop, 2002), and self-interest (Edwards, 2006). Participants reflected that the challenge arose from an understanding that to best do justice work it was important for them to work with target group members (Broido, 2000; Evans & Washington, 2010; Munin & Speight, 2010). In the analysis, these participants were primarily engaged with activist groups and oppressed friends as a means to address issues of injustice. Because they did not have a clear understanding about what role was best to play, participants subsequently struggled with entering the spaces of individuals holding oppressed identities where justice work was being done most often (Evans & Washington, 2010). Further, these participants did not report having a clear structural mechanism for reflecting on their own work, understanding their own self-interest, and then forging clarity about what their role needed to be (Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Evans & Washington, 2010; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Washington & Evans, 1991).

A second group, who appeared to be at the action stage (Washington & Evans, 1991; Evans & Washington, 2010), were working with dominant group members (Bishop, 2002),

expressed doing self-reflective work (Broido & Reason, 2005), and were generally acting for altruistic purposes (Edwards, 2006). Their reported role confusion seemed to be a byproduct of their own self-reflection, acknowledging the struggle of feeling a need and desire to be in multiple spaces. However, they seemed to recognize that their best work could be done in spaces where they could educate the dominant group on activist engagement, engaging men in anti-violence work, and educating on critical whiteness (Applebaum, 2010; Reason, Broido, et al, 2005). Therefore, my findings supported the developmental models through empirical evidence and emphasized the critical nature of creating structural opportunities for privileged students to understand and process their own development (Davis & Wagner, 2005).

Moreover, these findings demonstrated recognition by participants that doing justice work required presence in and contact with oppressed communities and their members (Reason, Broido, et al., 2005). However, findings supported that privileged people must also be willing to do their own work and to find spaces where they could focus on educating those who held privilege (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006). Very few, if any, spaces of that nature were reported by participants, which presented a challenge for privileged social justice ally development. Charlie and Graham were the exception, having situated themselves in academic settings where they were encouraged to conduct work on justice issues, engagement, and research on critical whiteness and racism. The barrier created by not clearly understanding their role in the spaces they currently occupied was further emphasized when participants such as Brandon, Glenn, Graham, and Ray reported that they struggled with when to lead, using their privileged status for common good, and when to relinquish opportunities by empowering others to take leadership roles. Offering promise, participants

were actively engaged in the consideration of how they might best contribute to justice advocacy, thus providing common ground from which future work might be done.

Lack of awareness. Confirming an array of conceptual and empirical work, participants echoed that their most prominent barrier to engaging in justice work was their lack of awareness regarding the need for such work (Adams, et al., 2010; Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Munin & Speight, 2010). Several participants confirmed they simply had no idea of their own privilege, or that others lacked similar opportunities, until they were immersed in the college learning environment. For one participant, Brandon, that knowledge did not become clear and present to him until after he had graduated from college. These data were neither surprising nor unique and supported assertions that those holding privileged identities frequently do not see the reality before them (Evans & Washington, 1991; Kendall, 2006). Moreover, given their development, participants each revealed varying degrees of awareness as to how they colluded with the system of injustice (Applebaum, 2010; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Goodman, 2001)

Others' lack of awareness. As literature supported, participants reported that justice work was not a topic typically discussed in their friendship groups comprised of other people who identified as privileged. Participants relayed that their knowledge and understanding of justice issues had grown, thereby changing how they saw the world around them. However, because their friends and family had not gained similar awareness at a comparable rate, the gap of understanding presented challenges for these individuals engaged in change work (Goodman, 2001). These findings were comparable to findings of Bridges (2011), who discovered that individuals tended to seek out activist spaces focusing on justice issues when

they lacked spaces that affirmed their perspectives and connected them with like-minded peers. Further, the presence of people who did not understand or embrace their work made it necessary for participants to be constantly ready to address issues that affronted their growing commitment to justice. Hence participants noted wrestling with some degree of isolation. Additionally, they actively considered whether or not to abandon friends or ignore comments that felt inappropriate (Brown, 2002; Evans & Washington, 2010).

Lack of skills. Findings also revealed participant awareness that there were skills that they needed to enhance, or shortcomings to overcome, in order to be successful in their social justice work. This finding echoed an earlier finding by Broido (2000). In particular, self-awareness and reflection were cited as aspects of an important stage in ally development and one affirmed by my research participants (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2000; Reason & Broido, 2005). In fact, most participants realized that to be effective their work had to be as much about what they stopped doing as it was about what they started doing. These findings importantly affirmed that ally willingness to engage in personal development for the sake of effectively serving common community interests was critical to ally development.

Assumptions others held of me. Participants identified that those around them frequently made assumptions that needed to be addressed or that resulted in their discouragement from participation in justice work. Andy shared that many assumed, based on his visible identities, that he had not experienced any adversity in his life. Ray echoed such assumptions, reporting that many assumed he would not advocate for justice given his visible identities. Steve experienced feeling as though assumptions were made by lumping him into categories based on his identity, such as men perpetrating sexual assaults.

Participants responded to these experiences with determination, motivation, frustration, and,

in time, understanding about why they encountered such reactions and their subsequent need to put concerns into perspective. These results were consistent with theoretical literature, in which authors noted that privileged students typically experienced these emotions when walking into the spaces occupied by historically oppressed individuals (Evans & Washington, 2010; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006). In many respects, findings from this study, supported by previous findings, further emphasized the need for spaces in which privileged social justice allies can process their work with peers holding comparable identities.

Questioning commitment. Given the in-depth nature of the interviews, participants elaborated candidly about their hesitations with justice work. Several participants openly wrestled with the tension between embracing justice work and the vision in their heads of what a successful life entailed. I believe this to be an important finding as it affirmed theoretical literature addressing the need for privileged people to relinquish their privileged status and the potential fears associated with engagement in justice work (Brown, 2002; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Kivel, 2002). Additionally, these findings confirm that work in social justice is a developmental process, complete with personal highs and lows that surface during the work.

Initially, I was somewhat concerned to hear reflections that suggested a wavering commitment to justice work. Upon reflection, I find the comments both revealing and reflective of the commitment doing justice work requires for those holding privileged status. As supported by this study and earlier ones, those holding privileged positions are often not taught to see their privilege (Bridges, 2011; Cabrera, 2012; Rice, 2009). I interpreted the fact that participants offered their struggles with commitment to be a byproduct of their efforts to

confront the dominant frame in their minds and to actively envision a different frame for themselves that included overcoming both real and unsubstantiated fears. Therefore, I believe the reality of privileged students struggling within the work itself continues to present cause for promise.

To expand, Howard (2011) found a similar pattern in his research, specifically that the self-interest displayed by privileged students in maintaining their privileged status served as a resource in justice work. Working with affluent student participants, findings revealed participants felt the combination of having access to resources that those disadvantaged did not, possessing a social justice mindset, and maintaining their privileged positions through which they could implement change was an asset to justice work (Howard, 2011). Privileged students in effect see the privilege they hold as a way they can contribute to the common good by using the resources they have access to differently, or at least in ways that do not stifle the development of a more just structure (Haviland, 2008). While struggling to envision what a new environmental frame looked like, participants in this study clearly advocated a more just distribution of opportunities for all people (Bell, 2007a; Goodman, 2001; Kivel, 2007)

Discouraging voices. Closely related to assumptions encountered about privileged allies, participants expressed being discouraged by other voices, both an internal voice carrying self-doubt and external voices from those around them who doubted the legitimacy of their work and their motivation. Participants commented about openly struggling with doubts about the effectiveness of their justice work, family members speaking out against their work, or people in target groups pushing back about their motivations for being present in justice advocacy spaces. Lincoln's internal voice that fostered feelings of hopelessness

echoed reflections shared by Bishop (2002). Literature supported the need for hope, affirming that the criticisms from their family and friends could over time become detrimental to seeing possibilities for a just environment and at the same time were a crucial precipitator to growth (Davis & Wagner, 2005; Goodman, 2001). Charlie reported the value of and difficulty with gaining the trust of targeted group members, a finding supported in previous research (Bridges, 2011). Additionally, concerns about these findings as a barrier were supported empirically by studies that indicated that students with significant self-confidence tended to engage and persist in social justice work (Broido, 2000; Munin & Speight, 2010). It is possible that over time persistent negative messages could underline the self-confidence of privileged students and lead them to choose paths of lesser resistance outside of social justice work.

Need for others like me. Finally, two participants noted that the absence of those holding similar privileged identities in justice advocacy spaces served as a barrier. Lincoln in particular discussed the powerful nature of being within a community of like-minded individuals committed to a common purpose, in his case providing strong educational opportunities to underserved students. These findings were consistent with empirical recommendations in the literature (Bishop, 2002; Kendall, 2006; Tatum, 1997). Bridges (2011) documented in previous research the concept of solidarity among racial justice allies, highlighting that those in his study felt isolated from peers due to their ally actions and therefore looked to fellow racial justice allies and target group members for solidarity. Ray also reported that not seeing many like him in justice work served as a deterrent. While Ray affirmed knowing that he is doing the right thing, he longed for solidarity with others similar to himself, a finding identified by Bridges (2011) in past research.

Research Question #4: What Triggers, Key Moments, or Life Dynamics

Led Privileged College Students to Work for Social Justice?

The final research question I answered through participant interviews was, “What triggers, key moments, or life dynamics led privileged college students to work for social justice”? Participants revealed that the educational institutions they attended and the comprehensive environment in which they grew up were the most significant factors influencing their decisions to embrace justice work. Interestingly, several participants also reported that their family of origin served as a motivator for them to engage, either by presenting dynamics they desired to work against or that participants acknowledged the privilege they enjoyed and therefore worked to honor the obligation they felt by holding privilege status. As with the second research question, the social justice ally development model outlined in Chapter 2 provided the framework for discussion of these findings.

Educational institutions. Given study criteria that participants be engaged in justice work as college students, I was not surprised that they reported their educational institutions to have been a significant influence on their decisions to pursue justice initiatives. The majority of participants, 8 out of 9, cited undergraduate college social justice engagement experiences, while one other cited justice experiences to have occurred in graduate school. The life history format interestingly revealed that five of the participants had pre-college experiences in schools that nurtured their awareness of social needs and their propensity for justice work. Similar findings consistently appeared in previous research, affirming that pre-college attitudes and the knowledge gained through traditional academic settings factored into student ally development and engagement in justice work (Broido, 2000; Munin & Speight, 2011; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005).

The findings from this study also affirmed that the curricular and co-curricular experiences offered by educational institutions have an impact on student advocacy for social justice. Participants highlighted the influence of study abroad, faculty modeling, interactions with peers holding diverse identities, and peer encouragement in general stemming from their educational experiences. Likewise, as other research found, the classroom in particular was cited as a space that pushed those in college to a deeper level of awareness and understanding about justice issues, hence fostering their motivation to engage (Broido, 2000; Howard, 2011; Munin & Speight, 2010; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). Findings were also consistent with those of Warren (2010) in his study of racial justice advocates. Though the study focused on people after their college attendance, Warren found that participants cited incidents in college as seminal experiences that led to their activism.

