CONNECTION AS CENTRAL: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM FOR SEXUAL MINORITY WOMEN AND TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS

by

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ABSTRACT

Feminist multicultural therapists assert that contextual factors, such as oppression and discrimination, contribute to psychological distress, limited access to resources and information, as well as social isolation. They suggest that participation in social justice activism contributes to psychological benefits, such as increased empowerment, social connectedness, and resilience. Sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals have a strong history of participating in activism and creating social change. However, little is known about what social justice activism means to these populations. This research describes the experiences and meanings of social justice activism for 20 SMW and transgender individuals. A grounded theory qualitative design employed the use of initial interviews, follow-up interviews, and feedback interviews. A conceptual model emerged that depicted the social justice experiences of these participants. Social justice held different meanings for the participants based on their social identities, values, and experiences of oppression and privilege. The results indicated that social justice activism was an intensely relational experience for SMW and transgender participants. They described the struggles and benefits associated with their activist work. The conceptual model may be used by clinicians to conceptualize the experiences and meanings of social justice activism, including specific strategies activists may utilize that reflect their understanding of activism, as well as the psychological benefits derived from creating positive social change.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Feminist therapy and theory advocate involvement in social justice efforts as a method of creating social change and empowering people to become politically mobilized (e.g., Dutton-Douglas & Walker, 1988; Mander & Rush, 1974; Morrow et al., 2006; Worell & Remer, 2003). Activism is also a way people may nurture and care for themselves as well as others in their community(s). Through involvement in social justice causes, people may feel less isolated and have higher self-confidence than individuals who do not participate in some form of activism (Worell & Remer, 2003). Sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals have a strong history of activism, yet little attention has been given to understanding what social justice activism means to this population, how the styles and types of social justice activism they choose may reflect the meaning they attribute to activism, and the effects of doing activism on their sense of empowerment and psychological well-being.

Morrow and colleagues (2006) argued that multicultural perspectives have only recently begun to focus necessary centralized attention on intersectional approaches to feminist therapy. More research is needed to understand the social justice efforts of sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals. In particular, attention needs

to be given to address the multiple oppressions that these individuals face pertaining to sexuality, gender, race, socioeconomic status and class, education level, religion, age, size, ability, and geographic location.

Social constructivists (e.g., Brown, 1994; Mahoney, 1991) emphasize the individual's active interpretation and understanding of their contexts and social environments. For constructivists, the world is not objectively presented to the individual, but it is interpreted through the individual's experiences, culture, values, and beliefs (Burr, 1995). Social identities are regarded as socially created and meaningful according to a person's subjective interpretation and understanding. Although many people may use the same identity label, their understandings and perceptions of that identity may be very different and specific to each person. Further, the individual's knowledge, beliefs, and insights about the world are derived from and influenced by communities of understanding and interpersonal relationships rather than being purely intrapsychic (Cottone, 2007).

As activism is both an important tool and goal of feminist therapy (Worell & Remer, 2003), it is essential to understand how issues and experiences specific to SMW and transgender individuals inform their activism. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to better understand what social justice activism means to SMW and transgender individuals, as well as develop a theoretical model to conceptualize their experience of activism as a potential way to feel empowered and connected to community. Moreover, an integrative perspective on experiences of identity and oppression will further inform the practice of feminist multicultural therapy (FMC) with these populations (e.g., Brown, 1994; Szymanski, 2005b).

Involvement in activism and social justice will be considered as therapeutic strategies to address issues central to sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals' lives, including discrimination, social marginalization, isolation, internalized shame and oppression, and exclusionary cultural norms (e.g., Kashubeck-West, Szymanski, & Meyer, 2008). The literature review begins with (a) a brief description of the principles of FMC; (b) an overview of the use of activism as an empowerment tool and goal of FMC and its relevance to SMW and transgender individuals; (c) descriptions of feminist frameworks guiding the present research; (d) a discussion of SMW and transgender individuals' multiple intersecting identities; and (e) an overview of the levels, forms, and styles of social justice activism that SMW and transgender individuals may engage in based on the meaning they attribute to activism.

Review of Literature

Feminist Multicultural Therapy: Principles and Practice

Feminist therapy and the theory that underlies it are political at their core. A founding principle of the second-wave feminist movement is the "personal is political:" personal experiences are both formed and informed by surrounding socio-political contexts (Brown, 1994). Historically, psychotherapists largely ignored issues relevant to social and political circumstances (Chesler, 1972; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003). Emphasis was placed on understanding a person's internal pathology, and symptoms of distress and coping were not perceived as responses to his or her environment. Early feminist therapists distinguished themselves from other disciplines of psychotherapy by emphasizing the influence of social context on women's psychological health (e.g.,

Brodsky, 1973). Oppressive social contexts, rather than intrapsychic, individual circumstances, were identified as causes of women's psychological distress (e.g., Rawlings & Carter, 1977; Worell & Remer, 2003). Brown (1994) asserted that psychotherapy itself has historically often been a system of oppression by neglecting to analyze race, gender, class, and other socially constructed influences in people's lives. Further, the understanding of mental health from a feminist multicultural framework is different from traditional therapies, which view and privilege the characteristics of the dominant social group (e.g., White, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied) as normal and healthy. Brown (2010) explained that a goal of FMC is to "undermine the internalized and external patriarchal realities that serve as a source of distress and as a brake on growth and personal power for all humans" (p. 4). By explicitly deconstructing issues of power and privilege, feminist multicultural therapy (FMC) challenges the assumption that psychological distress originates within the individual. FMC emphasizes a person's multiple statuses and identities within a context that enhances or discourages psychological well-being (Brown, 2010). In FMC, the client makes connections between their symptoms of distress and the oppression they have experienced. Further, contrary to traditional psychotherapy frameworks, FMC emphasizes that psychological well-being may be specific to each person's understanding of what is healthy and normal for them based on their cultural beliefs and values (Brown, 2010).

The approaches and interventions that FMC therapists use are informed by the five basic principles of feminist therapy, as described by Hill and Ballou (1998). The first principle includes valuing clients' personal experiences and understanding how those experiences are informed by their socio-political context (i.e., the personal is political).

The second principle involves viewing clients' distress as socio-culturally based. The third principle pertains to addressing power in the therapeutic relationship by collaborating with clients. The fourth principle includes actively discussing clients' experience of oppression. Finally, the fifth principle involves collaborating with clients to create social change. Informed by these central principles, an FMC therapist challenges the values and assumptions of patriarchal, hierarchical, and monocultural social systems (Brown, 2010). Further, approaches to FMC are diverse and specific to each therapist. Although FMC is guided by these central principles, there is no single, standardized approach to FMC (Enns, 1992). Rather, FMC therapists are expected to collaborate with clients to determine the most appropriate strategies that will encourage and invite clients to experience increased empowerment and psychological well-being (e.g., Worell & Remer, 2003).

Activism as a Tool and Goal of Feminist Multicultural Therapy

A leading goal of feminist multicultural therapy (FMC) is to help people address socio-political oppression, defined by Worell and Remer (2003) as limited access to resources, through activism and developing healthier coping strategies for managing their marginalized social roles (e.g., Mander & Rush, 1974, Brown, 1994). Women are often denied power, equality, and freedom in patriarchal social systems (e.g., Worell & Remer, 2003). As Worell and Remer explained, social hierarchies deny women and minority populations in general the freedom and opportunity to celebrate their experiences. FMC encourages the development of feminist consciousness, through which people may understand how socialization influences their understandings and experiences (e.g.,

Brown, 2010). It is important to note that FMC is not exclusive to women's issues, although much of the past FMC literature has focused primarily on women's issues. Rather, FMC considers the impact of multiple intersecting identities and statuses, as well as diverse experiences of privilege and oppression. Thus, FMC is relevant to individuals with diverse gender identities and presentations.

The development of feminist consciousness is reinforced by the feminist principles of consciousness raising and empowerment. As people deepen their awareness and think critically about their circumstances, they may feel increased motivation to take action to improve those circumstances (e.g., Brown, 1994). Morrow and Hawxhurst (1998) defined empowerment as liberation from internalized, interpersonal, and sociopolitical oppression. Feminist multicultural therapists argue that, through empowerment approaches in therapy, women feel increases in their resilience for managing obstacles, including oppression and interpersonal and situational distress, in their lives (Worell, 2001; Worell & Johnson, 2001). Worell's (1993, 2001) Empowerment Model of Women's Well-Being emphasized that women's empowerment was influenced by factors such as gender-role and cultural identity awareness, sense of personal control, assertive communication skills, and socially constructive activism. Thus, social justice activism plays an important part in the feminist therapeutic process by helping women feel and become stronger and more resilient to negotiate their circumstances and roles. People may also use activism and social action as a coping strategy to manage their distress from experiences of oppression and discrimination. This concept may be applied to therapy with clients from diverse backgrounds and various social identities. Discrimination and oppression, broadly defined, may impact people

differently and contribute to psychological distress and disempowerment (Szymanski, 2005a).

Moreover, social activism is framed as a healing process in FMC (e.g., Hawxhurst & Morrow, 1984; Worell & Remer, 2003). Through consciousness-raising, people may better understand their psychological distress to be externally influenced rather than something inherently wrong within themselves. As previously mentioned, this is contrary to many historical psychotherapeutic perspectives (Chesler, 1972; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003). As people understand their distress to be contextual, they learn they must address their contexts in order to reduce their distress (e.g., Roades, 2000). Marginalized people often have a sense of powerlessness in their lives that can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and feelings of hopelessness (Ballou & West, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008). In particular, women have historically been encouraged to assume social roles that lack authority and influence (e.g., Greenspan, 1993).

In an FMC framework, people challenge dominant institutions and question encouraged social roles rather than simply accept them as truth (e.g., Espin, 1994; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998). Activism is an opportunity for people to take some control of and influence the systems that affect them. The powerlessness people may feel is validated as an expected response to oppressive circumstances, and the intervention is to take action that will change oppressive dominant institutions (e.g., Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998). Furthermore, feminist psychologists argued that activism is essential to the healing process because recognition and critical evaluation by themselves may not be enough to facilitate resilience and empowerment (Worell, 2001; Worell & Johnson, 2001). People with minority identities may need to be involved in creating change to feel that change is

possible (Morrow et al., 2006). Morrow and Hawxhurst (1998) described empowerment in the therapeutic process as clients' working to change the internal and external circumstances that contribute to oppression and distress. FMC therapists help clients think critically about their circumstances and roles while encouraging them to feel and become stronger and more resilient to manage obstacles, including oppression and interpersonal and situational distress. Individuals' empowerment may occur on three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and socio-political (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998). As clients gain increased control in their lives to navigate and change their circumstances, social action can be a valuable way for people to nurture and care for themselves as well as others in their community(s). Through involvement in social justice causes, clients may feel less isolated and have higher self-confidence than people who do not participate in some form of activism (Worell & Remer, 2003). Examples of activism include evaluating and deconstructing power and privilege and challenging hierarchies of power and authority (Brown, 2010). The social action people take may help them feel more resilient and better able to handle the stressors in their lives (Worell, 2001; Worell & Johnson, 2001). Further, the different forms and styles of activism that people choose to be involved in may be important to their processes of healing and empowerment, as will be further explained later.

Relevance to Sexual Minority Women and Transgender Individuals

A problematic tenet of early feminist therapy (FT) and theory was the assumption of a universal woman's experience (e.g., Adleman & Enguidanos, 1995; Hill & Rothblum, 1996). The application of FT with sexual minority women (SMW)

underscores this point, as SMW's experiences are markedly different than those of heterosexual women. Although SMW have many shared experiences of marginalization because of similarities in their gender socialization and roles, their sexual minority status adds at least one more layer of complexity to their experience. This complexity increases as additional identities are considered, including those based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education level, religion, age, ability, size, and geographic location (Bowman & King, 2003). Another problematic tenet of early FT was the exclusion of gender minorities that did not identify as cisgender women (i.e., female-bodied individuals who identified as women). The early and exclusive focus in the FT literature on cisgender women, coupled with a lack of information about transgender identities, excluded and invalidated the experiences of transgender individuals. Many early feminist therapists lacked awareness of sex and gender continuums, which contributed to pathologizing nonnormative gender expression and identities (Sennot, 2010). Feminist therapists have made increasing efforts in recent decades to address issues of multiculturalism and intersecting identities (e.g., Adleman & Enguidanos, 1995; Brown & Root, 1990; Comas-Diaz, 2007; Hill & Rothblum, 1996).

Feminist multicultural therapy (FMC) addresses the intersection of many identities and experiences of oppression as well as privilege (e.g., Espin, 1994). By celebrating and advocating for the complexity of gender minorities' experiences, it distinguishes itself from traditional psychotherapies (e.g., Brown, 1991, 1994). As with earlier feminist therapies, FMC frameworks attribute major sources of psychological distress to the socio-political context. Rather than assuming that all women have the same gender role socialization, multicultural therapies appreciate how identities influence each

other and contribute to each person's unique understandings and experiences of reality. This is crucial for understanding SMW and transgender individuals' social justice activism because their style and approach to activism will likely be informed by their experiences and understandings of their identities. The type of oppression these individuals experience--and address through activism--will likely pertain to their identities. Further, the psychological benefits SMW and transgender individuals derive from activism may be influenced by the specific types of activism they engage in. Therefore, it is imperative to consider SMW and transgender individuals' experiences of oppression and activism from the perspective of multiple intersecting identities.

Theoretical Basis for the Research

As previously explained, feminist theorists assert that patriarchal, hierarchal social systems are sources of human inequality, discrimination, and oppression (e.g., Lorber, 2002). Several feminist theories exist that specify frameworks for conceptualizing diverse sources of oppression within culture and society. Multiple feminist theoretical frameworks inform the conceptualization of sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals' activism in this study, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, feminist intersectional perspectives, Marxist feminism, postcolonial feminism, and poststructural feminism. I will briefly describe each of these theoretical frameworks and explain how they inform SMW and transgender individuals' perspectives and experiences with social justice activism. The paradigm guiding this research will be discussed in Chapter II.

Liberal feminist theory. Historically, feminist frameworks often underscored a singular perspective on the source of oppression. Liberal feminists asserted that women's gendered behavior is the result of gender socialization and not a biological predisposition (Lorber, 2002). Liberal feminists have historically primarily focused on the experiences of White, heterosexual, middle-class, cisgender women. They did not address the complexity of intersecting social identities and oppressions. Thus, the focus has primarily been on the issue of gender inequality between women and men (Tong 2009). Sources of gender inequality included gender stereotypes, forcing women into traditional occupations (e.g., nursing, child care), pay inequality among women and men, and restrictions on reproductive rights. Liberal or reform feminist theory has not always involved a critique of institutional sexism. Liberal feminist theory does not suggest that the patriarchal system is innately flawed. Rather, it suggests that women's rights should be increased to equal the rights of men (Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). Approaches to addressing gender inequality often involved encouraging women to expand their occupational choices, evenly dividing childrearing among parents, and establishing affordable, accessible, and safe reproductive services (Lorber, 2002).

Radical feminist theory. Radical feminist theories acknowledge the patriarchal social structure to be the primary source of oppression and discrimination (Brown, 2010). Thus, institutional oppression is considered essential to maintain women's subordinance to men. Although radical feminists historically focused on the gender binary and experiences of women and men, there has been increasing emphasis recently to emphasize the impact of systemic oppression on multiple social identities, including race, class, gender, and sexual identity. Radical or resistance feminisms may advocate forming

nonhierarchical, collaborative, and specifically women-supportive organizations and communities to challenge the patriarchal, hierarchical structure (Lorber, 2002). Radical feminists criticize the traditional sex/gender system, emphasizing the difference between the individual's biological sex and gender socialization. Further, gender oppression is thought to originate from oppressive societal messages. Within the radical feminist framework, the traditional nuclear family is often criticized for maintaining traditional male dominance, as is men's use of violence and objectification of women (MacKinnon, 1987). Radical feminists advocate valuing the diversity of women's bodies and sexualities. They encourage women to be empowered to change ineffective legislation regarding harassment, discrimination, and violence (Brown, 2010; Enns, 1992).

Another resistance feminism, lesbian feminist theory, also asserts that women's subservience to men within patriarchal systems can be maintained through heterosexual relationships and sometimes even the presence of men in women's social spaces (Lorber, 2002). Lesbian feminists may maintain a resistance to engaging in relationships with men, and they may work to create community and social spaces they believe are exclusive and safe for women. However, if resistance means creating spaces that are only inclusive to women or sexual minority women, specifically, then a criticism of radical feminist approaches may be that they exclude transgender individuals. Further, radical feminists, like liberal feminists, have historically conceptualized gender as a binary (Weedon, 1999), further excluding transgender issues. For example, if men as a group are thought to have contributed overall to the oppression of women, then a male-bodied individual who transitions to a female gender identity (e.g., male to female transgender, MtF), may be treated with suspicion by cisgender radical feminist women.

Cultural feminist theory. Cultural feminist theorists address the historical exclusiveness of feminist theories by criticizing the lack of attention given to intersections of multiple identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, age, size, ability, and geographic location (Lorber, 2002). Multicultural feminism examines how all of these identities, statuses, and circumstances may inform a woman's experience of oppression and discrimination. Therefore, institutionalized oppression is essential to challenge because it disadvantages women from different groups for having different positions within the social structure. In particular, this feminist theory challenges the dominant culture's discrimination and oppression of women of color (Zinn & Dill, 1996). Approaches to challenging inequality include obtaining equal access to education, employment, and political power (Lorber, 2002). In addition, cultural feminists challenge the historical representation of marginalized groups as inferior to a normative, dominant group (e.g., bell hooks, 1995, 2000). Cultural feminist approaches have also addressed issues specific to everyday constructions of gender differences and boundaries (i.e., social construction feminism; DeVault, 1991).

Feminist intersectionality perspectives. Intersectionality perspectives have had their origins attributed to Crenshaw's (1989) feminist sociological writings. Identities are commonly perceived as universal and collective. However, from a social constructionist view, identities are created based on sociopolitical contexts and saturated with cultural meaning (Bohan, 1997). Crenshaw (1989) explained that identity-based categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability interact on multiple levels simultaneously, creating a complex experience of identity. Therefore, identities may be perceived as

processes that are flexible and capable of changing according to social context and demand. Further, social inequalities and oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism are intersected, not independent of one another (Dill, Zambrana, & Hill Collins, 2009). In order to consider an individual's experience of oppression or privilege, it is necessary to understand the multiple, simultaneous experiences of oppression and privilege. This is contrary to some perspectives on social justice advocacy, which will be described further later.

Furthermore, feminist intersectional theory refutes the historical assumption that a single identity takes priority over all other identities (Ward, 2008). Each person's identities are understood to intersect and be interdependent (Hill Collins, 1993). Indeed, there may not be a way to truly separate multiple identities and look at them individually. Rather, it is necessary to consider the influence of many experiences, statuses, and identities as informing each person's experience of oppression and privilege. The existence of any one identity will inevitably influence the experience of other identities. Because different and similar identities influence each other, it is not accurate to assume that there is a single, universal experience of oppression. To understand the impact of oppression, it is necessary to consider each person's experiences of all their intersecting identities simultaneously.

The increasing attention given to intersectionality was strongly influenced by criticism from cultural and multiracial feminists of early second wave feminist theory that did not emphasize the intersection of race, class, and gender (e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1979). Early feminist theorists centralized issues pertaining to gender, often placing emphasis on the experiences of oppression for White, middle-class, and often

heterosexual, women (e.g., McCall, 2005). Cultural and multiracial feminists emphasized the need to understand oppression and social justice activism from the perspectives of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Hill Collins (1993) posited that oppression is influenced by the intersectional systems of society that impact these different identities and statuses. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the "big picture" regarding a sexual minority woman or transgender individual's experience of oppression and privilege rather than considering only their gender.

Marxist feminist theory. Marxist feminists emphasize the importance of classism and Capitalism in gender-based oppression. They assert that Capitalism is a system that exploits the work of women and minorities (Tong, 2009). The ownership of private property is believed to contribute to economic inequality and an emphasis on monogamous rather than communal relationships and living situations. The pay inequality for women's work contributes to the social expectation that women may be financially dependent on men, thus reinforcing heterosexuality as a social norm. For Marxist feminists, money represents power, and whoever holds the economic privilege has an advantage over other groups. The domestic work that women have historically been expected to perform may be underpaid or not paid at all because it maintains a class-based hierarchy with women's social location being below men's social location (Tong, 2009). This point may be further emphasized when considering the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Marginalized populations are limited in their resources, including access to effective and affordable healthcare, childcare, and education, which maintains their status in a lower social class (Lorber, 2001).

For Marxist feminists, the solution to class-based oppression is government-subsidized health care, child care, and education. They advocate for permanent paid employment and equal pay for the work performed by different genders. Marxist feminists challenge the social class hierarchy and advocate for social equality (Lorber, 2001).

Postcolonial feminist theory. Postcolonial feminists criticize traditional feminist theories for imposing Western and first-world perspectives on the experiences of women around the world. As discussed above, given the complexity of people's intersecting social identities, statuses, and experiences of privilege and oppression, it is not accurate to believe there is a universal woman's experience (Tong, 2009). Thus, postcolonial feminists advocate for an intersectional perspective that emphasizes issues such as race, gender, migration, slavery, economic exploitation, and colonization broadly. Unlike earlier feminist theories, postcolonial feminists are explicit in deconstructing the negative impact of colonization on women and children in developing countries. They speak to the economic exploitation of women and children while men are frequently hired for higher paying jobs (Lorber, 2001). Thus, postcolonial feminist theory shares many perspectives with Marxist feminism.

Further, while early feminist theories focused primarily on the injustices experienced by White, middle-class, heterosexual, Western women, postcolonial feminists hold dominant Western nations accountable for the oppression they have inflicted on countries throughout the global south. They emphasize the impact of historical oppression, including genocide and slavery, on the current systemic oppression faced by people in the global south. For many postcolonial feminists, the solution to

oppression lies in protecting economic resources for women and children and increased access to effective and affordable healthcare, childcare, and education. They advocate for increased community connection and support as well as reclaiming indigenous cultural values and experiences (Lorber, 2001).

Poststructural feminist theory. Poststructural feminists assert that because language is socially constructed, it is not objective but rather a reflection on the dominant political discourse. In hierarchical, patriarchal cultures, language privileges the experiences of the dominant social group. It conveys the meaning the dominant group wants to convey, rather than being authentically representative of different members' complex and shifting experiences and meanings. Thus, poststructural feminists criticize the dominant male discourse in patriarchy, including challenging and deconstructing conventional categories of gender and sexuality (e.g., Ollenburger & Moore, 1992; Plummer, 2005). They emphasize that there is no single, universal woman's experience. Rather, they assert the need for intersectional perspectives that more authentically convey the fluidity and complexity of people's experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality more broadly.

Poststructural feminists criticize the use of identity politics that is so common in many feminist theories and activist approaches to social justice. They assert that identities and self-concepts in the context of patriarchy are often created to reinforce disempowering statuses and traditional power imbalances. They suggest that even the concept of "woman" was invented by men and therefore is disempowering because women may not have had the opportunity to define themselves for themselves without being defined by others (Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). They suggest that the focus be

placed on questioning and challenging the power issues involved in social identities, including creating new subjects rather than focusing on traditional identity politics and labels (Haraway, 1988; Scott, 1988).

These different feminist theoretical perspectives provide frameworks from which to understand the social justice advocacy of sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals. Further, the use of multiple paradigms and theoretical lenses may contribute to a broader conceptual framework for appreciating the meaning of social justice advocacy for these populations.

Intersecting Identities

SMW and transgender individuals' intersecting identities influence their different styles and approaches to social justice activism. In fact, their activism styles are as diverse as they themselves are (Gartrell & Rothblum, 2001; Ward, 2008). In order to understand SMW and transgender individuals' activism, it is imperative to understand their intersecting identities as well as their own understandings of those identities and statuses. Further, the different ways that SMW and transgender individuals experience and perceive oppression and privilege may also influence their group memberships and involvement with communities based on similar social justice interests.

Approaching politics and activism from an intersectional, multiple-identity perspective honors the complexity of individuals' full selves and lives (Lorde, 1984). An issue that is commonly recognized among feminist activists is the simultaneous experience of oppression and privilege (e.g., Hernandez & Rehman, 2002). Hill Collins (1993) posited that, because of their multiple intersecting identities, it is necessary for

activists to fight the historical misconception of a centralized and unified singular identity. Even for the identity category “woman,” there does not exist a single definition or set series of characteristics (McCann & Kim, 2003). Naples (1998) explained that activists may organize themselves more easily when they are in smaller groups based on specific identities. For example, a group of bisexual women of color may have an easier time campaigning for their specific political needs than a group of women organized under the broader category of bisexual.

Rust (1995) asserted that lesbian-identified women struggle to gain acceptance and recognition in cultures that commonly idealize heterosexuality. Identifying as lesbian may present a challenge to heteronormative cultural assumptions and expectations that women are inherently attracted to men (Diamond, 2003). For many lesbian activists, the identity of lesbian has strong political meaning (e.g., Johnston, 1985). It may represent ideological dissatisfaction with institutions of heterosexuality (Golden, 1994). In fact, some lesbian activists have explained their conscious choice to identify as lesbian for political reasons (e.g., Golden, 1994). This point was reinforced with the 1970s claim, credited to Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice (Koedt, 1973, p. 246).” An example of political resistance to heteronormative social expectations is lesbian separatism (Johnston, 1985). As a form of separatist feminism, lesbian separatism advocates withdrawal from mainstream, patriarchal, hierarchical societies that privilege men’s experiences over women’s experiences (e.g., Hoagland, 1989). Further, separatist feminism is a form of radical feminism which asserts that patriarchal societies privilege male domination, men’s roles, and men’s experiences over women, thus limiting the advancement, power, and well-being of women (Hoagland,

1989). Thus, feminist separatism represents radical opposition to institutional oppression. However, lesbian separatism has been challenged in the way that it centers issues pertaining to sexuality and gender over multiple intersecting identities (e.g., Faderman, 1991). It may inadvertently prioritize the experiences of European American, lesbian women over all other groups of women, including transgender women. Indeed transgender women have a history of being excluded from women-only spaces, such as the famous Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (e.g., Gamson, 1997). Stone (2009) noted that cisgender, sexual minority women may express empathy toward transgender women but still feel cautious about potential power dynamics that could be negatively affected by including transgender women in their social groups and spaces.

Because of the strong historical connection between lesbianism and feminism, bisexuality has often historically been perceived as a challenge to lesbian politics. Rust (1995) explained that bisexual women are often regarded by lesbian feminists to enjoy the benefits of women's community and relationships while maintaining heterosexual privilege. Bisexual women may not pay the costs of social stigma that lesbian women pay in heterosexist cultures. However, bisexual women who experience emotional and physical attractions to women and men may present a more complex alternative to the lesbian/ straight binary. Bisexual ("bi") feminism may present a challenge to historical lesbian feminism because bi women may simultaneously oppose the patriarchal hierarchy that privileges men's power while also engaging in relationships with men. Bisexuality itself has often been perceived as a temporary phase rather than a legitimate sexual identity (Diamond, 2008). The lack of historical validation of bisexuality has posed a

problem for women who have not identified within the sexual identity binary to find community and social support (Galupo, 2006).

Transgender individuals, similar to bisexual women, may be considered minorities within a sexual and gender minority community, as neither is easily placed in the gender or sexuality binary (e.g., male/female, lesbian/heterosexual) that is commonly accepted in dominant Western cultures. Transgender individuals and bisexual women may experience invalidation or discrimination from communities on both sides of the binary. They may struggle to connect with social support and community for their various identities and experiences. This likely also contributed to challenges for gender variant individuals to find inclusion in activist groups and organizations historically. However, Armstrong (2002) noted transgender individuals and transgender social justice issues became more visible and included in the contemporary LGBT movement in the United States during the 1990s. Stone (2009) suggested there may be less public attention given to transgender activist issues than lesbian or gay activism partly because the transgender community is smaller than the lesbian/gay community. Her qualitative study of lesbian and gay activists' perceptions of transgender issues further indicated gay men and lesbian women reported different reasons for struggling to include transgender individuals in their social justice groups and communities. However, lesbian women described being more inclusive and described a primary reason for exclusion being concern about power and privilege dynamics.

The experiences of women of color have differed within the bisexual and lesbian feminist movements (Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991). Rust (1995) explained that the bi women's movement inherited the monocultural criticisms from women of color regarding

the historical lesbian feminist movement, which may have contributed to the bi women's movement placing stronger emphasis on multicultural inclusiveness from its inception. Fukuyama and Ferguson (2000) asserted that bisexual people of color experience multi-marginalization based on their ethnic backgrounds and discrimination from gay/lesbian and straight communities. Thus, many bisexual women have experienced invisibility among organizations and groups of lesbian and heterosexual feminists (Rust, 1995). Critiques and challenges of bisexual feminists led bisexual feminists to claim a legitimate place for themselves within the feminist movement, challenging dichotomous thinking as well as the politics of lesbian separatism (e.g., Bradford, 2004). In recent years, the emergence of queer identities and politics has further challenged the categories and politics of SMW's identities and group memberships (e.g., Lorber, 2001).

Different experiences and performances of identities may contribute to SMW and transgender individuals' different experiences of oppression based on race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, age, ability, and geographic location (e.g., Baumgardner, 2007; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2002). Few researchers have investigated women of color's experiences of sexual identity development. Espin (1994), using Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1989) Minority Identity Development model with a sample of Latina lesbians, found that the process of integrating and internalizing sexual minority identities was similar to that of ethnic identities. Espin (1987) explained that both processes involved moving from initially rejecting a socially stigmatized identity to gradually accepting the identity as positive. Moreover, Collins (2000) explained the need for a model that integrated sexual identity and ethnic identity development process, which occur simultaneously in sexual minority people of color. Researchers addressing

the effect of oppression on SMW have largely focused on European-American women (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008). These examples illustrate the need for additional understanding of sexual minority people of color and transgender people of color's experiences of their intersecting identities and multiple oppressions.

Social Organization and Group Membership

SMW and transgender individuals' identities also influence their social organization. By organizing for common social justice goals, gender and sexual minorities may feel more empowered and less isolated than they do individually (Worell & Remer, 2003). Feminist multicultural therapists argued that group organization in activism may encourage people to understand how their similar experiences and struggles are influenced by the socio-political context (Butler & Wintram, 1991). Morrow and colleagues (2006) explained that social organizations and group work create atmospheres in which individuals may challenge power and privilege boundaries.

Coalitions give activists an opportunity to embrace their multiple intersecting identities and participate in social justice work that may fulfill each of their needs (Sandoval, 1995). Coalitions also give SMW and transgender activists a space to organize themselves across different ideologies and political goals without having to select a singular central goal (Ward, 2008). For SMW, this is particularly important. The histories of SMW of diverse identities and group memberships have been all but erased from history (Rich, 1980). For example, bisexual women's connection to community and social support may be especially important because researchers show bisexual women report higher levels of internalized oppression than lesbian women (D'Augelli,

Grossman, Hershberger, & O'Connell, 2001; Herrick, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998). Given the historical invisibility of gender and sexual minority issues and community, it is especially important that activists organize and find spaces in which to share their political passions. The social connectedness that activists gain by working together in groups may also provide psychological benefits, such as increased hopefulness, resilience, and ability to manage stress.

Meanings of Social Justice Activism

Although social justice activism is commonly regarded as an important tool and goal for feminist multicultural therapy (FMC), the meaning that it holds for each individual is unique and different. In the therapeutic relationship, clients collaborate with therapists and negotiate their therapeutic goals (e.g., Brown, 2010). The same is true for individuals' experiences of activism outside of therapy. Activism may be unique and dependent on the meaning each person assigns to it. Lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women experience activism from their own understandings of oppression (Gartrell & Rothblum, 2001). Therefore, activism can take as many different forms—and hold as many meanings--as there are activists. To illustrate the value of knowing the different meanings that social justice activism has for each SMW or transgender activist, I will further describe the different levels of activism. This will enhance the understanding that activism may look different for each activist depending on her or his social justice interests, goals, and style.

Kashubeck-West, Szymanski, and Meyer (2008) explained that social justice advocacy can be used to address oppression on *micro* (individual), *meso* (communities),

and *macro* (social and political structures) levels. Although the researchers primarily described activism as it pertained to counseling psychologists' activism, it has important applications that may be generalizable to many SMW or transgender activists. A primary difference between the micro, meso, and macro levels of activism is involvement in group effort to change oppressive environments. A person may be active in all three levels of advocacy or only one or two. Their degree of participation in each level may vary at different times and depend on their experiences of oppression as well as the different meanings of activism for each activist.

Social justice advocacy on a *micro* level pertains to helping individuals who are immediately affected by oppression. Kashubeck- West and colleagues (2008) described micro level activism as consciousness-raising. It involves acknowledging oppressive cultural messages that contribute to gender and sexual minorities' marginalization (Szymanski, 2005b). SMW and transgender individuals may challenge negative stereotypes and examine how any negative feelings they have about themselves may have been learned from their cultures, society, and contexts in general. At the micro level, SMW and transgender individuals examine and challenge prejudice, discrimination, isolation, violence, harassment, and invisibility (Szymanski, 2005b). Experiences of marginalization may vary depending on the individual's intersecting identities, statuses, and social contexts. Consistent with multicultural feminist therapy, a goal of micro activism is to help people connect their distress to the socio-political context and reduce their self-blame and helplessness (Kashubeck-West et al., 2008). Indeed, Weitz (1982) found that women with depression who participated in feminist consciousness-raising groups experienced a reduction in their depressive symptoms. Individuals at the micro

level may also develop skills to help them cope with their environments and assertively communicate their needs and interests.

The *meso* level of activism involves SMW and transgender individuals connecting to communities of people who work to create social change. Such organizations and communities may exist on university campuses, community-based LGBTQ pride centers, and LGBT or feminist political groups (Kashubeck-West et al., 2008). Through community involvement, SMW and transgender individuals may further understand the influence of the larger social context on their personal experiences. Meso level activities help individuals address oppressive contexts while being supported by LGBTQ affirming people, allies, and other gender and sexual minorities. Kashubeck-West and colleagues (2008) recommend that the micro and meso level activities be combined, because sexual and gender minority people may feel less isolated and invisible through increased social support. Further, involvement in meso level activism may facilitate SMW and transgender individuals' empowerment by showing that community activism leads to social change. Activist organizations may challenge policies and ideologies in the workplace, college campuses, and other community-based organizations. Consciousness-raising groups and outreach activities are ways to connect individuals to social justice on larger scales (e.g., Goodman, Liang, Helms, Latta, Sparks, & Weintraub, 2004).

Activism at the *macro* level involves challenging political institutions, cultural ideologies, and historical understandings. This is consciousness-raising at the highest level: understanding the original, historical, and institutional sources of oppression, bias, privilege, and power. Changes to inclusive public policy pertaining to health insurance benefits, adoption rights, paid maternity leave, and nondiscriminatory employment laws

are examples of macro level activism. Feminist scholars identify critical examination of the social and political institution of marriage as a macro level activity (Kashubeck-West et al., 2008). Such activism is clearly informed by both micro and meso levels of social justice and reinforces the argument that individual activism can lead to local, national, and even global change (Kashubeck-West et al., 2008).

As previously stated, these levels of activism have relevance for the different meanings of activism, particularly in regard to activists' interests, goals, and styles of activism. Further, SMW and transgender individuals' intersecting identities, statuses, and circumstances influence the types of activism with which they choose to become involved. Therefore, it is important to consider different historical and contemporary activist movements and the motivations that fueled them. Understanding their styles of activism may provide further insight to the meaning that SMW and transgender individuals attribute to activism.

Styles of Activism

Feminist scholars assert that SMW and transgender individuals' activism is historically influenced by the civil rights, women's liberation, and gay liberation movements (e.g., Enke, 2007). Although these movements had many similar characteristics, such as bringing organized public attention to the rights of socially and economically marginalized people, there were many predominant styles, approaches, and goals that distinguished them. Even within a single social justice movement, people may have different styles and approaches to activism. Further, the social justice paths that SMW and transgender individuals choose may reflect something important about the

meanings they attribute to their activist work. These multiple levels and forms of activism may serve different purposes based on their meanings for activists.

Activist scholars provide several examples of styles of activism. Gartrell and Rothblum (2001) emphasized that activism is a subjective experience, in that gender and sexual minorities approach activism with unique values and complex experiences that inform their advocacy styles. To begin to understand their unique activist experiences, it is important to review activist styles and approaches. Antrobus (2004) emphasized that increased attention needs to be given to the different strategies and types of action that diverse groups of feminist activists take and how those activisms may include a single or multiple-issue approaches.

Single-issue and multiple-issue approaches. Activism scholars explain that social movements assert goals based on the interests and needs of people involved in the movement (Ward, 2008). Kurtz (2002) explained the single-issue approach to activism as a social movement's tendency to advocate for justice pertaining to one identity (e.g., gender) over others. Such prioritization may assist activists in clarifying their goals to general populations because their goals may be more specific than multiple-issue (e.g., gender, race, class, and sexuality) approaches. However, Kurtz (2002) explained that the prioritizing of a single identity may make it difficult for a movement to gain widespread acceptance and mobilization. Single-issue approaches to activism may promote the idea that some types of oppression are more salient than others, also known as a hierarchy of oppression (Hill Collins, 1990; Ochs, 1996). Single-identity politics may ignore the existence of intragroup differences, as previously described. Researchers emphasize how people form communities based on a shared sense of oppression (Ward, 2008).

In her book *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations*, Ward (2008) described the historical use of single-issue political perspectives in social movements. She explained that prioritizing lesbian rights as a single issue may have contributed to African American SMW's feelings of exclusion in the lesbian feminist movement (e.g., Faderman, 1991). By primarily placing emphasis on lesbian rights, the lesbian feminist movement may not have given appropriate attention to issues of race and class (e.g., Faderman, 1991). The Black lesbian feminist group, the Combahee River Collective (1979) advocated approaches to addressing the multiple needs of people through social movements. Their argument was reinforced by intersectional theorists who advocated that identities are interdependent and influence each other (e.g., Collins, 1990). The Combahee River Collective (1979) emphasized their multiple-issue social justice advocacy as distinct from other social movements because it was both antiracist and antisexist.

Recognizing their multiple identities and group memberships offers SMW and transgender individuals opportunities to celebrate their multiple identities and experiences while also advocating for multiple-issue political gains (e.g., Naples, 1998). Ward (2008) noted that social movements advocating multiple-issue strategies do not gain the widespread general attention that single-issue approaches do. Despite the lack of widespread recognition, activists, speakers, and writers bring attention to these issues (Esterberg, 1997; Sandstrom & Vetter, 2001). Both single-issue and multiple-issue approaches to diversity and activism can be problematic. SMW and transgender individuals' interests in single-issue and multiple-issue activism may be reflections of the meaning they attribute to social justice activism as well as their interpretations of their

identities and experiences of oppression and privilege. Therefore, the levels, forms, or styles of social justice activism that they engage in may further influence the beneficial psychological outcomes of that participation.

Feminist psychologists have asserted that participating in social activism may contribute to increases in women's empowerment (i.e., liberation from personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical oppression) and resilience (Brown, 2010; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998), as previously explained. However, researchers have not examined how the meanings and understandings of social justice activism for SMW and transgender individuals may influence their process of choosing activism that they perceive to be most relevant to their interests and social justice passions. It may be logical to conceptualize SMW and transgender individuals' social justice activism from a "bigger picture" perspective that examines the different meanings they attribute to it, how their style and approach to activism may be reflections of that meaning, and how their activism contributes to their overall sense of empowerment and well-being.

Summary

Feminist multicultural therapists assert that involvement in activism is an important tool and goal for therapy (Brown, 1994; Worell & Remer, 2003). As individuals understand their distress to be influenced by contextual sources of oppression, trauma, and discrimination, they may use activism to create positive changes in their contexts (Roades, 2000). For SMW and transgender individuals, activism can lead to feelings of empowerment, social connectedness, and decreased isolation (Worell & Remer, 2003). Feminist theories and intersectional perspectives provide frameworks for

conceptualizing these individuals' activisms. Because SMW and transgender individuals' activism is informed by their multiple, intersecting identities, statuses, and experiences of oppression and privilege, it is important to consider how social organization and group memberships that are based on identities influence their activism. Further, activism styles, approaches, and goals may all be representative of the different meanings they attribute to social justice activism. Although SMW and transgender individuals have a strong history of activism, additional research is needed to understand what social justice activism means to diverse SMW and transgender individuals. Therefore, it is essential that researchers continue to investigate their experiences of activism to better inform the practice and theory of FMC and reinforce SMW and transgender individuals' ongoing social justice work.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to increase understanding of the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender activists. In particular, it was important to understand how interpretations, understandings, and experiences of SMW and transgender activists' multiple intersecting identities inform their styles and types of activism and how the approaches these individuals choose may be reflections of the meaning they attribute to activism. A further goal of this research was to enhance the practice of FMC by demonstrating the influence of SMW and transgender individuals' activism on their experiences of empowerment and psychological well-being. I endeavored to bring together multiple perspectives on feminism, gender, and sexual identities, and I encouraged participants to critically examine their political perspectives,

discuss their visions for approaching social change, and identify strategies for achieving their visions.

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research were aimed at understanding what social justice activism means to sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals. The overarching questions were:

1. What does participating in social justice activism mean to SMW and transgender individuals?
2. How do SMW and transgender individuals' styles and approaches to activism reflect the meanings they attribute to activism?
3. How do SMW and transgender individuals' social identities and social justice activism interact?
4. How does social justice activism contribute (or not) to perceptions and experiences of empowerment and psychological well-being?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Different perspectives and conceptual models of empowerment in FMC have been theorized to apply to the experiences of diverse groups of people (e.g., Brown, 2010; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998; Worell & Remer, 2003). However, there is currently no theoretical model for understanding what social justice activism means to SMW and transgender individuals specifically. Marshall and Rossman (2011) asserted that qualitative methodology is appropriate for developing a conceptual model of a

phenomenon. This qualitative study will contribute to the knowledge base in counseling psychology regarding the social justice activism of SMW and transgender individuals as well as the implications for the practice of FMC and empowerment interventions with these populations. Counseling psychologists are being urged to centralize intersectionality and multicultural identities to create more in-depth understanding of the psychological well-being of diverse groups of people (Sue & Sue, 2008). Little attention has been given to understanding the experiences of SMW and transgender activists. Therefore, the use of qualitative methods is appropriate for providing in depth understanding of the complexity of the meaning of SMW and transgender individuals' activism.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

In this study of the meaning of social justice activism for sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals, I endeavored to understand what participation in social justice activism means to these populations, how their styles and approaches to activism are reflective of the different meaning they assign to activism, and how participation in activism does (or does not) contribute to their perceptions of empowerment and psychological well-being. The method of this study was guided by a feminist social constructivist paradigm. In this chapter, I describe (a) my research paradigm, (b) my role as the researcher, (c) the participants, (d) the research design, (e) data collection procedures, (f) data analysis procedures, and (g) the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Paradigm

As previously discussed, this qualitative investigation was guided by multiple feminist theoretical frameworks. The overarching paradigm that guided the research was feminist social constructivism. In this section, I define the constructivist paradigm and relate it to the present investigation with an emphasis on the epistemology, ontology, and axiology that guided the research.

The feminist social constructivist paradigm emphasizes that reality is constructed within cultural and historical contexts (e.g., Ponterotto, 2005). The understanding of reality is specific to each person and influenced by individuals' different experiences and perceptions of their contexts. Thus, reality may not be objectively understood (Hansen, 2004). Indeed, from a social constructivist perspective, the world is not objectively presented to any individual, but rather is interpreted through the individual's experiences, culture, values, and beliefs (Burr, 1995). The social context is very important to the individual's construction of meaning and understanding, and emphasis is placed on the individual's active interpretation and understanding of their contexts and environments (Mahoney, 1991). Further, knowledge, beliefs, and insights about the world are derived from communities of understanding and interpersonal relationships rather than purely intrapsychic (Cotton, 2007). Within the field of Counseling Psychology, a strong emphasis has historically been placed on understanding research participants' objective reality. Positivist and postpositivist perspectives are often valued for providing global insights to the realities of specific populations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, psychology is a social science that cannot objectively know but rather describe and attempt to explain the phenomena of social life in a particular culture, time, and place (Gergen, 1985). Psychologists have shown that the experiences of SMW and transgender individuals are diverse and varied (e.g., Bowman & King, 2003). Therefore, traditional research paradigms may not effectively capture the richness of these individuals' different realities and experiences. A feminist social constructivist paradigm is more appropriate for deepening the field's understanding of the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender individuals.

Social constructivism emphasizes a relativist ontology. SMW and transgender individuals have multiple experiences, interpretations, realities, and truths. The nature of research participants' realities is subjective and multiple (Ponterotto, 2005). It was expected that the participants in the study would have diverse experiences of reality; thus, the intention of this study was to understand their unique experiences. As previously explained, SMW and transgender individuals have multiple, intersecting identities that influence their experiences of oppression and privilege. From a social constructionist view, identities are created based on sociopolitical contexts and saturated with cultural meaning (Bohan, 1997). Different social contexts contributed to participants' perceptions and knowledge. Each person's understanding of their identities, privilege, and oppression influenced the types of activism they were interested in as well as the unique meaning they placed on social justice activism. Participants' reported understandings of reality were regarded in this study as specific to each participant and were not to be generalized to all SMW and transgender individuals.

Moreover, the social constructivist epistemology advocates that, because research participants' realities are socially constructed, the relationship between the research participant and the researcher is pivotal for both creating and capturing the meaning of participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). To this end, a portion of time spent in interviews was used to create trust to enhance participants' comfort in describing their experiences and perceptions of their realities. The relationships between the participants and I were collaborative, involving appropriate use of self-disclosure and dialogue about participants' various understandings of social justice activism, as will be described later.

The axiology of this study emphasizes my values and lived experiences, as the researcher, as influencing the study in multiple ways. Values, biases, and experiences cannot be completely eliminated from the researcher's investigation (e.g., Bohan, 1997). However, consistent with social constructivist perspectives, these values and experiences can be acknowledged, discussed, and attempt to be distinguished from the participants' described experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). My perceptions and experiences enhanced my connectedness to participants' stories. Further, my awareness and cautiousness of biases and values potentially guiding the research and interpretations contributed to me asking questions that disconfirmed my hypotheses or expectations as I worked against my confirmation bias.

Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative design, the researcher is considered the primary instrument for the research. The answers that participants provided to interview questions may have been influenced by their experience and perceptions of me as the researcher. Further, the questions that I asked were informed by my values, beliefs, and worldview. This was consistent with my feminist social constructivist paradigm. I would like readers to understand my standpoint as a qualitative researcher so that they may know the subjective influence that I brought to the present research. In this section, I describe my interests, expectations, and biases about the current research to establish my credibility as well as the credibility of the research itself (Patton, 2002).

At the time that I conducted this study, I was a fourth and fifth-year counseling psychology doctoral student. I had completed my program's qualifying exams and had

been advanced to doctoral candidacy. My research experience and training was primarily in quantitative design and analysis. I had previously been a primary investigator on five quantitative studies and a research assistant for two quantitative studies. At the time, I was gaining my first qualitative research experience working as Dr. Lisa Diamond's research assistant on her mixed-method study pertaining to women's attractions and hormones. This dissertation was the first time that I had been a primary investigator in qualitative research.

In addition to my research experience and training, my practical training is relevant to this study. At the time of my defense, I was completing my predoctoral internship and had almost 3 years of experience working at university mental health settings and 1 year of experience in a community mental health setting. Prior to internship, I completed a weekly 20-hour practicum at the University of Utah's Women's Resource Center (WRC) in which I received extensive, specialized training in feminist multicultural therapy (FMT). At the WRC, I gained experience working collaboratively with clients on issues pertaining to identity, culture, and contextual circumstances. Further, the WRC incorporates the Empowerment Model (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998) into counseling to emphasize clients' experiences of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical empowerment. My professional training and personal development at an explicitly FMC site strongly influenced my interest in the topic of SMW and transgender individuals' empowerment and increased psychological well-being through social justice activism. It is also worth noting that I co-facilitated a long-standing transgender therapy group as well as a therapy group for women survivors of trauma during my predoctoral internship at a university counseling center.

In addition to research and practical training and qualifications, I want to briefly describe my personal identities and experiences that informed the research overall and my standpoint as the researcher. I have always proudly identified as a woman who loves women. I have always had strong political positions in favor of women's rights and gender equality. As an identified radical feminist, I value deconstructing the power and privileges that exist in patriarchal systems and challenging the dominant discourse on social roles and values (Brown, 1994). I recognized my attractions and emotional connections to women and men to varying degrees throughout my life and used both lesbian and bisexual identity labels. Currently, I identify as bisexual. My experience of my gender and sexual identities are further informed by my identities as a European American, able-bodied, highly educated, pagan woman who has survived emotional, physical, and sexual trauma.

I developed the idea for this research during the fall of 2008, at the time of the presidential election and the passing of Proposition 8 in California. At a time in which many lesbian/ gay/ bisexual/ transgender/ queer/ questioning (LGBTQQ)-identified individuals and allies to the LGBTQQ community were advocating for inclusion and equality, I was particularly struck by how diverse and, at times, divided, people's viewpoints were regarding social justice advocacy. Further, I noticed that amidst the controversy regarding same-sex marriage rights, LGBTQQ-identified individuals had different opinions regarding access to marriage equality and whether or not marriage equality should be a priority for social action. I found myself thinking about social justice activism as a continuum in which everyone's political viewpoints were represented. I noticed that the different social values and political positions that LGBTQQ individuals

had contributed to the types or styles of activism in which they engaged. Some people attended public protests while others engaged in private discussions about politics and social change. I observed disagreement among people about which social justice issues should be given media attention. I was also evaluating my positions on these political issues and reflecting on the ways in which my values and experiences influenced the directions in which I focused my political energy.

Moreover, as a developing counseling psychologist, I wanted to understand how engagement in activism was helping people who experience social marginalization cope with discrimination and invalidation. An important bias that I have as a therapist is that creating positive social change in oppressive social contexts contributes to a person's increased empowerment and resilience. I wanted to know if being active in challenging oppressive legislation and noninclusive social norms helped SMW, in particular, feel empowered. Further, I began questioning how SMW's experiences of social justice could be influenced by their diverse identities and statuses. What does social justice activism mean to SMW who experience privilege and oppression?

Thus, this research touches on my own experiences as a sexual minority woman who values social justice and further feels empowered by engaging in activism. Subjectivity was important in this study. Consistent with my feminist social constructivist paradigm, I wanted to understand SMW and transgender individuals' unique understandings of social justice activism. Further, I embraced my subjective position as a bisexual woman interviewing other SMW and transgender individuals. I did not aspire to be objective or remove my values, biases, and experiences from my process as an interviewer. However, I took important steps to manage, evaluate, and reflect on my

experience throughout the research process. These steps included (a) keeping a reflective journal, (b) engaging in a peer research team, (c) meeting with my faculty mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Morrow; and (d) co-analysis of the transcripts and conceptual model with my participants in individual feedback interviews.

The journal was used for three purposes: (a) for my personal reflections on the research process and how my biases and values influenced my experience of the research; (b) to record observations of the research process, as well as a summary of interviews including nonverbal communication that could not be observed through the audio recordings; and (c) an analysis of emerging thoughts throughout the research process about the patterns that emerged and results of the study. I consulted with a qualitative research team twice a month in my doctoral program that was supervised by my faculty advisor. I consulted with my advisor throughout the research process. She supervised my qualitative dissertation and provided constructive feedback. Finally, I managed my interpretations of the data analysis by proposing a preliminary model of SMW and transgender individuals' experiences of social justice activism to participants in individual feedback interviews.

My subjectivity was integrated into the research. To help readers understand my standpoint as a researcher/ participant, I included an additional autoethnography chapter in this dissertation. I asked and answered my own interview questions as if I were a participant. This enhanced my empathy for participants with whom I have similar and dissimilar experiences and values. Further, it helped increase my awareness of my beliefs, values, and biases related to social justice in order to manage my own

perspectives throughout data analysis and understanding the beliefs and values of my participants.

Participants

Context and Setting

The setting and context for this study was SMW and transgender individuals in the United States (U.S). Participants were recruited from different states and were asked to participate in telephone or Skype interviews if long-distance. Local participants in Salt Lake City and surrounding areas were asked to interview in person. I have personal experience and familiarity with aspects of LGBTQ communities in Salt Lake City (SLC), Utah. I actively recruited participants from these communities as well as other SMW and transgender individuals around the country.

Increasing attention has been given to SMW and transgender issues, and more broadly to LGBTQQ issues, in the U.S. in the past few decades. There are increasing numbers of positive representations of SMW and transgender individuals in the media, in film, and television. There are increasing numbers of support services, networks, and resources. There has also been progress in extending hate crimes legislation to include gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g., the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act). During the time this study was completed, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) was repealed in the U.S. Military, President Obama became the first U.S. president to publicly endorse same-sex marriage, and Maine, Maryland, and Washington states legalized same-sex marriage by popular vote. At the time that this dissertation manuscript was being written, the Supreme Court of the U. S. had just heard

arguments concerning California's Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage, as well as the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). LGBTQ activists were cautiously optimistic, and the results of the high court's deliberations were expected to be unveiled in July, 2013.

Further, within the field of Counseling Psychology, there has been a shift in conceptualizing sexual and gender minority clients in affirming rather than traditionally pathologizing ways (Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger, & Manning, 2008). However, equality for sexual and gender minorities continues to be a common topic of political debate. In most states, it is legal to fire an employee on the basis of sexual orientation. SMW and transgender individuals may be denied housing, health-care, child-custody, and marriage and civil union rights. There is also an ongoing threat of violence, harassment, and discrimination throughout the country. The contextual experiences of participants in this study varied depending on the sociopolitical climate in their geographic location. Indeed, participants made comments about these issues in their interviews, which will be described later.

Participants

Participants in this study were 20 SMW and transgender individuals who reported being interested in social justice activism. Of the 20 participants, 5 (25%) identified their sexual identity as queer, 5 (25%) identified as bisexual, 3 (15%) as lesbian, 1 (5%) as pansexual, 1 (5%) as "lesbian or queer," 1 (5%) as "queer or bi," 1 (5%) as "sexual minority," 1 (5%) as "queer or 'Amanda sexual'" (in reference to her attractions to her partner)," 1 (5%) as "attracted to female bodied" individuals, and 1 (5%) as "open" or "fluid." With regard to gender identity, 13 (65%) identified as a woman or female, 3

(15%) identified as gender queer, and 4 (20%) identified as transgender. Of the total sample, 15 (75%) identified their race/ethnicity as White, 2 (10%) as multiracial, 1 (5%) as Chicana, and 1 (5%) as African American. With regard to social class/SES, 2 (10%) participants identified as "working class," 15 (75%) as "middle-class," and 3 (15%) as "upper middle class." Participants also reported on their ages: 11 (55%) indicated their age range was between 20 and 30, 4 (20%) were between 30-40 years of age, 3 reported being between 40-50 years of age, 1 (5%) indicated being between 50-60 years of age, and 1 (5%) identified as being between 60-70 years of age. Participants also reported their level of education: 3 (15%) reported having a bachelor's degree, 7 (35%) indicated having a master's degree, 1 (5%) indicated having completed their law degree (JD), 6 (30%) reported they were either completing or had completed their doctorates, and 3 (15%) indicated having completed at least some college, but had not yet obtained a bachelor's degree.

Despite some homogeneity of participants, particularly with regard to race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and education level, several efforts were made to recruit participants who represented more diversity in these areas, including snowball sampling, word of mouth, and emails to listserves specifically oriented to LGBTQ individuals. Participants were recruited and data were collected until the data analysis began to yield redundancy and saturation of categories. Once I became aware of redundancy in participants' answers, I took efforts to selectively recruit participants who represented more diversity and search for disconfirming evidence. Participants were no longer recruited once the categories appeared saturated and dense enough to reflect

participants various experiences and interpretations and the relationships among the categories were more clearly established (Fassinger, 2005).

Sampling Procedures

Throughout data collection, I used purposeful, criterion sampling (Patton, 1990). I recruited SMW and transgender men and women who were interested in social justice activism and/or actively engaged in social justice activism. I excluded individuals younger than age 18. Participants were initially recruited by word of mouth around the U.S. After data collection began with the first few participants, purposeful snowball sampling was used to encourage existing participants to identify additional individuals who met the inclusion criteria and may be interested in this study. Early participants were enthusiastic about reaching out to others, and even copied me on some emails they sent to their activist friends and acquaintances. This snowball sampling approach assisted me in recruiting information-rich participants who were often connected to other activists around the country.

Further, Charmaz (2006) asserted the importance of theoretical sampling in grounded theory research. The process of theoretical sampling involved identifying missing information, unanswered questions, and potential gaps in research throughout data analysis, and intentionally recruiting participants who were believed to enhance the richness of the emerging themes, provide disconfirming evidence, and further solidify the developing conceptual model.

Recruitment

Participants were initially recruited from email and word of mouth via requests to members of my qualitative research team who forwarded the recruitment email to their friends and acquaintances. This yielded positive results and assisted me in connecting with activist participants in different parts of the U.S. As previously noted, these early participants assisted me in further contacting potential participants about the study, and several additional participants were recruited this way.

The flier/email that was sent to participants included my email address and phone number with a confidential voice mail system, allowing participants to choose how they wanted to contact me. Several participants initially contacted me to inquire for additional information about the study. Interestingly, several participants further asked if their engagement in activism or social justice interests met inclusion criteria, implying to some extent that they questioned the legitimacy of their own social justice work. All participants chose to correspond via email. Prior to their participation, we clarified the inclusion criteria and made arrangements to schedule the initial interview. For long-distance participants, I provided the option of scanning and emailing the informed consent document or mailing the informed consent document to them with an additional stamped and addressed return envelope. Most long-distance participants asked to have the paper informed consent mailed. For in-person interviews, participants signed the informed consent immediately prior to the interview. All participants were given copies of the informed consent to keep (see Appendix C for consent form).

Researcher Roles and Relationships with Participants

Consistent with feminist relational frameworks (e.g., Worell & Remer, 2003), I emphasized approaching interviews as a collaborative, mutually beneficial process. I expressed empathy in honoring the time that participants were willing to share their stories and experiences with me. I explained at the beginning of all interviews the purpose of the research and my personal interest in understanding the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender individuals. It was important to me to practice transparency with participants by describing the research process and my values as a researcher and developing feminist multicultural therapist. I collaborated with participants in setting process guidelines for our interviews (Worell & Remer, 2003) and explaining the rights and expectations of participants in this research (APA, 2002). I also invited feedback from participants about the interview questions and process. It was consistent with my feminist relational values to ask participants questions that appropriately captured their experiences rather than focusing exclusively on my research agenda (Tannggard, 2007). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) emphasize the value of feminist research as a form of activism. In the process of having a semistructured conversation with participants about their experiences and understandings of activism, we discussed their experience of engaging in this research as a political act. We discussed the interview as a mutually beneficial process in which we both deepened our understanding of the meaning of social justice activism. I disclosed my beliefs about the research as a process of honoring the experiences and voices of diverse activists. I also disclosed the political significance of centering the experiences of marginalized people in psychological research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Taking Leave

In my process of taking leave from the interviews, I provided my contact information to participants and invited them to e-mail me if they had any concerns about how their information would be used in my study. I also invited them to think about everything they disclosed and encouraged them to contact me if they changed their minds about having their interviews included in my study. Furthermore, I collaborated with participants about subsequent participation in feedback interviews and invited participants local to Salt Lake City to attend my doctoral dissertation defense. I disclosed my gratitude for their participation and my expectations about the impact of this research on FMC and social justice work more broadly. We discussed the impact of describing their individual social action efforts in our interviews and their plans for future involvement in social action. I believe that disclosing my personal beliefs and values pertaining to the positive effects of social justice work in sexual and gender minority communities enhanced my relationships with participants and increased the likelihood that participants felt valued and appreciated. I also asked participants how I might be more active in ways that are useful to the community and contribute to sexual and gender minorities' well-being and social justice.

Research Design

A primary purpose of this research was to develop a conceptual model for the meaning of social justice advocacy for SMW and transgender individuals. Therefore, this study used a *grounded theory* (GT) design. Grounded theory is useful and important for moving beyond basic descriptions of participants' experiences and moving into the

creation of a conceptual framework that can inform practice and future research (e.g., Creswell, 2007). Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained that theory development should be grounded in the qualitative research process and informed by data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon. Grounded theory was developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and based on the sociological approach of symbolic interactionism. This approach emphasized that symbolic meaning is derived from interpersonal interactions. People are believed to act toward things (e.g., gestures, emotions, clothing) based on the specific meaning those things have for them, and the meaning is influenced by social interactions (Kendall, 1999).

Since its inception, GT has been applied to various fields of research and practice, including health, nursing, education, business, and different psychology disciplines. There continues to be debate about the meaning and procedures of GT. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) collaborated on its initial development, they disagreed about its implementation (e.g., Glaser, 1992). Glaser and Strauss's approaches to GT may be viewed as primarily postpositivist. In recent years, researchers have advocated for GT to be approached from constructivist and interpretivist paradigms as well (Charmaz, 2006; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Creswell (2007) asserted that the systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (e.g., 1998) and the constructivist approaches of Charmaz (2006) represent the two popular approaches for conducting a GT study. Consistent with the constructivist paradigm of this dissertation, my approach to implementing grounded theory was primarily consistent with the constructivist approaches described by Charmaz (2006) and Morrow and Smith (2000). My approach to using GT was further supplemented by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Several of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological considerations of this design have already been described in the Paradigm section. Contrary to the GT single-process focus of Strauss and Corbin (1998), researchers argued that constructivist GT's ontology embraces multiple, socially constructed realities and experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Understanding participants' experiences, therefore, involves exploring multiple sources of information and emphasizing participants' values, beliefs, feelings, and subjective ideologies. Constructivist approaches to GT emphasize the epistemological use of the researcher-participant relationship to construct mutually meaningful understandings of a phenomenon. Its axiology focuses on the description of the researcher's expectations and theoretical and interpretive perspectives.

The basic principles of GT involve inductively deriving theory from participants' described experiences. This approach is most useful for research in which a theoretical model does not currently exist or if an existent model has not been extended to include a specific population of interest. Strauss and Corbin's (1998) systematic approach to GT includes a procedure of coding participants' transcripts for central themes and developing a visual presentation of a theoretical model. Charmaz's (2006) approach is less structured and places greater emphasis on the researcher's and participants' subjective experiences of the research processes. Further, she asserted the importance of the researcher's role in constructing meaning with participants in GT. She emphasized the power that the researcher has to code the transcripts and identify the primary themes. Charmaz's attention to the power, values, and subjective experiences of both the researcher and the

participant are fundamental to the constructivist paradigm of this study. I will elaborate further on GT procedures and analysis in the next sections.

An important challenge in the application of GT is the researcher's knowledge of the relevant literature. Given the research purpose of generating a new theory, it can be challenging for researchers to put aside their understandings of existent theories and research (Creswell, 2007). These preconceived ideas and expectations may potentially interfere with the researcher's ability to accurately detect the emerging new theory. For this reason, researchers debate the extent to which one should be familiar with the existent literature. Researchers must find a balance between minimal familiarity with the literature in the early research stages and sufficient knowledge to select appropriate samples and effectively gather data (Fassinger, 2005).

In addition to the GT design, this study also incorporated autoethnography to explore my experiences and the unique meaning that I attribute to social justice activism. Autoethnography is appropriate for providing personal narratives and insight to the researcher's experience (Creswell, 2007). It is fundamentally different from ethnographic design, which focuses on the beliefs and experiences of others. Autoethnography enhanced my reflexivity in this study by placing me in the context of the study as a researcher and as a participant. To this end, I included an additional chapter in the dissertation that includes an analysis of my answers to the interview questions. This enhanced my feminist relational approach to interviews because I experienced increased empathy and connection with participants answering the questions that I had answered. Further, the use of autoethnography centralized my experiences as a SMW activist, which

emphasized the personal value I place on understanding the different meanings that SMW and transgender individuals attribute to activism.

Sources of Data and Data Collection

Triangulation is the process of bringing together multiple sources of data to provide a clearer understanding of a central issue or research question (Rossman & Wilson, 1994). The use of multiple sources of data in this study contributed to the deeper understanding of the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender individuals. I used the following sources of data to achieve triangulation: individual interviews, follow-up interviews/ participant checks, individual feedback interviews, physical data, field notes, and analytic memos and journals. I elaborate on each of these methods below.

Individual Interviews

Data were collected through 60-105-minute, semistructured interviews conducted with each participant. Eight initial interviews were conducted via phone; five were conducted over Skype, and seven interviews were completed in-person. I began the interview process by describing my personal interest in the topic, explaining the interview procedure, and obtaining informed consent. Each participant was informed of and consented to the audio recording of the interview for the purposes of transcription and data analysis. An experiential activity was included (see below) to facilitate participants' self-reflection and discussion of their social identities, statuses, and experiences. Several participants noted this activity helped them to think more

deliberately about their multiple, intersecting identities and how their identities and statuses influenced their understandings and experiences of social justice. Interviews were semistructured and included a series of predetermined questions including:

1. Screening Question: How do you identify your gender and your sexual orientation? What does being a (e.g., woman, lesbian, queer, bisexual, transwoman, transman, etc.) mean to you?
2. Experiential Activity: Now I'm going to ask you to draw an image of yourself that expresses your identity or who you are. This can be a picture, a stick figure, a map, symbols, anything that expresses who you are. You don't have to be an artist to do this; it will just give us a starting point to talk about you. In this drawing, try to incorporate all the different aspects/parts/ pieces of your identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, SES, social class, geographic location, citizenship status, age, size, ability, language, education). Write words on top of your image that come to mind when you think about your different identities. Please feel free to talk about what you are drawing as you go; or, if you prefer to draw in silence, I can ask you questions afterwards. (After the participant is finished, ask questions about it.)
3. Have you ever felt discriminated/ disliked/ judged for who you are in regard to any of the parts of your identity? Have you felt oppressed?
4. What was/is that like for you?
5. Thinking again about your picture/ your different identities… in what ways do you think you experience privilege/ benefits/ special advantages/ special favors that others do not have?

6. What was/is that like for you?
7. As you may remember from the flyer, I am interested in understanding your experience of working for change? Tell me about that experience.
8. What does social justice activism mean to you? How does it relate to what you were just describing about your work for change? Cues:
    a. What does social justice mean for you and your life specifically?
    b. How often do you think/ talk about social justice/ activism?
    c. What are some of the things that you do that you consider social justice/ activism?
    d. How are those actions/ things/ behaviors meaningful (or not meaningful) to you? What do they mean?
9. How does social justice activism influence how you think and feel about yourself? Cues:
    a. Does it contribute to feeling good about yourself, give you a sense of empowerment or strength? How?
    b. Does it contribute to any negative thoughts, feelings, or experiences? How?
10. If you were asking these questions, what else would you like to know from other lesbian/ bi/ queer/ trans people about social justice activism?
11. Anything else?