Finally, a finding not supported by this study reported that faith served as a significant motivator for students to engage in social justice work (Munin & Speight, 2010). As explanation, I would offer that participants in this study were not selected from a single Catholic university. Participants in this study attended seven unique undergraduate institutions, three of which were religiously affiliated, and none of the participants claimed a religious identity consistent with the institution they attended. One participant did cite his faith as intimately intertwined with his social justice work while two others noted faith influence as a contributing but not a driving factor. More consistent among participants was a strong value set, not necessarily derived from their faith identity, imbedded with the values of equitable treatment and that all individuals should have the same opportunities the participants did.

Environmental factors. Beyond their educational institutions, participants noted elements within their environment that pushed them to engage in justice work. First, four

participants reported influential dynamics involving people in their lives or facilitated opportunities that fostered deeper awareness, knowledge, and skills about addressing social injustice. Common to these influences was an active response by study participants. Brandon was able to follow the impact event he experienced by enrolling in a leadership experience that allowed him to further process what that event meant for him. Andy and Samson had peers who stepped in and embraced these two participants for who they were at the time, linking their lives and modeling positive regard for them (Elder, 1995). For each, the influences instilled a sense of self-confidence outside of the college experience, consistent with findings by Munin and Speight (2010). Such presence is critical given the stamina required to push against the dominant frame and to re-vision a new dominant discourse.

Also, two participants in particular experienced impact events, or single occurrences, which in their minds changed the direction their lives were headed. Those highlighting such events remembered the experiences vividly and how they saw the world differently as a result. These two experiences resemble those cited by civil rights activists (Brown, 2002), White male college allies (Bridges, 2011), and racial justice allies (Warren, 2010). Regardless of the event, these individuals remembered such moments as contributing to the reason they chose to engage and stay engaged in justice work. For those who were college students at the time, the resources available at the respective educational institution they attended and additional related opportunities presented to further process the events proved critical to their developing commitment to justice advocacy.

One element not present in my findings was the concept of being rewarded for social justice work (Howard, 2011). In the interviews, I did inquire about whether being recognized was a factor in their decisions to engage and stay engaged in justice work. Participants

acknowledged that being recognized for the work they were doing did feel good at times. Ray and Steve both even admitted that it was nice to hear positive comments just to let them know they were doing something right. But most participants downplayed those feelings, quickly saying that they felt it was unjust that they were being recognized for doing social change work that they regarded as their duty. Also, several found recognition questionable, leaving them wondering whether it was because their work was that good or simply because they demonstrated an identity unique to most in the activist spaces.

Life experiences. Finally, four unique participants noted events that I categorized as life experiences, occurring either as moments in time or through interactions with others, that fueled their decisions to engage in justice work. While characterized as being less significant than the impact events, several participants shared specific moments in their lives that moved them toward, or reinforced the direction they were headed. These included impromptu conversations with peers and being embraced by a friend or group of friends during an important life transition. Such a finding reinforced that life timing can be critically important, ultimately mitigated by many factors occurring in one's life (Elder, 1995).

Also cited by participants were critical interactions with others that occurred over time and caused each participant to see the world differently as a result. These findings were consistent with previous research findings that reported such interactions dislodged participants' privileged thinking, helping them to understand that not everyone has the same opportunities (Broido, 2000; Munin & Speight, 2010). Those interactions likewise increased privileged students' awareness that oppressive events do happen to others (Rice, 2009). Subsequently, participant realization of what others experienced led to more substantive conversations and allowed privileged students to develop more meaningful relationships with

those who were different (Bridges, 2011; Howard, 2011). These experiences led each person to see a more comprehensive picture of the social dynamics comprising lived lives and were not unique to this study.

Family of origin. Beyond simply educating participants on where they stood in the social spectrum, one participant credited the model his parents provided as directly impacting his decision to pursue justice advocacy. These findings tracked consistently with previous research findings (Brown, 2002; Munin & Speight, 2010). Additionally, two others suggested it was their parents' support and the general environment they created that fostered the path each had chosen, also consistent with previous findings (Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005). In contrast, one participant reported that the influence by his family was in opposition to his own beliefs, which he felt subsequently continued to serve as the motivation for his commitment to justice work, a finding consistent with previous empirical research (Bridges, 2011).

Though revealing variability, these findings are important given the significant influence that the family had on individual development. Those who benefited from parents engaged in justice work arrived in college with an inclination to engage themselves. For each participant, the key proved to be locating themselves in the right space, student organization, or social group. Findings noted above suggested that a positive social identity and belief that they could make a difference factored into social justice engagement. Participants whose family of origin instilled a sense of positive regard and confidence were then more readily able to leverage their values and leadership for the common good. Finally, consistent with life course theory, one participant demonstrated human agency by transcending the model his

parents offered and used that contradictory model as the motivation to remain engaged in justice education (Elder, 1995).

Not Found. One motivating element found prevalent in previous research that was virtually non-existent in my study was the concept of guilt. Howard (2011) found in his study of privileged college students that guilt was a motivational factor that fueled their engagement in justice work. Participants in this study did not mention guilt, other than in one instance where Lincoln owned that he had at first felt guilty in college when he first learned of the advantages he had. But Lincoln was quick to acknowledge that he had since that time moved through those feelings and guilt no longer played a factor in his decision to engage in justice work. Howard (2011) specifically studied affluent students, which tracked with Lincoln's portrayal of himself as a doctor's son. Lincoln was several years older at the time I interviewed him than those in the Howard (2011) study, which may account for why guilt was no longer developmentally playing a role in his engagement.

Another element that surfaced in the literature addressed how everyone, including and particularly privileged people, are harmed by systemic oppression (Blumenfeld, 1992/2013; Kimmel, 2003; Kivel, 2002). Participants in this study did not for the most part address the issue of social justice in regard to how systemic privilege and dominance impacted them. Graham did discuss how his interactions with peers had helped him to better understand what it meant to be a man, thereby alluding to his struggles to live up to what he thought were masculine ideals. Steve also discussed the concept of women being afraid of men. However, participants did not directly address the impact of systemic injustice on them. Given that the discourse around social justice focuses on injustice, I sensed that these participants possessed an outward focus toward creating an environment that was better for others, ultimately

benefitting themselves. Though I did not pursue this line of questioning, I suspect that if I had done so, participants would have deflected or minimized it so as to intentionally not make the issue about themselves, the privileged. Likewise, I did not perceive that the justice environments in which participants were involved were addressing the issues in terms of how dismantling systemic injustice benefits everyone.

Finally, an element that Howard (2011) reported was that privileged students believed they could serve as a resource and make a difference. Findings revealed that affluent students believed that they had access to resources that could be helpful to social justice efforts, thus motivating their engagement. That theme did not emerge from data that I collected through this study. While one of the participants in this study did report as middle to upper class, Lincoln spoke of affluence simply supporting his efforts and his ability to engage in teaching, which he knew would not allow him to maintain that same lifestyle. Interestingly, however, participants did not discuss access to resources as something that they provided in their justice work. While I might argue again that Lincoln was several years older, and thus more developmentally mature, most participants were the same age and did not suggest resources as a motivator. Instead, participants reported feeling a sense of duty derived from the privilege they enjoyed.

Limitations

In Chapter 3, I reported the methodological steps taken to achieve sound results. First, I conducted a pilot study that led to methodological adjustments. Then, I employed efforts to achieve trustworthiness of data, including member checking and peer review, and addressed ethical considerations to guide research study facilitation. I also discussed both researcher positionality and reflexivity to disclose possible hidden bias that existed. Finally, I provided

rich description through the participant profiles and findings sections. Though these steps were taken, there were still limitations to this study.

Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique in collaboration with professional colleagues. As such, my sample population consisted primarily of privileged college students who were identified as working for social justice. Therefore, the sampling frame allowed me to compare findings to other privileged students involved in social justice activities, but not necessarily all privileged students and specifically those who are not involved in social justice. Chambliss and Schutt (2013) called this process sampling on the dependent variable. That is to say, to be confident that certain life events might lead privileged students to work for social justice, this study would have benefitted from interviewing those who did not get involved in justice work for comparison. The possibility exists that students of similar backgrounds experiencing similar life events did not respond in the same way. Therefore, the outcomes of this study serve to further explore many of the themes identified through previous theoretical and empirical models. To explain the themes, additional research, such as that conducted by Messerschmidt (2000), is required to assure greater confidence in the findings.

Expanding on the first limitation, this study only considered students who identified as social justice advocates. I did not involve for comparison participants similar in profile. The study may have been strengthened by selecting participants for comparison who did not engage in justice work so as to understand why some did engage and others did not. For example, Messerschmidt (2000) offered the benefit of such a technique when he compared nine boys of similar backgrounds. In the study he included three boys of comparable background who had assaulted another peer, three who had sexually assaulted another

person, and three who had not done either of these crimes to understand why some did and some did not. While the interviews revealed that Brandon and Lincoln had attended the same undergraduate university, I certainly did not tailor interviews to understand and draw out comparisons between their two experiences, let alone provide individuals in the study for comparison.

Also, participants were screened to confirm fit for the study based on social justice advocacy engagement and privileged identities. During those screening interviews, not all reported to meet the identity criteria I outlined. I discussed Charlie's identity as bisexual and why I decided to include him in the study in his Chapter 4 profiles. While Charlie did not cite his oppressed identity as having an impact on his privilege or motivation to do justice work, the disclosure could be viewed as limiting the information provided from the study's findings. For additional thought on this issue, see the "Researching Social Identity" reflection section below.

Additionally, the three separate interviews were conducted in relatively close proximity to each other, approximately one week between each interview. The design was constructed to allow adequate consideration of the questions ahead of time but to minimize overall redundancy. This approach arguably did not provide a longitudinal relationship with the participants and therefore should be viewed with some caution when generalizing to other similar studies. Anecdotally, my contact did persist and confirm sustained work in justice initiatives by the participants but I did not include longitudinal interview data in my research or findings.

Further, being a qualitative study, only 9 participants were selected for the study and therefore limit the reach and scope of the findings. Further, considering that these men may

not have previously reflected on their experiences, in addition to their evolving identity development, meaning making probably occurred as the process unfolded. Therefore, the data analysis captured a snapshot in time, rather than a completed picture of the individual's lived experience, and was contingent on the degree to which the individual was able to self-reflect and make meaning of his experience.

Moreover, I did not select participants based on the quality of their social justice work. The criteria used to evaluate the justice work of potential participants were broadly applied during screening. While I certainly screened for work designed to bring about social change, I honored minimal criteria that determined such fitness. Similarly, I entered the study concerned about identifying privileged college students holding the identities I sought and therefore applied an open acceptance of both identity and justice work. Therefore, the impact of participant social justice work was self-reported and not confirmed for quality or positive impact.

Finally, the findings were based on self-reports and researcher analysis of data. Findings emerged from the process of data collection and thus may be questioned regarding their authenticity. Consistent with the methodology, a life history qualitative approach seeks to reveal previously unknown details regarding lived lives (Dowsett, 1996) and to uncover a situational truth, whether or not it is deemed to be factual truth (Messerschmidt, 2000, 2004). Coupled with a recognition that the purpose of qualitative research is not to create generalizability, the results from this study will be applicable to other individuals and other settings only to the extent that individual views, experiences, and settings are similar to those of the participants. Generalizability is not the primary intent of this research initiative.