Given the emergent design nature of qualitative research, additional questions were asked in the course of each interview to probe for further information and prompt participants to think deeply about their experiences, beliefs, and values. When the

interview was over, I thanked participants for their willingness to share their stories. I informed them that I would contact them in the future to schedule the follow-up interview and possibly a feedback interview. I asked long-distance participants to mail their drawings from the experiential activity to me using an addressed and stamped envelope I provided. For in-person participants, I collected the drawing from them directly. I also invited them to share writings or other physical expressions of their social justice activism; however, only 3 participants completed this task. Further, I gave them my email address for future correspondence and invited them to email me with any concerns, questions, or feedback.

Follow-up Interviews and Participant Checks

After I completed 17 of the initial participant interviews, I again contacted participants about completing follow-up interviews. As a result of participants' answers to the semistructured interview questions above, new questions emerged that were incorporated into the feedback interview. Participants were contacted via email and given the option to participate in a 15-30 minute follow-up interview or answer the questions via email. The email sent to participants included the interview questions. Eighteen of the 20 participants answered the follow-up questions (7 participants participated in the phone interview and 11 participants chose to respond via email). The following questions were asked:

1. When do you think you first became aware of discrimination/injustice/oppression? Can you briefly describe what experiences triggered your awareness that there was social/political injustice in the world?

2. Participants have been talking about experiences and early-life events that contributed to their interest in helping others/ creating political change. Can you think of an early-life event that contributed to your interest in activism/ social justice/ helping others? (For example, seeing someone being discriminated against or experiencing discrimination yourself?)
3. Participants have talked about ways that their involvement in activist work has helped them to heal or feel increased strength after experiences of discrimination/ prejudice/ oppression/ trauma. Does this seem true for you as well? How so?
4. What is a goal you have for yourself in the future with your activist interests/work? What are some things you would like to do in the future? Why is that goal important or interesting to you?
5. Since our first interview, have you thought of anything else that you would like to say about your interest in activism/social justice work? Have you been working on anything new/ had any new ideas that you would like to share?

Feedback Interviews

The purpose of the feedback interviews was to obtain participants' feedback about the primary themes derived from the individual and follow-up interview transcripts as well as the conceptual model that emerged from the themes. Participants were given descriptions of the emerging model and asked to provide further insight about how the model represented their perspectives and insights. I asked how the model might be enhanced and visually presented to represent their experiences and beliefs.

I intentionally selected a subgroup of participants in order to gain meaningful insight and potentially challenging, disconfirming evidence that would ultimately strengthen the integrity of the model. Eight participants completed 30-60 minute feedback interviews. I began each interview by explaining the purpose and organization of the interview. I described the major themes that emerged from the initial and follow-up interviews, the relationships among the themes, and the visual representation of the themes in the conceptual model. It was from participants' feedback that the visual representation was ultimately created.

Physical Data

Art and documents were provided by participants during the initial interviews and incorporated into the data. Participants were asked to draw visual representations of themselves in the initial interview process to describe their different identities, statuses, and experiences. This information and participants' descriptions of their drawings were incorporated into the data analysis. Initially, I intended to ask participants to bring an object to the interview that made them think of social justice. Indeed, participants were asked to do so on the flier/advertisement for the study. However, I typically did not inquire to participants about such objects, and only two participants referenced such objects (both of which were articles participants had written about social justice issues).

Field Notes

Throughout the study, I observed and made notes about popular culture, news, and media pertaining to LGBTQ issues. I positioned myself as an observer at events that

explicitly addressed issues specific to LGBTQ issues, and I made observations within my local communities in urban Utah and rural North Carolina about issues and situations concerning sexual and gender minorities. I took notes about my participants and others' physical appearances (e.g., style of clothing, hair, piercings, tattoos), which may potentially have been acts of political resistance or social action. Further, sociopolitical issues that arose in the news were documented and included in the data analysis as contextual factors.

Analytic Memos and Journals

As previously described, I kept a journal throughout the research process that served the following purposes: (a) observations and summaries of interviews including nonverbal behaviors that could not be noticed on the audio recordings; (b) analysis of emerging thoughts and hypotheses about patterns, results, and themes; and (c) my personal reflection of the research process and my experiences as a sexual minority women engaged in social justice activism. Further, my self-reflective journal was used to inform my analysis of my autoethnography (described below).

Data Analysis and Writing

Data Management

The body of data was compiled through different strategies. Audio recordings of participants' interviews as well as transcriptions were kept on my password-locked laptop computer. Audio recordings were transcribed by a transcriptionist (a member of my study team), who kept transcriptions in a password-protected document within his password-

protected laptop computer. Transcription checks enhanced my immersion in the data. I relistened to all audio recordings after transcription to verify that transcripts were accurate. All transcripts were assigned a name or pseudonym chosen by the participant to maintain confidentiality. Once transcripts were ready for analysis, they were transferred and saved with my ATLAS.ti qualitative software program on my password-protected laptop.

Additional forms of data, including participants' drawings from the experiential activity, were described in my observational and analytic journals. The physical drawings were kept in my residence without any identifying information attached. Only participants' pseudonyms were written on the document. When the participant's chosen name was their real first name, the first initial of the participant was written on the drawing, but no additional information.

Further, I typed my responses to the interview questions for the autoethnography. My responses were saved on my password-protected laptop computer. As with participants' interview transcripts, my responses to questions were transferred and saved within ATLAS.ti. However, my answers were saved in a separate "hermeneutic unit" from participants' transcripts, as described below.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory (GT) provides detailed procedures for qualitative analysis. Coding was done in three stages: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After the interviews were transcribed, they were imported to ATLAS.ti as individual transcripts and part of a single "hermeneutic unit" that was created specifically for this

study. First, open coding was used to initially reduce the data into small and specific units of meaning. “Codes” were created and assigned to specific quotes in participants’ transcripts using the participant’s own language as much as possible. This was done in ATLAS.ti by highlighting a quote within the transcript and assigning it a code or label that was stored within the software database. The codes were intended to capture and summarize the meaning in participants’ quotes. Examples include 1) “activism means I embody my labels,” 2) “need to be doing more,” and 3) “discouraging to go door-to-door.” As transcripts went through the open coding process, I referred to my overall list of codes from the different transcripts. I engaged in “constant comparison” in which I compared participants’ different codes to identify themes and maintain awareness of gaps and areas of further exploration (Charmaz, 2006). To this end, I wrote memos frequently about the data analysis process. After initially coding all of participants’ transcripts, I grouped codes together based on conceptual similarity into larger categories, also referred to as “families” in ATLAS.ti.

Charmaz (2006) recommended engaging in theoretical sampling to intentionally recruit participants who will provide information to fill gaps in the data analysis and potentially provide disconfirming evidence. I also continued to engage in constant comparative analysis as I grouped open codes into conceptual categories. I frequently referred to original transcripts in addition to referring to codes to be sure I understood the context of participants’ quotes.

Axial coding was the second level of coding in this study. Through axial coding, I explored the relationships among categories or families. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to axial coding as the stage of data analysis in which the fragmented data are pieced back

together to form larger categories or concepts. Categories of codes were grouped together into overarching themes. One example of this includes the two subcategories, “Activist Groups” and “Collaborating,” being grouped together in the larger theme of “Working with Others.”

Finally, selective coding was the last stage of data analysis. In selective coding, a central or core category was identified as connecting and relating to all other themes and categories. Relationships among the different categories were defined, ultimately contributing to an overarching narrative that connects the different themes or categories. During this process, a conceptual model emerged from the data analysis, offering a visual representation of the themes.

I reflected on my data analysis in my analytical memos, including considering biases and assumptions I may have been potentially imposing on the data. The feedback interviews with participants were vital in challenging these assumptions and seeking disconfirming evidence. In the first, second, and third feedback interviews, I provided participants with a list and description of the themes. I explained each theme and asked participants for ideas about how to visually represent them. Based on their feedback, I created a draft of the conceptual model. In subsequent feedback interviews, I described the themes to participants and asked if they agreed or disagreed with the visual representation. I also asked them to expand upon previous participants’ feedback to be sure the emerging model accurately represented their different perspectives and experiences. Feedback from the fourth, fifth, and sixth interviews assisted me in modifying, consolidating, and solidified the themes and a draft of the visual model. For example, in the fifth interview, a participant provided feedback about consolidating two

of the major themes into other themes based on conceptual similarity. I revisited the data and confirmed that the participant's feedback was accurate. Thus, the initial list of 10 themes was consolidated to eight themes. The visual model was further revised to reflect this change. I explicitly described the fifth participant's feedback in the sixth, seventh, and eighth interviews. Those participants all agreed with and confirmed the final list of themes and conceptual model. It should also be noted that the seventh and eighth feedback interviews did not provide any further suggestions for improvement.

I answered the interview questions for the autoethnography portion of the study midway through participant data collection, after interviewing 13 participants. I began analyzing the autoethnography data after completing participant follow-up interviews. The same grounded theory (GT) coding procedures (open and axial coding; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to analyze my autoethnography. My answers were saved in a hermeneutic unit separate from participants' transcripts. I created open codes for my answers after finishing the follow-up interviews with participants. I reduced the data to smaller units of meaning by highlighting particular quotes and assigning them a brief name or phrase using language within the quote. Examples include: 1) "choosing effective change strategies" and 2) "discouraged by battle fatigue." I grouped codes together based on conceptual similarity into small categories or "families." Codes such as "desired friends and love" and "interest in connection" were grouped together into a category labeled "Connection."

With axial coding, I examined the smaller categories of open codes for potential relationships and similarities with other categories or families. I grouped categories together that were conceptually similar in order to form overarching themes. One

example of this involved grouping together the smaller categories of "Learning about social justice" and "Activist development" within the larger theme of "Becoming an Activist." The title of the larger theme was created to represent the meaning conveyed within each subcategory. My analysis of the autoethnography resulted in six themes, which are articulated in the next chapter.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a fundamental criterion of the quality of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). Standards of trustworthiness, from a constructivist perspective, are based on authenticity criteria, including fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln, 1995; Morrow, 2005). *Fairness* requires that multiple, diverse perspectives be represented throughout the research process. In this study, I recruited participants from different parts of the United States through the recruitment procedures previously described. I actively noticed and searched for disconfirming evidence that indicated I needed to recruit additional participants to be inclusive of varying experiences. In data analysis and reporting the results, I was certain that all participants' reported experiences were represented and participants were quoted a relatively equal number of times. *Ontological authenticity* involves the full development of participants' perspectives. I assisted participants in feeling safe to fully describe their experiences and perspectives by being authentically warm and empathic throughout recruitment, interviews, and subsequent interactions with participants. I disclosed my interests and investment in the topic of this study as well as my identity as a SMW activist who believes in the power of social justice activism. I

attended to all ethical issues throughout the study, including confidentiality and continuous informed consent. Further, I invited participants throughout the study to review my data analysis and provide feedback about my interpretations and coding.

Educative authenticity refers to participants' ability to learn and take others' perspectives into consideration. At the beginning of each interview, I described my feminist relational approach to the research process and emphasized my expectation that our interview would be mutually empowering. That is, both the participant and I had the opportunity to deepen our understandings of the meanings of social justice activism and ultimately learn from each other's wisdom. Further, I practiced transparency throughout the interviews, follow-up interviews, and feedback interviews by describing the research process. I also invited participants within close proximity to Salt Lake City to my dissertation defense so that they may have an opportunity to see the final conceptual model, and I ensured them that I would send them the final copy of the dissertation after the defense.

Catalytic authenticity means that research facilitates change. Because the focus of this study was on social justice activism, my participants and I were deliberate in considering the implications of the research process and subsequent conceptual model in contributing to social change. I asked participants how this research may be beneficial to them. I also consulted with my research teams and advisor about the applications of this research in practical, academic, and community-based settings. After my dissertation defense, I will also find appropriate activist and psychology-focused journals to publish the results of this study so that they may reach broader audiences.

In addition to authenticity criteria, there are important elements that contribute to the rigor of this study. To achieve rigor, I kept a journal that included my observational notes, analytic insights, and personal reflections about the research process. This helped me maintain high self-awareness throughout the study and encouraged me to consult appropriately with my advisor and colleagues. I used multiple data sources to inform the conceptual model. This ensured that themes and codes were based on diverse sources of information pertaining to SMW and transgender individuals' experiences. The data taken from interviews were specific to the participants in the study. However, aspects of popular culture and news media enhanced the applicability of the research findings to sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals outside of the sample. I spent extensive time interviewing enough participants to reach saturation. I immersed myself in the data by analyzing codes, categories, and themes. My autoethnography further reinforced my immersion in the data and self-reflective process. Further, rigor of the study was established by providing many quotes throughout the Results chapter to demonstrate that the research and conceptual model were grounded in the data (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Moreover, I repeatedly checked the data through the different coding stages for disconfirming evidence. I asked members of my peer research teams and advisor to provide feedback about themes and codes that I had not noticed so that I would intensify my search for disconfirming evidence. As I observed discrepancies in the data, I made notes and reviewed discrepancies with my advisor and study team members as well as participants in feedback interviews. This reduced the risk that I could inadvertently overlook discrepancies and ultimately added to the rigor of the study.

An audit trail (see Appendix D) was used to enhance accountability by documenting consultations with colleagues, advisors, and participants. The audit trail included an outline of the research process, a description of developing codes, themes, and the emerging conceptual model (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Charmaz (2006) emphasizes that trustworthiness of the study may be enhanced through memoing about the emerging conceptual model and constantly comparing participants' codes. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the audit trail in all descriptions of consultations.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, I maintained familiarity with the APA 2002 Ethics Code, particularly regarding issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, competence, and research processes. I obtained approval in July 2011 from the University of Utah IRB before proceeding with this study. At no time in the research did I encounter a significant ethical dilemma.

Because I recruited participants from across the United States and used Skype interviews, I was particularly attentive to all ethical considerations involving the transmission of data over the internet, informed consent, and limits to confidentiality (APA Ethics Code Standard 3.10, Informed Consent). When potential participants initially contacted me, I provided them with copies of the informed consent document via email attachment. I explained the process for signing the copy and returning it electronically or mailing it to my address. I also provided information on participant confidentiality as well as the potential limits to confidentiality. Ensuring confidentiality

for participants was particularly important given the likelihood that different participants had varying degrees of "outness" about their gender and sexual identities. I discussed the risks associated with transmitting information online, and I offered participants an opportunity to consent to engage in the research process as well as to select a pseudonym to be used as I referred to their quotes throughout the dissertation and subsequent publications. We collaborated on setting an appointment time for the interview, at which time I re-explained the informed consent, right to withdraw at any time, and maintenance of confidentiality.

CHAPTER III

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this autoethnography was for me to position myself as a participant in the study by answering my own interview questions and further exploring my values, biases, and experiences with social justice activism. This chapter also provides an analysis of the major themes that emerged from my responses regarding my social identities, understandings, and experiences of oppression and privilege.

Six themes emerged from my descriptions of my social justice interests, experiences, and social identities: (1) *Recognizing Oppression and Privilege*, including awareness and personal experiences of these issues; (2) *Becoming an Activist*, including learning about activism and my process of becoming an activist; (3) *Creating Change*, including challenging dominant perspectives and engaging in various social action to create prosocial change; (4) *Connection and Community*, including valuing connection with others and a desire for community; (5) *Struggles*, including negative feelings throughout experiencing oppression and working to create social change, and (6) *Benefits for Me*, including the positive feelings resulting from engaging in social change and how I believed activism has directly helped me.

Recognizing Oppression and Privilege

The first theme that emerged was my recognition of injustice and oppression. I acknowledged my history of recognizing oppression and seeing different examples of this. I stated, “I always recognized the world as a place in which bigotry, oppression, and hatred existed.” I spoke generally to oppression as a phenomenon and my observation and perception of hurtful behavior. I went on to say, “People just say shit without any awareness that they’re hurting people.” Understanding the reality of oppression was important to my definition of social justice activism. I described social justice in the following way: “I think it’s about recognizing that there is injustice and oppression in the world.”

I spoke more extensively to my memories of experiencing oppression. I stated, “I can’t recall a time in my life in which I did not feel discriminated against, harassed, or oppressed. Some of my earliest memories are of abuse, neglect, invalidation. It’s sad, but harassment and oppression seemed like normal for the majority of my life.” I spoke to the social messages I received as well: “I received oppressive messages from my family, peers, teachers, and the larger, dominant culture.” Thus, I recognized oppression as a larger phenomenon as well as having directly impacted my own life.

I described my experiences of oppression and trauma throughout my interview. I spoke to experiences of being bullied, invalidated, and a history of abuse. Interestingly, I focused primarily on my experiences of trauma and indicated conceptualizing my trauma as oppression. I indicated, “…the trauma is really important to my worldview and experiences.” I further spoke to my experiences of oppression and trauma contributing to struggles in my personal life. I explained, “The combination of experiences of abuse and

oppression in addition to the intense invalidation and punishment led me to develop unhelpful relationship patterns. I assumed that people would hurt me so I became intensely distrustful: always waiting to be hurt and left." I added that this also contributed to my behavior being oppressive and hurtful at different times. One example of this was when I commented, "I have done the critical comments and judging bullshit too. And it ultimately pushed people away."

I spoke to the oppression I internalized about my identities, particularly my sexual identity as a bisexual woman. I commented, "Throughout my development, I had a tremendous amount of internalized bi-negativity and felt ashamed of having attractions to men- as if that made me a traitor to feminists." I spoke to feeling blamed for my status as a survivor of abuse. I described feeling isolated by the lack of social support and oppressive messages I received from others about these identities and statuses.

I emphasized that my past trauma informed my interest in social justice and motivation to create positive social change. I stated, "For my own life, it's about recognizing that I have experienced trauma and taking action to ensure that it doesn't happen to anyone else."

Recognizing Privilege

I also reported recognizing the privileges I gained from my social identities. I described experiencing privilege related to my race/ethnicity, being able-bodied, educated, and my socio-economic status. I spoke to my understanding of White privilege in the following way:

> All the oppressions, harassment, and abuse I experienced were never connected to my race and ethnicity. I definitely have White privilege. And I think that affects

> my life in ways I'm not even aware of. Things I accept as normal… everyday things like shopping without being suspected of criminal activity or not being asked to represent all White people are evidence of my White privilege.

I spoke to my perceptions of my financial privileges in the following way: "Although I have financial limitations, I know I am going to get a job that will give me financial security." Thus, I acknowledged that even while perceiving myself to have disadvantages, I also held privilege for my upward mobility. I spoke to privilege regarding my education status as well. I reported, "The very fact that I feel entitled to an education and realistically expect to earn these degrees is evidence of privilege."

I acknowledged feeling less aware of my privileges than my experiences of oppression. I stated, "Mostly, I think that all these privileges are things I often take for granted. It's easier for me to be aware of the oppression than the privilege. The privileges are the things I don't have to think about. I have the option to ignore my privileges."

Becoming an Activist

Having recognized the negative impact of my past experiences of oppression and trauma, I acknowledged the challenge of learning how to productively move forward to create positive social change. I explained, "That's been a big growth edge for me in my own process of healing: learning how to challenge my own violence and hurtful anger." I spoke to my difficulty knowing how to get involved in social justice work:

> It was hard to connect with people and imagine working together to create positive change. Activism always seemed like this formal idea of marching in Washington D.C. or carrying protest signs in Civil Rights marches. I had difficulty imaging how I could realistically contribute - how I could positively influence anything or anyone.

Thus, although I believed I valued social justice and activism throughout my life, I had difficulty translating that interest into concrete activist action and behavior. I spoke to my struggle to get involved, not knowing how I could begin to create change.

I went on to speak to learning how to apply social justice values and principles in my life and work during a training experience at the University of Utah. I explained,

> But the change for me really started to happen when I was in the Women's Resource Center practicum. I was finally in a place to talk about the importance of social justice activism and be heard. Even more, my supervisors were teaching my cohort sisters and me about the significance of activism - that activism is both an intervention and outcome in feminist multicultural therapy. I started thinking more concretely about activism. I realized that activism took many forms.

I also spoke to learning from role models. I described my experiences being formally trained at the University of Utah's Women's Resource Center in feminist multicultural therapy and learning how to incorporate social justice interventions into my counseling, outreach/programming work, and interpersonal process. I reflected:

> The WRC gave me women role models who were really doing the work they talked about doing. And like the rest of us, they were flawed and made mistakes. They showed me that people who do activism make mistakes and have to pick themselves up, apologize for hurtful behavior, and be accountable for all of our actions all the time. They taught me to learn from my mistakes.

I continued to describe learning from my peers in my practicum cohort about incorporating social justice into interpersonal process, conversations, and relationships. I added that my cohort was an educational experience because it taught me how to collaborate with other activists. I said, "Maybe more important than anything else, my cohort sisters and the women at the WRC taught me that you can't be an activist alone. It's not work we can realistically do individually. We gotta have each other's backs and push each other forward."

Further, I spoke to learning how to do social justice activism as an ongoing process. I described challenging myself to learn about nonviolent communication. I said, “So much of my interest in social justice work is about nonviolence and practicing nonviolence in my own life as well as teaching it/learning more about nonviolent communication with others.”

Community and Connection

Throughout my interview, I spoke to passion for connection and community. I reflected, “Love is so core to everything I value and support. I love people. I love connection and developing relationships with people.” For me, connection and relationships appeared to be important to my understanding of the meaning of social justice activism. I commented, “For me, activism is about building community and working together to create change.”

I reflected on my desire to connect with others during the experiential activity of the interview. I spoke to writing words on my illustration that captured my passion for connection. I stated:

> Love is core to my passion for social justice and desire to create peace. I've written "peaceful" with a flower and "passion" near the heart… I have words like "nature-loving," "tree-hugger," and "connection" there to reflect my interest in connecting with not only people but nonhuman animals, and the Earth in general.

I emphasized believing social justice was about peaceful connection with others. I described my interest in being engaged in processes with people that focused on collaboration and partnership. I explained:

> I think social justice is about nonviolence and about communicating peacefully. It’s about working together. It’s about helping and sharing… It’s about loving each other. I think social justice is about empathy… recognizing myself in others

> and others in myself. It's about patience and commitment to being engaged in a challenging (at times very difficult) process with others to get through the shit we've internalized about oppression and injustice being normal.

I went on to describe my interest and approach to conversations that might be considered social justice. I stated, "I incorporate activism into my personal and professional relationships, in which I connect with people across a spectrum of worldviews and political beliefs and participate in conversations that question belief systems and values."

Community was another important theme. I went so far as to recommend that people seek out communities to become involved with in order to do social justice activism: "Any advice I might have for other activists would be about building/finding community." I continued, "My experience has been that it was helpful to walk into an activist community that was already established at the Women's Resource Center. Those women taught me how to DO activism… beyond thinking about the idea of social justice."

Although I emphasized community and connection throughout my interview, I most clearly emphasized my belief that connection with other people is vital to meaning of social justice activism when I stated:

> The whole point is to have community: to be connected to others. To build relationships and work on hard shit with people… together. I have come so far as an activist and in my own healing because people stuck with me. People grew with me and loved me and were patient with me. Without my activist community in SLC, I wouldn't be where I am in my healing.

Thus, I acknowledged that community was important to both my personal healing and my activist work. I indicated these two concepts were interconnected and both important to my understanding of social justice activism.

Creating Change

Another theme that emerged was my interest in creating positive social change. I stated, “I think social justice is about creating change in the world.” I described my interest and experience with taking action and steps to create change. For me, social justice meant doing work to end oppression. I explained, “I think it’s about recognizing that there is injustice and oppression in the world and taking action to make sure it stops. It’s also about understanding how change happens and choosing strategies that are effective. It’s not as simple as expecting it to happen overnight.”

Further, I distinguished between my understanding of social change more broadly and what it meant for my life specifically. I continued, “For my own life, it’s about recognizing that I have experienced trauma and taking action to ensure that it doesn’t happen to anyone else. I don’t want anyone to ever go through what I went through.” I also emphasized the importance of collaboration in my efforts to create positive social change. I stated, “I want to be healthy and happy and successful with others. So for me, activism is also about building community and working together to create change.”

I acknowledged different approaches to creating change. I described the work I observed other people to be doing and the progress that came from their efforts. I expressed interest in understanding activism from different perspectives. One example of this was when I described social justice as “understanding that there is no single correct perspective, but there are many helpful, creative ways to create change, and create a life and world that is egalitarian and peaceful.”

I spoke to doing change work in the contexts of relationships, counseling, teaching, and research. I noted this perspective was largely informed by my training:

"When my cohort sisters and I started thinking about therapy as activism, I began thinking about other things like teaching and relationships as activism." I described believing feminist multicultural therapy was social justice work in the following ways:

> Feminist multicultural therapy itself is activism because we're creating change by collaborating with our clients in increasing consciousness and ultimately contributing to people making more informed, empowered choices that lead to change. FMC challenges the status quo and questions the origins and benefits of different values and beliefs systems.

I spoke to specific behaviors I engaged in that I believed contributed to change. I described making comments in conversations to encourage people to consider different perspectives and even challenge their biases. I reflected, "As I imagine the antiracist activism I do… I think making comments in relationships with friends about where they learned to think certain way… I challenge generalizations and encourage people to consider alternative understandings." I went on to describe my efforts to "[go] out to classes, talking to people on campuses about sexual assault prevention and multiculturalism - [which] feels like more direct activism." I also reported believing my physical appearance had implications for social justice as it may have challenged dominant culture beliefs about women's beauty. I stated, "I also think of my appearance as an expression of my activism. The counter culture look I have going on with my dreads, piercings, and tattoos feels like a way to challenge mainstream expectations about how women are supposed to look."

As I reflected on my activist beliefs and experiences, I spoke to believing I had been engaging in action to create social change even before I realized that was what I was doing. I said, "I realized that to varying degrees I had been participating in activism all along. I was doing things the whole time that promoted social change."

Struggles

Another major theme that emerged from my interview pertained to my struggles while doing social justice activism. I reported concern and fear about being invalidated for my social justice beliefs. I stated, “I definitely feel discouraged at times. I feel that I’m alone in seeing things the way I see them. I feel isolated. I worry about being rejected and not accepted for being myself as an activist.” I described questioning myself and considering how I might not be adequate or effective in my activism. I added that when I feel overwhelmed by the process of creating change, I consider giving up. I stated, “I worry about giving up on everything because of the fear of being rejected. I wonder what it would be like to have things easier. I feel like I’m not strong enough to be the activist I’m trying to be.”

I also indicated feeling overwhelmed at times by recognizing oppression in the world. I said:

> I can also feel overwhelmed by the amount of injustice and oppression that we need to change. It seems unrealistic at times. It’s exhausting to keep challenging microaggressions and figure out how to supportively or explicitly challenge people who say things without any awareness of what they’re doing. It’s particularly infuriating to challenge other professionals’ (e.g., training or licensed psychologists) microaggressions.

I emphasized concern about taking action to challenge others, noting, “There are times that I know I choose to say nothing when an oppressive comment is made.” I attributed some of my struggle to not speak up and take action to feeling overwhelmed and afraid. I continued, “It feels overwhelming to keep going and challenging people. It’s also exhausting and hard to work on my own shit as an activist.” Thus, I acknowledged the struggle of challenging myself, including deconstructing my biases and evaluating my perspectives. Finally, I spoke to my concerns about becoming so fatigued by social

justice work that I may feel forced to stop. I reflected, “I worry about burnout. I’m discouraged by battle fatigue.”

Benefits for Me

A final theme that emerged from my interview pertained to belief that I benefitted from participating in social justice activism. I spoke to my social justice values contributing to my resilience during times of trauma and oppression. I reported that in spite of feeling “powerless to stop or control it, I had awareness and a political analysis of what was going on. I had a sense that it wouldn’t happen forever - that things would get better at some point.” Thus, my beliefs also contributed to hope for the future and optimism that change was possible.

I emphasized that the social support that came from my activist communities also helped me work through distress related to past trauma and oppression. I explained, “Without my activist community [in Salt Lake City], I wouldn’t be where I am in my healing.” I added later, “Activism has been hugely important to my healing. That is a huge part of why this dissertation seems relevant and meaningful to me.”

I also reflected on benefits that other people derive from social justice work. I reflected on feminist multicultural therapy in the following way: “I think social justice activism is important to feminist multicultural therapy because it leads to increased feelings of empowerment and strength.” I went on to describe the empowerment other people may derive from creating change:

> Changing the context that oppresses people leads to empowerment - feeling that our contribution is significant and meaningful - and maybe most importantly, we can actually have the power to end oppression. We can make the changes needed

> to ensure that no one else will experience the hatred and abuse that we experienced.

I also indicated feeling increased empowerment from my social justice efforts. I noted believing my choice to engage in social justice activism was an empowered choice to create positive change. I stated, “It means that I made the choice to contribute positively rather than replicate the abuse that was inflicted on me.”

I emphasized believing social justice activism contributed to a larger sense of meaning and purpose in my life. I stated, “For me, knowing that I am helping keep others safe makes me feel that my time on this planet is meaningful.” I added, “Having a social justice perspective is core to my identity as a person too. It fuels my love for people and my investment in living this life. It feels like the wood that keeps the fire burning. It helps me know that change is possible and worth working toward.” Finally, I concluded my interview by emphasizing the gratitude and hope for the future I derived from engaging in social justice: “In spite of all the negative shit that can get tied up with being an activist, I feel grateful for everything I’ve learned, and I trust that amazing things are coming.”

In summary, my responses to the interview questions revealed six themes related to my experiences and understandings of activism. I described having awareness and experience with oppression and privilege, which created a context for valuing social justice and being motivated to take social action. I explained some of my experiences in my journey of becoming an activist, as well as my strategies and approaches to create social change. I emphasized my understanding of social justice activism as a relational

process. Finally, I described the struggles and benefits I experienced as a social justice activist. In the next chapter, I explain the themes that emerged from participants' answers to the interview questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this research was to increase understanding of the meaning of social justice activism for sexual minority/queer women and transgender activists, including how interpretations, understandings, and experiences of multiple intersecting identities inform their styles and types of activism and how the approaches that sexual minority/queer women and transgender activists choose may be reflections of the meaning they attribute to activism. The goal of this investigation was to attempt to develop a conceptual model to demonstrate participants' experiences and understandings of social justice activism.

This chapter provides an analysis of participants' interviews regarding their descriptions of their identities, experiences, and understandings of oppression and privilege, as well as their experiences and understandings of social justice and activism. This analysis also identifies the major themes that emerged from the data in an attempt to identify both the divergences and convergences of experiences. Each participant's description was integrated into a conceptual model that attempts to capture the richness of their experiences.

Ten themes emerged from participants' descriptions of their social justice interests, experiences, and personal identities: (1) *Recognizing and Experiencing Privilege and Oppression*, including awareness and personal experiences of these issues; (2) *Activist Evolution*, including their activist developments and evolutions as well as learning about social justice and activism; (3) *Activist Identity*, including identifying as a social justice activist, believing in fairness and equity, and seeing their part in a bigger picture; (4) *Doing Change Work*, including participants discussing the types of activisms they choose to engage in to create social change, taking action, doing their activism intrapsychically, working with others, and wanting to do more; (5) *Connection & Community*, including activist communities, having community and connecting with others, seeing others doing the work, and getting people involved; (6) *Being Engaged in the Process*, including engaging in the process, questioning activism, and coping; (7) *Struggles*, including the negative impact of activism on the activist, struggles involved in the process, taking breaks, and not doing social justice; and (8) *Positive Outcomes*, including the positive impact of activism on the activist, being supported, and seeing positive external outcomes of activism. Brackets in quotations (i.e., [ ]) indicate changes were made for clarification.

Recognizing and Experiencing Privilege and Oppression

A central theme for participants when discussing their identities and activist experiences was the recognition of privilege and oppression in society. Participants described recognizing that oppression occurs in society, in their families, to other people, and to themselves. They also described their reactions to experiencing and recognizing

oppression. Similarly, participants described having awareness of privilege, recognizing their own privileges and advantages, and their negative reactions to their privilege. In this section, I first discuss the participants' recognition of oppression in society, including recognizing oppression in their families, receiving oppressive social messages, seeing others oppressed, their own experiences of oppression, as well as their reactions to oppression. Second, I describe participants' recognition of their own privilege, awareness of privilege in society, and reactions to privilege.

Recognizing Oppression

All participants described recognizing oppression, disadvantages, and a lack of fairness in society. While reflecting on her work with children as a teacher, Maria commented, "I'm just aware that children don't often receive the respect that is due to them, such as, like, putting a child in time out is not really respecting their power and, like, their agency." Esther reflected on her experiences in high school and her burgeoning awareness about oppression:

> I remember thinking about, in particular, we had school uniforms; and, um, the family coming from… uh… I think it was Lebanon at the time… didn't have any money to afford a school uniform, and... discussing that at the house, you know, and kinda realizing that there's this whole world of broader injustice, um… you know… oppression."

Charlotte acknowledged that larger systemic oppression contributes to individuals in communities of color having difficulty accessing safe public transportation. She stated, "Boston is really segregated in living patterns. There's a few neighborhoods where the majority of communities of color are located, and those neighborhoods have a high rate of exposure to abuse of public transportation."

Alexis recognized the impact of racism historically when she commented, “I mean, even historically over time, families being able to accrue wealth in White families… that hasn’t historically been possible for people of color, um, due to land ownership and stuff like that.” Thus, participants were acknowledging the impact of historical racism on the current oppression experienced by people of color. Participants discussed oppression relevant to diverse groups and targeting specific identities (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism). Jennifer commented on the heterosexism that she perceived to be common in military culture: “I mean, even, um, so with my partner, he… you know the military culture is very, very different from what I’m familiar with; and it’s very common for them to say, like, “gay” like ‘that’s gay’ or ‘he’s a faggot’ or ‘that’s retarded.’” Maria shared her observations of sexism among some parents:

> And I think there’s, you know, a lot of parents that are really sexist about, um, who they want to work with their children. Like, I’ve met lots and lots of mothers that say “I don’t ever want a man to be my child’s preschool teacher. That just weirds me out. I’m uncomfortable with that. There must be something wrong with that man if he’s an early childhood teacher.”

All participants described recognizing in different ways the impact of oppression on people’s lives, including acknowledging the unequal distribution of opportunities and advantages in society. “They” (pseudonym selected by participant) commented, “I think [social justice] means, I mean, it’s being socially aware… I mean, knowing when there are injustices occurring.” All participants acknowledged this to varying degrees and in different ways. The following sections describe participants’ recognition of oppression within their own families and in social messages, as well as how it has directly impacted their own lives.

Oppression in the family. Several participants spoke of experiencing oppression in their own families. They described experiencing their families as unsupportive and recalled receiving hurtful messages from their parents, siblings, and extended family members. Noah stated, "When I first, like, um, came out to my family, I think some of them kind of struggled with it as far as their religion is concerned, because they are devout Catholics, and Catholics don't tend to like the gays." She went on to recall specific instances of being discriminated against by extended family members: "I remember at one point, one of my aunts was, like, following me around when I was hanging out with her children, like I was a fucking creep or something because I was gay."

Participants described believing they could not be their authentic selves, embracing all of their social identities, around their families because they understood their parents expressed discriminatory views. Alexis reflected:

> Even with my mom saying things that I think are condoned, like micro-aggressions in our culture, like, "I wish you wouldn't take the hard road, Alexis… wish you could pick an easier one… uh, I would feel sad if you ever got into a long-term relationship with a person of color or a woman," and here I am.

In some instances, participants reported their families being blatantly disrespectful, expressing heterosexism, sexism, and racism. Sarah stated, "I think as a child seeing/hearing the way my grandfather spoke about blacks, gays, or, really, any non-WASPs, I knew that some people were viewed/treated differently by society."

In other instances, participants spoke of their families outright discriminating and oppressing other family members, including siblings. Jennifer spoke of her and her brother's struggle to be accepted and supported in their sexual minority identities by their

conservative father. In the experiential activity, she described her father in the following way:

> Since my brother and I both have a really hard time with him, he's kind of, like, the part of America that we don't like and kind of, like, the color blind, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and you'll be fine, um, rather than realizing the setbacks people have in society and how not everyone is able to pull themselves up because they don't have bootstraps to begin with. So that's kind of, that's my dad.

Messages we got. Several participants reflected on oppressive societal messages they received. This included observations of media depictions of LGBTQ individuals in which gender and sexual minorities were negatively portrayed and represented. Bri commented on the lack of positive representations of trans women in the media when she commented,

> When trans women are depicted, they're always depicted alone. Um, they're never part of a family. They're never part of anything else, you know. So it's, like, you see lesbian couples modeled on TV. You see gay couples modeled on TV. You see… however problematic they might be, they're there.

Jaden reflected on messages he internalized as a child about gender roles and gender-specific social expectations for boys and girls. He stated:

> I remember in grade school, where, you know, the teacher would ask for helpers or something, and she'd always pick boys… I'm like… you know, because they were carrying stuff or something… I'm, like, so by picking boys you're saying that girls aren't capable of carrying boxes… you know, like, it always angered me that there was this social expectation for girls to be weaker, more passive, you know, like… or that's how they were thought of, you know, when I didn't think it was necessarily true. It made me angry.

Participants also described their struggles with internalizing these stereotypes and oppressive messages. They explained these internalized messages made it challenging for them to be confident and believe in their self-worth. As a result of receiving these messages, they often believed there was something wrong with them or that they were

inadequate somehow. Max emphasized the negative impact of these negative messages on him throughout his development:

> Well, a lot of the messages I was getting in middle school was that, um, the world was really dangerous for queer people and that, um, queer people could maybe grow up, but they couldn't come out. They couldn't have families. They couldn't, um, have regular jobs. They would, you know, maybe they could, like, move to the city and, I don't know, sort of never see anybody again. But, and it, it was still like AIDS was being used as a way to tell you that, like, "Oh, you don't want to be queer because you'll get sick and die." Um, there was just a lot of messages about, "You don't really have a future, like, you're gonna be stuck forever… in… like you were in middle school." Um, like I remember somebody asking me, you know, oh, like, "How are…when you, um, go off to college and you don't live at home anymore, how are you gonna decide which family to spend Thanksgiving with, with your partner?" And I was like, "Gay people go to Thanksgiving?"

Seeing others oppressed. Part of participants' recognition of oppression was recalling specific instances in which they observed others being oppressed, excluded, shamed, harassed, and humiliated. Bridgett recalled an instance in the army in which a sexual minority female soldier was harassed by other female soldiers:

> The thing was, like, she was openly gay… like, she talked about it [to] her girlfriends, and stuff, like it wasn't a big deal. But then... one day [name deleted] started yelling at her; and… she got really pissed, and… I don't really remember the comments, it was like five years ago, but, um, you know, she said something about her girlfriend; and then [name deleted] just freaked out on her; and then, I mean, it's like anything else, you know what I mean, if… people get… I don't know, it's just like saying a rude [comment] any other way, you know.

L. recalled her brother being harassed in high school:

> When my brother was in high school, he, there were a couple of times when he was, um, I don't know if… he wasn't absolutely chased, but more like harassed after school, where people would follow him… people would follow him home after high school and, like, throw things at his car and stuff, um… because he was gay.

Similarly, D. described seeing her brother harassed in school. She shared, "And then my brother, who was older than me, he stuttered, and they'd tease him, and he didn't

care, but I cared." She went on to describe her awareness growing up of the racism her family experienced:

> Traveling with my parents when we were little from Utah to the South and my father would, um, change pretty dramatically when we got to certain parts of the South… because it was the sixties and we were so, he was so kind of family and kid focused; and when we got to those parts, he just was, like, no, he did not play, don't get out of the car, don't speak to anybody, don't stare at anybody, and I think one time, he had to go to the back to get us food, and I just think he just… I didn't know it then… I didn't know what that look was… but I'm sure now that that look was the brokenness and devastation of a proud, honorably working, beautifully compassionate, generous man having to go to the back door of a place to get his children food… and didn't wanna make a misstep while traveling to get them to their home town.

Being Oppressed

Participants described their different experiences of being oppressed, including feeling discriminated against. Jenny shared, "And as far as the survivor piece, I think I get discriminated against a lot because I own that, um, identity, and people think that, 'Oh, you identify as a survivor? You must be really fucked up.'" Similarly, Loraine spoke about her experiences of oppression: "I've definitely been heckled for being queer, been discriminated against on a job for being queer, and for being female." She added, "There's a lot of fat oppression that I've dealt with my whole life." Thus, participants understood the complexities of their experiences of marginalization based on their multiple intersecting identities.

Bri spoke to her increased understanding of sexism and employment discrimination based on her experiences of transitioning. She stated:

> [When] people thought I was a boy, I always got jobs. I always got job interviews. I speak three languages, I'm a veteran, you know all these world experiences, I've been to different countries… it's, like, "Here's your job." And then when you get an interview as a woman or as a physically queer woman or as some flavor of

> something that's not me, all of a sudden those very same qualities don't even get a callback.

Several participants spoke to their experiences of being verbally harassed and called oppressive names by strangers. L. stated, "I've been called 'a fag.'" Noah reported, "I've been hassled on the street for, like, holding hands with other women and stuff like that." There were also descriptions of being physically threatened and harassed. Paz stated, "I've been physically, uh… kind of threatened for identifying… for somebody knowing I identified as a sexual minority."

In addition to discrimination and harassment, participants also described their experiences of being personally oppressed with regard to feeling stereotyped, judged, dehumanized, and tokenized. Several participants described people making negative assumptions about them based on their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identity. "They" commented, "Sometimes there's assumptions about how I got it… 'How did you get educated?' You know… affirmative action… all this kind of craziness." Similarly, D. shared, "I think people see me sometimes, and they assume that I'm not smart, um, just because I'm Black."

Reaction to oppression. Most participants described having emotional reactions to their observations and experiences of oppression. They indicated the oppression and discrimination contributed to feelings of sadness, isolation, hopelessness, and anxiety. They also described feeling concern for others and discouraged and disappointed that others were being oppressed.

Maria reflected on her fear of coming out about her sexual identity to her family: "When I was first coming out, there were a lot of people that reacted negatively, er, that I was definitely feeling scared to come out to because I was, like, afraid of their reaction."

Charlotte spoke to her fear of being influenced by the oppression her overall community experiences. She said, “I guess it more hits me now and then so… I was thinking about police today and how a lot of the community I’m a part of believe… And so I have a little bit of fear associated with the idea of the police.” Charlotte’s fear may be indicative of the fear that many other people in the LGBTQ community experience.

Several participants also described feeling angry about oppression and traditional/ conservative beliefs. Noah described feeling particularly angry in response to a reference made about the “myth of meritocracy” and the idea of people “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.” She commented:

> …that expression, and I hate the way people think that way. “I worked really hard to get my money, and so other people can work really hard to get their money.” But actually, I don’t know, it’s just, like, so untrue. It just, like, completely negates, like, the way that our entire society is built on, like, the backs of poor people and people of color.

Sarah emphasized feeling angry in response to a male peer expressing heterosexism and challenging her on the validity her lesbian identity. She stated:

> I think that… even when it falls on deaf ears and you feel like you can’t get through to somebody or feel like, I’m gonna use this guy for an example ‘cause he’s been particularly obnoxious lately… he’s, like, ugh, there’s so many of them, you know, and… so that kind of gives you a little more motivation maybe, to be, like… not to necessarily be out there, not to necessarily talk to more people… it doesn’t make me feel like that, but it makes me feel like… you know what, I am gonna fuckin’ hold my girlfriend’s hand at the mall. So what… you know… you get that kind of feeling, like, I’m gonna defy you just because I’m annoyed by your unwillingness to listen.

Recognizing Privilege

Most participants acknowledged having privilege for their different identities and statuses. They spoke to the different types of privilege they experienced and discussed

how certain identities may carry privilege some of the time, but not all of the time. L. reflected on the privilege she experiences for being heard by others as a White woman talking about racial injustice:

> You know, if I was speaking up about racial injustice… I had the benefit of the doubt, because people would think, oh, she's just… you know, if I was a woman of color, people would more easily ignore it because you know, oh, she's, you know, just advocating for herself, or she's perceived that way… whereas as a White woman, I think you or a White person, you get the benefit of the doubt which is unfair and unearned but useful… can be useful.

Indeed, several participants who identified as White/European American acknowledged their White privilege. Esther stated, "I carry around with me quite a lot of privilege as a White person in particular."

Additionally, participants discussed privilege they experienced for their socio-economic status, such as when Alexis commented, "Being upper middle class links me to a whole bunch of privileges that somebody who didn't have that wouldn't… even if I don't make a lot of money now, I still have links." "They" acknowledged receiving privilege for their education status: "It's education, but I know that that is not always something that is seen. It's an invisible privilege."

Paz described benefitting from presenting her gender as conventionally feminine (e.g., long hair). She explained that her gender presentation influenced how other people perceived her as potentially being heterosexual rather than a sexual minority woman. She commented, "Even when I'm naming a minority identity, there are times when I still get the privilege associated with it… you know, being read as being normative." This, again, is a reflection on participants' awareness of the complexity of their identities and simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression.

Jaden described his awareness of a new privilege in his life, following his transition: "passing" privilege. He discussed his developing understanding of passing privilege:

> It's so complicated. And then I also have "passing" privilege, too, that I just in the last year have kind of been, you know… uh… well, I had this, like, awakening, like, wow, I have passing privilege, you know, 'cause who'd of thought… that there would be all this privilege… not only male privilege and White privilege but now passing privilege because I pass so easily and not all trans people do… especially trans women, um, so… again, it's just this huge responsibility, like what do I do with this privilege, you know. So I hopefully am using it a lot more consciously.

Awareness of privilege. Participants' previous descriptions of their privilege suggest that most participants already have a strong awareness of the advantages and benefits they experience as a result of their identities and statuses. However, many participants also made specific references to their awareness of privilege. For example, Jennifer shared, "I guess I'm just always so aware of privilege." Similarly, Charlotte stated, "I realized that because of, um, like, because of having a lot of privilege and having a lot of my identities being, um, dominant ones, but they were ones I don't have to think about everyday unless I choose to."

Owning their privilege was another important part of many participants' descriptions of their awareness of privilege. It was not enough to just acknowledge they experienced privilege, but many participants described needing to own that in order to do social justice activism. This is clear in Jenny's description of owning her White privilege:

> Um, I wrote White. Um, I purposely did that in black because I think it's… this is a huge… it's the only black color on the page. This is a really, it's a privileged status, and it's a really big struggle of mine, and I identify as privileged in that way, and that's part of my larger process is really owning my White privilege.

J. emphasized feeling aware of the privilege she received for her citizenship status. She stated, “I’m a citizen of the United States. I was born here so I am very conscious of the fact that, um… I receive a number of privileges for being a citizen that, um, a lot of people I know don’t, uh, which is primarily why I’m involved in a lot of immigrant rights organizing.” Thus, J.’s awareness was particularly meaningful given her interest in working with immigration rights.

Further, two participants discussed the importance of owning their cisgender privilege (i.e., privilege for presenting as gender normative, gender typical for the individual’s assigned sex, originating from the Latin “cis,” meaning “on this side of”). Paz commented, “Because I neither identify as transgender or intersex, this has added a dimension to my research/ teaching in terms of being sure that I am keeping myself aware of my own privilege.” Also, Esther reflected on doing research with transgender populations as a cisgender woman:

> So for instance with transgender populations and, um… it’s about writing, you know, writing research, trying out the research questions, um, when working with trans populations, and not imposing those identities that I hold myself… how much power am I… you know, like, I influence, obviously I influence the questions that I choose, but… you know, I, somebody that is changing the literature… at best… you know, of course, practically I’m probably doing nothing but… trying to change the literature about trans issues and what I say does, can influence at least perceptions of what people’s experiences are like, but that’s not my experience, and so I think being acutely aware of a, trying to be aware of my privilege that I come in with is not trans, um, and, um, how I can talk about somebody else’s experience from a different personal experience.

Activist Evolution

A second major theme that emerged in this study was participants’ experiences of becoming activists. Although participants were not asked directly to comment on their

activist developments, most participants provided sequential descriptions of their processes of first becoming aware of social injustices/ oppression, beginning to engage in activism, and how their activist interests and work has changed/ progressed over the course of their lives. The major theme, *Activist Evolution*, describes these processes.

Early Awareness

Most participants described understanding at an early age that there is injustice in the world. L. described first becoming aware of oppression that she experienced first-hand: "I think because I'm a White female and that being aware of discrimination against females was more… I was aware of it at an earlier age than I was aware of discrimination on racial lines or other lines, because it was… it was me, so it was right in front of me."

Bridgett discussed her awareness and observations of racist statements in her predominantly White community when she was growing up. She described hearing other people make discriminatory statements as an important part of her increased awareness. Bridgett shared, "This really helped me create awareness of different situations people may encounter."

Cicely described an incident in elementary school that contributed to their first awareness that race was a heated topic for many people:

> Probably third grade when my third grade teacher… this is the first time in my schooling that I had to do, um, a standardized test… and, um, they required me to indicate my race on the test, and I didn't know the answer… 'cause I looked at all the options, and they were all words that I knew… but I didn't know which one of those was me. And some of them seemed to be colors… you know, white or brown, uh, white and black I mean… so those are colors and I knew what color I was… I was brown… and so there was a section for other, and so, in other, I wrote brown. I gathered my thoughts about it and figured this out and never asked for any help. And, uh, my teacher was not pleased with this, and she called my mother. She went and got me in trouble, basically. She called my mother; and

> she's, like, you know, "Cicely won't fill out the paper properly." Mom's, like, 'It's just a question, of course she's brown. Stop calling me at work.' So that's when I realized that there's something really, really important going on, and that I don't have all the information for, and that grown-ups get real upset about. So that's probably the first time I understood that, you know, things weren't all good.

Activist Beginning

Sixteen participants described the beginnings of their interest in social justice activism. For some participants, their activism began as an interest in changing and stopping injustice. For others, such as Cicely, their activist involvement began in an attempt to connect with others. They shared, "My activism started as a desire for social community… for faces of people who looked like me." A common theme for several participants was a sense of social isolation throughout their developments; thus, involvement as activists was an opportunity to find communities of like-minded individuals.

For many participants, their activist developments began in their childhoods. Loraine disclosed that her development as an activist largely began by observing her parents' involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. She explained:

> But I think I first became an activist watching my parents and my grandparents fight to make sure that our church stayed a church for the people in the neighborhood and people in the community, because we were in DC at a time when the DC neighborhoods were changing and more Blacks were moving up into DC from the South after WWII. And White flight was happening with Whites moving out to the suburbs and away from Black people moving in, and there was a lot of neighborhood-by-neighborhood racial tension, and my parents and my grandparents very clearly took a stand and said, "We're not leaving the church. We're gonna help the church survive with the new people who are moving into the neighborhood, and if it's a big Black church or primarily Black church, that's fine."

Max explained that his motivation to engage in social change began when he realized there was a lack of role models and examples of people he related to that were thriving. He discussed in his interview the isolation he felt throughout his development and how this ultimately fueled his motivation. He commented:

> Like I remember being in… like, eighth and ninth grade, especially, they make you read a lot of books where people die before they grow up. I don't know why, but we read, like, *A Separate Piece*. We read *Of Mice and Men*. We read, uh… those were two big ones, and, um, often in those novels there's some, like, innocent character who just, they just… die. Like, rather than change, they, um… and they're always the ones you like the best, and the ones you're, like, cheering for; and then, um, just… dead. And so… starting from the time I was, like, twelve or thirteen years old, it felt like if I was gonna have a chance of surviving, that I was gonna have to work hard to make the world, like, ready for me.

Jaden shared that his motivation to engage in activism began when he started to study Zen and meditation. He shared, "It was really my own healing, my own inner healing… when I started doing my own, like, spiritual work and my own, like, emotional work, is really when I started getting involved in activism." He described the importance of "examining [his] own emotional state and getting [himself] healthy" and the impact that had on his current activism.

Activist Evolution

Fourteen participants described how their activism and their perspectives on activism changed over time. Paz reflected during the experiential activity on her early perspectives on creating social change and observed the difference between her current views and her previous perspectives. She stated, "It's just interesting to me how much that has probably changed across my lifetime. It's not just kind of across age or experience, but I think it's the way I've kind of thought about activism that has changed."

Cicely spoke to their changing interests in activism. They described previously preferring to pursue social change they believed would directly benefit them; however, they were beginning to consider participating in activism that would not directly impact issues related to their social identities. They stated:

> I might be ready to move into activism that doesn't directly affect me, um, which is amazing. I don't understand how other people do it first… like, how they work for things that aren't going to directly benefit them all day long. But now I can, and it's very new for me to think about. I want to start educating myself and maybe find a group so that… who already exists, who's doing activism around some things that don't directly affect me. That's kind of, uh, an amazing shift.

Participants described their changing perspectives and understandings of social justice issues over time. Shelby described her experience of growing up with traditional, conservative religious beliefs and shifting her perspectives to focus on social justice. She stated:

> I went from being, you know, a very religious individual transitioning to the complete opposite, um… being very in-your-face and very activist… to… where I am now, where I'm in the middle… where I am able to speak about things. But it's not to the point where people will necessarily want to throw me out because I'm being disrespectful.

Similarly, J. described her social justice interests within her activist community shifting over time from a focus on fighting and challenging hatred to creating spaces in which love and connection was the primary goal. She explained:

> Focusing our activism not on, like, countering all the hate, but really creating spaces where, um, we could really celebrate each other, like, love for each other, love for our community and that sort of thing. So even, like, the focus of our activism shifted from, like, being, like, really oriented towards, towards, uh, always, like, feeling, like, we were fighting, fighting towards, like, healing or healing our community, so that sort of thing.

Learning about Social Justice Activism

Fourteen participants described their processes of learning how to get involved in activism. They spoke to the importance of role models and being given direction and guidance in learning activist approaches. Noah emphasized this when she said:

> I mean, people taught me how to organize. People taught me how to, you know, I just didn't learn any of this shit on my own. And, I guess, I figured some of it out along the way, but people taught me how to organize. People taught me the philosophy of community organizing. People taught me how to listen. People taught me how to, you know, talk to people respectfully and engage in thoughtful dialogue, things like that.

Thus, Noah emphasized the complexity of learning how to do activism as well as the importance of having role models and teachers.

J. spoke to her choice to identify as "Chicana" as a result of learning about social justice activism. She explained:

> I started identifying as "Chicana," um, when I was, like, a young, like, teenager, um, because I learned about, like, the Chicano movement and its significance as far as… fighting for the rights of people who were, like, of immigrant origins, or who were Mexican but were here prior to the border being established.

Jennifer described learning from teachers and role models about effective ways to communicate with other people through activism. She stated, "Through them, I learned that social activists won't get anywhere by lecturing or pointing any fingers." Approaching activism in ways that make positive impacts and allow others to hear them without feeling defensive are strategies that several participants described. Jenny explained, "Part of being an activist is learning how to be accessible to others, and when we become rigid in our thinking, we can no longer be helpful in the sharing of information/having dialogues."

Education Relevant to Social Justice

Eight participants spoke to studying activism in academic settings. They described studying social work, public policy, sexology, nonviolent communication, social movements, and women's studies/gender studies. Esther commented on the importance of pursuing social justice interests even in her studies: “It feels, like… going to grad school… a big part of thinking about career and thinking about training was oriented around social justice.”

Noah described finding a sense of belonging in gender studies. She felt surrounded by people who were similar to her. She stated, “I mean, I think it influenced, like, my, like, finding that moment of feeling a sense of, like, belonging in terms of… gender studies. I actually saw, like, uh, more of, like, my life or people who kind of lived like me, like, represented, and it being, like, a legitimate thing.”

Choosing Activism

Ten participants described their processes of choosing areas of social justice activism on which to focus. One example of this was Cicely’s description of selecting particular activist groups. They stated, “I’ve been very careful this time with, uh, choosing the groups and the energy that I put in so I don’t get burned out again.” Loraine also pointed out, “We make choices every day about where we put our energy.”

“They” spoke to choosing to be involved in activism that afforded them autonomy and opportunity to do activism the way they prefer. They said, “I mean it’s, like, I like to do it on my own terms.” They described their dilemma of feeling restricted in the political statements they could make given their leadership position at their job as well as

expectations that they represented their job. They emphasized choosing to engage in activism that was congruent with their values; however, they often felt stifled by the expectations of their job.

Charlotte described her collaboration with an activist group and the group's process of deciding on a grassroots approach to creating change. She explained:

> So wanting to get more trans-activism going in Philly, and so we had options a couple of times to try to go more, like, high-level route, and get a senator to call the public transportation office, or whatever, but we really wanted it to be grassroots, because our secondary, like, equal to our goal of changing public policy was the goal of getting people involved and engaged.

Max discussed choosing to be involved in social justice work that fit his personal interests rather than working with formal activist movements. He shared:

> There are ways I could be involved in sort-of formal movements for educational change, but, um, just because I really like getting to actually do the teaching, and actually write the curriculums, and do the math, I've chosen, instead, to be involved in working directly with teachers and students, helping figure out how to change their classrooms and how to do more student-centered, more, um, more respectful math education.

Finding fit. Eight participants spoke to their experiences of figuring out how they fit into established activist groups, and how they fit into social justice work, in general. Charlotte described her process of figuring out how her activism could fit or be compatible with her job. She stated, "I guess, just a little bit of what I sort of just mentioned about now taking a little break from the transit justice activism… as I try to figure out how that fits into my job… and so, just gettin' a little complicated… when your job overlaps with your activism."

D. explained that much of her interest in social work had to do with opportunities she perceived to get involved in social justice activism. She indicated she initially became involved in her field because the work fit with her values and interests. She stated:

> I totally found social work because I was unhappy in education, and I had a boyfriend at that time; and I told my boyfriend, and he said, "Well, take a class with me." And, um, I said, "Sure." And it just, it opened up that space for me, and, like, "Wow, this is kinda cool." And I found my niche."

Conversely, Esther explained that she initially pursued social work with the hope of being involved in social action; however, she did not believe social work was the right fit for her. She said:

> Being in the social work world, um, and activism in social work looking a certain way, and for me, it didn't quite feel like that fit with what I wanted to do, not that that wasn't a perfectly fine way to go about social justice. It just didn't feel like what resonated with me the most for what I wanted to do in social justice.

Esther and D.'s different perceptions of the goodness-of-fit with social work are examples of the different experiences and meanings of social justice activism for these participants. Although they both described valuing social justice, they approached it differently, and both approaches appeared valid and meaningful to each individual.

Noah articulated her process of finding ways to fit into social justice activism after moving to a new geographic location. She explained, "I'm still kind of trying to figure out how social justice work exists in my community, and… how I fit into that, because I'm not from the South; and I don't entirely understand how things work still, even though I've been living here for a couple of years." Finding ways to fit into communities and activism appeared to be a process that required time and patience.

Activist Identity

Another theme that emerged from participants' interviews pertained to their activist identities. As *Activist Evolution* was primarily about participants' experiences that contributed to them becoming activists and getting involved in activism, *Activist*

Identity is about participants' arrival at their activist identities. They spoke to considering themselves activists, incorporating social justice in their lives, and having worldviews that emphasized fairness, equality, and respect for other people.

Social Justice Identity

Sixteen participants explicitly identified themselves as activists. They spoke to this identity as an important label, but they also described the meaning it carried for them. Loraine said during the experiential activity, while describing her identities, "I'm writing down 'bi spokesperson', 'sex educator,' um… 'sex radical,' and 'social justice activist.'" D. commented, "I'm a gifted social justice advocate, speaker, and facilitator." Although most participants described believing they were somehow directly involved in social action, Sarah emphasized believing she did not see herself explicitly being a social justice activist. She stated, "I'm a 'covert activist,' I think… is how I would describe myself… in my social justice activism."

Some participants described their activist identities as being very central to their self-concepts. Jenny explained that people throughout her life have perceived her to always be working toward social change. As she reflected on others' perceptions of her, she stated, "And so, I think, now it's, like, 'Oh Jenny's got another cause,' or 'Jenny's got another something else that she's passionate about.' And… that's just always been my life calling, even since I was little."

Max emphasized believing his identity as an activist was related to survival. Throughout his interview, he described the lack of positive representations and messages

regarding sexual and gender minorities. He indicated believing his involvement in activism was essential to help him survive and thrive. He explained:

> I felt like I wanted to… like, I wanted to survive. I wanted to be an adult. I wanted to have a job. I wanted to, if not have a kids kind of family, like a household and be connected with my family and my partners family… and in order to do that, and be safe and sane, like, I was going to have to be an activist."

It should also be noted that 5 participants described feminism as being important to their identities as social justice activists. Loraine commented during the experiential activity, "and 'feminist'… I could consider it in my definition of social justice activist, but I'm giving it its own line." Similarly, Jenny stated, "The feminist identity is really true to who I am, and it's really at the core of what I do."

While an activist identity carried positive meaning for multiple participants, it also carried negative meaning for some. Bri noted that this identity sometimes felt out of her control because she was often expected to be a representative of transgender issues in different social contexts. She explained, "I'm a person taking on a cause. I'm definitely a representative of that. And so, you know, uh, 'We need a trans person's voice for whatever.' Or oft[en] times in social work it's just like, 'Ok, Bri's gonna talk.'" She went on to explain that carrying this identity led her to feel tokenized by others at different times.

Being a social justice activist. In addition to descriptions of their activist identities, 17 participants spoke to having social justice worldviews, ethos, and generally approaching their lives with social justice intentions.

Bridgett stated, "I guess, it's just kind of natural for me to… like, I'm the kind of person that would rather be helping people." Although Bridgett did not identify herself explicitly as a social justice activist, she described examples throughout her interviews of

engaging in prosocial behavior aimed at helping people. In a similar vein, “They” described feeling some resistance to labeling themselves an activist because there might be assumptions that one should constantly engage in activism with that label. However, they explained, “I don’t think I’m always on… as an activist, but I think there’s a part of me that has that activist sort of approach to situations.”

Several participants described their lifestyles having been influenced by social justice. Maria stated, “’Cause I think, like, it can really be, sort of, like, an ethos about how you’re living your day-to-day life.” Alexis shared, “Social activism kind of feels like… oxygen in the air, almost… and it’s always there. There’s always an opportunity that’s sitting around, and inside of me, and a part of me.”

D. emphasized believing social justice permeates her values and her different roles, both personally and professionally. Indeed, when asked at the end of the interview if she had any final thoughts about her activism, she replied simply and eloquently, “It’s just in my heart.”

Having purpose and direction. Thirteen participants described gaining a sense of purpose and direction as a result of identifying as an activist and participating in social justice activism. Shelby shared, “I’m driven to be an activist.” They described gaining a sense of purpose, drive, and direction for the future through their social justice interests and activist work. Jennifer reflected on the meaning of social justice activism in her personal life as she stated, “I think it means, um, it gives me a purpose, and it gives me a drive.” Similarly, Jaden shared, “I think, to some degree, it gives me some meaning and purpose, you know.”

Several participants described feeling motivated to live deliberately with the intention of creating positive social change. They described having an increased awareness about their potential impact on others. Indeed, for many participants, this translated to an emphasis on being authentic and living their social justice values. Jenny described having such intention when she commented, "But it definitely means… I learned the intention, too, like, I'm really clear about my intentions when I do most things, because of all the social justice work that I've done. I'm really, I'm much more aware than I have been because of my social justice advocacy."

Loraine emphasized the importance of social justice throughout her life. She described believing her lifestyle choices and career choices were influenced by her motivation to engage in activism. In her career, she described being deliberate in taking risks that she perceived others to not be taking, and she attributed this to her social justice motivation: "I take risks. And I take them because there is something singing inside my heart that says, 'You can do this. It's alright. It's meant… you're meant for this.'"

Believing in Fairness and Equity

Almost all participants described believing in fairness, equality, and equity. Their beliefs about human rights, as well as animal rights and environmental justice issues, were important motivators for them to be social justice activists. Two important sub-themes emerged related to participants' beliefs: respecting and honoring others, as well as fairness and equality.

Respecting and honoring others. Nineteen participants emphasized their respect and appreciation for people. They spoke to the importance of loving and honoring others,

empathizing with others' experiences, and appreciating different perspectives. "They" stated, "I just think that, you know, that people deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, and equality, um, all of us."

Maria explained that her beliefs in fairness and respect contributed to her motivation to connect with others. She shared, "I'm really driven by respecting people, and that's one of the big drives for me [being] involved in, like, social justice." Indeed, throughout Maria's interviews, she described practicing nonviolent communication and appreciating people's different perspectives. For Maria, and many other participants, being a social justice activist is about having compassion and appreciation for people, in general. She went on to say, "I really, like, try to live a life about respect, and about courage, um, and about nonviolence."

Often these perspectives on respect emerged in the interviews when participants described the meaning of social justice. Loraine spoke to the importance of believing in the inherent good of people. She typically emphasized simultaneously feeling concerned and hopeful about people's behavior in the world, as she acknowledged people contribute both to justice and injustice. Loraine described having an overall sense of optimism about humanity. She spoke to social justice in the following way:

> Believing in the goodness of yourself and other people… and that people are not inherently evil, that people are not inherently sinful, to me, that people are not inherently bad or broken… that we have inner strength and inner health and inner perfectness that can take root and take shape, and… another world is possible.

My beliefs. Fourteen participants spoke to their general beliefs and values pertaining to fairness and equality. Max stated, "I mean, from as young as I can remember, being described and describing myself, I've always been really into fairness."

He continued to explain he even received feedback from his teachers about the emphasis he placed on fairness. He shared:

> I remember my preschool teachers would send home notes saying, like, "Well, this kid's always wanting to make sure everything's fair, make sure everybody's involved in getting their fair shake." So, like, I think, if I weren't doing some kind of social justice work, either formal or informal, I wouldn't know who I was.

Participants talked about valuing peace and animal rights. Animal rights activism, in particular, was a strong part of L.'s belief system. She emphasized throughout her interviews the importance she places on treating human and nonhuman animals with love and respect. She stated, "It's sort of believing that… animals have rights and should be treated in certain ways… sort of fits in the same camp for me as human beings… all human beings have rights and should be treated in certain ways."

Some participants spoke to having an activist point of view and some of the political beliefs that fueled their activist worldviews. Charlotte described studying public policy and her awareness that she approached graduate school from an activist perspective. She explained:

> When I went to grad school, and I studied public policy, I was confused at first why things didn't feel quite right. And then I realized that the study of public policy is sort of a top down sort of thing. You're trying to learn how the systems work, and so you're thinking about how, you know, if you're in Congress, how do you make change? Or if you're at the state legislature, how can you make change? And I would say, you're still thinking about, if you're an activist organizing people, how do you make change? And so, then I realized, I was even approaching grad school from… an activist point of view.

Doing Change Work

Another major theme that emerged from participants' interviews was related to the actual activism and social change action participants reported doing. They described

choosing activism to get involved with based on their specific social justice interests, as well as the types of activism and work they do. Participants described doing change work by taking action and steps to create change. They discussed doing internal activist work to challenge them. They discussed working with other activists to create social change. Finally, participants described their goals and interests in continuing to be engaged in social justice activism.