Implications

Despite the limitations of the study, the data offer information that contributes to the current body of literature. Further, based on the process of conducting and reporting the findings of the research study, I was able to identify several ways this study contributes to the literature and to formulate recommendations for future research.

Contributions to the Literature

Research to date on college student allies had not specifically examined students holding privileged identities, in the manner in which the experiences of privileged college student allies were investigated in this study. In previous research, Bridges (2011) selected college student allies who identified as White men; Broido (2000) explored ally behavior and student status; Munin and Speight (2010) examined those who held a privileged identity at least in the area of their social justice focus, and Howard (2011) selected participants with privileged socioeconomic status. As I found in my pilot study, privileged participants who engaged in social justice work often cited the reason they worked for justice was due to the awareness they gained through an oppressed lens. In this study, 8 of the 9 participants held privileged status as White, male, heterosexual, middle or upper middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. Therefore, the experiences of these individuals were isolated for privileged status to better understand how they became aware of and decided to work against a system arguably maintained as beneficial to them. Further, the one participant holding an oppressed identity reflected on and confirmed a belief that his identities did not specifically lead to his decision to engage in justice work. This work is particularly important in that it allows understanding of why privileged students, absent a readily identifiable reason, would embrace work to change systems that benefit them directly.

Additionally, this study expanded the scope and findings of similar studies in several important ways. All previous studies on college student ally development included participants from either single educational institutions, faith-based institutions, or both (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000; Howard, 2011; Munin & Speight, 2010; Rice, 2009). While one must be cautious to generalize findings given the small sample size, the fact that participants represented geographic and institutional diversity expanded the reach and understanding about privileged college students who chose to engage in social justice work. Additionally, the majority of participants in this study neither attended faith-based institutions nor did they cite faith as particularly influential on their decisions to engage in their work. This finding is also important given the significant influence students gain from messages of service and justice that are common to faith-based institutions. These findings, then, begin to affirm the values orientation to embrace equity advocacy that privileged students often possess as they enter a higher education setting and the potential for cultivation of their justice engagement.

This study also confirmed the dominant narrative that students holding privileged identities received regarding how to view the U.S. culture. The life history format used to explore participants' early upbringing, school attendance, family, and peer influences revealed different ways that the narrative about opportunity and success was transmitted and embraced. I also portrayed through the interviews from this study how that dominant narrative began to be questioned and reframed by these individual student participants. While each participant experienced different influences that led them to engage in justice work, many common dynamics emerged that supported the direction in which they chose to move. What was clear in this study was that the dominant discourse, supplemented by facts of

inequity, resonated for privileged participants and resulted in active reframing of that narrative by each participant.

Viewing an additional set of findings, this study explored the barriers privileged students face to engaging in justice work. At times, the best method to implement change within student affairs divisions is to remove existing barriers, actions that can be as important to overall learning as providing the right instruction. I believe the in-depth exploration and identification of these barriers expands the literature base related to ally development and affirms the theoretical literature to date. Information gathered through this study may be considered as educators foster comprehensive ally development. By working to remove barriers such as those identified by participants in this study, campuses can create environments that encourage well-intended and value-centered students to more frequently engage in work for equity and justice.

Finally, I believe this study confirms that privileged college students are coming to educational institutions with a heightened sense of social awareness and emerging attitudes of equity and fairness. Previous studies on ally development noted pre-college attitudes that contributed to ally engagement. Educational institutions, within the context of broader society, are fostering the emergence of justice attitudes prevalent in college students, thereby pushing their inclinations closer to an affinity for change. Participants in this study, the majority of whom were not exposed to direct social justice advocacy during their upbringing, confirmed that there exists a closer connection between the ideals of fairness, access to opportunity, and the outcomes of hard work to the realities they learned about systemic inequity. This study confirmed that the attitudes of privileged students may allow for a closer connection between dominant narrative ideals and those that advocate greater social equity.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study had to be limited in scope and thus could not answer all questions related to the chosen topic. Therefore, several opportunities emerged that should be considered for exploration in future research.

First, the understanding of ally development would benefit from a comparison of student experiences at specific types of educational institutions. For instance, Brandon and Lincoln reported being completely unaware of justice issues prior to arriving in college. Interestingly, both attended the same undergraduate university and chronicled very different experiences. Brandon graduated with a persisting unawareness of justice issues. Lincoln, on the other hand, had a life-changing learning experience. Broido (2000) and Bridges (2011) suggested that the literature would benefit from future studies that compare privileged students who engaged in justice work with those who did not. I believe future research studies should be framed to identify students from similar types of educational institutions to explore what aspects of the learning environments at those respective institutions have an impact on student awareness of and engagement in justice advocacy and where there may be gaps.

Further, given the limitations of this study, ally development should be studied using the model employed by Messerschmidt (2000). Selecting privileged students who do not engage, those who engage in service work (addressing the immediate needs of individuals), and those who engage in social change work (addressing the root cause of inequity) would allow a deeper comparison of and understanding about why some privileged students engage and why some students do not (Bridges, 2011; Broido, 2000). Current empirical evidence reported what dynamics led to ally development and engagement. Yet also known is that

those of us holding privileged and dominant status are not abundantly present in justice advocacy spaces. Focused research would heighten understanding of the barriers discussed in this study and offer insights as to how educational institutions might deepen transformative learning experiences to foster more privileged student involvement.

Additionally, the empirical literature base would also benefit from greater study of whether those privileged students who engage in justice work come from certain academic areas or if certain academic areas fail to produce justice-minded students. I offer this suggestion with the anecdotal awareness from this study that Brandon emerged from a business focus as an undergraduate with reportedly no awareness of justice issues. Given the capitalist business structure, and curriculum necessary to educate successful business leaders, questions that should be explored include whether the current curriculum blocks or deters equity and justice in business practice. Do past concepts like welfare capitalism have any utility in today's world? Finally, is it possible to develop a business model that integrates just business practices with profitability and what dynamics must be in place for such a model to be successful?

Finally, ally development should be studied longitudinally to determine how attitudes and actions demonstrated in college persist beyond the college environment. Some participants in this study struggled openly to envision their work in social justice beyond their campus environments. Future research should be focused on re-connecting with participants such as those in this study at 5-year and 10-year post-graduation intervals to assess their attitudes and engagement in social justice work. Identification of insights gained, barriers encountered, and reflections about how their ideals and intentions materialized would provide information germane to structuring college learning environments.

Implications for Professional Practice

The findings from this study also presented some practical implications for implementation in college learning environments. As has been shown, students can experience significant developmental shifts while engaged on college campuses. To that end, educators and student affairs practitioners should consider taking advantage of the rich opportunity to develop privileged justice allies who contribute to the common good.

College and university educators. Significant work is being done within institutions of higher learning to create integrated learning opportunities designed to enhance the holistic development of students. Study findings confirmed that college curriculum can have a significant effect on privileged students by exposing them to previously unknown social dynamics. Also evident, two students can attend the same undergraduate university and have entirely different outcomes with respect to their awareness about inequitable treatment and opportunities. Therefore, colleges and universities that assert truth claims about civic engagement and social justice-based learning would benefit from a curriculum review to determine how stated learning outcomes are achieved.

Also, this study confirmed that co-curricular experiences provide students with opportunities to engage in justice work during their time on campus. Student affairs professionals must continue to advocate for the development of student organizations focused on justice and equity issues. Further, practitioners charged with shaping co-curricular learning opportunities should enhance collaborative relationships with their faculty colleagues to raise awareness of the need to produce student engagement experiences outside the classroom that draw on the review of literature in the classrooms. Post-engagement collaborative discussions for reflection about connections to specific course curriculum

components could then be facilitated within the classroom setting, bringing student learning full circle and deepening the impact of that developmental experience. Empirical evidence to date, including this study, support such initiatives.

Additionally important about these findings is that several privileged students from this study were inclined to be, or were already, engaged in justice work prior to entering college. Berkowitz (2011) found that the best predictor of men acting in a just manner was their belief that their peers would have done the same. Therefore, college personnel should actively seek avenues to identify students as they are arriving not only to encourage deeper engagement but to facilitate a more active voice for social justice. Based on the findings of this study, students may often possess dispositions that position them to embrace greater awareness about the need for justice and to lead efforts among their peers to contribute to social change initiatives.

Similarly, participants reported that the U.S. cultural ideals of fairness, treating others as they wanted to be treated, and the belief that all people deserve similar opportunities resonated for them prior to arriving on campus. These ideals offer a foundation from which to build awareness of social inequity. However, college students frequently have neither been asked to reflect on their values prior to arriving on campus nor have they considered what those values mean for them pragmatically. Therefore, curriculum and co-curriculum should be designed to offer structured opportunities to clarify personal values, identify their own self-interest in justice work, and to reflect on how best to apply their values in specific settings of interest. Faculty and staff must work collaboratively to require engagement in experiences that link classroom learning outcomes with use of time outside the classroom. College and university personnel likewise must become models who connect the in and out

of class learning opportunities through facilitated experiential engagement that fosters curricular application, community engagement, and active reflection about the learning experiences.

Further, privileged student allies need a space for their own development, reflection, and support that does not place a continued burden on their peers who hold oppressed identities. Therefore, as leadership programs develop, administrators in particular must create spaces that bring privileged students together to heighten their awareness about injustice. As privileged students embrace justice work, opportunities should be facilitated to bring them together to discuss their work, enhance their skills, and to formulate clarity about next engagement steps. Reflection on how their decisions collude to reproduce systems of oppression should also be a part of privileged student leadership development sessions. Emphasis should also be placed on reaching out to and educating their privileged peers to increase general awareness and to confront oppressive practices.

Finally, this study affirmed the need for educators to embrace students for who they are and who they can become. Staff and faculty need to see in each student the possibility of that individual embracing a commitment to acting justly and advocating for a just environment. College personnel must deliver a combination of theoretical and empirical information to deepen awareness of and critical thinking about U.S. culture. Likewise, space must be created where privileged students in particular can work through the assumptions and explanations they have been groomed to embrace about injustice. Creating a developmental experience grounded in justice curriculum will provide an environment of challenge and support that pushes students to recognize the injustice that many face, the dynamics of which they have often been unaware.

Student leaders. As suggested by Berkowitz (2011), privileged students must begin to overcome bystander inclinations and address issues of injustice with their privileged peers. Findings from this study suggest that privileged students would benefit from a greater critical mass of students like them for support, encouragement, individual reflection, and accountability. Therefore, those students active in social change work must locate separate opportunities for their peers to gather and to do their own work outside of the communities that they seek to work alongside.

Further, privileged students who see the need for greater work against systems of injustice must place an emphasis on working to educate their peers about the need for justice work. Leaders must present opportunities to help their peers recognize how oppressive situations hurt all people, not just those who are oppressed, and to consider how they are complicit in replicating the very systems that privilege some while oppressing others. Students must begin to embrace the ability they have through focused work in their peer communities.

Similarly, movements to teach and implement bystander intervention models are critical. This study highlighted the potential importance of peer relationships and the impact of those that address injustice directly. Student leaders must embrace a willingness to influence their peers and to understand how best to do that. Student leaders should also reflect on what they need to learn to be effective leaders beyond what they simply enjoy doing. As noted by participants in this study, learning about their oppressive actions was not always enjoyable. However, as they worked through the pain they inflicted, and that was inflicted upon them through the learning process, each realized the value and benefit of those

learning experiences, citing those experiences critical to their overall development and authenticity.