Activist Interests

Fifteen participants spoke to their particular activist interests and how those interests fueled their choices to be involved in particular social justice work. Sarah denied believing she was active in creating social change, but she indicated several times that she was interested generally in social justice, particularly discussing articles and political issues with her friends. She stated, “And in terms of social justice activism, while I’ve not particularly done a lot… with ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,’ I certainly was interested in it.”

As participants discussed their activist work, they made clear connections between their interests and their activist involvement. Charlotte explained, “I think, one of the reasons I care about transportation is that, I think, it’s really important to having a good quality of life is being engaged in your community or getting to do the things you want to do or go to jobs or religion or doctors, um, so, so, yes, it’s related to social justice.” Indeed, Charlotte spoke to her passion for transportation activism throughout the interviews, connecting it to oppression specifically targeting ethnic minority and lower income populations.

Noah described her interest in helping communities, particularly communities of lower socio-economic statuses, connect to adequate health care and healthy foods. She described her interest in the progress made within food movements in particular:

> I'm into, like, uh… gardening and, like, kind of, like, food movements. I'm not, like, a huge participant and fan of some food movements, 'cause they're kind of… challenging in some respects, like, the way that… those ideas of, like, healthy and, you know, locally produced food, and the expense that actually creates. But I think, there's a lot of really interesting, like, food justice work that goes on. And I have done, like, access to, like, fresh foods and, like, that kind of thing. I'm real into neighborhoods, and in, like, growing your own food as kind of, like, a sustainable way to supplement your income and supplement your, um… access to, like, fresh produce, and stuff like that.

Types of Activism

Fifteen participants spoke to their involvement in different types of activism. Paz emphasized there was no single correct way to create social change, but she believed that different approaches were valid and meaningful. She believed in "Allowing people to kind of find ways to define the different ways that they're going to impact the world." "They" spoke to their observation of activists' different types of activism when they commented, "You know, some people, you know, [are] in-your-face in their form of activism, and [for] some people it's kind of doing things in the background, and [for] some people it's in the middle. I just think that all parts of that are necessary. Ok, I don't think there's a wrong or right way."

Alexis also recognized the multiple approaches and types of activism. She commented that her awareness of this changed as a part of her activist development and learning about activism. She indicated that seeing different types of activism as

meaningful was a newer insight. She shared, “I think getting introduced to the shades of social justice activism makes it easier to be more involved.”

This theme emerged from descriptions of particular activist work participants were doing, and how they perceived their work to be examples of direct versus indirect activism or small-scale versus large-scale activism. While several participants recognized the different “waves” or “forms” of activism, some participants reported believing some forms of activism were more meaningful or effective than others. Several participants indicated preferring to do activism in smaller ways, rather than aiming to create large-system changes. Paz stated, “I see activism on a much smaller scale, but in the end I see that as being much more… um, actually, probably having much more impact.” Alexis shared, “I don’t have to stand at the court, um, at the city center steps and shout at people with signs and shit.” She continued to explain she found activism to be more accessible on a smaller scale. She added, “I feel, like, there’s… it’s much more palatable for me now, because I don’t have to, like, I can do bigger social change if I have the emotional energy to do so. There’s also ways that I can do it… smaller ways that also create change.”

Only a few participants indicated preferring larger scale activist approaches. One example of this was Charlotte’s description of her campaign work and efforts to change larger systems. Throughout her interviews, she discussed her strategies and approaches to creating large-scale changes:

> It makes me think about it on a broader level, like, maybe in my, like, usually I think about, like, even that … ‘cause I’m White, like, individual interactions and direct interactions with authority figures or with institutions. But we also talk about broader political discussions about how money is treated or how food transportation projects get funded… so to benefit people that, like, on a larger scale level.

Participants emphasized seeing these different types and approaches to activism, regardless of the type or size, as ultimately contributing to the larger purpose of creating social change. Esther illustrated this point when she explained, “It reminds me of a, kind of [a] visual image of, kind of… almost like waves… I guess I’m making waves in my mind… where some waves are bigger and move faster and some waves are bigger and move really slowly but they’re all kind of moving toward the same place.”

Creating Change

All participants in this study spoke to their efforts to create social change. Bri stated, “I think raising change, you know, I think that’s an everyday thing.” Throughout her interview, she spoke to her parenting as a social change process: raising children that value diversity issues and connect with people across their different perspectives and opinions.

Bridgett indicated there was a recent sexual assault on her college campus that received a lot of public attention. She explained several students were angry when the legal charges were dropped against the alleged perpetrator. She described working with other people to coordinate and facilitate workshops on campus to raise awareness about sexual violence. Bridgett noted, “After these events, I felt like I was truly making a difference on campus.” She believed she was providing additional information and resources to students. She also coordinated a rally for students to come together in protest.

L. spoke to her experience creating a new support group for transgender veterans at a Veterans’ Affairs (VA) hospital. She described the challenges she faced in an

atmosphere that had historically been disaffirming of transgender individuals to raise awareness and sensitivity toward transgender issues. She reflected on the progress and change she helped create:

> A few months ago, a transgender female came to a group… I don't run the group anymore, but I supervise the people who run it… and in supervision, they said, you know, she's new to this VA. She's new to this area, but she's been to other VA's before, and she said that this VA has treated her better than any previous VA, and this VA understands transgender women better than any other VA she's been to.

L. proudly explained that individual's positive experience in the hospital was largely the result of L.'s activist efforts.

D. described her work in the following way: "We work towards setting policies and practices that move from equality to equity, from intent to impact." Charlotte said, "I think of activism as trying to change… systems to make them work better for people or promote social justice better."

Several participants indicated social justice meant creating social change. As L. stated:

> I think it means working towards… the world or society, or, you know, however small the community you're working in, whether it's, you know, working to change the world, or working to change, you know, like, my own hospital, or my own clinic, or whatever… it means working towards a world where everyone has opportunities, and everyone is treated with respect.

J. spoke to her postcolonial feminist perspectives in which she described believing the United States dominated and asserted power over other countries. She indicated believing similar oppressive dynamics occurred in the context of interpersonal relationships. She spoke to the importance of doing social justice in the context of relationships. J. stated, "So I think we can really change our relationships and our

responsibility to each other, in order to ensure that we live in a society that's, um, that's more equal, I guess."

Thus, participants indicated a desire to create change in different ways. Alexis said simply, "I see social justice as being… working for change on many levels."

Taking Action

All participants described taking action and steps to create social change. "They" stated, "I mean, knowing when there are injustices occurring... and being willing to move forward to address those, um, and, then, sometimes being strategic about how you do it." Several participants described the different steps they took, such as speaking up about issues they considered important. Shelby described the work of an activist in the following way:

> If you're an activist... that's having that active role, and doing the work, and going out, and participating in rallies, and holding speak-outs, or you know, just having a conversation with any individual, whether you know that person or not, and taking that time and that effort to really change, um, those assumptions and perceptions.

Participants described taking steps to move forward and be involved in the process, even when it seemed challenging. "They" commented, "For me it's kind of being willing to move forward, even if it's an uncomfortable place to be." Similarly, Sarah spoke to the need to keep taking steps. She said, "I think, you can't try to change everyone's mind, but… you know, not everyone's going to agree… ever… it's not gonna happen. So, you just start chippin' away, you know."

J. described the different actions and efforts needed to create positive social change. She gave the following description of the multiple strategies activists could take:

> It involves like multi… multi, like, working in different areas. So, whether some people will be on the ground doing work, like, civil disobedience and other people will be, uh, educating people and going to places, like churches, and that sort of thing, to talk to people who may not usually be open to that, those spaces. And then, there's gonna have to be people doing the work that, um, involves, like, talking to senators or representatives.

Taking action and steps was ultimately part of the larger goal of creating change for many participants. Throughout their interviews, participants described their specific activist actions, such as attending social justice events, addressing and challenging dominant political beliefs, challenging people in conversations, as well as advocating and helping others.

Attending social justice events. Eleven participants spoke to attending different social justice events, including political marches, rallies, and Pride festivals. Paz explained that earlier in her activist life, she "went to a lot of rallies." Jennifer also reported attending more social justice events earlier in her activist development. She explained, "I started to participate in more, kind of, social justice events, you know, like, little candle light ceremonies, and stuff, and go to the governor's mansion, and kind of, like, Take Back the Night events for sexual violence, and stuff like that." For several participants, attending larger events was an initial way to feel involved and do change work.

Sarah emphasized that attending social justice events, particularly Pride festivals and parades, was one of the primary ways she participated in activism. She stated, "I'll go to… you know, I'll go to Pride events. I think they're fun." Attending events provided an opportunity to feel connected to social justice causes without believing herself to be taking a more direct role. As previously indicated, she thought of herself primarily as a "covert activist." Sarah further explained, "I think it's good that… I mean, if you're not

involved in things, I think it's good to show, to show up to those things… to show support… to just, kind of… look [like] there's a crowd of people… even if they're not gay, they at least are here, you know?"

Thus, attending events was perceived by different participants to be both passive and active ways to participate in social action. Shelby added, "It's just being able to participate in that, and go to lobby day in the capital, and, you know, go to Denver Pride… one of the biggest Prides in the nation, and… you know, it's just really cool to be part of."

Addressing dominant views. Thirteen participants spoke to taking action by challenging and addressing dominant political views. They reported making comments to others that deliberately challenge the status quo, social norms, and political beliefs. Alexis described challenging dominant perspectives throughout her interviews. She gave examples of particular statements she made in conversations that she believed were politically subversive. One example of this was when she explained:

> Even using the word, "ungoddessly," to me, is related to my… I see it as related to my subverting identity, like, liking to say things, even though they are congruent for me, but being intentional about saying things that don't fit the status quo, I guess, could be seen as social justice, like, saying "Goddess" instead of "God," like, um, trying to use nongendered pronouns, like, trying not to use crappy marginalizing language, like… "that's so gay" and "how retarded," like, these words that are marginalizing in and of themselves.

Jenny also spoke to using social action to challenge dominant social perspectives. She described teaching healthy relationship behaviors and facilitating support groups for women. She shared, "I think supporting women to connect with other women is… so challenging to the main stream system of women being disconnected from other women, um, that, that in itself is kind of creating a ripple effect."

Loraine described challenging social norms in even more subtle ways on a daily basis, such as her choice to sit with her legs apart in public. She explained, “I mean, I sit with my legs apart. Um, I take up more space than women are told to do. You know, so I’m giving off messages that I’m not, um, gonna conform.” Thus, participants took action in direct and more subtle ways to challenge dominant perspectives.

Challenging others. Sixteen participants spoke to verbally challenging other people in conversation. They described taking action to encourage others to think about issues differently. One example of this was Charlotte’s description of a situation at a wedding in which a man she conversed with made a derogatory comment about people who received welfare. She explained:

> I talked about how low-paying jobs just don’t pay very much, and that’s a problem, and you know, jobs not being available, and so… I mean, I don’t know that I got at all of the assumptions, but I think I was able to get at some of them in a way that he was able to think about.

Bridgett reported taking a very direct approach to challenge a male friend when he made a heterosexist comment: “I grew up with the kid so I was just kind of, like… I’m not afraid to tell him, like, at all what I feel. Like, ‘Hey, you’ve known me since I was in diapers, so you’re gonna listen to me.’”

Jennifer emphasized that speaking up in such situations was an act of social justice. She reported, “It’s having the courage to sit down with people and challenge them when they make those comments, whether it be just correcting them and letting them know that it bothers me.” However, Jennifer noted throughout the interview the challenges involved in speaking up and challenging other people. She explained this was a growth edge for her, but she emphasized believing it was important to take action in conversations. D. emphasized trying to be ready every day of her life to speak up in

situations of oppression. She reflected, “You have to be ready for it every day. ‘Cause it may be that I’m not doing any training, or I’m not doing any dialogue, but what I may be doing is speaking-up about something that I see… and saying, ‘It’s not ok.’”

Taking action for many participants happened in relationships with people they trusted and knew well, but it also involved challenging people they barely knew. They described taking action by giving new information and alternative perspectives to people with the hope of ending oppressive behavior. Shelby described doing this in the following way:

> When people are around me and they use that really terrible phrase, “That’s so gay,” I often respond by saying, “It’s not that good.” And that kind of makes them stop, and they go, “Huh?” And it’s like, “Yeah, you said, ‘That was gay,’ and I’m assuming you meant stupid, and I can definitely tell you that gay is not synonymous with stupid, so you know, I would really appreciate it if you would find another word.”

Helping others. Twelve participants spoke to taking action by helping other people. They described doing the work of helping others stay alive. For example, Max stated, “I joined ACT UP and, um, met some drag queens and queer people of color, like, just feeling somehow, like, it was the right thing to do to join ACT UP, and help keep them alive the way that they had helped keep people alive through the 50s, 60s, and 70s.” Max felt inspired by reading about other activists and minority populations supporting and helping each other survive and thrive. He emphasized wanting to take action to help.

Jennifer recalled an experience of giving some of her belongings to a woman in need:

> There was one time where there was… actually more than once… a prostituted woman who had been sexually assaulted, and I walked her out of the hospital, and she didn’t have any shoes, and I remembered that I had a bag of clothes in my trunk that I had been meaning to give to Goodwill. I just hadn’t done it yet, um, I had some flip flops in there, and so I pulled them out, and I gave them to her, and

> it was just kind of my little, like, thank you and good luck. And you're not supposed to give things to clients or anything, but that was just one little thing where I was, like, you know, she needs it, and I can give it, so I did.

Thus, helping others involved taking action to support each other as well as helping people connect to necessary resources. Several participants discussed helping others by validating people's suffering and helping them to feel less ashamed.

Doing Your Own Work

Most participants described doing social change work on themselves. They talked about being willing to challenge themselves, take risks, and examine their own biases. Alexis shared, "Doing social justice intrapsychically when I notice myself saying stuff that's crappy, correcting myself, and maybe even explaining that out loud when I notice." This theme is about participants turning the activism on themselves. They described working through their past experiences of discrimination and oppression in order to make positive changes in their own lives and better enable them to positively impact the world. Bri stated, "But to kind of be eager to change myself helps [me] be more adept at changing the world." She added in her definition of social justice activism that being an activist is about "being proactive about learning and changing, not just being reactive… so trying, when you can, to not wait for others to educate you, but educate yourself."

J. reported, "I feel like sometimes it's not always about changing the consciousness of other people, but really empowering yourself in order to be able to continue to do that work." Jenny reflected on examining her past experiences of trauma, her biases, and feelings in therapy as helping her to be a more resilient activist. She explained:

> Because even… in doing my own therapy in my own process, emotional process, I definitely am coming to a clearer understanding about my own issues, and how… I'm informing myself, pretty much, which is what would happen in, like, a relationship or educating or having conversations or dialogues with your loved ones or anyone really about hard issues.

For Jenny, and many other participants, the process of doing their own work was very challenging. They emphasized their motivation to do that work with themselves as a part of their larger goal to create change in the external world.

Participants described examining their belief systems and challenging their beliefs. They described challenging their privilege and increasing their awareness of ways in which they benefited from those unearned advantages. Jaden spoke to the importance he placed on continuously educating himself. He stated, "I try to go to things that are gonna empower me, educate me, um… oh, I went to that movie, 'Bullied.' I try to, like, I guess, stay informed of what's going on." Thus, the majority of participants described challenging themselves to be stronger, more confident, and informed activists.

Being challenged. Nine participants described feeling challenged while doing their social justice work and pushing themselves to step up and address those challenges. Cicely explained how being excluded at a transgender conference because of their gender presentation challenged them to re-evaluate their gender identity. They reflected on that experience and their action afterward: "I wrote a letter coming out to everybody. And then, I joined all the trans groups so people would see me as a transgender person. Um, so that was the most recent example of, uh, a negative event that made me change my presentation to more fully fit with what was inside." It is also worth noting that Cicely described a similar experience during the initial research interview for this study in which they were asked to draw a visual representation of themselves and their social identity

labels. In that interview, Cicely disclosed feeling somewhat agitated about the process, but they chose to tolerate their feelings and engage in the activity. In the feedback interview, Cicely explained that experience also contributed to their decision to transition and feel more confident in their gender identity. Thus, Cicely's example of tolerating their discomfort in a challenging circumstance was further evidence of their willingness to deconstruct and evaluate their self-perceptions and beliefs.

D. spoke to her decision to challenge herself more. She stated, "I'd moved into this new place of… I've been wanting to challenge myself, and me being the one to challenge myself and it not being about anybody else, but just me." She described this more recent desire to challenge herself as being part of her ongoing growth and continuing to progress as an activist.

Alexis articulated her willingness to immerse herself in challenging experiences in order to grow. However, she indicated this led to discomfort at times. She emphasized that discomfort would not deter her from doing the work. She clarified, "…Not uncomfortable bad… oh, I have, but uncomfortable good and challenging myself, taking risks." Indeed, taking risks in different situations was an important part of many participants' descriptions of doing change work, both internally and externally.

Being informed. Another theme that emerged from participants' descriptions of doing their own work was staying informed and aware of current events and political issues. Jaden described his motivation and efforts to stay informed. He stated, "I want to stay on top of what's going on, you know, in politics… because it affects me. It affects my friends. It affects my family. It's very relevant, I think, in my life, and that's one of the ways I can be an activist… is to be politically active." Sarah also stated, "I really like

to read and be really informed. Even if we don't do a lot, we like to read a lot about what's happening."

Many participants spoke to challenging themselves to be politically aware and knowledgeable. This theme was particularly salient for Loraine, who emphasized watching news programs and reading about politics. Throughout her interview, she referenced different news sources as they informed her perspectives and opinions about various political issues. One example of this was when Loraine discussed her knowledge of pay inequality in academia. She explained:

> I read the statistics about how women professors earn less. I'm an adjunct. I know the whole… I'm an adjunct to the labor organizer for adjuncts in a national union. I know very much what's going on in terms of academia and the work force. I'm also very aware of how it relates to other trends in academia around online education and other ways that education is changing with profit driven motives.

Working with Others

Working with other activists was another way participants described doing social change work. For many, the challenges of creating social change felt overwhelming if undertaken alone. Thus, most participants described working with others to do change work.

Activist groups. Several participants spoke to being involved in activist groups. In particular, participants indicated benefitting from the solidarity they experienced by working with others. This fueled their ability to continue taking steps to create social change. Noah emphasized her interest in activist groups. She said, "And I think it helps to, you know, like, gather in groups and know that there are other people who are kind of

working toward the same kind of concept of… um, concept of the world or being… being able to live with ourselves."

In her initial interview, Maria indicated feeling disconnected from LGBTQ activism in her geographic location. However, in her follow-up interview, Maria shared she had become engaged with an activist group campaigning for marriage equality. As a result, her confidence for doing social justice work had increased significantly. She explained, "I've become really active in the campaign to get that passed. Um, so I'm volunteering with a group called Equality Maine, which is, like… they're sort of… the driving force behind this political campaign." Her enthusiasm was clear throughout the feedback interview, and she emphasized believing she was beginning to be involved in activism in ways she had desired for a long time. Maria went on to describe her involvement through the activist group: "Primarily, I've been doing the phone bank. The idea is that, um… this is a very cool, like, this is such, so totally right up my alley because the idea is that you want to have, like, a heart-to-heart conversation with this undecided voter that's on the other end of the phone line…" Thus, plugging into a well-established activist group was hugely important to Maria's confidence and excitement about doing activism.

Participants described their involvement with different types of activist groups working on different social justice issues. "They" explained, "I do some work with the Pride Center and Equality Utah." Max shared his involvement with a transgender activism group: "You know, it's not a support group, but it is a place of trans people where, and we try and have events where we're doing things, like, you know, making signs or stuffing envelopes so many can really, like, just be together in a relaxed setting."

Max also talked about doing work in trans activist groups to increase visibility for transgender issues. He said, "We have a transgender march this Saturday. We have a transgender film fest that, you know, just more stuff that's specifically about transgender identities and making the world look a little different to include more visible transness."

Participants spoke to their specific positions within the group (e.g., leader, board member). They also described their level of involvement with the group. They indicated working in activist groups as a part of a larger movement (e.g., Occupy Wall Street), campaigns, committees, and organizations. They described the work that the group was doing. Shelby explained, "We have a 'Make It Better' campaign… you've heard of the 'It Gets Better' campaign… but ours is a 'Make It Better' campaign… instead of making it possible, it's more of an active role in making it better instead of… eventually, it will get better."

Collaborating. Twelve participants spoke directly to their experiences collaborating with others to do change work. They emphasized the importance of working together. Esther described working with others on marginalized research topics. She said:

> I do feel, like, I have a… kind of a… I don't know what the word is… um, an awareness maybe of who else is doing that type of research, and how can I… not just thinking about research together, collaboration, but also, you know, um, as how to encourage each other to keep things and to raise the bar as to how research is done.

Esther spoke throughout her interview of the importance of collaboration and support among social justice-oriented researchers. Within academia, she perceived there to be a risk of burn-out among such researchers without social support. She continued to say, "It's important to not carry the load alone, because… that's also problematic in terms of

what the future looks like without me… or you know what I mean, like… it's not about me… it isn't about me, um, and so finding a way to keep it going."

L. stated simply, "This is not work you can do on your own." Noah also emphasized collaborating, stating, "It's never easy work, and it's never something that we can do alone." Further, "They" commented on the collaboration they do with students at their work. They explained, "I mean, when I think about the center and what the center does, it's not… you know, the position I'm in may be the director, but I sure as shit didn't do it alone."

Wanting to Do More

All participants spoke generally about having goals and interests in doing more change work in the future. Many participants spoke to wanting to continue the work they were already doing. Two examples of this were Esther and Paz wanting to continue working on research specifically relevant to gender and sexual minority issues.

Jenny explained, "A more specific goal is to gain experience in the field of facilitating dialogues around issues of diversity, and then, provide corporate trainings to companies that want to create an inclusive work space." She indicated this was a continuation of dialogue work she was already doing, and she perceived this to be the next step in challenging herself to facilitate other people in their process of becoming more inclusive and aware.

Many participants described wanting to make changes in their approach to activism. In her follow-up interview, Sarah commented she wanted to become more involved in activism since she completed her education and had more time. She

explained, “Maybe now I will look for ways to be at least slightly more involved – ideally I could use my legal expertise to help LGBT [people] in need… or my position in the Army to promote access to military benefits to gay and lesbian military members (myself included).” Similarly, Bridgett reported wanting to become more involved in activism. She explained, “I have been talking to some friends in Des Moines who work a lot with the LGBT community. I see that as something I would really like to get involved in, as well. As Don't Ask Don't Tell continues to settle down, I would like to start a group similar to that in the military.”

Participants articulated specific goals for their future activism. Cicely described a history of doing social justice activism they believed directly benefitted their social identities. They noted, “I wanted to do… work on issues that don’t directly affect me but are equally for the greater good.”

“They” indicated wanting to do more activism in their university community to help students have greater access to resources. They said, “One thing that I’ve been thinking about for a while and it just doesn’t come… I haven’t thought about it for a while now but… is establishing like a food pantry on campus for students.” They described previously working on this activist project, but it did not amount to a sustainable food pantry. However, they expressed enthusiasm about picking the project up again in the future.

All participants reported a desire to continue doing change work in the future, depending on their different activist interests. They expressed hope about being engaged and continuing to challenge themselves and others.

Community and Connection

A particularly important theme in this study was participants' emphases on relationships with other people. All participants spoke to the importance of connecting with people and having community. They emphasized their desire to have relationships and build supportive communities. They spoke to the importance of having people in their lives they felt comfortable with. Participants had differing perspectives on preferring activist or nonactivist communities. However, all participants reported finding value in both and needing the overall sense of community for themselves.

Community

All participants reported being part of a community. They spoke to their interests in being with other people and having a sense of family and friendship. For many participants, community was instrumental to their meaning of social justice activism. Maria remarked, "I've just always been very community minded, and I think building community is, like, a number one way to have there be a sense of justice."

Noah also commented on the importance of community in creating social change. She explained:

> Let's say that they decide to let gay people get married, for example… It's not really gonna change, like, the behavior toward a gay couple who's walking down the street and, like, you know, in my town even, in rural Florida, whether or not that's legal is not really gonna change the reactions that they get or the behavioral influences that people have on that kind of thing… but building, you know, this doesn't change it in a way that like building communities of respect and dignity can.

She emphasized believing the connections people create with each other in communities and relationships were vital to social justice work.

Many participants reported finding community specifically through their activist interests and work. Loraine commented on the importance of building communities for members of marginalized social groups. She stated, “Social justice activism is, um, just about creating the community that we need… by making it for ourselves, because we can’t bear not to.” Similarly, Jaden described finding activist communities through shared spiritualties and beliefs. He shared:

> When I started on my spiritual path and became more involved in activism and stuff, I felt, like, I started surrounding myself with those types of people who were also activists, who were also spiritual, and I felt, like, that was supportive. You know, like, the energy was supportive. We kind of fed off each other. So for me, I guess, that is the support… having communities of people who are like-minded, perhaps, and have similar goals, maybe.

Jaden reported believing the social support he gained from community was also a positive outcome of participating in activism.

Max profoundly articulated the importance of social support and community in social justice activism. He stated, “If we were outside waving flags or wearing t-shirts that say whatever we believe on them, together in solidarity, um, we kinda don’t need to change laws or anything.” This point summarizes many participants’ desire and need for social connectedness through community.

Several participants spoke about belonging to communities that were not explicitly social justice-oriented. Bridgett described her friends and other soldiers in the Army as her family. She stated, “It’s like, with the Army it’s, like, they’re family after a certain point. Like, I’m closer probably to them than I am with most of my family. Like, I’m closer to the people I drill with more than my family. It’s just, like, a family outside of your family.” Throughout Bridgett’s interviews, she described her relationships with friends in the Army, and it was clear they were her primary community. Indeed, during

the Skype interview, one of her fellow soldiers knocked on the door of the room where she was doing the interview, and they had a pleasant exchange that left Bridgett smiling and appearing happy.

It is also worth noting that some participants indicated feeling excluded from communities at times. Jennifer spoke to her experience as a bisexual woman in a committed relationship with a man. She did not believe herself to be completely included in sexual minority communities because of her social identities. She said, "I see myself as a member of the LGBT community, um, but when it comes to my own quote lifestyle, and I'm living a heterosexual life and committing to that by being engaged to a man, and so for me it means… the feeling is that I'm kind of an outsider of that population." Jennifer reported feeling more connected to her running community. She stated, "I have a huge sense of community as a runner."

Connecting with others. Seventeen participants spoke to the importance of connecting with other people. They described having the desire to connect and working to develop those connections. They also discussed how natural it felt to build connections with other people. Noah commented directly to this idea by stating, "A lot of social justice work is about, in my opinion, or should be about is, like, basic relationship building." Several participants spoke to those connections helping them feel supported.

Participants overall emphasized feeling connected to other people and having positive feelings about their connections. Bri described her desire to connect with others in the following way: "I love feeling, like… you know, maybe it's that intimate part of me, that need for intimacy and connection with other people. I, like, it's nice to connect. I

mean, it's positive in that… um, you know the people that care about things that you care about, and you care about each other."

Maria also shared the enthusiasm she gained from connecting to other activists (including me) working toward similar goals. She stated, "Then, I also feel like I make connections with people, like you, that are doing the same thing, and it feels, like, oh my God, like, you know we're together in this."

Jenny described feeling more connected to other people because of her health conditions. She explained:

> I think, too, there's an advantage to having lupus and being, and having celiac's is… I've had the opportunity to become very bodily aware. And I wouldn't have had that any other way. Um, and I think having that awareness has really grounded me and connected me to a lot of people, particularly those that have chronic illness. I think it really is quite connecting… more than it is disconnecting.

Participants spoke to the importance of building connections in order to create positive social change. Bridgett noted in her initial interview that she was not involved in activist groups, but she was interested in becoming more involved. She spoke in her follow-up interview of her efforts to build more connections to help her become more involved. She stated, "I think it will be easier getting involved when I am outside of the college community and in an actual city community. I feel as though I am constantly meeting people and making connections that will make this possible."

Participants also described making efforts to connect with people even when those individuals were perceived as unsupportive. Many participants still emphasized trying to connect in those situations. As previously noted, Paz spoke to her efforts to connect with a neighbor whose behavior was discriminatory and oppressive. D. indicated

believing she had a strong ability to connect with people, even in conflict or disagreements. She stated, “I can cross over and build bridges with people.”

Participants described the importance of having people in their lives they felt comfortable enough to let their guards down and be themselves with. They wanted relationships with people they could “let go” and have fun with. “They” emphasized this throughout their interview, particularly when they described wanting time away from their role as a representative of activist groups. They explained:

> I have people in my life where I don’t have to hold back. I don’t have to. I can just put it all out there, and they listen to it. They help me process it. They don’t, like, you know, say, “Oh, this must mean this.” And so, I am really an advocator for having people in your life that you can just be the way you are at any given time, the way you need to be… because there are spaces where that is not possible. So to have spaces where that is possible is very important, because there are not always spaces that hold or have the capacity or know how to hold that stuff.

Participants indicated needing people who were like-minded and supported their beliefs and values. Paz, too, reported believing activists needed to have supportive relationships with like-minded people. She stated, “You know, it’s part of why we want to surround ourselves with people who believe all the same things as we do and have all the same kind of experiences, ‘cause it’s really hard to fight a lot of this stuff inside your relationships.” Thus, having supportive relationships appeared to be a resiliency factor for several participants.

Relationships. Fifteen participants spoke to the importance of the relationship in doing social justice activism. Several participants reported believing the relationship was essential to creating change because they had opportunities to build trust and respect. They recognized that change work was challenging to do in relationships, but ultimately, it was where a lot of significant change happened. Jaden commented on relationships

with other people being important to his understanding of social justice activism. He said, "It's about… you know, forging friendships and not only having those friendships but being supportive to other people, you know, whether they be people of color or queer people or whatever."

They described doing social justice work in the context of relationships. Jenny stated, "And really having the political analysis discussion with women feels really important, too. And, and I do that in my interpersonal relationships. I mean, with my close girlfriends, that's what we talk about." Alexis also stated, "In my relationship, trying really hard not to let patriarchy play out, um, whether that be in becoming insulated in the relationship so I don't have others, because that's what I'm taught to do… is to make my relationship primary and everything else bleed." Thus, even Alexis' approach to her relationship was a reflection on her understanding of social justice.

Participants spoke to relationships being important to healing from past experiences of trauma and oppression. L. explained, "I would say that for me, it is not necessarily involvement in activist work that helps me heal and manage, but it is relationships with other like-minded individuals, some of whom are involved in activism, some not."

Activist Community

All participants indicated having relationships and connections with other activists, whether in their communities, romantic partnerships, friendships, or families. This section illustrates participants' relationships and connections with other activists.

Twelve participants spoke specifically to having activist friends and community. Sarah noted, “I have friends that are, like, super, like, active for the cause, so I’ll track them on Facebook.” Many participants described activist community and friends as being supportive to them. Bri reported finding a support network of activists to be helpful at times. She stated, “You can have your little queer bubble, your little activist bubble. It’s really sustaining, and it helps.”

J. spoke to co-creating activist communities. She emphasized her investment in other people feeling supported within activist communities and being part of creating those community experiences. She explained:

> We really tried to create a space, um, more in, like, the last two or three years that was really focused on, like, love and, like, creating community and, like, healing and that sort of thing, where we would do like check-ins every time we started a meeting and really do, like, retreats, like, two to three times a year, uh, to, like, just get our minds together.

Shelby’s activist development was largely influenced by her conversations with activist friends in high school. She described the importance of their political conversations throughout the interview. She stated, “And so it got to the point where [name removed], [name removed], myself, and [name removed]… we all kind of powwowed around together, and we just would sit and have conversations for hours on end about, you know, politics and things.”

Max intensely emphasized the importance of activist community. As previously noted, he described feeling socially isolated through much of his development. For Max, finding activist community affirmed his social identities and helped him feel supported. He explained:

> Part of the reason I went to ACT UP… was looking for other queer activists in Philadelphia, and I totally found them, which was awesome. And so a lot of my

> best friends and my girlfriend are ACT UP members, and that, I think, that's really helped me, coming out as trans and have strength there, and it was that group that was the first group of people who were, like, "We're gonna be your allies, and even though we're gonna mess up your pronouns, like, we're gonna get this right, and hold each other accountable." Um, so that was really huge.

Activist family. Ten participants described having family members who participated in or supported social justice issues. Several participants described this being supportive to them during their developments. For many, having activist family members was part of them learning how to do activism. Loraine spoke to this when she described her parents' participation in the Civil Rights Movement:

> My dad and my granddad on my mother's side… they were both Southern, White men who were trained up in racism and who worked to overcome it to a certain extent. And they certainly supported their women being White liberals who were in the Civil Rights Movement and in the church, the liberal church that was working for integration.

D. described knowing her parents were very informed and knowledgeable about politics. She described one memory of her father advocating for himself as he attempted to sell their house for a competitive price. She recalled:

> I remember when… my parents bought a house when I was, um, three months old, and they lived in that house 'till after I went to college, and during that time, the city bought the house or wanted to build the Ogden City Mall in that area. My dad had that house and owned another house, and they wanted to, they were doing things like… "Well, if you don't sell it to us at this or this price, then we'll just condemn the block, and you'll get even less." And I remember him going on the news talkin' about it and standing-up to it. And… um, that was powerful for me to see.

Paz recalled her family reaching out and helping family members from other countries during her development. She stated, "We also sponsored many relatives and friends from different countries to live with us at different points in my childhood." Thus, participants had many impactful examples throughout their lives of family members' efforts to create positive social change.