Also, student leadership programs need to be grounded with curriculum that calls student leaders to examine student organizational environments so as to facilitate the development of opportunities for equitable engagement. Questions about target audiences, who is gaining access to events, and the purpose of student organizations to create just learning environments for all students must become the foundation for leadership training. Additionally, this study identified that the heart of leadership exists through relationship development and the consideration of each student experience, not simply those who are privileged. Leadership development should continue to emphasize the importance of knowing the lens of diverse student experiences and what that means for demonstrating effective leadership practice that does not collude with systems of injustice.

Overall Significance of the Study

The use of a qualitative life history approach to study how privileged college students chose to engage in social justice work is significant. The approach reported here isolated students who held privileged identities, predominantly as White, male, heterosexual, middle or upper-middle class, able-bodied, and Christian. Previous studies on college allies frequently included those with oppressed identities and were from single educational institutions. This study included participants from nine different undergraduate institutions who represented geographic areas across the United States. Findings affirmed the influence of pre-college attitudes, educational institutions, peer interactions, and mentors on student ally development. Additionally, findings offered insight into how the dominant narratives of hard work, fairness, and opportunity may connect with equity and justice work. Finally, the

study revealed inherent barriers that can inhibit privileged student engagement in social justice work and offered suggestions for reducing those barriers to encourage greater engagement.

Researching Social Identity

At the onset of this research project, the task of studying students with privileged identities seemed straightforward. However, as I conclude this study I find myself in the precarious position of possessing perhaps more questions than answers, but certainly a deeper respect for the complexity of social identity. That is to say, along my chosen research journey I discovered that studying the social construction of identity is a messy process. Arising from my experience, I found myself perplexed by how to honor the many elements that shape an individual's social identity and lived experience. That complexity became the focal point of significant conversation during the committee discussion of my dissertation oral defense meeting, fully engaging all present. Many of the perspectives raised during that discussion caused me to think more deeply about the points presented in my reflection below. Ultimately, the research experience revealed to me that identity emerges at the intersection of individual lived experience, identity as ascribed by others, and the influence of social forces that are often beyond a person's scope of understanding. Moreover, no specific lens or theoretical perspective provides a complete and comprehensive account of individual social identity (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Process

As I shared in Chapter 3, given my interest in understanding the unique lived experiences of the participants, it seemed appropriate that I employ a constructivist and basic interpretive approach, a lens which holds that there is no objective truth and that individuals

construct a truth through their interaction with, and interpretation of, the reality they live (Crotty, 1998). In essence, the approach honored that each participant's lived experience was authentic, as determined by that individual's interpretation and meaning making. Therefore, this lens guided my screening and approval of applicants, which initially included three participants who disclosed historically oppressed identities. While hesitant to include these individuals, each assured me that their oppressed identities had not by their interpretation motivated their engagement in social justice work. After consultation with my adviser, I chose to move forward with including these individuals in the data collection.

Having completed the research study, I now better appreciate that the identity of each individual is also shaped by contextual influences from the social world in which the individual exists (Jones & McEwen, 2000). For example, the dominant narrative in the social world ascribes an assumption that people identify as heterosexual unless and until an individual presents a sexual orientation narrative otherwise (Blumenfeld, 1992). Therefore, individual meaning making is mitigated by dominant narrative socializing forces, leading individuals to assume a specific identity rather than allowing them to freely discover their identity gradually over time. Individuals who realize that their emerging identity runs counter to the dominant narrative frequently experience doubt, denial, and marginalization throughout the process of self-recognition. What I realized was the need to be mindful that participants might hold identities deemed as counter to what they believed they should be. That possibility needed to be considered when analyzing individual participant lived experience, especially those that presented any signs of marginalization, given that social pressure could be argued to influence how each individual came to understand and make meaning of his life course.

Reflecting more deeply and further complicating matters, I likewise had to consider the reality that individuals might be unknowingly influenced by the social world. Two participants in my original data collection identified as Jewish. During the screening process, each noted that they neither felt oppressed nor did they believe that their Jewish identity led them to engage in justice work. In fact, one even revealed a belief that identifying as Jewish in a community dominated by others holding a Jewish identity only furthered his privileged status. I accepted these assertions at face value. By including such participants I felt I both honored their interpretation of their lived experience and empowered them to define the meaning each drew from that lived experience (Baxter Magolda, 2013). Yet that decision left me faced with the need to consider whether the alteration of my criteria for study inclusion was appropriate in order to honor these participants' reported lived experience, or whether I should have excluded the individuals from the study given the absence of a specific criterion I had established as a study parameter. I encountered what Abes (2009) has referred to as a theoretical borderland.

Reflecting on the argument for exclusion, I revisited the literature, which revealed that privilege also emerged when individuals blended into the dominant narrative rather than running counter to it (Blumenfeld, 2012). Including those with oppressed identities, who in effect had been passing with dominant group status, emerged as a research dilemma. At this intersection, the complexity of the interplay between identity and culture revealed itself. Blumenfeld (2012) asserted,

An African American identity is interpolated as immutable, [*sic*] Jewish identity, on the other hand, is often seen for its mutability – its Chameleon-like properties. Jewish

identity not only confounds the racial binary frame, but also confuses the outside/inside binary as well. (p. 14)

That is to say, what must be considered is that while the participants felt privileged, that feeling may have come from a perception achieved by subjugating themselves into a dominant culture, rather than their own, so as to pass as part of the dominant culture. More concerning, their collusive actions may have become so commonplace for these individuals that they no longer recognized the rejection of their true identity (Blumenfeld, 2012; Patton, et al.; forthcoming). Clearly such unknown suppression might be argued as further evidence of the oppressive norm propagated by systemic privilege.

Therefore, I found it necessary to think more deeply about the complexity of identity and the interplay of an individual's intersecting identities. The consideration of whether to include two participants who identified as Jewish brought to the forefront the identity continuum I had come to see in masculine identity, yet failed to consider with respect to race and faith. The research process revealed to me that identity as it plays out in the individual cannot be limited to binary identification or a single theoretical perspective (Abes, 2009; Blumenfeld, 2012; Jones & Abes, 2013). Such was an important distinction and complicated my decision as a researcher to include, or exclude, participants based on their reported social identities. Nonetheless, it seemed most appropriate for this study to exclude those participants holding Jewish identities, given my original desire to limit participants to those who held dominant identities at the time they first engaged in justice work.

Subsequently, such thinking also brought me to consider privilege as multi-faceted and more complex than I originally understood. Setting up the research project, I had viewed privilege and identity to be intertwined, privilege naturally flowing from identity. What I

failed to consider is that privilege should be separated from identity and that the amount and type of privilege one experiences also can differ over time along a continuum rather than existing in a static fashion. Privilege is experienced, or not, by individuals and originates as a systemic entity that rewards those who conform to the dominant group narrative and oppresses those who step outside that narrative. As Collins (1993) noted,

Once we realize that there are few pure victims or oppressors, and that each one of us derive varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives, then we will be in a position to see the need for new ways of thought and action. (p. 72)

Once opened to this consideration, including and excluding participants based on privileged status became more challenging.

Furthering the questions of privileged social identity, the transcripts from participant interviews revealed that each had moments when they failed to live up to the dominant narrative to which they were ascribed, moving them into a state of oppressed status if so ever briefly (Blumenfeld, 1992; Collins, 1993). For example, Graham developed an eating disorder in high school that influenced his life course, and might be argued to compromise his reported able-bodied identity. Similarly, Steve reported to have been bullied by male friends in grade school for being different, presumably compromising his privileged male identity. Both acknowledged these episodes as events that held significant meaning in their lives yet which were no longer pervasive. Therefore, I emerged with a better understanding that theoretical perspectives such as the social construction of identity, privileged dominant group status, and oppression are grounded from a particular perspective and do not present a comprehensive lens through which lived lives might be interpreted (Jones & Abes, 2013). To

fully understand the meaning making presented by each individual participant, I needed to embrace the necessity of looking through multiple theoretical perspectives to see the intertwining influences of experience, social influence, and identity development on each unique lived life (Abes, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013).

Methodology

Intersecting elements also emerged within the methodological frame I chose. I found that the interplay of methodological decisions created the need for me to think more deeply about how each element influenced the others in the context of this research study. Given my focus on the social construction of identities and the privilege gained through intersecting identities, I could not simply overlay general methodological parameters to guide the research approach and analysis. Research framed in the constructivist, phenomenological, and life history approaches hold the lived experience to be a truth, not the truth, and therefore seek to honor the uniqueness of lived experience as reported by the individual. Such a lens is influenced by the dominant group cultural narrative, which reveals that those holding privileged identities often do not understand the scope to which their perspective has been influenced by unknown social forces that have not been critically considered (Goodman, 2001; Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 2003; Patton et al., forthcoming).

The result of the methodological intersection was that I found myself, along with my research committee, considering a host of questions germane to the research questions, research methodology, and ultimately the study findings. If influences are unknown to a participant, is the lived experience reported a truth? As a researcher holding privileged identities, should I decide the outcomes of an individual's lived experience when contradictions arise? For those holding privileged identities, does privilege come as a binary;

either you have it or you do not? If, for a period of time, an individual holds an oppressed identity status, such as when experiencing an eating disorder, does that identity status trump all other current privileged identities? Further, how should an individual be viewed who has seen his sexual identity as heterosexual most of his life but later comes to see his identity as bisexual? Finally, how should a person be regarded who does not believe he has been oppressed as a result of his Jewish identity, in fact arguing that given the geographical location in which he lives, being Jewish furthered his privilege?

Each of these questions emerged as I re-evaluated three participants initially included in my research study. Asher, Charlie, and Michael each made a compelling argument as to why they felt they fit the criteria of the study. Though identifying as Jewish, Asher reported meeting all criteria given that his Jewish identity was least salient to him and that he was privileged because he lived in a predominantly Jewish area. Charlie also felt he met the criteria for the study, although he identified as bisexual at the onset. His argument was that he had only come to identify as bisexual 6 months prior to the study and well after he had first engaged in social justice work. Though identifying as Jewish, Michael also felt he met the criteria, citing that his Jewish identity was least salient and that he observed Christian holidays growing up. All asserted that their respective oppressed identities did not influence their decisions to engage in or remain committed to social justice work. Consistent with the constructivist lens, I made the decision to interview these three men.

In the end, what weighed most in my final decision regarding who to include were the criteria I established for the research study. Therefore, I chose to remove Asher both because he identified as Jewish, thus not meeting my privileged identity criteria, and because through the course of the interviews he also disclosed that he had a social anxiety disorder. Similarly,

Michael was also removed due to his reported Jewish identity. Finally, I decided to leave Charlie in the study as a participant. While he identified as bisexual at the time he was screened for participation, he did not claim that identity during the majority of his life course. Prior to asserting a bisexual identity, Charlie claimed privileged identities that fit my research criteria. In addition, he had engaged in on-going social justice work that he did not believe he engaged in as a result of his newly held oppressed identity.

Did I make the correct decision? I concluded through careful reflection that including Charlie was justifiable. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) noted, “Social identities are very much influenced by time and place and are constantly shifting” (p. 228). Sexual identity encompasses both sexual orientation and sexual orientation identity, perhaps most challenging to understand given social forces and the ability to hide true identity (Blumenfeld, 1992; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). While individuals most readily identify and are placed into discrete categories, such as heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian/gay, emerging understanding about sexual identity reveals a fluid continuum (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). Complicating matters, the category of heterosexuality is not only assumed in our social structure but privileged as well, often simply not thought of by those who identify as or assume themselves to be heterosexual (Evans, et al., 2010; Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012; Worthington, et al., 2002). However, emerging models are suggesting that every individual undergoes sexual identity development, negotiating self-exploration and social expectations to embrace a commitment to their sexual identity (Patton, et al., forthcoming).

With respect to individual lived lives, scholars have questioned the appropriateness of privileging single theoretical approaches, such as constructivism and queer theory, over one

another. Coming to know and embrace sexual identity, for example, is a complex and fluid process. Thus, emerging scholarship posits that each theoretical perspective intertwines to reveal a borderland that results in the complimentary intersection of multiple theoretical perspectives, facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexity of an individual's social identities (Abes, 2009; Baxter Magolda, 2013; Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., forthcoming). Therefore, I might argue that Charlie's account of recently claiming a bisexual identity was consistent with the fluid complexity presented by emerging sexual identity development models (Patton, et al., forthcoming). Charlie did not identify as bisexual during much of his life course and thereby met study criteria for the majority of his adult life, including his traditional age college years when his justice work began. Of the three, I felt most justified by the existing literature to include Charlie in my findings.

I am confident not all scholars will agree. However, I offer this study, and the complexity revealed, as a contribution to the emerging literature base that fosters our deeper understanding of social identity construction. Each theoretical perspective offers another lens that adds to our understanding and at the same time fails to honor complimentary and contradictory perspectives that reveal the essence and depth of each unique social identity. At the heart of the matter is how we researchers and educators honor lived experience and the ability of an individual to make meaning of that experience. Intersecting individual meaning making is the reality of what each unique individual knows and does not know. At that intersection lays the fundamental question of what is the truth and who is empowered to claim that truth? It is my hope that my work here has helped fellow scholars to move closer to understanding such a truth.

Personal Reflections

When I began this journey my goal was to learn. Degree attainment certainly would be the outcome but in my mind I entered with the desire to learn to be a better academic and thereby a better student affairs professional. I believe these goals are demonstrated by the program of study I have compiled and my persistence in the program. As I have always told people who ask, there has not been a class or experience during my doctoral degree program in which I have not learned something and applied it to the work I am doing. Some of those applications come more quickly than others but I am without a doubt a better person and professional from this experience.

As for the dissertation itself, and specifically this research study, it has been the second most humbling experience of my life, falling just short to that of my role as a father. First, I learned the true value of the literature review. Though I felt I had covered the disciplines I needed to thoroughly, I often stumbled on my own researcher bias and the limitations that lens put on my ability to see the social world. In retrospect, I certainly would have benefitted from immersion in a full-time graduate experience that made better use of a cohort group to assist with the development of stronger research mechanics.

Additionally, the research itself through the interviews I conducted was a humbling experience. Participants spoke candidly and authentically, entrusting the truth they spoke and the potential for judgment to me. The questions I asked were at times too wordy, and difficult to understand, yet the participants endured me with grace and answered to the best of their abilities. I asked too many questions over the three interviews and gathered a wealth of data that were overwhelming to sift through. Yet at the end of each interview, and certainly the third, each participant expressed what I perceived to be genuine gratitude for being asked to

participate, for the questions I had posed, and the value of the reflective experience. In short, I was reminded of the mutual benefit of listening and being listened to by another.

I submit this document embracing an intense creative tension between believing I have done work that has contributed to the profession and fundamentally questioning the degree to which this work honors the beauty, rigor, and skill of good research practice. Should my committee find that I have indeed accomplished my research to an acceptable level then I will be most confident in their assessment, while shifting my doubt into a state of humility, gratitude, and deep respect that will ground me throughout the rest of my professional career.

As for my professional career, I know not where that will go. This research experience has convinced me more than ever of the need to advocate for just environments and the value of the college environment to develop social justice allies. Further, the process also reinforced the duty I feel as one holding privileged identities and status to enlighten those like me about the injustice that we collude with and reinforce on a daily basis. I am confident my role is to carry the learning from this research into my work as a senior administrator influencing the development of a comprehensive learning environment. I am also confident that I need to find mechanisms as a senior administrator to measure the value of my efforts through the experiences and success of those I serve. As the literature and these study participants so eloquently reminded me, to do otherwise is presumptuous and counterproductive to effective justice advocacy.

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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: “Working for Justice: The Life History Reflections of Privileged College Student Social Justice Allies”
Investigators: Timothy P. Phillips, Principal Investigator

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to determine how life history impacts the commitment to social justice in men. You are being invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as someone who has been committed to social justice work and/or as a leader in social change for a significant amount of time. You should not participate in this study if you do not hold privileged identities as reviewed during the prescreening selection process.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the study you will be asked to:

- * Allow digital audio and cassette taping of interviews for the purpose of transcription.
- * Participate, in person or by phone, in 3 semi-structured (meaning that initial questions will mirror those presented but may include follow-up questions) interviews.
- * Review a provided list of questions ahead of each interview that explore how you came to engage in social justice work, family influences, and personal experiences. Follow-up interviews will explore comments and themes revealed during the previous interviews and researcher observations.
- * Answer each question as in depth as possible. You may skip any question at any time.
- * Review the transcript from the interview(s) and make adjustments to any aspect that is misrepresented or needs further explanation.
- * Review findings of the study for accuracy

Your participation will last for no longer than 9 months from the point of first contact. Each of 3 interviews will required 60-90 minutes to complete. Transcript analysis will take approximately 60 minutes. Participation will consist of an initial screening, 3 interviews, review of a transcription from each interview, and review of the findings for accuracy.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks anticipated with this study at this time. Questions will be offered ahead to time and you will be able to answer as in depth or not at all to the extent you choose.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the experience will help you better reflect on your lived life. Further it is hoped that the information gained through this study will benefit society by providing insight into the education and development of men who embrace social change for the purpose of fostering a just world.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study other than your time, which is no doubt quite valuable. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can also skip any questions at any time and for any reason during the interviews.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- * You will be asked to choose a first name pseudonym that will be used to identify you and reference you in transcripts, research papers, and presentations.
- * Once the transcript has been developed and approved by you, the audio tape will be destroyed.
- * If a transcriptionist is used, this individual will be subject to all confidentiality measures.
- * Transcripts will be maintained in confidential files and not available for general use.
- * If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Timothy P. Phillips at 563-333-6259. Additionally, you may contact the study supervisor, Dr. Nancy Evans, at 515-294-7113.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Timothy P. Phillips – Principal Investigator)

(Date)

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: **“Working for Justice: The Life History Reflections of Privileged College Student Social Justice Allies”**

Principal Investigator: Timothy P. Phillips

Questions for Human Subject Research Study Semi-structured Format

Interview #1 -- Background

- 1) Please describe your life today; your year in school, major (minor), campus involvements, job(s), and the work you do on justice issues.
- 2) Reflecting, please describe where you were born, your family structure, the environment in which you grew up, and how you chose to come to this college/university.
- 3) Our families influence who we are and how we see the world. Please describe what values and ways of seeing the world your family imparted upon you?
 - a. What messages do you recall receiving about opportunity and success?
 - b. Where did these messages come from and how were they delivered? Can you describe an event that illustrates that message?
 - c. What key decisions or opportunities have brought you to where you are today?
 - d. What affect do you think your family has had on your choices?
- 4) Describe how your friends helped you to see the world. Please share an event that illustrated the messages you received.
 - a. What messages about opportunity and success emerged?
 - b. What influence did your peers have on your decisions to engage in justice work?
 - c. Please describe events that illustrate peer influence.
- 5) What influence have schools you have attended had on your perspective to date?
 - a. What messages about opportunity and success emerged?
 - b. What influence did your schools have on your decisions to engage in justice work?
 - c. Please describe events that illustrate this influence.
- 6) What influences or experiences stand out in your mind as significantly shaping your life course?
 - a. Who in your life, if anyone, served to influence your choices to work for justice?
 - b. As you have developed, who have been your role models?

- 7) Reflecting on what we have discussed today, what aspect of your life has had the most effect on your choice to engage in justice work?
- 8) Is there anything you have thought of or would like me to know that I have not asked about?

Interview #2 - Personal Development

Briefly review previous conversation.

- 9) What, if anything, comes to mind that you would like to discuss from our last conversation?
- 10) Would you like to comment further or pick up on any specific topic to start?
- 11) Describe your key beliefs and your goals in life; in essence who you are.
- 12) To what extent do you feel you've been successful in obtaining the goals you mentioned?
- 13) [Review identities mentioned] Which of these seems most salient to you now?
- 14) What actions that you have taken have best defined congruence between who you say you are and what you do?
- 15) How does your work as an ally contribute to or detract from your identity?
- 16) Why do you do this work when you could be doing otherwise?
- 17) What do you personally gain from this work?
- 18) What motivates you to do this work?
- 19) What have you had to unlearn through your work?
- 20) What has been most challenging for you in the work you are doing?
 - a. What barriers or deterrents emerged to doing this work?
 - b. What have you had to overcome to be successful in your work?
- 21) What events have helped you to better understand your role as an ally?
- 22) Is there anything you have thought of or would like me to know in relation to your social justice work that I have not asked about?

Interview #3 – Current Justice Work

Briefly review previous conversation.

- 23) What comes to mind that you would like to discuss from our last conversation?
- 24) Is there a place you would like to begin our conversation today?
- 25) As we discussed, you were asked to participate in this study because you identify and are identified as a social justice activist. Describe the work you do.
- 26) Please define what you believe the actions of those who work for social change or as social justice advocates look like on a daily basis.
- 27) What do you believe brought you to and draws you to do justice work?
- 28) Describe an event(s) that illustrates that you are doing what you are meant to do?
- 29) How has your approach to justice work changed over time?
- 30) What are the keys to success in social justice work?
- 31) As you look back thus far, what have been your greatest challenges or obstacles faced when working for social change?
- 32) What keeps you engaged in justice work?
- 33) As you reflect, what elements in your life do you feel contributed most to your inclination to engage in justice work?
- 34) Reflecting on your life experience, what do you believe are the keys to encouraging others like you to become involved in social justice work?
- 35) Is there anything you have thought of or would like me to know about your social justice work that I have not asked about?