Activist partners. Six participants described being in romantic relationships with other activists. Shelby described her partner as supporting her activist interests. She explained:

> She's an activist in the sense that she supports me. She likes to question a lot of things, and she's really pro education, and she actually is going to be… she eventually wants to be a music educator for high school age students. But yeah, in her own way, she's definitely an activist. She supports me in what I want to do and what I'm interested in, because she always wants to know what I'm thinking about and what's going on in my mind.

Participants spoke to their partners' social justice interests and work. Often, participants did not perceive their partners to be as politically active as participants were, but they still believed their partners shared many of their social justice values and interests. Jaden described his partner in the following way: "She's very involved in the trans community and the queer community. She's not as involved in politics and things like that. They don't interest her. But she will get involved in things if…..I mean, she's very, I think aware of, you know, racism and classism, ableism."

Maria reflected on her partner's interests in Native American rights. She explained:

> He lived out west for a while, and I know when he was out there, he did a lot of work with Native Americans, um, for, like, Native American rights in Arizona and Colorado. So I'd say right now he's not really active in one particular cause, but you know, that's something that drives him and has influenced him a lot.

They described seeing their partners being involved in communities and doing change work. Cicely indicated activist groups were particularly important for helping her develop romantic relationships with people who shared her beliefs, values, and social identities. She explained, "I meet my sweeties in activist spaces. I meet the people that I share my love and life with in those spaces… so this is the pool of people I pull from for,

uh, intimate connections, and if I didn't go to those places, I don't know how I'd meet anyone who was like me."

Role Models

Seventeen participants reported having relationships and connections with people who influenced their approach to social justice activism and their interest in social justice issues. Maria noted, "In social justice work it's really helpful to have mentors." Participants described having role models who mentored and taught them about activist work.

"They" described being inspired by and learning from their work with their clients in therapy. They stated, "And clients that I had in the years that I practiced are roles models, you know, doing very courageous things… um, being themselves, you know, regardless of what, you know, the outcome's gonna be, um, and saying, you know, 'I'm gonna be myself even if I get stared at.'" They went on to describe their grandmother having been a significant role model. They explained, "My grandmother was a role model for me. I mean, she didn't have any formal education. She was deaf. She grew up in a very poverty- sort of... she showed me, you know, love that, um, I hadn't or still haven't ever experienced."

Esther spoke to a past therapist she worked with who appropriately self-disclosed her own experiences as a butch-identified woman. Esther indicated finding this experience very supportive and encouraging. She shared, "[My therapist] revealed that she had very similar experiences in terms of her own faith background and, um, coming-

out experiences. And so being able to… and I don't often get to see butch women doing similar things that I'm doing."

Shelby described her professors as important role models. She stated, "I have such great mentors at this university… I feel I could not go anywhere else and get the education that I'm receiving and have the relationships that I do with my professors."

It should also be noted that several participants reported having role models they had never had formal relationships with. However, participants described the connection they felt with the person who inspired them. Charlotte indicated one of her first feminist role models was Louisa May Alcott. She explained:

> As a kid, I did tourist programs… and then, I worked at the house where Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women*, and her family [was] very into social justice as it was for White people in the eighteen forties, and fifties, and sixties. And so, antislavery work, and, um, temperance work, and women's suffrage, and all sorts of things like that, and they even moved out in a Utopia for a while and so… I sort of grew-up thinking about it, and respecting people who worked for social justice and tried to make the world closer to what they thought it should be.

Being Engaged in the Process

Another important theme that emerged in participants' descriptions of their activist work pertained to the behaviors and characteristics they emphasized throughout their activist experiences. These characteristics and behaviors were relevant to their personal and activist lives.

Being Open

Seven participants described approaching social justice work with openness and willingness to consider different viewpoints, such as when Paz commented, "You're open

to connecting to others and trusting that that's going to result in something that's really meaningful that might, in the end, result in somebody changing their mind about something, but you're not going into it with that kind of focus." Thus, Paz described approaching conversations with a sense of openness. She continued to reflect on the importance of being open to connecting with people and considering the possibility that she may be changed in the process: "It's not just me trying to change people, but opening myself up to allow myself to be changed, um, and allow myself to connect to people who I would never in million years, based on how I categorized them, think that I would have anything to learn from them." Participants expressed openness to engaging in a process and connecting with other people.

In her work, D. described wanting to continue to be open to working with other people who share her interests in approaching social justice work from different angles and perspectives. She explained, "I want us to be doing stuff that's passionate, so work for people of color, work for women, work for men who wanna to do work in a system that's compassionate and doesn't lock them into one way of doing work and thinking… healthy relationship classes, and stuff like that." She emphasized wanting to be flexible and open to growth throughout her engagement in social justice activism.

Participants indicated approaching their relationships and dialogues with openness. Bridgett reflected on a disagreement she had with a friend. She stated, "I mean, it was really good, like, that's when it really made me realize, hey, you know, we're not gonna agree about everything." Similarly, Loraine described openly considering multiple political perspectives and beliefs, even when they were opposing, throughout her interview. One example of this was when Loraine disclosed her history as a sex worker

and sex educator during the experiential activity, and she admitted to feeling nervous about this disclosure because some people had reacted negatively to it before. She emphasized her willingness to consider other political views. She stated, “So you know, in some ways I’m just as open to anti-sex work arguments as I am to pro-sex work arguments because it all informs my thinking, and it’s all important to me.”

Participants expressed openness to admitting they made mistakes and had more to learn. D. noted, “It’s not possible to have all the answers.” Bridgett similarly commented, “No one’s right or wrong.” These perspectives emphasized participants’ openness to being engaged in the process, considering different beliefs and perspectives, and wanting to connect with others over their different beliefs.

Being Authentic

Thirteen participants described valuing authenticity throughout their experiences as social justice activists. Indeed, one of Cicely’s definitions for social justice pertained to being authentic. They stated, “Activism means first, that I embody my labels, um, that I don’t hide them from myself, and I’m honest with myself about all the things I’ve written on this piece of paper as often as I can be.” Similarly, L. commented, “[Social justice] means owning my experience and being honest about my experience.” Maria also indicated believing social justice was about “Being true to yourself.”

J. emphasized the importance of living authentically while she expected others to live authentically, too. She explained:

> It’s important to try to live the life that you wanna create for other people. So if you want to create a life in which people, you know, are happy… in which people are able to pursue their dreams… a life in which, you know, uh, people don’t have to stress about, you know, whether it’s like housing issues or there’re some things

> that… [you have to] take care of yourself, too, you know. So you can't be, like, self-sacrificing and be, like, trying to create all these things for, like, everybody else but not have them in your own life. So if you want people to have access to better food, then take care of your body and really give your body, you know, access to the things that, that you're… asking for other people, right. So, in many ways, that means, like, you do have to take care of yourself.

They noted past experiences of having their authenticity (e.g., their social identities and beliefs) supported and punished by other people. Jennifer spoke to having her social identity as a woman validated when she attended an all-women's college. She described the impact of this experience in the following way:

> Once I went to the all-women's college, you know, the college really prides themselves on diversity and inclusion and feminism. I saw that it was ok, and I was like, wow, this is actually, like... it's ok to do this, and it's ok to be this, and this is me. So I think getting that feedback kind of… allowed me to really get in touch with who I was as a woman.

Participants spoke to wanting other people to be authentic. They emphasized not wanting people to fake understanding or pretend to care about social change. They believed the change needed to be authentic for each person. Loraine reflected on an assignment she gave her students in which she asked them to interview an older woman for a women's studies class. She explained that many of her students interviewed their mothers and "got into more normalized culture." She shared, "But I feel, like, it's one step farther and that it's incremental and that I don't want them to fake some kind of radical feminist analysis, and impose it in a place where it's not yet taken root." She valued the understandings and perceptions of her students even when they were different from her own.

Jenny also emphasized the importance of being authentic and wanting others to be authentic, too. She stated, "I think just owning my true experience is part of… social

justice work, and… telling other people to own their experience and really do everything with intention, um, and so, I mean, you gotta live it to tell people to do it."

Paz spoke to the importance of living authentically in her personal life as much as in her activist life. She said, "I think it comes down to also living your life very authentically… you know, and that touches whoever that touches, but you're not doing… that, in and of itself, is not a political statement, you know, it's just being authentic."

Approach to Communication

Fifteen participants described their style and approach to communication throughout their social justice experience. They described approaching conversations and connection with other people with openness and willingness to engage and consider. Noah emphasized the importance of listening while engaging with others. She explained:

> [If] I have any advice for [other activists] based on my experience… um, just… thoughtful and active listening…. I mean, I think the, um, one of the things that has been really important, it's been really important to me is, like, um, really doing a lot of, like, listening and making sure that, you know, um, to best of your ability… yeah, listening.

Jaden spoke to his intentionality in communication with other people. He explained, "I've always thought it was kind of an asset for me because I am more quiet, and I have a lot more time to… you know, evaluate my thoughts and kind of formulate before I speak, rather than just reacting and talking like a lot of my friends do." He added, "I think that people who are talkative often don't give other people the opportunity to talk, so that could be oppressive." He described his listening skills being helpful in his personal life as well as his activist work.

Participants discussed their approaches to communication being influenced by what they believed was necessary in order for other people to receive their information. They conveyed a desire to get their point across and not alienate people in the process. Bri made this clear in her description of wanting to communicate her message while having compassion for the impact it had on others. She explained, “There’s that balance of how much to say and how much not to say and to still feel like you’re balanced… and balancing, that’s really important, the balancing that message with one of understanding how scared they are.”

They described wanting to build safety in the interpersonal process to facilitate connection. D. explained her experience of facilitating challenging dialogues and conflicts. She described her process of “really trying to hold and create a space for people to be who they were… to be safe, to be cared for, to, um, talk about how they were hurting and where they were hurting.”

Reflecting on Activism

Thirteen participants described questioning, reflecting on, and ruminating about their activism. They considered their particular approach to activism and if this was the best place for them to place their activist attention and energy. Jenny commented, “I don’t necessarily struggle, but a part of me is, like, is this where the work needs to be done in order to create change?” She described participating in activism oriented to multiple social justice causes, and she questioned if her efforts were making positive impacts. Similarly, Charlotte shared that she asked herself at times, “Am I doing enough? Should I do something different? What should I do?”

Cicely described checking-in with themselves throughout their participation in activism when they did not feel satisfied with their work. They indicated asking themselves throughout the process, "Am I overwhelmed with the things that I am doing, and this movement is perfectly fine? Are the people in the movement not enjoyable for me to be around anymore, but the movement is fine? Or last, is the movement not fine?" Although they noted this self-reflection typically occurred at times of struggle, they also believed it was beneficial to ask themselves these questions throughout their activism.

Loraine described a strong history of engagement in social justice work. She compared activisms across multiple decades. She stated:

> But in the period of the last three months, I've had so many déjà vus about my own younger activism days and you know, feeling that the last couple generations were not getting it at all, and this new generation is. And it's not just the young people. It's people of all ages, but there's a young energy that's leading it that's just so exciting to me, because it's also paired with older energy.

Noah spoke to evaluating activism in general during her engagement in the work. She explained:

> I have focused a bit in the last two years on, like, academic work and… studying social movements and… writing about people who do community organizing. I kind of have this, like, you know, debate in my head, if you will, about whether or not that kind of thing is, you know, what kind of use or purpose that has, um, in the grander work that we do or want to do. Uh, but I don't really have an answer for that.

Thus, Noah reflected on the larger purpose of social justice work and how that work was making an impact.

Coping

Many participants spoke to their efforts to engage in self-care and focus on the positive aspects of activism in order to continue feeling motivated to do the work. They

noted that these behaviors occurred throughout their engagement in their activist experiences.

Self-care. Thirteen participants spoke to their preferred self-care activities. "They" stated, "You know it's… even I go on vacations, you know… but I'm pretty good for the most part. I try to, um, really do things around... I mean, I enjoy this… but other things that I enjoy too." With the pressures and struggles associated with social justice work (described primarily in the *Struggles* theme), participants recognized the need to do fun things for themselves. Alexis reported watching television and spending time with her partner to feel disengaged from explicit activism. Esther stated, "I notice a huge difference when I'm taking care… just basic, basic stuff, um… making sure you get a lot of sleep, making sure you have enough time where I'm, um, alone for me, like, having my own space is… really helpful."

Many participants emphasized prioritizing their self-care and coping strategies with the awareness that social justice could be psychologically exhausting and energy-draining. Maria described learning through her participation in activist groups about the value of different self-care activities:

> I think, you know, that gives me a greater peace of mind, and it's got me interested in things like meditation and yoga and, like, ways of having, you know, taking better care of myself and being able to have more awareness of myself. So being able to notice when my feelings are hurt or when my body is tired or when my brain just needs a break, things like that. Um, and I think, it makes me feel good in my relationships because I'm proud of the work that I do, and you know, talking to others really kind of lights me up inside, and I can say, "Wow. This is what I've been working on lately, and, like, can I tell you about it?" And you know, getting a positive reaction from other people is nice.

Jaden emphasized the importance of self-care and health care for activists throughout their work. He stated:

> I get it as a health care provider or as a mental health provider… any kind of service provider, especially in therapy, you have to… you have to have self-care, you know, otherwise, you're not much use for anyone else. So, it totally makes sense for activism. You know, if you're sick, how can you help anyone else?

Thus, most participants agreed that self-nurturing activities were essential in their work. Further, many participants indicated in their interviews that they were interested to know how other activists took care of themselves.

Focus on positive. It is also worth noting that 7 participants described trying to focus on positive perspectives as a coping strategy. Max described preferring to focus on the positive in his interactions with other activists as a way to support one another. He stated, "…always with this message of empowerment, and we're making change, and we don't just have to, like, sit around and talk about how bad things are."

Similarly, Paz explained, "I try not to live in fear. I try not to give in to that. Certainly there are moments of that, but I also just think… I think it would be hard to kind of just live your life if you lived kind of always focusing on that." Participants acknowledged that injustices occurred and oppression is a reality, but they described wanting to focus on their resilience, empowerment, and controlling what they realistically could control on a daily basis. Noah reflected, "You know, you gotta take the good points if they come along, and feel good about the work you're doing when you can, and try not to get utterly discouraged when things seem to be backwards or not working for you or you know, that kind of thing."

Maria explained she sometimes felt her energy was drained in her work, and she believed it was important to think positively. She explained, "You know, the challenge is to try to stay positive and hopeful even though it seems like there're a lot challenges that

make the work seem small." She continued to describe the importance of celebrating the positive efforts of activists, which was a focus of her "Be the Peacemakers" project:

> I do think one of the challenges as a teacher is just being able to see the bigger picture of what you do, because the day-to-day work is so busy and so hectic… so again, trying to celebrate that. I've also learned that celebration is, like, a really key thing in the last couple of years. So that's a lot about what the Be the Peacemakers concept is to say, you know, not only do we do this work, but we should celebrate it, and we should let people know so they can celebrate it, too.

Struggles

Another important theme participants described was the struggles they experienced throughout their participation in social justice activism. Nearly all participants acknowledged struggling at times with difficult feelings, not seeing progress from their activist efforts, having negative experiences within their activist communities, taking breaks, and not taking action in situations of oppression.

Fourteen participants described specific struggles they had encountered in their social justice work. Some participants indicated they struggled to advocate to others because of their minority statuses. They described struggling to be taken seriously by other people. They struggled to speak up in situations of oppression. Jennifer shared, "I think that's one thing that I've found myself struggling with… knowing when to speak up and when not to." Other participants struggled to find ways to get involved in work that was meaningful to them.

Max shared his struggle to "be out" about his sexual and gender identities, understanding the potential consequences in oppressive societal contexts. This posed a particular challenge for him as a social justice activist wanting to be a role model and ally to others. He explained:

> I've struggled a lot with being willing to be out, to tell my story, especially stories of oppression. A lot of queer people get hit with the messages that visibility makes you a target and is your fault. If you don't take steps to hide the fact that you are trans/gay, any bad stuff that happens is your fault.

Max's struggle may be symbolic of the challenges that many individuals with minority identities face: the balance of being out to others, risking oppressive consequences but also wanting to live authentically and connect with other people.

It should also be noted that some participants described struggling with their social identities and identity labels, particularly regarding gender and sexual identity, all the while trying to find or establish community and participate in social justice work. Cicely acknowledged the difficulty of finding activist communities for individuals that identify as "queer." They stated, "There's no, you know, uh, established queer community that's fighting for, uh, civil rights. So it's harder to, uh, move forward from an activist standpoint on a label that isn't, uh, seen as valid." Similarly, Esther described struggling with some social isolation in her geographic location. She said, "It can be a struggle at times with being the only butch woman I know at all down here."

Negative Impact on Me

Eighteen participants described experiencing difficult feelings related to activism and being an activist. Feeling overwhelmed was a common struggle. One example of this was Cicely's description of their need to not focus exclusively on the outcome of activism or else they would risk feeling overwhelmed by the process. They explained, "I have to be careful that I don't become overwhelmed with the seeming impossibility of making, um, progress, and that's one of the things all activists have to be careful about no

matter what their issues are, because things take a long time… they sometimes take an entire generation."

Many participants attributed their overwhelmed and exhausted feelings to the never-ending process of social justice activism. Participating in that process led many participants to feel fatigue and discouragement at times. Bri described her experiences of being "pegged" as a representative for activist causes, sometimes without her consent, and this contributed to exhaustion. She said, "I'm made into a cause. Sometimes, if I don't speak-up, then no one does… and that comes at a cost to my personhood. So I become that to people, and that can be exhausting."

Shelby spoke to feeling discouraged at times, particularly when she observed others to seem less invested than she was in activist work. She explained:

> And I know there's been plenty of times I've been caught up in the day-to-day and just, you know… for example, because I'm the president of "Prism," there's so much that goes into planning an event, and it's really difficult when… you know, you're not… when I ask a question of the group, you know, and they don't have an answer. They just stare at me with, like, blank faces, and it's, like, discouraging.

Several participants described feeling conflicted about continuing to work on particular social justice issues independently or in an activist group when they did not believe progress was happening. L. reflected on her experiences with door-to-door canvasing, and she recalled it was very discouraging. She said:

> It made me feel really impotent and really… useless. And so, I think in some ways, that's why I don't do that kind of thing. Part of it is time, but part of it is that it was just too discouraging, and I didn't, you know, after years of that, I couldn't keep doing it and feel, like, I was doing anything. So I had to shift to things and places that I knew I was making a difference.

Thus, not feeling successful in one's social justice efforts contributed to participants feeling emotional pain. This was an important struggle for participants, as many

acknowledged that some negative experiences were inevitable when creating social change.

Not working out. Sixteen participants discussed their efforts to increase other people's awareness and ultimately create positive social change. However, for different reasons, their efforts were unsuccessful. Participants indicated struggling to put energy toward their activist goals while not getting the outcomes they hoped for. Sarah noted there were times when she perceived her advocacy to "fall on deaf ears" because people did not respond the way she hoped. Bridgett recalled her efforts to challenge a male friend in the Army who opposed the inclusion of sexual minority men in the military, but she stated, "He still hasn't changed his mind."

Jenny described a specific instance in which she advocated her perspectives to a group of older adult feminists at a conference and received an invalidating response to her advocacy. She reflected, "And how do, you know, as a young feminist, how do you not take my beliefs about feminism seriously? ...and, and really saying that I'm 'over-reacting' and really kind of placing the blame on me, as a young feminist?"

In other instances, participants described other people being resistant, defensive, or even engaging in backlash. Paz disclosed her experience living next to a neighbor that behaved violently toward her daughter and herself. She shared that after his initial aggressive behavior, she attempted to talk with him; however, he rejected her efforts. She explained:

> [My daughter] and I made some Christmas cookies and took them over to the guy in his garage. He ran a used car mechanic shop out of his garage on the property. And I just went over and handed him a plate of cookies… actually he wouldn't take them from me but I just put them down on his bench… and I just said, you know, "I just wanted to let you know, happy holidays, and I hadn't had a chance to introduce myself, and we're your neighbors next door," and he didn't say a

> word, and I just left. And actually I think that pissed him off even more because then he got more bold in the things that he was doing against us. But I never really had an opportunity to have a conversation with him.

Thus, participants' effort to create positive social change, which was previously acknowledged to be energy-intensive at times, being met with resistance or backlash was a significant struggle.

Negative community experiences. Eleven participants described struggling with feeling excluded from community. They discussed having communities pertaining to their different social identities, but still felt unsupported. Cicely reflected on this when they explained, "In some spaces, intersectionalities are not recognized… and that leads to meeting in a group of people where we only have one thing in common, and they might be disparaging about some of my other labels… accidentally."

Sometimes, this struggle was related to receiving messages within a community that were discriminatory. One example of this was Bri's perception of trans feminine communities pathologizing her gender identity and experience. She explained:

> A lot of times in trans feminine spaces, I'll identify as gender queer just because I don't really find a home in the trans woman community. I feel, like, it's very binary. It's very medical. This is a sweeping generalization, but a lot of the language used within the trans feminine community is still very, uh, pathologizing, and it's hard… 'cause I don't experience my gender in that way. So words like, *transition* or *gender change* or any of those things, I just don't really feel that way.

In their interviews, some participants reflected on social change they believed needed to happen within some marginalized communities in order to make them more inclusive, safe, and affirming. "They" emphasized believing social change within the larger LGBT community was needed. They explained:

> I think, you know, within the… LGBT community we, we often talk about, "Oh, what's, what's not ok with what's being…," which it's not ok, it's not… but I

> think, it does mean we need to look at what we're doing to each other and you know, maybe the violence or the hatred we do to each other, um, or the denial of access.

Some participants struggled with not having community support at all. J. explained that negative experiences she had in activist communities, in which people were in conflict, contributed to a sense of burn out. She said:

> When I'm in spaces in which it's, like, even though organizing spaces… people's… attitudes or people's different characters are, like, clashing, then even the organizing space itself creates that burnout, not just like the society and what's going on and stuff. So, um, I have felt burnout from that.

Taking Breaks

Several participants described struggling to continue in activism without ever stopping. Taking breaks, stopping activism, and setting limits were particularly challenging struggles for several individuals.

Eleven participants described taking breaks from their activism. Unlike their descriptions of stopping activism, which typically resulted from fatigue, discouragement, or burn-out, this theme included participants' choices to step away from activism while they reconsidered their interests and goals. Charlotte described taking a break from her activism regarding public transportation issues because she was trying to negotiate her activist involvement with her paid employment. She explained, "I guess just… taking a little break from the transit justice activism… as I try to figure out how that fits into my job… and so just gettin' a little complicated… when your job overlaps with your activism."

Cicely spoke to the value of choosing to take breaks from activism to focus on other things, such as hobbies and self-care, to avoid experiencing burn-out. She stated, "I

think it's really important to talk about the idea that activists need to take breaks from… pushing the world and just live in the world, um, to avoid burnout." In a feedback interview, Cicely further explained they perceived the choice to take breaks was a struggle for activists because it involved setting boundaries and understanding the limits of what people were able to realistically handle. Further, they emphasized that activists understanding when to take breaks was wisdom that came from having more activist experience. Therefore, it might not be something newer activists would necessarily appreciate or understand.

D. described her choice to change her activist priorities and activities when she noticed herself becoming more tired. She said:

> I mean, I think that it shifts at times and sometimes I'm tired, but, like, right now, I'm really tired… so I feel, like, I need to do something different. I need to not be at work every day. And one of the ways I'm doing that is I'm gonna go do facilitation… and volunteer staffing at the Inclusion Summit for Adults… and that's gonna be a week-long intense work of doing social justice work, but it will feel like a break.

Thus, D. recognized her work led to fatigue and made a choice to take a break from some of her activist activities in order to regain her energy.

Limits of what we can do. Ten participants discussed the struggle of recognizing their limits in social justice activism. They described recognizing they could not realistically do everything they might like to do. D. spoke to this directly: "I try to be honest with myself about what I can and can't do." However, for many activists in this study, it was clear how motivated and interested they were to engage in multiple challenging and different activities to create social change. Setting limits for such motivated individuals appeared to be a common struggle.

Bri was aware that not recognizing her limits might contribute to self-blame when she was not successful in her activist efforts. She reflected, "I know that a lot of where my failure is coming from is because I don't want to be a sell-out or whatever that means to me, and I think that can actually be detrimental in some ways. I think it's important to know your limits." However, it is clear from her description that recognizing one's limits is not necessarily an easy task.

Maria also described the struggle of recognizing the limits of what she could realistically accomplish. She explained:

> I think one, one negative feeling is that I wanna do as much as I can and then realizing what the limits are to what I can do is hard because there are lots of times that people ask me for help with things, or I see something that looks really interesting that I'd like to get involved in and then having to really assess and realize that, like, I don't have the time or energy to do it and feeling, you know, guilty or feeling badly or just feeling regret that, like, I can't be a part of something else that's awesome because I'm already doing a lot of other awesome good things for people.

Although Maria described her activist involvement with enthusiasm, it was clear she struggled to say, "No" when asked to take on more tasks and activities.

Stopping activism. Ten participants spoke to the need to stop doing activist work. Charlotte explained her history working in activist campaigns: "Since I started actively pursuing activism work, I've had some campaigns, or some jobs within campaigns, that have worked well for me and some that haven't worked as well." She went on to discuss her process of deciding to continue or stop working with an activist group: "When they don't work as well, either I'm really unhappy, or it's not meeting my needs, or it's, like, do I flake out or not do what the campaign needs to be done?" This process of deciding whether or not to stop their activist work was a struggle multiple participants experienced.

Sarah described repeatedly trying to challenge discriminatory perspectives expressed by multiple family members without success. She articulated her struggle to continue challenging derogatory statements or choose to stop engaging. She stated, "My mom is on the same boat as I am, too. She's, like, trying to fight it, but at some point, you're just, like, 'Ugh, just let it go.'"

Cicely described disbanding an activist group once the group reached consensus that they were not making progress in achieving their goals. She discussed the group's decision-making process and associated struggles:

> I actually was the president of [group name deleted] in New Jersey when I decided that we should disband the group, because we were putting our efforts in and not getting anything back. And, um, it was a source of extreme… comfort to people to have someone else say, you know, "I think that we should stop what we're doing," because they weren't… if they had said it to themselves, they would have felt like failures.

Further, participants acknowledged their struggles to avoid burn-out or feeling forced to stop their activism due to total discouragement and fatigue. Although Esther denied personally experiencing burn-out, she emphasized the importance of discussing this potential struggle with other activists in an effort to cope and avoid future burn-out. Indeed, she recommended this be a question added to the interviews for this study. She stated:

> It just seems to me that the idea of burn-out… so social justice is potentially leading to burn-out or having experiences with burn-out could lead to… Also, I think that would be something that would be really interesting and valuable to cover 'cause that might be, um, helpful for combating burn-out or coping with the burn-out.

Not Taking Action

Most participants indicated having been in situations in which they did not engage in activism because they were not sure how to take action or they felt fatigued. Although they typically recognized that oppression was occurring, they chose not to challenge the situation. Participants reflected on these experiences as struggles. Sometimes, they wanted to make comments to challenge oppression, but they were worried about jeopardizing their job stability, worried about someone disliking them, or they felt too shy or afraid.

Alexis spoke to struggling in the past and still into the present with speaking up in situations of oppression. As she reflected on her past, she commented, “It always scared me too much to actually say anything, ‘cause I didn’t want somebody to not like me.” Similarly, Maria recalled an example from middle school in which she and a friend were stopped as they walked home from school by a White woman who stated she was interested in moving to the local area but wanted to know if their school was safe because there were students of color. Maria stated, “We weren’t old enough, really skilled enough to really, like, respond in a way that could, like, get to that, get her to understand that that was wrong. So we just kind of dealt with it and, like, walked away.”

Charlotte described ongoing struggles to make comments in conversations in which she was aware that oppression was happening. She explained, “Something I want to work more on is when there’s an opportunity, like if someone says something and it’s awkward, like, I feel like I should call them out on… I get really shy, and I’m not good at that.” As Sarah recalled her experiences of not speaking up when she wanted to, she stated, “Biting your tongue can be hard, for sure.”

"They" added that the fatigue of social justice work contributed to them not wanting to engage at different times. They stated:

> Fatigue… comes along with kind of being on all the time… sometimes, I just don't have the energy to… I think, you know, if I'm going to refer to myself in this way [as an activist], then I need to be doing this at all times. And sometimes, I don't, uh, because… I am tired, and I am, um, don't have the energy.

Similarly, L. indicated not being able to participate as much as she previously did because of time limitations. She explained:

> I used to do a lot of animal right activism. I used to… go to protests and write lots of letters and write you know, write animal rights activists in prison and things, but now, I have less time and energy for that, and it's just in the background of everything I do and the way I live my life.

For some participants, continuing to engage in activism that was incongruent with their interests was a struggle. Bri described caring strongly about nondiscriminatory policy work, but she struggled to continue engaging in it when she found the process unsatisfying. She emphasized, "I feel like it eats my soul... the political… the strategic. It's so cold and logical and it hurts. I find that I can only do that for so long, and I have to check out again. I can't talk policy one more time… ever." Thus, participants experienced many struggles throughout their activist experiences.

Positive Outcomes

A final major theme that emerged was participants' descriptions of the benefits of social justice activism. Paz emphasized in her interview, "In some ways, yeah, maybe it looks like an act, and yeah, maybe it looks like it's for this greater cause, but in the end, you're the one that's transformed by it. You're the one that's changed by it." They described the positive impact on their own lives of doing this work, including increased

empowerment, hope, and social support. In this section, I illustrate the ways participants described benefitting from their social justice activism.

Positive Impact on Me

Eighteen participants described their beliefs that their various forms of participation in activism were beneficial to them, personally. They explained that, as a result of understanding their personal identities, and subsequent experiences of privilege and oppression, they had experienced a great deal of personal growth and healing. Jenny described activist work as drawing out "raw shit" regarding past trauma that she was able to work on. Alexis articulated this idea in the following way:

> I think that most of the activism that I do, um, at any given place is so integrally and intimately tied to my own, um, oppression and trauma that sometimes, it's initially really, really, really fuckin' scary, and then, as I get more comfortable with it, um, it becomes, it becomes a bit of a healing process.

She went on to describe specifically how her participation in sexual assault prevention programming at her university helped her continue to heal from her own experiences of trauma. She said, "I think even having the changes in the classroom that we could see, um, led to some healing of my own experiences with, um, sexism, um, and trauma with sexism, um, and interpersonal, uh, sexual violence stuff. I think it did lead to some… helping me kind of move."

Several participants described gaining an increased sense of control in their lives by creating positive social change. Paz shared, "I would say that given the discrimination I have experienced at different points (which often lead to feeling isolated or helpless), engaging in activist work has made me feel like I am doing something… particularly so that no one has to endure my same experiences." Similarly, Shelby stated, "I do believe

that making a society and environment better for those like myself through my involvement in activism work definitely helps me get through those days where I'm doubting myself or need a pick-me-up." Thus, activism helped some activists develop increased self-confidence.

Jennifer explained her knowledge of systemic oppression and engagement in activist work helped reduce her self-blame about her experiences of discrimination. She recalled, "My experiences of discrimination are a result of the system, not necessarily a reflection of me or the other person. To step back and look at it from the larger perspective has been helpful for me and has freed me a bit." Similarly, J. spoke to her history of blaming herself for the discrimination she experienced. She explained her involvement in social justice helped her understand she was not to blame. It helped her shift her focus to external sources of her distress. She explained:

> Prior to getting involved in activism, I feel like I would experience things like racism and… question whether I was, like, really worthy or whether, um… whether there was something that was wrong or something that we, that I needed to do in order to… counter that. But understanding how racism works systematically and how discrimination works in a systematic way, I understand that it's not so much about what I do, but really systems that are in place to create the situation in which we are, you know, in.

It is important to note that no participants described their activism as benefitting them to the extent that it completely eliminated their emotional pain or struggles. However, most participants described experiencing these various benefits. Many participants shared that they felt heard, understood, and appreciated by their activist communities. J. indicated feeling more confident to come out as a sexual minority woman as a result of being engaged in social justice work. She explained, "I feel like, um, participating in… activism with other people who are identified as Chicana and feminist really enabled me

to feel comfortable enough to come out." Thus, activism provided an outlet for J. to have social support around her social identities.

Participants gained a sense of safety through their involvement in activism with others. Loraine emphasized the importance of activism in her personal life in contributing to her hope for the future. She stated, "Without hope and vision that a better world is possible, I would despair and kill myself, if I had the courage. 'Nuff said? So yes, solidarity and activist projects save my life, period."

Liking what I do. All participants described liking the various ways they were involved in activism. Although some participants described times in which activism was less enjoyable, there was a clear consensus that they appreciated parts of the work they did.

Bridgett, who appeared in her interview to not have definite explanations for the reasons she felt motivated to help others, commented, "I mean, I guess I don't think that deeply about why I do it. I just do what I feel is right and what I wanna do." She went on to say, "I'm the kind of person that would rather be helping people. Like, that's just kind of… whether it's my friends, the kids I babysit… that's just kind of what I enjoy doing."

Overall, participants expressed passion for their work and derived enjoyment from participating in activism. Jaden commented, "I'm not just sitting around complaining like most people, but I'm actually doing something about what I'm passionate about." "They" stated, "I really enjoy the work I do. Um, I like it a lot. Um, I get a lot of joy from doing it."

Jenny described her work to help adolescent women increase their self-confidence and self-efficacy to pursue higher education with strong enthusiasm. She explained:

> Our ultimate goal, really, is to promote higher education, but I think that's our end goal, and if that happens, that's really cool… um, but really setting these women up for, for a different life than most women have, feels so important. Um, and that's, that's my job. I mean, that's what I get to do every day for work, so… it's pretty fuckin' awesome.

Participants described finding their work rewarding. Although they acknowledged the stress they experience with the work, participants, overall, conveyed a sense of excitement and enthusiasm about continuing the work they love and finding new ways to become involved. This translated to a strong sense of hope in each interview. Loraine used the following metaphor to convey her feelings about her activist involvement: "We're big ships who are sailing on an ocean that's full of storms and waves, and it's very unpredictable what will happen, but this is exactly what we came here for. So, you know, let's enjoy it because it's an amazing experience. And that's kind of where I'm at."

Positive feelings. All participants described experiencing positive emotions as a result of their activist work. They commented on the increased happiness, hopefulness, pride, excitement, and energy they experienced. Although D. appeared somewhat fatigued at the beginning of the experiential activity and interview, she appeared increasingly animated as our interview and conversation about activism progressed. She attributed this to her enthusiasm about her social justice work, and commented, "I mean, a minute ago you said I was feeling tired, and I start talking about this, and I feel energized." All participants demonstrated such enthusiasm in their interviews. They described the work they were passionate about, and their excitement was obvious.

Shelby described her increased hope: "Then, you see turnouts for different activities that you want to be involved in, when you see communities forming, or when you see people united for like purposes, I guess, that's when the hope comes up."

Similarly, Esther commented on the hopefulness she derived from doing social justice work in her research, teaching, and counseling. She stated, "When I'm engaged in the process, then I do, I feel hopeful… I feel excited, really excited about it all."

Although Sarah explained she did not consider herself explicitly to be a social justice activist, she expressed appreciation for the activist work others were doing. When asked to reflect on any positive emotions she derived from her "covert activism," Sarah explained, "I'm not sure it's 'increased my strength' per se, but it does make me feel encouraged about the future. Seeing how active participation has given strength to others, as well as a sense of purpose to people, makes me see the value in social justice activism."

Further, participants spoke to the increased sense of empowerment they gained from their activist work. Jaden commented, "I think it is very empowering to fight the system that oppresses you. I feel more empowered and less of a victim." Cicely described the strength and social connectedness they felt by being connected to the activist community. They explained, "When I go to a meeting that's talking about any of these issues, um, I feel heard, I feel seen, I feel like a real person… like I'm not the only person who has this orientation or this concern."

L. described her involvement as an escort for Planned Parenthood. She described her experiences escorting women past protesters for their appointments as well as the pride she felt about supporting women. She said:

> You know, I always… on the day they escort… it's you know, it's a Saturday, and I have to be there at seven-thirty, so it's getting up at the same time I get up for work. And so the morning… other than getting up and I [feel] grouchy, and I don't want to go, and why did I sign-up for this… but when those two and a half hours are over, and I'm headed back home, I feel proud.

Being Supported

Several participants described increased social support as a benefit of participating in social justice activism. They described this as related to finding activist community and connecting with others. In the space below, I describe participants' different experiences of finding and receiving social support.

Feeling supported. Seventeen participants described feeling supported, accepted, and appreciated by others. For many, this support was found in activist communities and by individuals that shared their social justice interests. Jennifer indicated she felt supported by people in her academic program that mirrored many of her social justice interests. She explained:

> People in my program all… we are very big advocates of social justice, and we all, I think, definitely like to do those things when we can, um, but usually the support I get is from them. I also get a lot of support from my peers from my undergraduate college and that's just kind of through Facebook and keeping up with them and posting things online and keeping each other… which is really nice.

Thus, participants found ways to connect with social support through personal contact and Internet-based social support networks.

For some participants, their support came primarily from family. Bri described her difficulty finding community support at times. She often felt excluded by others. She emphasized believing her family was where she was primarily loved and appreciated for being herself. She stated, "This is, like, the only place where I'm normal, you know… where… and I'm okay embracing who I am as a part of who I am, but at the same time, at home, I'm basically the one that maybe makes food or whatever. It's just that it's a normal part of things." Bri described her activist work as part of helping her nurture a supportive family system that affirmed her identities as a trans woman.

Bridgett indicated she felt supported by her fellow and sister soldiers in the Army. She described feeling safe disclosing her sexual minority identity, as well as her relationship with her partner, to her peers. Bridgett's confidence in disclosing to her friends was clear in the following statement:

> If my friends ask, I'll tell them… like, they don't care. At the beginning of the year, or this summer, I was seeing someone who was also in the Army, and you know, a couple of our mutual friends who are also in the Army just asked us, you know, "Is there something going on?" And I was like, "Yeah, like, I don't care. We're not gonna hide it… it is what it is." And they were actually really ok with it.

Supporting each other. In addition to feeling supported, 17 participants described the importance of supporting each other. Bri spoke to her values of appreciating people allowing others to be vulnerable and make mistakes. As she reflected on her activist work, she commented, "I think it's a matter of giving yourself grace, giving other people grace."

Jenny described perceiving the very experience of marginalized people supporting each other as a political act. She spoke of the work she did to help adolescent women learn to support each other and collaborate. Jenny said:

> I think supporting women to connect with other women is… is so challenging to the main stream system of women being disconnected from other women, um, that that in itself is kind of creating a ripple effect. These women are connecting, they're finding support in other women, and then, they're going out and they're… they're doing that in their daily lives.

Participants spoke to their experiences of being allies to different communities and in the process, feeling more supported themselves. Jaden spoke explicitly to his belief that people supporting each other is essential to social justice activism: "It's about… you know, forging friendships and not only having those friendships but being supportive to other people you know, whether they be people of color or queer people or

whatever." Thus, Jaden recognized the increased social connectedness as a meaningful outcome of social justice activism.

Further, participants' social connectedness was described as being directly beneficial to participants. Max explained that people supporting each other serves a protective purpose insofar as activists are able to help each other avoid becoming burned-out in their efforts to create social change. He said, "There's a whole crew of friends of mine who are current or former AIDS activists, all of whom are negative, so we do a lot of, like, sort of checking-in for each other and both helping folks not get burned-out and also helping folks stay committed."

Making a Difference

Several participants described seeing positive outcomes for their efforts to create social change. They described noticing positive impacts on others' lives as well as concrete examples of progress.

Impacting others. Fifteen participants observed the positive impact they had on others. They recognized their actions and conversations were contributing to positive changes and leaving lasting impressions. Jenny recalled an activist experience during her undergraduate education in which she stood on campus handing daisies to people to raise awareness of child sexual abuse. She stated, "…Standing on the middle of a campus, like, handing-out flowers trying to have conversations about it. I think it really caught people off guard, but it really made a statement, for sure."

L. described speaking to students about racism and White privilege. She explained:

> When I would go into classes to talk about racism and say, you know, "I'm racist," it has an impact. It has an impact on the students when you say that… you know, we all grow-up in a society learning certain things, and I didn't grow-up in a jar. You know, you can't avoid internalizing really toxic messages that exist in our society. You can, as an adult, learn about them and try to dig them out, but they have lived in you; and whether you dig them all out and are somehow magically free… you still accrue unearned privilege as a White person. So you're still part of a racist system. You still benefit from racism, even if you see yourself as completely unbiased. So I think you can say those things with… and not, not get as much shit for it as a White person, I think that, that's part of how it has helped. When they speak out about owning racism - it has an impact on people.

Participants described wanting to have positive impacts on the lives of others. They spoke to hoping to plant the seeds of change. They also indicated preferring to focus their energy on actions they believed would have the most impact. Noah recalled the positive impact she had on people she worked with:

> I know the impact this can have on people… that social justice can have on peoples' lives… and even though it may not be changing our society as a whole, like… I used to work at this neighborhood center, and I used to, like, help people, like, enroll in health care or, like, enroll for food stamps or, like, things like that, um, like, just the absolute, like, gratitude people have for being able to gain access to something like that, like, for being able to eat or being able to see a doctor after they've been sick for God knows how long. I mean, on some level it certainly works, and it helps, and it's important.

Seeing progress and change. Eighteen participants reported seeing progress and positive changes as a result of their social justice activism and the efforts of others. Shelby reported noticing people correcting themselves after making a subtly heterosexist comment in conversation. She explained, "They'll say, 'That's so gay,' and they'll be like, 'Oh wait… sorry.' And I'm like, 'That's okay. It's alright. You're recognizing where you're doing things wrong and trying to take corrective action, and that's all that matters.'

Alexis described, in metaphor, her perspective on even small changes being considered progress. She stated, "So, in some small way… I think a drop in the bucket is

a drop in the fuckin' bucket. It might be a cup of water or it might just be a drop, but it's something." Sarah conveyed her overall optimism about progress when she stated, "I think things are changing… But I think change right now is being accelerated."

J. spoke to her early positive activist experiences and the success that came from her involvement with activist groups. She shared:

> I got involved at an early age with an activist, with the activist community there, uh, mostly around immigrant rights, but I mean, most of the organizing that we did was around immigrant rights, but we really did it in a way in which it was, like, intersecting with feminist and queer politics. We would lead our meetings in a way in which we try to make them, like, a really safe space, um, and when we organized we made sure to, uh, include, like, a queer contingent to make sure that… folks who, uh, were either women or, like, trans-identified, uh, really had a space…We got some pushback from the community initially, but after a while… other community members…'cause we organized with a lot of, like, the Mexican Federations and, um, some of the church leaders. So at first, there was a little bit of a pushback, but after a while… after organizing, like, the first couple of marches… we were really able to set the tone for, like, the way that rights was organized in [city name deleted].

Seeing progress also gave several participants hope and motivation to continue doing activism. Max stated, "At my job, I have a combination of knowledge, and skills, and a passion for it, and a group of people around me who, like, help me have feedback and get better at it, and I can see the change that I'm making rather tangibly. So I can keep going in that kind of activism."

D. described the positive outcomes of a challenging discussion she facilitated with a group of people in conflict. She explained:

> I took a place that was full of tension and division and anxiety and anger… that was supposed to be a team. Everybody had different roles and there's certainly different statuses, but they were a team, and they were hurt. And there was hurt and disappointment and, um, fear and… when I left, people were energized.

Conceptual Model of the Meaning of Social Justice Activism

The model proposed here (Figure 1) reflects my attempt to configure the eight themes discussed above such that they accurately represent participants' experiences of social justice activism and the meaning of social justice for these participants. The model demonstrates the interconnectedness of these themes. As I elaborate below, it is important to understand the model represents a culmination of multiple, diverse experiences, and no single participant's experience is captured in total by the model. Eight participants provided feedback that contributed to the development of this visual representation/model. I will now discuss the components of the model in detail, including how the themes relate to one another, and offer examples from the data where appropriate.

Recognizing and Experiencing Privilege and Oppression as Context

The feminist social constructivist paradigm that informed this study emphasizes the importance of understanding participants' experiences and understandings as fluid, constantly evolving, and informed by the cultural and sociopolitical context of each participant. Participants' recognition and experiences of oppression and privilege was a major theme in this study. All participants acknowledged this theme. It includes participants acknowledging the phenomenon of oppression and privilege, seeing others being oppressed as well as committing acts of oppression, and directly experiencing oppression and privilege themselves. During the initial feedback interview, I presented this theme as initially being equally important as other themes. However, the first participant emphasized her belief that the first theme presented a frame for her experience

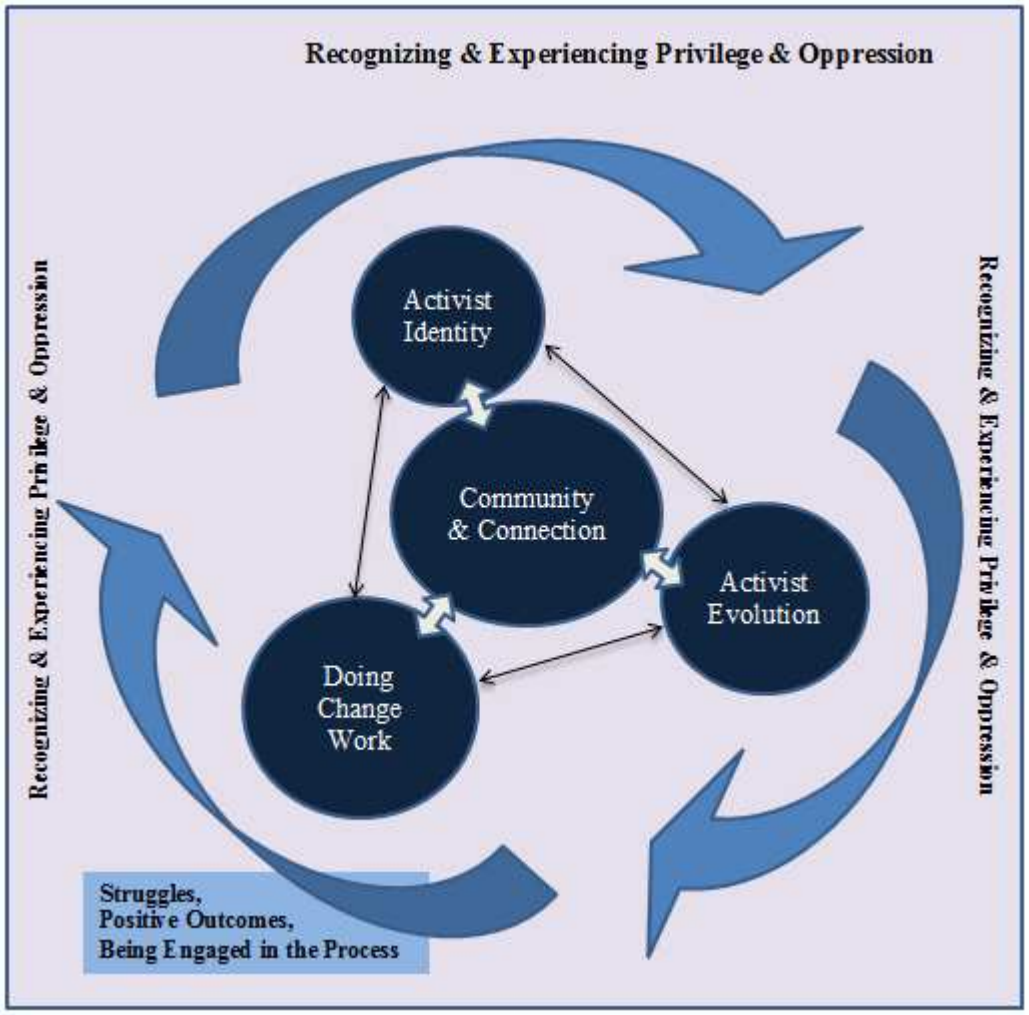


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the meaning of social justice activism.

and understanding of social justice activism. She believed her experiences and understandings of social justice activism occurred within the context of recognizing and experiencing oppression and privilege. I offered this perspective to the remaining 7 participants, and all agreed it should be visually represented as encapsulating and containing their meanings of social justice activism.

The outer frame of the model, then, represents participants' recognition and experiences of privilege and oppression. Also, the background of the model, presented as light purple, further demonstrates that the theme of oppression and privilege encapsulates the other seven themes. Thus, the context of oppression and privilege in this model may be viewed as both a container and frame for participants' experiences and understandings of their activism. In the space below, I describe how this theme serves as a context for the seven remaining themes.

All participants spoke to understanding the negative impact of oppression on people's relationships and connections with each other. They described seeing the negative impact it had in their families, such as Jennifer's description of her struggle with her father's disapproval of her and her brother's sexual minority identities. Several participants sought out communities of people who shared their experiences of oppression, often based around similar sexual or gender identities. Further, participants' activist communities emphasized their interest in connecting with like-minded individuals who also recognized, discussed, and shared their awareness of privilege and oppression.

Participants' identities as social justice activists occurred within the context of recognizing and experiencing oppression and privilege. Participants indicated gaining a

sense of purpose and direction from their interests in creating social equity and fairness, and thus reducing oppression. Indeed, many participants' desires to be activists stemmed from their awareness of their privilege and motivation to use that privilege to challenge social injustices. Max's activist identity stemmed from his belief that, if he wanted to survive in the midst of oppressive and invalidating circumstances, he would need to commit to living a life in which he participated in social justice activism. Thus, participants' identities as activists occurred within the context of oppression and privilege.

Many participants shared that their activist developments and evolutions were strongly influenced by their experiences of oppression and privilege. Charlotte, Bridgett, and Sarah believed they had not directly experienced oppression themselves; however, their awareness of injustices was important to their motivation to become involved in creating positive social change with their different informal and formal activist approaches. For some participants, such as Loraine, their activist evolutions were influenced by seeing others responding to and challenging oppression. Loraine emphasized that seeing her parents' involvement in the Civil Rights Movement was a significant influence on her activist development.

Recognizing and understanding social injustice was important to every participant's involvement in activist work. Although they described having different approaches and styles to participating in activism, their activist behaviors centered on the idea of creating social change and decreasing oppression. Further, many participants found their privileged social identities helpful in their efforts to take action. L. spoke to feeling heard by her students when she discussed White privilege and internalized racism.

She believed her White privilege allowed many White students to better hear her challenge racism.

Participants' ongoing process of experiencing struggles related to their activist work is also contained within this theme. They described the difficulties of challenging oppression while they continued to experience it. This led several participants to feel fatigue and discouragement. They acknowledged the oppression is ongoing, and social change takes a great deal of time in many instances. Therefore, their activist experiences sometimes led to burn-out and total exhaustion because they did not perceive themselves to be creating change at the rate they would prefer. Many spoke to struggling to see oppression continue in spite of their activist efforts. Some participants described struggling with unsupportive experiences within marginalized communities. "They" emphasized observing oppression within sexual and gender minority communities and recognized this as an ongoing social justice dilemma.

Further, participants' recognition and experiences of privilege were struggles for them at times as well. Alexis, in particular, spoke to the struggle of owning that her social identity and privilege as a White person may pose a barrier preventing people of color from feeling safe to connect with her. Thus, even participants' experiences of privilege posed a struggle for them at different times.

Participants' activist successes and positive outcomes were further embedded within their awareness and experience of oppression and privilege. They described seeing positive changes occurring as a result of their efforts to reduce oppression. Their increased empowerment and hope were benefits from challenging their internalized oppression and helping others to challenge privilege and oppression. The harmful effects

of oppression were somewhat reduced at times as a result of participating in activism and the relationships they gained during their activist experiences. It is important to note, however, that none of the participants believed their activist work completely eliminated the harmful impact of oppression on their lives. Thus, the benefits they derived from their social justice work remains embedded within their recognition of privilege and oppression.

Participants spoke about coping and engaging in self-care throughout their activist work, largely because of the potential exhaustion associated with reducing oppression. Similarly, they described trying to focus on the positive and feel optimistic while engaging in their activist processes, because they were immersed in oppressive social contexts and often presented with situations of oppression. They indicated awareness of the need to take care of themselves and try to feel some optimism while immersed in that context. Further, participants' interest in being open while communicating with different people spoke to their efforts to not contribute to oppression by harming others or forcing their opinions on people.

Underlying Contextual Processes

The blue arrows represent three themes participants described as ongoing and occurring throughout participants' experiences of activism: *Engaged in the Process*, *Positive Outcomes*, and *Struggles*. When I initially constructed the visual representation of this model, these themes were represented as being independent of one another. They were presented as large blue circles, similar to those described below. However, all 8 participants commented that these three processes were important to their experiences

and understandings of the themes represented by the large blue circles. They asked that these three themes (i.e., *Engaged in the Process*, *Positive Outcomes*, and *Struggles*) be visually represented as occurring throughout their activist experiences and contributing to their experience and understanding of other major themes. Thus, the blue arrows were created to represent the fluidity and ongoing nature of these themes. They represent underlying contextual processes embedded within *Recognizing and Experiencing Privilege and Oppression* that further inform and influence themes represented by the large blue circles. In the space below, I describe how each of these contextual processes relates to the blue circle themes.

Participants described their struggles throughout their activist experiences as well as their different meanings and understandings of activism. Several changes that occurred throughout participants' evolution and development as activists were influenced by the struggles they encountered. Paz described being more involved in rallies and wanting to explicitly challenge others and change their opinions early in her development. However, she explained that this contributed to frustration and discouragement when she was not successful. Her struggles with these feelings led to her choosing different ways to approach activism.

Many struggles persisted and influenced participants' activist identities. Bri emphasized her belief that other people perceive her to be both "a person and a cause." She described her activist identity as an overall experience of social justice activism that contributed to her feeling tokenized and stereotyped at times. Several participants struggled with their activist identities and experiences. "They" commented specifically on their hesitancy to identify as an activist because they believed there would be an

expectation that they needed to “be on all the time” if they described themselves as an activist. Their concerns about fatigue, discouragement, and burnout from engaging in activism influenced even their understanding of their identity. Further, participants described struggling with not engaging in activism in situations where they believed it may have been helpful or necessary, and this further caused them to question if they were truly activists.

Further, participants’ struggles to take action when they believed it was needed impeded their ability to do change work. Charlotte indicated her shyness prevented her from speaking up in some situations when she wanted to do so. Participants described struggling throughout their activist experiences with sometimes not knowing how to take action. They struggled with negative feelings that impeded their interest in some social justice topics or types of activism.

Their struggles persisted throughout their interactions with other people, their relationships, and their community experiences. As previously noted, many participants sought communities of like-minded individuals and people who shared their social identities. But occasionally, participants struggled to find the social support within their own communities. J. emphasized her belief that, when she has experienced burnout, it has been due to conflicts among people within her activist communities.

Further, participants indicated the importance of the relationship in creating social change. However, every participant identified negative experiences in their pasts in which they attempted to advocate or assert their beliefs to others and the outcome was negative. They described experiencing backlash or being invalidated by people they cared about. Thus, participants’ struggles throughout activism are relevant to each theme.

Further, participants' struggles permeate their understandings and meanings of activism. The struggles were an undeniable part of the process for every participant in this study.

Participants' experiences associated with *Being Engaged in the Process* permeated their overall activist experiences and meanings of activism. They described approaching communication with other people with the hope of engaging in cooperative conversations rather than trying to argue or lecture. Many participants spoke to early experiences in their activist developments and evolutions in which they tried to approach activism more aggressively, but they learned this often did not work. Thus, many participants learned how to engage in the process from their early experiences as well as learning from other activists.

Participants' descriptions of being open and authentic are also relevant to their interest in connecting with others and engaging in community. D. emphasized wanting to collaborate with others throughout her social justice work. All participants spoke to wanting to build and support meaningful connections and safety with other people. Throughout their activist experiences, they reflected on their activisms and styles to consider how they could continue to engage with others and foster those meaningful connections.

Similarly, participants reported the elements of the *Being Engaged in the Process* theme were also relevant to their efforts to do change work. They reported that change work happens in the context of relationships, and thus there is a need to approach communication with openness, authenticity, and an emphasis on safety. They described reflecting on their activism throughout their experiences, and they perceived this to be important to determining the most effective approaches to creating social change. Their

ongoing efforts to focus on the positive and engage in self-care helped sustain them throughout their work.

Further, their emphasis on being open, authentic, and wanting to approach communication with these positive intentions informs their activist identities. Several participants described living authentically itself as living their social justice values and beliefs in fairness and respect. This permeates everything described in themes represented by the four blue circles.

Finally, participants described experiencing benefits and *Positive Outcomes* throughout their activist experiences. It should be noted that participants did not describe these benefits as end points in their activism. Rather they occurred, like positive reinforcement, throughout their activist experiences. The benefits they described pertaining to healing and growth occurred simultaneously with their developments and evolution as activists. Many participants were motivated to get involved in activism because they experienced many positive outcomes.

Several participants described identifying as activists and their beliefs and values about fairness and respect. They emphasized liking what they were doing as activists because it felt congruent with their beliefs and values. They experienced joy through activism, and they felt passionate about their social justice interests. The positive outcomes they experienced throughout reinforced their drive and motivation to be activists. This also sustained them during times when they questioned and challenged the validity of their work.

Participants described feeling increased empowerment, hope, happiness, pride, and excitement throughout their involvement in activism. Shelby indicated seeing

positive outcomes for her social justice work helped reduce her self-doubt. She and other participants spoke to having increased confidence by participating in activism. The benefits of healing from past experiences of trauma and oppression also resulted from their activist work.

Further, the positive outcomes participants described occurred throughout their experiences connecting with others and being involved in communities. They experienced increased social connectedness and support. They described seeing positive outcomes and changes occurring within their relationships. This further reinforced for many participants that change is possible, albeit slow at different times. Getting positive feedback from others in relationships and communities contributed to their hope and motivation to continue engaging in social justice work.

The Four Central Themes

The final four themes presented in this model, *Activist Evolution*, *Activist Identity*, *Doing Change Work*, and *Connection and Community*, are represented as blue circles. As previously noted, these themes are situated on top of the underlying contextual processes, which occur throughout participants' descriptions of the four final themes (blue circles). Although these themes are presented as independent of one another, they, like the rest of the model, should be interpreted as influencing each other. Participants agreed with the representation of these themes as separate but connected by bi-directional arrows to emphasize their interdependence. I will describe how each of these remaining themes is related to each other.

Community and Connection is presented as a central theme in the conceptual model to convey the importance participants placed on their relationships and connections with other people. Each participant in the feedback interviews indicated believing this theme was central to their experiences of activism as well as the meaning they attributed to social justice activism. Indeed, for many participants, their initial interest in becoming involved in activism during their *Activist Evolution* began as an attempt to find other people who shared their social identities, activist interests, and struggles with oppression. Many participants described feeling isolated during their early lives, particularly while experiencing discrimination and oppression. Max and Cicely particularly emphasized their activist developments co-occurring with their desire to find community and social support. By becoming involved in activism, participants found others with similar interests. They learned from other people how to approach activism and create social change.

Community and Connection was described by participants as influencing and being influenced by their *Activist Identities*. As previously described, many participants found communities through activism. They described feeling comfortable around other like-minded people working to create positive social change. The purpose and direction many participants derived from their social justice interests fueled their motivation to seek out activist communities. They further emphasized their beliefs in fairness and equity as important to their activist identities and contributing to their desire to establish cooperative and respectful connections with other people.

Community and Connection was described by participants as influencing and being influenced by *Doing Change Work*. Participants described doing change work with

other people. Indeed, Maria, and many other participants, indicated activist work is not something the activist can do alone. Participants emphasized collaboration and cooperation throughout their efforts to create social change. They emphasized that some of the most substantial social justice work takes place in the context of relationships. Thus, the relationship between Community and Connection and Doing Change Work may be particularly important.

Participants described their *Activist Evolutions* as related to their *Activist Identities*. Participants typically did not identify as activists early in their activist evolutions. However, they indicated that characteristics of their activist identities, such as believing in fairness and equity, contributed to their early desire and motivation to volunteer or help other people. These values and beliefs informed their developmental processes of learning about and becoming involved in activism. Through their activist evolutions, participants indicated they gradually came to identify as activists or people working to create positive social change. Thus, Activist Evolution may be understood as the process leading participants up to the current point of identifying as social justice activists.

Participants spoke to their different strategies and approaches to activism changing over time. Paz reflected on her activist work during the experiential activity, commenting that she was aware of how her activist priorities and interests had evolved. Noah spoke to preferring community organizing as her primary approach to doing change work. However, she had relocated to a different geographic location recently and noted going through a process of trying to learn how to do activism differently in a different location within the United States. Participants saw their perspectives on *Doing Change*

Work as appropriately changing throughout their *Activist Evolutions*, as a result of continuing to learn and gain new experiences and activist skills.

Several participants described their perceptions of themselves as activists being influenced by the type of activism they were doing. Several participants who indicated being involved in formal campaigns or community organizing more readily identified as social justice activists than participants who viewed their parenting and relationships as examples of social justice. Thus, many participants' *Activist Identities* were related to *Doing Change Work*. However, participants involved in more subtle and less stereotypical forms of social justice work also emphasized their beliefs and values in fairness, equity, and respecting other people. Indeed, many participants perceived being respectful and honoring other people was activism and ultimately contributing to positive social change. For many participants, having a social justice identity contributed to their motivation and drive to participate in change work. Jaden indicated believing social justice gave his life a sense of purpose and meaning. He described how his specific activist behaviors were influenced by this activist drive that stemmed from his identity.

Unlike the underlying contextual processes, the four themes represented by blue circles do not always occur simultaneously. They influence and are influenced by each other; however, there were times participants described them as occurring independently. As previously noted, participants admitted there were times they did not participate in change work. Some participants emphasized their need to disconnect from other people, relationships, and communities in order to rest and take care of themselves. Further, the negative experiences some participants struggled with in their communities also led them to want some time away from their communities. Participants also noted they did not

always identify as activists. There were times they chose not to engage in activism and, therefore, some participants were hesitant to describe themselves as activists. Further, several participants described their activist developments and evolutions in the past tense. They did not see their activist interests and involvement as currently evolving. Thus, these four themes were described by participants as contributing to each other, but also being separate from each other.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined the meaning of social justice activism for sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals. A grounded theory design and a social constructivist paradigm guided the conceptualization of the methods. In interviews, participants discussed their social identities, experiences, and observations of oppression and privilege and discussed their personal experiences with social justice activism, as well as their beliefs about and meanings of social justice more broadly. In this chapter, I discuss the findings specific to the research questions and then integrate the literature with those findings. Finally, I discuss limitations and implications for research and counseling with a social justice focus.

Discussion of Results

This study used a grounded theory design for my autoethnography as well as interviews with 20 participants. First, I will answer the research questions posed in this study with the themes that emerged from participants' interviews. Second, I will discuss and compare the results of the themes that emerged from my autoethnography with the themes that emerged from participants' interviews.

Themes from Participant Interviews

This study posited research questions centered on understanding the activist experiences and the meaning of social justice activism for sexual minority women (SMW) and transgender individuals. Each research question will be discussed in sequence. The research questions are:

1. What does participating in social justice activism mean to SMW and transgender individuals?
2. How do styles and approaches to activism reflect the meanings they attribute to activism?
3. How do identities and social justice activism interact?
4. How does social justice activism contribute (or not) to perceptions and experiences of empowerment and psychological well-being?

First, I explore what participating in social justice activism meant to SMW and transgender individuals in this study. The results demonstrated that recognizing and experiencing privilege and oppression was the context of participants' experiences and understandings of social justice activism. They recognized injustices in society as well as their personal experiences of being discriminated and invalidated. This provided a context for participants to appreciate the need for social action to create positive change. Further, most participants emphasized that social justice activism meant being aware of their social identities, including the privilege and oppression associated with their different identities. It meant finding ways to get involved in types of activism that were congruent with participants' interests, values, lifestyles, and social identities. Participants' activist interests were diverse and specific to each person.

For most participants, participating in social justice activism meant living authentically. Social justice did not start and end with doing formal campaign work, rallies, or marches. Rather, participants emphasized living their lives in ways that were congruent with social justice values, such as respect, fairness, and equality. Participating in social justice activism gave several SMW and transgender individuals a sense of purpose and direction. It gave many participants a sense of existential meaning. Further, participants emphasized that relationships and human connection were central to the meaning of social justice. Several participants found supportive communities through their involvement in activism. They collaborated with people to do change work, and they emphasized that change happened in the context of relationships.

Second, I discuss how participants' styles and approaches to activism reflected the meanings they attributed to activism. The types of activism participants described were diverse and specific to their interests. Overall, participants emphasized valuing fairness, respect, and equality. They emphasized connecting with other people throughout their social justice work. Participants agreed this was not work they could do alone. Thus, their styles and approaches to activism involved collaboration with other activists, pointing out injustices in conversations and social interactions, as well as building communities and relationships with other people. They also described their activism changing over time according to their evolving understanding of social justice. At different times in their activist developments, they described having interests in different approaches to social change, such as participating in rallies, parades, formal campaigns, and community organizing. Some participants noted that their activist interests changed to focus more on parenting, teaching, and everyday conversations. They described seeing the different

sizes and types of activism as important to creating change. Although participants often preferred certain approaches over others for their personal activism, most participants emphasized seeing the different "shades of activism" as important overall.

Third, I explore how participants' identities and social justice activism interacted. Participants' experiences of oppression and privilege impacted their interest in social justice activism. Indeed, participants reported in the feedback interviews that these experiences provided a context or frame for their social justice activism. Participants who directly experienced discrimination described feeling motivated to change systemic oppression to prevent others from sharing their experiences. Several participants chose to address injustices they had experienced themselves, such as those based on their race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Further, participants who indicated receiving privilege and advantages for their social identities described using that privilege to advocate on the behalf of others. Indeed, some participants found it easier to advocate and challenge oppression when they were not directly experiencing it themselves. For example, some participants spoke to having privilege for their citizenship status and wanted to advocate for immigration rights. Also, they described being HIV negative and choosing to address injustices faced by individuals with AIDS and HIV positive statuses. All participants indicated their intersecting identities influenced their experiences of injustice, privilege, and choice to become involved in different types of activism. Further, most participants emphasized the importance of their identities as social justice activists. These social identities reinforced their motivation to engage in activism and create positive social change.

With regard to the final research question, I discuss how social justice activism did or did not contribute to perceptions and experiences of empowerment and psychological well-being. Results indicated participants experienced struggles as well as benefits in their activist work. They described social justice work as emotionally draining at times, occasionally leading to fatigue. Being an activist felt exhausting to some participants, particularly when they had specific goals and expectations about the outcomes of their activism. Several participants expressed discouragement about not seeing progress or success for their activist efforts. Some participants expressed concern about burning out if they invested energy in activism and did not take care of themselves throughout the process or had positive outcomes for their activist efforts. Further, when participants did not have positive experiences in their activist communities, they struggled with discouragement and fatigue.