APPENDIX C. CRITICAL INCIDENT MATRIX

Turnings [Key Transitions in Thinking]:

- * takes on a new set of roles [cultural]
- * enters into fresh relations with a new set of people [social]
- * acquires a new self-conception [psychosocial]

Mendalbaum, 1973

Moment	Dynamic	Explanation
Middle School Foundation	Conversation with parents about desire to be “normal”	1p17 There was one example too that I was thinking about, you know that was kind of funny, there was one time when I was in middle school and I can’t remember how it came about because it was a long time ago, but they were talking about, something to me about um, success, and you know, becoming rich and living comfortably and I remember they asked me, ‘Don’t you want to grow up and become rich?’ And I remember my initial response, my response was, ‘No, I just want to be normal.’ And (laughs) whatever normal meant to me at the time, that’s what I wanted to be.
Get Involved Foundation	Foundational message from parents early on that has resonated; planted seed	1p19 But I think a lot of that started out with um my parents kind of advocating for my sister and I to become more involved in, you know, in the classroom as well as what goes on outside of the classroom. Now, none of that really has anything to do with any kind of justice issues per say. I did do community service but it wasn’t for purposeful working toward some kind of social justice issue. But I think that kind of provided the foundation, um, for me later in life when I decided that I didn’t want to become just a more involved community member, but shift the focus to more of a justice focus, I already had that foundation in place at least in terms of being more involved. It was the focus that, you know, just had a lot more intent on justice, and diversity, and equity.
Cookout Event (1) Turning - Social	Annual themed event that included ethnic slurs and stereotypes; ignited campus conversations	1p14 In February of 2009 while I was working at [Large Southwestern University] working in student affairs, there was a small group of students at [Large Southwestern University] who were affiliated with a university fraternity and they coordinated an off-campus event and called it the [event] and invited other students to attend this event on Facebook. The event page described how attendees should dress, behave, etc., but all of these descriptions had a lot of racial and ethnic and class-based stereotypes and undertones in them and at [Large Southwestern University] as I’m sure a lot of people are aware, there are a lot of marginalized racial and ethnic groups at the university and so this event was kind of like the last straw for a lot of them. In response to it, they organized a protest and protested, demanded action from the leadership, all the way up to the Chancellor, to not only respond to this individual situation but to really take more preemptive measures to create a university that was more inclusive, more socially just than what currently existed, because in their opinion it was anything but that. And this event kind of demonstrated how that was the case. So, you know, I was working at the university at the time and observing

		<p>all that was taking place and all this unfolding and I really saw the impact that this event but also the attitudes and perspectives and later on what I learned was a level of privilege that kind of informed this behavior and this event. What kind of impact this had on not only the university as a whole but also these individuals, these students, a lot of whom I worked with and knew. So it really served as this kind of catalyzing moment for me, where I decided that I needed to take action but really start by educating myself because I really didn't have an understanding of what was going on myself, you know, probably as a result of having privileged identities, I didn't have to think about these things. And that's the result of having a lot of privileged identities is that I didn't have to think about these things;</p> <p>1p24 ...tracing back to the [event], I was supported by a lot of my colleagues, many of whom were women, some who were women of color, men of color. But putting myself out there and opening up and saying I was making this change and was vulnerable to express anything that I was going to express I opened myself up to whatever. And by putting myself out there in that way, you know, signifies to other people, you know I'm more willing to work with someone who is open</p> <p>2p13 Well the initial catalyzing moment, or the motivational moment was really that [event] that I referred to in the first interview. And that experience again, and the impact it had on the university, and also on the individual students that I knew, that I worked with, that is what motivated me to make this shift to learning more and getting more involved in this type of work.;</p> <p>3p15 Yeah, I mean, I've talked about this event a few times, but really the [event] at [Large Southwestern University] was the catalyzing event, but really combined with having this supportive network early on and then also really the opportunities that were there to continue the learning process and start to get involved in social change work and having people who were leading these processes who were very patient in terms of working with me. So kind of having all those things working together, in concert, really contributed to my inclination not only to become interested in it, but also to become engaged in it, and stay engaged.</p> <p>3p16 Yeah, I think that it was a combination of things you had mentioned, you know, first and foremost it was the first time that I had ever personally observed where there was an event that took place and then there was the impact that it had on an entire community of people and then the response from the students, the staff, the faculty in response to this event, and you know, that's probably because you know, again as someone who has many privileged social identities, it's not something that I'm familiar with, or as you said earlier, I can just walk away from it, the situation, and so I think there was that part of it. But also growing up in a small town, um, maybe things like that don't happen on a large magnitude, but they do in the larger cities, or again I may have just been oblivious to it growing up.</p>
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		<p>But I think it was a new experience for me but then at the same time the impact of the event on the community and the students and faculty in particular, I think I knew a lot of them and worked with a lot of them, and that's where it became personal. And you know, again, I didn't feel as though it directly impacted me but it was impacting people I cared about so that was an issue for me. And so, those were the two things that kind of started to get me thinking about I should probably start to learn more about this because the people who initiated this were like me, at least in terms of their social identities and so, you know, this is probably something that could easily happen all the time if these things are addressed. And so this was the moment when I realized I needed to start learning more about terminology, social justice issues, things like that, and then finding ways to get involved in social change work and develop skill sets that would benefit me in my personal, academic, and professional careers.</p> <p>3p18 ... I also feel like it's important for me to focus some of my energy and attention to some of those people who do come from privileged social identities, and so, um, yeah, which is to think about how to go about doing that is tough because for me, it was kind of that "A-ha" moment where I saw something, I recognized it as an issue and decided to take action. But had I not been there to observe it, um, I don't know that I would have, necessarily.</p>
<p>Initiative; Self-Education (Leadership Institute [2])</p> <p>Turning - Cultural</p>	<p>Sought ways to develop self, learn more about issues, and develop skills</p>	<p>1p26 Well, I feel like the initial moment was that [event] because that's when I made the decision to seek out ways to educate myself on justice issues, but the first opportunity I had to seek that out was, [Large Southwestern University] had an institute, called [title]. I believe they still have it. It's a week long summer institute for student affairs professionals, so I identify this as the first big opportunity to put myself out there and begin the learning process. I spoke to my supervisor about it and she was fully supportive so I applied and was accepted even though I had no experience in justice issues. And it turned out to be a very transformative experience. It was very immersive, brought together about 25 different professionals with all different backgrounds, social identities, lived experiences, so you know we went through this whole process where we started out looking at ourselves, intrapersonally. And then transitioned into learning about one another and the theories around, you know racial identities, student development, and then came out with a plan of how can we take this to our field of influence. What kind of goals do we want to set for ourselves. So that was the big kickoff event and after that I only felt more inspired to continue looking into graduate school as an option, looking at more opportunities for involvement. I don't know if that would have been the case had I not had that immersive experience to kick it off.</p>
<p>Education in Master's program [3]</p>	<p>Based on experiences, decided to pursue M.A. focused on justice work</p>	<p>1p21 My experience at [graduate school] was very different because I was going there for a very different reason. You know I was surrounded by people who believed much differently than those I had encountered in high school and undergraduate. I was also</p>

Turning - Social		involved in organizations that believed in diversity, equity, social justice. So, you know, surrounded by a lot of people who, we were having these conversations all the time. So that's where the messages I got from [them], they were much more congruent with what I believe now than the messages I got in high school and in undergrad.
Invitation to co-teach Neutral	Co-worker of color invited him to co-facilitate a workshop on micro-aggressions	1p23 I developed a lot of peers, colleagues, allies, that I got a lot of positive messaging from and a lot of support from after I decided to make changes for myself. And one of the things I thought of was as I made the transition to [Large Eastern University], one of my classmates and eventually one of my friends, ally and colleague invited me to co-facilitate a workshop on microaggression, and she had invited me to do that because I had mentioned that microaggressions a couple weeks prior and we both knew we had an interest. And while we were working together I realized that she had a lot of experience doing justice work at the college level. And I realized that her motivation for justice was really focused on the love element. Love of others, love of society. That really had a positive influence on me.
General learning environment Turning [see above]	Chosen Master's program and University supported comprehensive engagement through classroom and out of classroom work	1p25 And, at [Large Eastern University] on the other hand, really the focus, kind of mission of the institution is to develop global citizens and has permeated throughout the entire university, bringing different students together to learn as much as possible from one another... academically, personally, professionally, et cetera. So, you know all the different levels of involvement I had at the university really supported what I was trying to accomplish for myself but also continue to have opportunities to be involved in with diversity, equity, et cetera.
Graduate experiential learning opportunities RL Assistantship – Turning – Social Alternative Breaks – Turning – Social Intergroup Dialogues – Turning - Cultural	Immersed self in assistantship, as alternative breaks leader, and intergroup dialogue co-facilitator	1p26-27 The opportunity in [assistantship]. I was very skeptical going into it because I had never had a residential job before, and I hadn't lived in the residence halls since undergrad, so (laughs) I wasn't sure how it [would] work out. But my supervisor, actually the person who interviewed me, she was very uh, she was a big proponent of social justice, diversity, equity issues as well. She was not only the Hall Director, but also the Diversity Officer for the entire department and the Diversity Programs Coordinator for the [center]. And so I knew that we would have a great working relationship right off the bat and I also felt it was a great opportunity to receive mentorship and support from someone who I knew had a lot of experience in this area. So that turned out to be a great relationship. The Alternative Break organization, again I was able to interact with so many different types of students who all bring a passion that [I] would not have otherwise had the chance to interact with. So that was a great environment to be a part of and I was glad that I was able to not only be a participant but also contribute back something to the organization. And then the Intergroup Dialogue, I felt like that was the uh, climactic moment of everything I had been working towards for the past three, or I guess two and a half years. I was selected to co-facilitate intergroup dialogue on race and that's something that I would have never seen

	Engagement in intergroup dialogues project served as a test of where he stood with his development	<p>myself doing, you know, prior to February 2009. Even when I went into graduate school I had no idea I would have felt comfortable putting myself in that situation. I have a lot of privileged identities, one of those being race, and I was worried how I might look or be perceived as, you know, a White male who's now in a leadership [position] and co-facilitating a dialogue with a woman of color. I definitely didn't think I had the skills for [doing it] prior to going to grad school, but I had a great experience and I'm really glad that I pursued it and was able to develop such a good working relationship with my co-facilitator. Also my professional experiences, my academic program and fused all of that into that opportunity as well.</p> <p>3p8 And, so, you know I was a little nervous to be honest about how the experience [intergroup dialogues] would work out because this was kind of a test for me. It was something that was three years in the making and this was the opportunity where I could see where I was at in terms of my development. Overall it was a very positive experience for everyone—the participants, my co-facilitator. And, you know on top of this, it wasn't just a voluntary experience; I was doing this for academic credit, and so, you know with that in mind I feel like I put more effort into this one single experience and opportunity than any other experience in my life, I mean, by a long shot. Probably more effort into this opportunity than a lot of professional responsibilities or initiatives as well, and so I think with that, that is when I knew that I was really doing something that I was meant to do.</p>
Professional environment Turning - Social	Surrounded by others with similar interests and beliefs created commitment	<p>1p28 Yeah. You know like I mentioned earlier, a lot of the support and people who influenced me the most were a lot of colleagues along the way... They continuously checked in with me you know now that I was opening myself up to becoming more aware with issues of justice, where I saw myself going with that, where I could see opportunities, or give me advice about graduate school. So I would say those were a couple of people in that environment. And then at [Large Eastern University], I mentioned my classmate and friend and colleague throughout the duration of the entire program. She influenced me very heavily throughout those two years. And then my supervisor that I had um working in [residence department]. We spent countless hours together bouncing ideas, helping each other. I was continuously talking to her about any issues I was having with classes, extra-curriculars, we were able to talk through those issues, and so it wasn't like she was just there for my supervisor for [department], but more like she was there for everything that I was trying to accomplish during my time at [university]</p> <p>2p7 I think the one thing that I could say really defines the congruence between who I say I am and what I do, um, is really in the people who I surround myself with. They kind of represent that, over the past few years, I've started to kind of make these active, intentional, um, changes, for lack of a better term, for myself, you know beginning to educate myself and talk about social justice issues, organization, pursuing graduate studies.</p> <p>3p3 So, you know, like I've said, a lot of [social justice work] has taken place at the</p>

		<p>university level, but I feel like I've tried to make it a part of everything I do personally, academically, and professionally.</p> <p>3p6 So having a supportive environment made all the difference, you know, like you just said—not working in isolation. If I witnessed this event and was interested in doing something, whether it's just learning more or taking action, but I had no direction or support network to rely upon, I don't know that I would have been able to do anything because I wouldn't have had any idea where to start. Having a supportive environment is a key component to being involved, and then what brought me to stay involved is probably just this idea that it's a key component of our co-existence.</p> <p>3p17 I've always been with diverse students in terms of their various social identities um, but then again thinking about what initiated this whole life change, I guess you can call it, is that there were people who looked like me who did something based on privilege basically, you know, social privilege and so I became motivated to learn more about that and take action on that.</p>
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APPENDIX D. EXPLANATORY EFFECTS MATRIX

Brandon

Influence (Event)	Characteristics	Messages Instilled	Quotes	Interpretation
Family of Origin Education, hard work, and getting involved	Values instilled education, hard work lead to success	This is how it's done. Work hard, do well in school, go to college, get a good job and be happy.	"So if you want to look at it that way:..." 1p16 and "...I mean I know they definitely..." 1p17	Messages - Wanted him to have what they did not; provided the foundation 1p19
Environmental Factors Cookout Event [1] [work environment]	Event contained racist elements and sparked community reaction	Brought awareness; helped to see injustice and feel he needed to take action; educate self	"I really saw the impact that this event..." 1p14 "...that's what started everything..." 1p15	Describes this as the turning point for him; also see 1p18; 1p24
Individual relationships	Individual students who he knew moved him	This hurts us; if I care I will engage more deeply	"And that experience, and again, and the impact it had..." 2p13	Event impacted people for whom he cared 1p15
Leadership institute – Building Communities for Social Justice [2]	Attended institute on social justice work; immersion experience	Time allocated affirmed value of experience	"I believe they still do it, it's a week...it turned out to be a very transformative experience..." 1p26	First opportunity to really learn process of social justice work; inspired to consider graduate school
Educational Institutions Educational work environment – peers	@ University; colleague encouragement & focus on social justice	Important not work in isolation 3p6;	"...combined with having this supportive network early on..." 3p15	People supporting his development; being patient were key
Graduate: transformative [3]	Essence of university about social justice; offered opportunities	Social justice is a way of life for us; infuse everything you do in life	"It's kind of one of those things" 1p12 "And, at [University] on the other hand,..." 1p25	Went purposefully to develop skills; was able in all aspects of life 2p18-19
Two courses: Action research & group dynamics	Active learning about others and collaboration	Learning is an active process we engage	"I think there were two classes from my..." 2p21	Active engagement facilitates exposure to different views and experiences
Grad Opportunities – *Res Life Grad Assistant	Supervisor also diversity officer; woman of color	Mentorship and support; collaboration	1p27 "It was a great opportunity...from someone who I knew had a lot of experience"	Day-to-day interaction and mentoring by supervisor working same issues from diverse lens

*Led Alternative Breaks 3p1; 6-8	Organization; saw places and interacted with many different people	Participation and giving back are important; we learn from each other	"I was able to interact with so many different types..." 1p27	Offered opportunity to interact with diverse people in diverse places
*Intergroup Dialogues	Co-led w/woman of color; made as participatory action	Affirmed skills and readiness to lead vision of learning with	"...my professional experiences, my academic program and fused all of that..." 1p27	Culminating event; able to pull skills and knowledge to facilitate a transforming experience
Life Experiences				
Duty/Internal Voice Being normal	Wanted to be as perceived he already was	I like life this way	"Don't you want...to be rich?...No, I just want to be normal." 1p17	Not aspiring to significant wealth – live just as parents are.
Values – mutual participation	Recognition that justice is about the environment mutually shaped for all	I value this, so as long as I can see less I need to be in the game	"...I don't feel I should be satisfied not looking at these issues..." 3p7	Foundational value drives effort to stay engaged in the work.
Dissenting Voice				
Mentoring by Others Supervisors; mentors	Professionals checked in and cared about	Encouraged reflection and social justice work	"people who influenced me most were colleagues..." 1p28	Individual touches, over time, have an impact
Activist Friend	Invited to co-facilitate a workshop with her	I affirm who you are and want to work with you	"And while we were working together..." 1p23	Approach had a strong influence on him.
Network of Support	Similar minded friends and colleagues; met me where I was	We are in this together and you need to stay	"I feel like now that it's the level of support..." 2p14	Important to have community of support to keep mindful
Role Model – activist speaker	Reading and hearing Tim Wise speak	Important to see someone who looks like him doing work	"serving as inspiration and role model for me the way he's able to put himself out there" 1p30	Important to identify like models; display traits we can and should aspire to
Does Not Fit				
Recognition by Others Feels good, yet bothers	Recognized with awards but seems to lack equity	We appreciate what you are doing and guilt flairs	"...but it does feel good to be recognized..." 2p14	Appreciates affirmation but feels others are not

**APPENDIX E. ANALYSIS MATRIX: RESEARCH QUESTION 1 –
UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL POSITION**

Influence (event)	Characteristics	Messages Instilled	Quotes	Interpretation
Family of Origin Andy	Parents - general Dad	Work hard, school 1p7, White is right Does not like acting out	1p4 "So it was go to..." 1p6 "They never really" 1p10 "So like I said..." 1p17 "...speak English" 1p9 "Somebody's based on their social..."	Received messages that our way is the correct way, with exception of from Grandma [see below]
Brandon	Parents – young Peers – re-enforced	Value of education – good grades, job, life; get involved Success = college	"So that was kind of the linear progression..." 1p16; "Sports was kind of that entry..." 1p19 1p20 "There was also..."	Parents worked from lens of opportunity they lacked – saw school, hard work, and good job as vehicle to success.
Charlie	Parents – general Brother	Conservative; Dad head; Christian service; subtle messaging KKK; bullying	1p3 "My Dad was the deacon of the church..." "Some of the more blatant things..." 1p3	Very conservative messaging; underpinnings of contradictory messages [see below]
Glenn	Parents	Conservative Christian upbringing; became less so	"So it went from these very,... sides of it... I think that's been... Yeah. I mean my parents are still very..." 1p3 "And so then I talk about my parents..." 3p5	Parents offered traditional values and then allowed latitude to do differently in a reasoned manner.
Graham	Parents	Education, open, value centered approach; hard work; community & service;	1p2 "My parents never set a clear, American dream state..." [bottom]; 1p2 [top] "And so that was sort..." 1p5 "My family's effect.."	Shaped the foundation from which he learned, acted, and worked.
Lincoln	Parents	Education is important; Mom – helpful;	1p3 "When I think about that... Probably hard work... I guess if I had... Wow, we really can't..."	Foundational value of reduction, service/care, and hard work.

Ray	Parents	Work hard; don't squander; Jesuit education	1p2 "I think the biggest value that I can..."	Work ethic instilled; exposed to Jesuits through church/school
Samson	Parents	UU church; Dad-musician; Mom-Career in non-profit justice work	"And so my parents had this very open mind on which I was raised." 1p3	Parents views, social action, and exposure in schools helped him see the world
Steve	Parents	Watch out for others; work hard; treat others like you want to be	1p2 "Ever since I was little, I've kind of always remembered..."	Fundamental rules consistent with American Dream
Community Graham	Church community [friends (Emily/Dave), family]	You should look to bigger, broader, issues	"And then I had this other segment of me of I had friends..." 1p4; 1p7; 1p8 "Going back to Dave and Emily..."	Strong service and justice foundation shaped his approach
Ray	Church and School	Catholic parish run by Jesuits; school	1p2 "More or less what they said in church..."	Church and school emphasized justice
Samson	Hometown	Grew up in diverse community and school	"And so I guess I should talk a little bit..." 1p1; 1p7	Diverse folks interacting; shaped him
Educational Institutions Glenn	High School –	Conservative, closed dialogue, and emphasis on helping others	1p2 "...and then I went to a Christian High School"; But the AP art history teacher..." 1p8	High school environment pushed him and had individuals who modeled behavior
Lincoln	Peer notes he is a doctor's son; history	Does not notice the privilege he holds... curriculum helps him realize disparity	1p7 "But I didn't really realize..." 1p10 "And then I think the only thing that can be..."	College revealed what he had not seen previously in high school
Steve	Co-worker in college	Makes comment in mall that opens awareness	1p19-20 "There are lots of them but there's one and..."	First time he really saw his social position
Life Experiences				
Duty/Internal Voice				

Dissenting Voice Andy	Grandma	Be open minded; treat others as want to be	“Out of all the people, my grandma was...” 1p7	Planted a different seed to grow within
Charlie	Mom & Grandma	We don't use that word; you are special	1p6 “I think that the big thing or the initial issue”	Re-enforced at times but drew a line in the sand
Mentoring by Others				
Does Not Fit				
Recognition by Others				

**APPENDIX F. ANALYSIS MATRIX: RESEARCH QUESTION 2 –
RAISED AWARENESS OF NEED**

Participant	Dynamic	Explanation
	Environmental Influence	Family of Origin
Graham	Parents – service; church – radical message in scripture	1p2-3, 1p5-6 2p6 community focus, mom/dad - service; 1p4, 1p7 church/youth group; 1p8 college gave courage;
Samson	Mother – non-profit work; community schools	1p2 mother; 1p3 family open; 1p3 community discussions; 1p5 schools; 1p6, 1p8
	Impact Event	Trajectory Altered Need Revealed
Brandon	Work Event - Cookout	1p14; 1p15; 2p13
Lincoln	Peer conversation; curriculum	1p7 conversation with college peer; 1p8, 1p10, 2p12; 2p15 college environment; 3p1 curriculum; 1p10 volunteer work [student teaching exp.]
Steve	Convo with friend; Teen court;	1p19, 2p5 friend confronts privilege; 1p17, 3p13 RA role
	Search for Authenticity	On the Margin – Glenn, Ray Authentic Relationships – Andy, Charlie
Andy	Family unique; early inter-racial attraction; school and church groups diverse	1p11; 1p16; 1p17; work with diverse folks 1p17, 1p19; 2p5 tell own story; 2p8 best friend; 3p6
Charlie	Picked on by brother; peers criticize friend;	1p13; 1p7 brother; 1p5 peer; 3p6 hearing stories; 3p7 peer interactions; 1p11 curriculum mind shattering; 1p13 peer Facebook postings
Glenn	Oppositional personality; on the margin until college	1p2 oppositional; 1p4 peer group oppositional; 1p8 could not start dialogue; 1p5 college, also 1p7-8; 3p3 peer group
Ray	Search to situate self authentically; college	1p8 political consciousness; 1p8 othered in work; 1p3-4, 1p7 lecture, major; 3p3 Jesuit upbringing
Andy Charlie Graham Steve	Othering Experience Grade school speech issue Brother Coach Friend rejected	Bullying Experiences – review answers about empathy [possible fodder] 3p2, 1p16 1p7 1p4; 1p19 1p10-11

**APPENDIX G. ANALYSIS MATRIX: RESEARCH QUESTION 3 –
BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT**

Influence (event)	Characteristics	Messages Instilled	Quotes	Interpretation
Lack of Awareness Andy	Privilege leaves him unaware;	I'm ignorant and need to learn	2.2 "...I'm not educated..." 2.12 "Definitely it's recognizing my..."; 3.11	Realizes he has not seen things clearly and that he has work to do to be more aware.
Brandon	Sees growing up he had no idea of issues; be open to self-awareness	Not aware of injustice; had to be comfortable with who he is first	2.16 "...none of this was really a concern..." 2.18 "...just really gaining a better understanding..."	Realizes missing awareness; must accept self and needs to learn before open to change
Glenn	Lens to overcome problems limited	Come to terms with privilege; Not all have same opportunity	2.6 "Lets, see. Especially the leftist stuff and having to..."	Not aware of privilege or that some do not have the same opportunities
Lincoln	Unaware of advantage he and others receive	Study, work hard, and you will be successful	2.12 "I think when I came to college..."	Combination of things kept him from seeing
Samson	Must acknowledge privilege; where I am from	Realize now privilege affords me benefits; working with, not saving	2.6 [top & bottom] "I don't know if it's unlearn..."	Now that I know it changes things
Steve	Never confronted with ideas, predisposition, baggage	My family not the norm; honor impact; don't take critique personally	2.5 "I never was confronted with these ideas until I got to college..."; 2.11; 3.11	Work has made him more aware
Discouraging Voice Andy	Work is not seen as legitimate; family does not accept his work	Folks question why he is in this space; endure lack of family support and barrage of comment	2.3 "But I've also seen..." 2.11 "One is my family not supporting me..., not having their acceptance,..."	Takes care in SJ spaces, aware of how he presents; family does not make it easy
Charlie Also see 3.5	Friends of color question his presence and trust	Need to constantly question and answer to	2.9 "Another challenge that I have noticed..."	Hard for others to understand his work
Lincoln	Overwhelmed sense of hopelessness	Uncertain how to feel optimistic	3.12 "But also I think one of the things..."	Does not know what the future will bring

Steve	Friends think I am a “dumbass”	They don’t get it and I have to overcome	2.13 “I have to overcome people...”	Friends think work is foolish; don’t see value
Role I Play Andy	Wrestles with how best to use power; makes difficult to be seen as helpful; own ignorance	I have power but don’t always feel powerful; I want to help, but do not always do so effectively	2.4 “I feel like if you’re going...” 2.5 “I also feel like at times...”; 2.12 “Because at times...”	Sees he needs to be part of the solution but that his solutions are not always helpful
Brandon	Understanding of role has developed	Article revealed “ally” must be appointed	2.9 “...the title “ally” can’t be...” 3.14 “...where best to apply”	Realizes value must be determined by others; how best to use skills
Charlie	Determined best serve with focus on Whiteness	Realized he needs to work with his own	3.4 “Over time I’ve realized a few things...”	Role to address Whites and Whiteness
Glenn	Realized he may not be the best leader; need to know which room allies are welcome	He needed to understand that others can lead; where is his place?	2.6 “I’m not the best to know what is going...” 2.7 “I never know which ones in which allies...”	Privilege inhibits what he sees and how he sees; sees that some room is needed without allies
Graham	Realize leadership style needs to be different	White male leadership is not most effective	2.12 “I had to quickly unlearn in my ally work...” 2.16	Role in diverse groups is different leadership type
Ray	Question what is right; feel miss understood; difficult to find voice	Not sure appreciated; questions deemed out of line; desire to contribute	2.5 “Sometimes it’s knowing whether...”; 2.6; 3.5	There seems to be assumptions and hierarchy within justice worker community
Assumptions of Me Andy	Assumptions are made about him;	You are White and privileged and you’ve had it better than us	2.6” Like especially cause I’m White, a lot of times, people will...”	Sees why folks assume but is also frustrated; seeking a solution
Glenn	Fears action may inhibit future employment	Opposition recognized; 2.7?; 3.4	2.6 “You know I can’t really be involved...”	Wrestles with the tension of uncertainty
Ray	Punching bag; goal to prove people wrong	Folks assume he will be opposed to justice work	2.4 “So half the time being seen...”; 3.5	As brunt of anger can show folks differently

Samson	When becomes personal we lose common ground	Personal attacks say your ideas are bad	2.6 “The whole thing about the issue...”	We lose sight when we take too personally
Steve	I am not all; question why I am here	Critiques are about system; I transcend assumptions	2.10 “I think the biggest thing is that...”; 2.13 “Like when I go to...”	Not take work personally; overcome expectations of others
Stereotypes Held Andy	Trying to overcome these; sees own issues that needs to push away and right in his head	What he thought was right given his family teaching is not accurate and he is realizing that	2.9 “And even, still to this day, I’m still...” 2.15 “Because mainly on stereotypes that I...”	Understands that his lens is not always accurate based on what he has been taught and seen
Brandon	Socialized with biases	Has had to realize and overcome these	2.16 “And, I guess another thing I’ve...”	Realizes biases that impact perceptions
Charlie	White racial frame: unlearn perceptions	White standards are right and others less than	2.7” I think the list is endless so a lot of the things we talked...”	Learned some unhealthy things about others growing up (see 2.3)
Lincoln	Mindset limits his view	Recognizes he needs to overcome learning	2.14 “I mean I do think that like my mind...”	Knows what he knows is not accurate completely
Accurate Information Andy	Sees he has much to learn; appreciates when folks correct him	Struggles with cross cultural differences; Feedback says I am okay	2.10 “Even though I’ve been working at it...” 2.12” Or if I say something offensive...”	Working to get better and depends on others for assistance
Other’s Awareness Brandon	Friends and family not as aware; tension	Regards positively yet sees things differently	2.17 “And so whenever I reconnect with any of these people...”	Family and friends remain important; must work through tension
Charlie	Family has been a challenge	Family attitudes and consistent challenging	2.8 “But I think, personally a huge...”	Family not happy with work he is doing
Graham	Others like him do not understand or engage	Need to explain what need to do and why	2.14 “I think for me, it’s also it’s just the need...”	Needs to pull folks along and not be in opposition

Ray	Difficult to form relationships with others	Work not seen as legitimate or honored	“But then how it becomes a deterrent” 2.6	Marginalized if not working on big issues
Steve	Friends not congruent	Friends reinforce norms but are good people	2.12-13 “Like I have friends who...”	Likes friends, just not some attitudes/actions
Lack of Skills Brandon	Not just about me but also about brining others	Sees need to work on bringing others to the work	3.14 “And I think the other orientation or change I’m learning...”	Sees it important to pass along what he has learned and seen
Charlie	Approach has needed to change to be better	Success has come with learning new skills	2.9 “...it’s helped me understand that my role”	Burden of others makes him uneasy
Graham	How balance comfort with self-care and effort	Feels need to continue but avoid burning out	2.14 “I mean, I think at the end of the day...”	Needs skills to feel good about balance
Lincoln	Balance care and expectations	Teacher – empathetic, open, and tough	2.14” I mean, those are, I think, are the...”	What I see as normal is offensive in other eyes
Ray	Exposure to different people has helped	I have much to learn from others	2.5 “For instance, with Americorps, I had...”	
Commitment Lincoln	Chosen direction requires work	Hesitant to sacrifice dreams or values	2.13 “I think that right now the biggest...”	Making sure he is ready for challenge
Samson	Must overcome work ethic; lack of effort	Can work harder and reach full capacity	2.6 “But overall my work ethic...”; 3.4	Feels he is the biggest obstacle to overcome
Steve	School, desire for career get in way	Feel pressure to go with flow, though vision/ideal has changed	2.12 “School, wanting to get a career.”	School work takes away from work; career desire is different than thought
More Like Me Lincoln	Work needs support from a group	Realizes not all places have like-minded folks	3.10 “So I know that I’m going to need that...”	Needs to be connected to a common cause
Ray	Not many who look like me engaged in the work	Don’t have the same supports as others	“There aren’t a lot of straight, White...” 2.5	Key is to encourage and collaborate with others

**APPENDIX H. ANALYSIS MATRIX: RESEARCH QUESTION 4 –
LED TO JUSTICE WORK**

Influence (event)	Characteristics	Messages Instilled	Quotes	Interpretation
Family of Origin	Charlie – comments on Facebook [2] Charlie – Brother [3] Lincoln – Family valued education [1] Samson – mother [1]	“Back home” reminds him of work to be done Picked on and continues to challenge Emphasized, supported, and encourage him NP Justice work - career	1p13 1p7; 1p13 1p11 1p2-4	
Environmental Factors	Andy – Church [2] Brandon – Cookout Event [1] Brandon – Leadership Institute [2] Charlie – peer reactions to friend of color [1] Graham – Youth minster and peer group [2] Ray – Jesuit influence[2] Samson – diverse city and schools [2]	Youth group; work as minority leader Event - awareness; drive to understand Attendance allowed understanding/knowledge Event really raised his awareness Supported and shared message of justice Home/school messages Interaction with people and issues; aware/skills	1p11 1p14; 1p15 1p26 1p5,7; 1p12 1p7 1p2; 3p3 1p5	
Educational Institutions	Brandon – graduate program [3] Glenn – conservative HS environment [1] Glenn – Active college peers [2] Glenn – AP Art History teacher [3] Graham – college choice expanded opportunity[3] Lincoln – college peer interactions [2] Lincoln – curriculum [3] Ray – College 2 nd year lecture [1] Samson – college opportunities [3] Steve – HS trip to Paraguay [2] Steve – RA role [3]	Allowed intentional pursuit of SJ learning Could not start dialogue about difference Peers encouraged and modeled involvement Modeled life of helping others to her students Allowed him to get peer support and find courage Peer discussions raised awareness of privilege Revealed realities to him Revealed injustice and root causes; inspired Engaged in action events; student teaching revealed Experience as minority; felt abnormal Understand difference	1p12; 1p25 1p8; 1p5; 1p2 1p8 1p8 1p8 1p8 3p1; 3p12 1p3-4 1p6; 1p7 1p1p16; 1p19-20 1p17	
Life Experiences	Andy – Latino & Vietnamese workers [3] Andy – Interracial attraction [1]	Heard their stories Realizes attraction to Afr. Amer. Women	1p17 1p11; 1p16-17	

	Graham – Eating disorder/quit baseball [1] Ray – AmeriCorps [3] Steve – confronted with privilege by peer [1]	Dream shifted; was looking for something Enhanced commitment First time heard, understood, and acted	1p4; 1p19 1p10 1p19-2p5	
Duty/Internal Voice				
Dissenting Voice				
Mentoring Others				
Does Not Fit				
Recognition By Others				