Several participants emphasized the benefits of doing social justice work. They felt increased empowerment, hope, happiness, pride, and excitement while engaging in social justice activism. By doing change work, many participants' sense of powerlessness in the midst of oppressive contextual circumstances decreased. They felt more confident about confronting oppression that led to their distress. Through activism, many participants increased their social connectedness. They cultivated relationships with other people through activism that decreased their sense of social isolation. Participants also shared that their involvement in activism helped them heal from past experiences of trauma because they were working to change and prevent injustices like those they had experienced. For many participants, the self-blame that resulted from past trauma and discrimination decreased as a result of understanding the systemic nature of oppression.

Thus, activism led to many benefits and increased psychological well-being. Now that I have reviewed how the findings of this study answered the research questions, I will explain how the themes that emerged from the autoethnography compare and may be integrated with the results of participants' interviews.

Integrating My Meaning with Participants' Themes

The themes that emerged from my autoethnography analysis were similar to those of the 20 participants in the study. Recognizing and experiencing oppression and privilege were important to my overall understanding of social justice, as well as my motivation to create social change. My autoethnography, as well as participant interviews, acknowledged changes in my perceptions of activism throughout my activist evolution. Further, I emphasized the drive and sense of existential meaning that social justice provided. Like the participants, many of my lifestyle choices were influenced by my social justice values and interests, including my career choice and decision to do a dissertation focused on social justice issues. Relationships and connection to other people was hugely important as well. Throughout the autoethnography, I emphasized appreciation for people and desire to connect and cultivate relationships. Indeed, the change work I participated in primarily happened in the context of relationships, including teaching and counseling. Even the qualitative design of this dissertation was evidence of my desire to connect with people in conversations about their experiences. Further, the struggles and benefits of social justice activism that I described were similar to participants' descriptions. I reported feeling overwhelmed and discouraged by oppression as well as the process of doing change work. I, too, emphasized the

empowerment I felt from believing I could make a positive difference in the world. Thus, there were many similarities in the themes that emerged in my autoethnography and participants' interviews. It is also important to note that my autoethnography was influenced by my interviews with participants. As this study progressed, my understanding of social justice increased through my discussions with participants as well as my self-reflection in memoing. Although I began the study with a positive perspective on social justice and an understanding of what it means to me, that meaning and understanding increased over the course of this study. Thus, the meaning of social justice for me, specifically, was influenced by my interactions with participants and engagement in this research.

Results as Related to the Literature

In this section, I integrate the major research findings with the social justice literature. I also offer implications for future research to build upon the findings of this study.

Activist Evolution

Participants in the current study described their evolving understandings of social justice, including the ways their activist work had changed over time. They had different experiences of learning how to do activism and emphasized the importance of role models and involvement in communities and activist groups throughout their activist developments. These findings were consistent with the social justice literature (e.g., Renn, 2007). For example, Swank and Fahs (2012) demonstrated that heterosexually

identified and LGB-identified college students were more politically active when they had feminist friends, which the researchers attributed to having more opportunities to discuss injustices based on multiple intersecting identities. Participants in the current study often learned about activism through relationships, often with politically active and aware peers and mentors. Even in their descriptions of formal education, such as studying social work or public policy, the SMW and transgender individuals in this study emphasized their relationships with professors as mentors and role models. Researchers demonstrated the importance of gender and sexual minority individuals having relationships with politically active individuals who shared their social identities in order to become socialized to activism (e.g., Swank & Fahs, 2011). They asserted the importance of lesbian and gay individuals having those communities to learn how to become involved in activism. Connection to other activists helped participants in the current study maintain their own political engagement. Zaytoun (2006) further asserted the importance of interpersonal relationships in activists' social justice development. Thus, future researchers would benefit from considering activists' social justice developments and education about activism as relational processes.

Activist Identity

The current study found that participation in activism provided a sense of identity for many participants. Social justice influenced participants' belief systems and worldviews. For many, it provided an overall sense of purpose and meaning in life. Indeed, participants spoke to social justice as a way of being, in addition to their specific activist behaviors and actions. This study adds to the little research that demonstrates how

social justice contributes to SMW and transgender individuals' sense of identity (e.g., Cashore & Tuason, 2009). Participants emphasized their social justice values impacted their decisions, including their career choices, education decisions, parenting styles, and their choice of romantic partners. Thus, the current study demonstrated that social justice activism meant more for participants than specific behaviors and actions. It is also important to note that, although participants experienced oppression, trauma, and injustice, they identified as social change activists rather than victims. This reinforces the FMC literature that asserts engagement in social justice activism may contribute to increased personal strength, resilience, and empowerment (Morrow et al., 2006; Worell & Remer, 2003). Future researchers may benefit from conceptualizing social justice as a broader way of being and self-concept in addition to their specific activist behaviors and interventions.

Doing Change Work

The current study provided a more detailed explanation of SMW and transgender individuals' social justice activism than previously available in the literature. Researchers have asked for increased attention to understanding the different strategies and approaches of diverse groups of feminist activists (e.g., Antrobus, 2004). Even more recently, Swank and Fahs (2012) asserted the need for researchers to continue to explore ways that student and community activists choose their activist approaches and create activist coalitions. The current study helped fill this gap in the literature by providing specific examples of the different styles and approaches SMW and transgender individuals use in their activist work. The different types of activism occurred on

individual, community, and larger socio-political levels (e.g., Kashubeck-West, Szymanski, & Meyer, 2008). On an individual level, participants reported challenging microaggressions and oppressive comments in conversations. They also emphasized doing activism intrapsychically by being open to considering and learning new information, as well as challenging their biases and beliefs. On a community level, participants reported collaborating with activist groups, working at resource centers in universities and communities, engaging in community organizing, and engaging in formal dialogue work with others in which they challenged their biases, power, and privilege. On a socio-political level, participants worked on campaigns to influence public policy, including transportation legislation. They also formally advocated for gender nondiscrimination policies at the state level. Thus, this study clarified specific activist approaches SMW and transgender individuals used to create positive social change.

Further, participants emphasized doing their social justice work in relationships. Although many held on to stereotypical expectations that social justice activism primarily involved macro level changes, such as influencing legislation, the majority of participants emphasized believing change happened in relationships. Future research should continue to explore how SMW and transgender activists' relational understandings and meanings of social justice influence their activist strategies and approaches.

Community and Connection

The current study extended the literature by demonstrating the central importance of relationships in the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender

individuals. Prior literature, such as Morrow and colleagues (2006) and Ward (2008), asserted that social organizations and coalitions provide important opportunities for activists to collaborate to create positive social change. Further, coalitions provide opportunities for individuals to embrace their multiple intersecting identities (Morrow et al., 2006; Sandoval, 1995). The current study reinforced these findings by articulating participants' emphases on collaboration and group work. However, the current study extends the literature to emphasize that participants' connections with other people were central to their definitions of social justice and the individual meaning of social justice for most participants. They defined social justice in relational terms. Their connection with other people was a thread woven throughout their experience and understanding of social justice. Each emergent theme demonstrated the importance participants placed on relationships.

Further, participants in the current study challenged activism that focused on single-identity politics (e.g., Naples, 1998) by emphasizing the value they placed on multiple intersecting identities. Several participants advocated for understanding the intersection of oppression and privilege in their communities and social organizations. They also valued and advocated for inclusion as well as a desire to connect with individuals across different worldviews and political perspectives. Future research may benefit from conceptualizing social justice activism as a relational process for many SMW and transgender individuals.

Engaged in the Process

The emergent theme, *Engaged in the Process*, included specific behaviors participants engaged in throughout their activist experiences, including being open, being authentic, reflecting on their activist work, and engaging in coping and self-care. These findings provided further insight to the overall activist experiences of these participants, beyond their specific activisms. These findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating the complexity of SMW and transgender individuals' activist experiences, particularly regarding their emphasis on engaging in self-care.

Recently, researchers have begun to give more attention to the importance of activists' self-care while engaging in activism. Vaccaro and Mena (2011) found that queer activists of color struggled in their activist work when they had limited social support, difficulty setting boundaries, and did not engage in self-care. Further, these struggles contributed to burnout and fatigue for the participants in their study. This is a topic that has only recently begun to receive attention in the mental health literature, and thus, the current study provides further insight to the importance of self-care in sexual and gender minority activists' experiences. Participants in the current study emphasized that simultaneously experiencing oppression while engaging in activism contributed to exhaustion and a high need for self-nurturance. Therefore, the field of Counseling Psychology would benefit from continuing to explore and examine this phenomenon, particularly for activists with minority identities and statuses.

Struggles

The struggles participants described were consistent with the social justice literature (e.g., Cashore & Tuason, 2009; Stone, 2009). In particular, participants struggled with feeling excluded from activist groups or having their social identities invalidated. Transgender and bisexual participants struggled with feeling invalidated or tokenized by gender normative, lesbian, and gay activists. Indeed, many recognized this oppression occurred within marginalized, activist communities, and they spoke directly to the need for activism to challenge these issues. The current study contributes to the literature by giving voice to some of these experiences of transgender and bisexual activists. Future research could explore how oppression within marginalized, activist communities contributes to struggles as well as activists' efforts to challenge these issues.

Further, many participants were hesitant to identify themselves as social justice activists, although they believed they participated in action to create positive social change. They attributed much of their hesitancy to concern that if they were not constantly engaged in activism, they could not consider themselves activists. Yet participants spoke to their struggles to engage constantly in activism. This finding was consistent with the activist literature, demonstrating people often expect activists to be constantly engaged in formal activism (e.g., Bobel, 2007). However, participants in the current study emphasized the need to take breaks from activism, or particular types of activism, at different times in their activist journeys. This finding contributes to the literature by challenging expectations that activists may achieve a 'perfect standard' of activism in which they are constantly engaged and motivated to take action. The current study showed the realities of participants' activist processes and difficulties maintaining

constant engagement. Further, SMW and transgender individuals' decisions to change their activisms and disengage from particular types of activism may be important for researchers to continue examining.

Positive Outcomes

In agreement with the FMC literature (e.g., Brown, 2010; Worell & Remer, 2003), the current study found that participants benefitted from participating in social justice activism. Worell and Remer (2003) asserted that individuals may feel increased self-confidence and social connectedness by challenging oppressive circumstances that contribute to their distress. Many participants spoke to their increased understanding of the external sources of their distress reducing their self-blame. They also described seeing progress and successfully creating social change. This reinforced many individuals' hope and belief that social change was possible. Jones and Voss (2008) explained that social justice activism was an outlet for sexual minority women to channel their sadness, fear, and anger about oppression and trauma. Thus, the current study reinforces the existent social justice literature.

Further, participants emphasized their connections and relationships with other people were central to the benefits they derived from activism. They did not do change work on their own. Through their engagement in social justice work, they cultivated new relationships with diverse people and learned to collaborate and cooperate with others. The current study contributes a more detailed understanding of the benefits SMW and transgender individuals may derive from participating in activism within relationships. Although the social justice literature (e.g., Chung & Bemak, 2012) emphasizes macro

level changes to create social justice, the participants in this study emphasized the empowerment, hope, happiness, pride, and excitement they derived from doing social justice work in relationships and communities. Additional research may provide further insight to the benefits SMW and transgender individuals derive from engaging in activism. Finally, future researchers may want to consider the question of whether well-adjusted gender and sexual minority individuals are inclined to engage in social justice activism or if engagement in activism contributes to positive outcomes.

Limitations and Implications for Research

One important limitation of this study was the lack of demographic diversity pertaining to education status, social class/SES, race/ethnicity, and age diversity among participants. All participants in this study indicated having at least some college education. Seven of the 20 participants had completed master's degrees and 6 of the remaining 13 had doctoral degrees. There was also a lack of social class/SES diversity in this sample. Fifteen of the 20 participants reported their social class/SES as middle-class. Fifteen of the 20 participants identified as White/European American and the remaining 5 participants identified as persons of color. Finally, a majority of participants (11 of the 20) indicated their age range was between 20 and 30 years old. Only 5 participants reported their ages were over 40 years old, and only 1 of those individuals was over 60 years of age. These demographic limitations further limit the ways the conceptual model derived here may account for the experiences of SMW and transgender individuals with racial/ethnic minority identities, over 40 years of age, lower social class/SES, and lower education status. For example, older adult SMW and transgender individuals may

emphasize different approaches and styles of activism. They may give more attention to different social justice topics, such as legal recognition of partnerships and granting power of attorney to partners in the event of illness or death. Also, SMW and transgender persons of color may have different understandings and experiences of activist communities regarding the inclusion or invalidation of multiple, intersecting, minority identities than White SMW and transgender individuals. Further, the language participants used to describe their social justice and activist experiences may be more typical of individuals from middle and higher socioeconomic backgrounds with more formal education. Gender and sexual minority individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might place less emphasis on formal, academic education in their activist developments than many of the participants in the current study. It is possible that gender and sexual minority individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may use different language to describe their identities and experiences. They may also describe different struggles, possibly related to having less economic privilege, and have difficulty advocating for themselves and others.

It is unclear to what extent education status contributes to sexual and gender minorities' participation in activism (e.g., Swank & Fahs, 2012). Some researchers found individuals with higher socioeconomic statuses and more education were more likely to participate in activism than individuals from lower SES (Swank & Fahs, 2011; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003). However, researchers have also found education and economic status did not affect political activism among gay and lesbian activists (e.g., Barrett & Pollack, 2005). It is possible that the more privileged social identities and statuses of participants in this sample provided them with the ability and permission to engage in discussion and

analysis of social justice activism. It may be that social justice activism is interpreted differently and carries different meaning for SMW and transgender individuals without these privileged statuses.

Another important limitation of this study was the recruitment methods I used. As described in Chapter II, I relied heavily on word-of-mouth and snowball sampling approaches. Although this strategy was useful for reaching participants with diverse social justice experiences, it may have contributed to limitations in the demographic diversity of the sample. It is likely that participants' social networks included SMW and transgender individuals with similar levels of education, SES/social class, age, and race/ethnicity. Thus, participants spreading the word about this study to their friends and communities may have added to the homogeneity of the sample.

Further, I also utilized email recruitment in this study. This method had the potential of reaching participants throughout the United States, thus increasing the geographic diversity of the sample. However, this method may have ultimately recruited individuals with education and socioeconomic privilege to have access to computers and email accounts. It should be noted that I did provide flyers to LGBTQ resource centers in Salt Lake City; however, no participants responded to this method of recruitment. Thus, additional recruitment approaches were taken, but they did not successfully enhance the diversity of the sample.

Additionally, several of my personal contacts provided assistance in spreading the word about this study through their social networks via word-of-mouth, email, and handing out fliers advertising the study at LGBTQ-related and social justice-oriented events. For the most part, these efforts were not successful. This leads me to consider that

the topic of my study may not have seemed relevant or accessible, even to SMW and transgender individuals who participated in activism. Indeed, most participants who contacted me about participating inquired initially if the social justice-related activities they participated in qualified as activism. This study demonstrated that participants engaged in a variety of activities with the intention of creating positive social change, many of which may not fit the mainstream stereotype or dominant perception of activism (e.g., parenting, teaching). Thus, it is possible that many individuals who would have qualified for the study chose not to participate because they did not perceive themselves to be activists.

The absence of focus groups may be another limitation of the study. I obtained feedback on the results and collaborated with participants individually to create the conceptual model. However, focus groups would have provided participants with opportunities to hear each other's perspectives and further collaborate with each other to create the conceptual model. Discussions in focus groups may have provided participants a forum to further consider and explore the meaning of social justice activism. As I shared participant quotes while describing the results during feedback interviews, participants were interested to hear about others' perspectives. Thus, focus groups may have enhanced participants' experiences in the study, as well as their understandings of the different meanings of social justice activism.

This study contributes to an increasing body of social justice-oriented literature in counseling psychology. As previously discussed, the results suggested several areas that need to be further explored by researchers and practitioners, including the relational meanings and understandings of social justice activism, the importance of self-care and

taking breaks as an activist, oppression these individuals may experience within their own minority communities, and therapeutic interventions and benefits pertaining to involvement in social justice activism. It is recommended that future researchers build upon the findings of this study and attempt to correct for the limitations. Future researchers' recruitment efforts need to orient specifically to reach participants who represent diverse backgrounds, particularly pertaining to race/ethnicity, SES/social class, age, and education status. It is recommended that researchers utilize diverse recruitment strategies, beyond word-of-mouth and snowball sampling, to reach participants. It may be beneficial for researchers to contact specific community LGBTQ resource centers in different geographic locations and send recruitment emails through activist-oriented listserves. Further, with respect to implications for research, future studies that build upon the conceptual model developed in this study may utilize a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. This qualitative design elevates participants' statuses to co-researchers. It allows participants to develop the research questions and determine the topic of investigation based on what they consider relevant to their communities and concerns (e.g., Torre & Ayala, 2009). This approach would build upon the feminist social constructivist paradigm of the current study by emphasizing participants' empowerment as co-researchers. Further, researchers interested in understanding the experiences and meanings of activism for sexual and gender minority populations would benefit from collaborating with these communities more directly to do research that directly benefits the community.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study provide several implications for practitioners of mental health who work with SMW and transgender individuals. First, participants in the current study agreed that oppression, trauma, and discrimination had significant impacts on their lives, including social isolation, distress, sadness, fear, and anger. The results reinforce the importance feminist multicultural therapists place on contextual factors contributing to the distress that marginalized populations experience. This may be particularly relevant for clients who experience and struggle with social isolation, anger, and self-blame as a result of discrimination and oppression. Conceptualizing SMW and transgender clients from a feminist multicultural and social justice perspective would help practitioners and clients to deconstruct their experiences of oppression and understand how their distress is influenced by contextual factors. Further, practitioners would benefit from utilizing an empowerment focus aimed at helping clients develop and employ their strengths and collaborate with others to create positive social change.

A second implication for practice includes practitioners' awareness of the specific strategies and approaches to social action that may appeal to SMW and transgender clients. This may include practitioners recognizing where their clients are in their activist developments. For example, a client who is beginning to deepen their awareness of oppression and privilege may be interested in different social action strategies than a client with more experience and knowledge of activism. Participants in the current study emphasized their approaches to activism were congruent with their lifestyle and career choices, such as doing change work through parenting or teaching. Practitioners would

benefit from knowing specific social justice strategies their clients could utilize in their different life circumstances and social contexts.

A third implication for practice involves practitioners' awareness of the relational meaning of social justice activism for some SMW and transgender individuals. The participants in the current study emphasized their desire to connect with other people and find community. Therapists may assist their clients in connecting with established activist groups, particularly if clients are early in their activist developments and trying to find ways to get involved. Consistent with the social justice and FMC literature, marginalized individuals often benefit from having communities based on similar social identities and/or awareness of social justice issues. Further, practitioners should be aware of the importance of role models and mentors for activists with marginalized social identities. It is recommended that therapists develop their own awareness and understanding of social justice in order to collaborate with their clients by brainstorming social action strategies or advocating together for social and systemic change. As participants emphasized the relational meanings of social justice activism in the current study, practitioners should be aware of their potential roles in their clients' understandings and experiences of activism.

A fourth implication for practice involves practitioners understanding that social justice and activism may have unique meanings for their clients. Although there were clear themes in participants' understandings of social justice, particularly regarding their emphasis on relationships, they all described having somewhat different interpretations of social justice based on their values and interests. By having awareness of this, practitioners may facilitate discussions with clients about the meaning of social justice for their lives, specifically. In addition to the positive outcomes from social justice

involvement, practitioners and clients may discuss how the struggles associated with engaging in activism may also be growth-enhancing and healing for activists. Further, if clients reflect on their own meaning and understanding of social justice, they may be more likely to see its relevance in their lives and feel motivated to take action to create positive social change.

Finally, although this study focused on SMW and transgender individuals, it has implications for mental health practitioners working with clients from diverse backgrounds and social identities. By increasing their awareness and involvement in social justice work, practitioners may feel more confident to incorporate social justice discussions and interventions throughout their work. This may involve ally training and helping individuals with privileged social identities to take action to create positive social change and decrease oppression. Further, this study emphasized the intersectionality of participants' social identities on their experiences of oppression, privilege, and social justice. Practitioners would benefit from considering clients' intersecting identities, privileges, and experiences of oppression.

Social Justice Implications

The results of this study provide several implications for social justice. Participants emphasized their desire and need to honor people's multiple, intersecting identities. Although activist groups may advocate for single-identity politics and approaches, and these approaches may have their benefits, participants emphasized their desire to be inclusive to different identities and experiences. They emphasized the need to recognize that people simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. Amid a

background of debate about different social identities and types of oppression impacting different social identities, even among marginalized communities, there appears to be a desire to appreciate and honor the complexity of people's identities and experiences. Further, participants emphasized their interpretations of social justice were informed by their values of respect, fairness, and equality. They emphasized connecting with others across different beliefs, perspectives, experiences, and identities. Perhaps social justice for many SMW and transgender individuals means connecting with each person's humanity. Although participants spoke to different styles and approaches to activism, the theme that was most evident in this study was the desire for connection and relationships. Their stories emphasize the power of human connection, collaboration, and solidarity.

Conclusion

This study provided further understanding of the meaning of social justice activism for SMW and transgender individuals, which contributes to and extends the current social justice literature. It also enhances the empirical basis of feminist multicultural therapy (FMC) interventions. Practitioners working from an FMC and social justice perspective would benefit from applying the empirically supported implications of this study. The results of this study indicate that social justice activism was an intensely relational experience for SMW and transgender participants. Social justice held different meanings for the participants based on their social identities, values, and experiences of oppression and privilege. They described their struggles as well as the benefits of their activist work. Mental health professionals and social justice activists

would benefit from continuing to examine and appreciate the complexity of SMW and transgender individuals' experiences and meanings of social justice activism.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research on Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women Working for Social Change

(Transgender Participants also Welcome)

Are you:

- **A lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender man, transgender woman, or sexual minority woman?**
- **18 years of age or older?**
- **Someone who works for political change?**
- **Willing to talk about your experiences about yourself and your work for change?**

If so, I would like to interview you about your views on working for change and social justice activism to better understand what this work means to you.

You will be asked to:

- **Take part in an in-person, Skype, or phone interview of 60-90"**
- **Take part in a follow-up phone chat of 30"**

- **Take part in discussion group (in person or on line) with other sexual minority women to talk about the meaning of social justice work**
- **Share any pictures, writings, or other things that relate to your experience as a trans man, trans woman, or sexual minority woman activist**

If you have questions or are interested in participating, please contact the researcher, Whitney Hagen at 801-828-7901 or by email at whitney.hagen@utah.edu, a sexual minority woman and graduate student at the University of Utah. My faculty advisor is Dr. Sue Morrow (sue.morrow@utah.edu).

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Subject: Research on Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women Working for Social Change
Transgender Participants Also Welcome

Hello!

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about lesbian, bisexual women, queer women, transgender men and women, and sexual minority women working for social change. This study is being conducted by Whitney Hagen at the University of Utah. The purpose of this study is to learn from sexual minority women and transgender men and women, ages 18 and above, about your views on working for change and social justice activism to better understand what this work means to you. We hope to use this research to inform lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer women's communities as well as service providers about the experiences and value of activism for sexual minority women.

You will be asked to:

- Take part in an in-person, Skype, or phone interview of 60-90"
- Take part in a follow-up phone chat of 30"
- Take part in discussion group (in person or on line) with other sexual minority women to talk about the meaning of social justice work
- Share any pictures, writings, or other things that relate to your experience as a trans or sexual minority woman activist

If you are engaged in social or political activism, and identify as lesbian, bi, trans, queer, or a sexual minority woman, we would be very interested in talking with you about taking part in this research. If you have questions or are interested in participating, please contact the researcher, Whitney Hagen at 801-828-7901 or by email at whitney.hagen@utah.edu, a sexual minority woman and graduate student at the University of Utah. You should be aware that e-mail is not a confidential form of communication. A request for more information does not obligate you to participate in any study.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Utah Institutional Review Board (IRB; 801-581-3655, irb@hasc.utah.edu). It is being supervised by my advisor, Dr. Sue Morrow (801-581-3400; sue.morrow@utah.edu). Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Whitney Hagen
Primary Investigator

APPENDIX C

IRB CONSENT FORM

Consent Document

BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study on social justice activism for sexual minority women, including the meaning of activism, experiences of activism, and the influence of experiences of oppression and privilege on activist interests. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you want to volunteer to take part in this study.

The purpose of this study is to learn from sexual minority women, ages 18 and above, about their views, feelings, and experiences as activists, as well as the meaning of social justice activism. We hope to use this research to inform lesbian, bisexual, and queer women's communities as well as service providers about the experiences and value of activism for sexual minority women. The research is being done by a sexual minority woman graduate student at the University of Utah who is supported by her faculty advisor at the University of Utah.

STUDY PROCEDURE

Your participation in this study will take from 2 to 2 ½ hours; and, if you decide you want to take part in the discussion group, it will involve an additional 2 or more hours of your time, for a total of 4 to 4 ½ hours maximum. You have the option to participate in the following interviews and discussion groups in person, via phone, or via Skype. You will be asked to:

- Take part in an individual interview in which you will be asked about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding your identities, statuses, and activism ~ 1 – 1 ½ hours. The interview will be audio recorded.
- Be available for a follow-up phone interview up to 30 minutes, which will also be audio recorded.
- Optional: Take part in a 2-hour discussion group with other sexual minority women and transgender men and women to further explore social justice activism issues. So that the researchers will know who was talking in the

- group, the group will be audio recorded and video recorded; however, you may sit with your back to the camera if you are uncomfortable being videotaped.
- Optional: Provide any photos, art, writings, or other items that relate to your thoughts, feelings, and experiences of activism (all items will be returned to you).

RISKS

The risks of taking part in this study are considered minimal. It is possible that you may feel upset talking about personal information related to your experiences of oppression, activism, or identities. These risks are similar to those you experience when discussing personal information with others. If you feel upset from this experience, you can tell the researcher, and she will tell you about resources available to help. If you participate in the discussion group, there is no way for the researchers to guarantee that the information you share will be kept private by other members; however, steps will be taken to educate participants in order to protect confidentiality.

BENEFITS

The researcher cannot promise any direct benefit for taking part in this study. However, our experience is that having the opportunity to talk about these kinds of issues may result in increased self-awareness and positive feelings about sharing your thoughts and feelings with other people and the possibility of sharing information that will help others. It may also result in greater clarity about your own participation in social justice activism.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you share will be kept confidential. Audio and video recordings and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer located in the researcher's work space. Only the researcher and members of her study team will have access to this information. Your information will be assigned a code name (which you may choose if you wish), which will be kept with your interview, discussion group, and discussion forum information. At the end of the study, the audio and video recordings will be destroyed. In publications, only your code name will be used, and every effort will be made to protect your identity by removing identifying information from quotes, etc., that are used in publication. We will do everything possible to keep information you share while participating in the discussion group from those not associated with the project. Thus, we ask you and the other participants to keep the discussion group conversations and information confidential. Still, there is a chance that a group member might mention your comments or name in a later conversation. Consequently, we cannot guarantee that no one will share what you have said after they leave.

Another exception to the guarantee of confidentiality is if you disclose actual or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child, or disabled or elderly adult, the researcher must and will report this to Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS) or the nearest law enforcement agency. The other exception to the

guarantee of confidentiality is in the case of a suspected ethical violation in accordance with American Psychological Association Code of Conduct. The researcher will notify the supervising staff of the suspected ethical violation.

PERSON TO CONTACT

If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about this study, or if you feel you have been harmed by taking part in the research, you can contact Whitney Hagen at 801-828-7901. Whitney can normally be reached during normal working hours; however, if she is unavailable when you call, you may leave a message on her confidential voice mail. She will return your call as soon as possible. You may also contact her by e-mail at whitney.hagen@utah.edu; however, you should be aware that e-mail is not a confidential form of communication. If, for any reason, you wish to discuss this research with Whitney's research advisor, you may contact Dr. Sue Morrow at 801-581-3400 or by e-mail at sue.morrow@utah.edu.

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at participant.advocate@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide not to take part, or if you withdraw from the study after starting, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits of any kind, nor will it affect your relationship with the researchers. If you decide to stop after you have agreed to participate, just inform one of the researchers. We will destroy your interview tape and any transcripts we have made. If you withdraw after taking part in the discussion group, the tape will not be destroyed, but all of your participation will be erased from the transcript of the group.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION TO PARTICIPANTS

There should typically not be any costs to you for participating in this study. If you incur any costs (such as transportation, long-distance phone calls, etc.), you will be reimbursed up to a maximum of $20. There will also not be any payment for your participation in this study.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX D

ABBREVIATED AUDIT TRAIL

Semistructured Interviews

September 30, 2011
First participant interview.
Of all the amazing things that [name removed] talked about, I think her description of *the evolution of her activist work* was the most amazing. She talked about doing activism for gender equality and sexual orientation equality. But as her social justice self-efficacy increased, she explained that she started to think that she could do work re: issues that affected identities different from her own. She said that she started doing anti-racist work in Boston for getting safe and effective transportation to parts of the city that were primarily populated by people of color and lower SES individuals. We talked about how in the beginning her privilege and awareness of oppression affected her choices in activism. It was easier to address the issues that affected her identities directly. Then, as she gained experience, she had more confidence in her ability to work on social justice issues that her privilege would give her the option of not addressing. She said it was important to her to not be stuck in her "White guilt" but to actively participate in anti-racist work.

October 6, 2011
Second participant interview.
He described feeling discriminated against while growing up for his queer identity. He was quick to own his privilege and maybe was thinking that his experiences of discrimination were less significant because of all his privileged identities. Awareness of White privilege at an elementary school age! He stated in 9th grade, he gained an "urgency" about the presence of disadvantages … that the tracking system was unfair. There wasn't a lot of depth around his past experiences growing up… this may be indicative of his perceived privilege and not seeing himself as experiencing oppression that influenced his passion for activism. However, when I asked him to talk about his social justice work, he became more talkative and gave longer answers! He described his teaching… educating teachers… teaching math and problem solving… how to be student-centered and respectful of student while teaching math. Emphasizing collaboration. Challenging the way teachers have historically been taught to teach and trying new ways. He liked the idea that I would ask people about their support networks

and support they have around activism and their identities. He found queer activists in Philly in the Act Up organization. He found an activist partner. Major Finding of the Day: *Being involved with activists ultimately helped him come out as transgender!! This is a healing effect of his activist experiences!!*

October 7, 2011
So something I'm thinking about with the first two interviews is how both participants had formal campaign experience. Their activism is more formal. For theoretical sampling, I think it will be important and necessary to talk to people who think about activism in formal and informal ways. I'm wondering what other kinds of things people are doing that might be considered activism. Also, these two participants have a lot of awareness of experiences of privilege and not a lot of explicit oppression. I'll want to be sure to talk to people with varying degrees of awareness and insight to privilege and with more experiences of oppression. Need to keep this in mind for theoretical sampling.

Personal reflection: I really liked these two. Particularly [name removed]. It's easy to talk to people with high awareness and insight to privilege and oppression. That's why it's going to be important to talk to people with varying degrees of insight and awareness… I'll have to look for disconfirming evidence with people who have perspectives that are different from my own.

October 20, 2011
Third participant interview.
She talked about "peace" as her main focus of her social justice activism. She explained her Montessori style of teaching (early childhood teaching approach) involves building community in classroom because children stay in classroom for 3 years usually… they enact caring community and help children develop interpersonal skills. It sounds very feminist/egalitarian! Empowering children to take action and manage conflict… embracing empathy and compassion for others… The children are considered active members of their education rather than passive students meant to be taught.

A lot of analysis of privilege and oppression, which she seemed to attribute to her privileged background… interestingly enough, she didn't say she could avoid talking about it because of her privilege… Also her Unitarian Universalist identity relates to her social justice passion… making the church more aware of racism and privilege.

She said her social justice work is connected to her heart. She feels connected with the little children she's working with. She's worried that her activism around sexuality and equality could jeopardize her career as a teacher… so she has to be careful about the activism she does…

Finding of the Day: "Community is the number one way to have there be a sense of justice" = beautiful!! Building communities across similarities and differences… the community is the meaning of social justice work for her.

November 2011
Fourth participant interview.
She talked a lot about healing. She described the struggle of owning privileges and not denying that privileges happen for her. She's struggled with privileges. Some more marginalized identities make it harder to admit and own privileges. Discrimination as a child… leading to fear and expectations of being judged. Feeling discriminated against for her survivor identity. Being discriminated against for other marginalized identities, including disability.

Doing s.j. with young women. She loves teaching and grassroots work. The work makes life healthier and stops the oppression- making things different. Teaching others to do s.j. Being a mentor/resource for s.j. She sees protests and marches as disconnected. She thinks the conversations among people are where the change happens. Relationships are important to the process. S.j. is just a part of everything for her. She'd feel naked without it. It's constantly happening. But she says she gets frustrated and wishes she could have a simpler view of things. She says it can be overwhelming and bigger than she is. But she emphasizes that even the struggling is evidence of strength- resiliency. She wonders if she's really helping. Empowering. She's too excited to burn out. She talks about doing her own work around struggles and biases. Therapy has helped her get to place to be an activist.

November 20, 2011
Fifth participant interview.
She described wanting to be a social worker in the army. She couldn't recall experiences of oppression. She believes everyone can have advantages if they work for them. She didn't think she'd been involved in s.j. She thinks she'd think about it more if she'd been oppressed.
She's not sure how to get more involved, but s.j. feels overwhelming. The helping part just comes naturally to her. She likes to make people happy. She's used to people being friendly and helping. She says she tries to stay away from politics. They seem like fighting and competing. Politics don't seem relevant to her. She believes in doing something meaningful to help out and make people happy. She wants to make a change.

November 29, 2011
Personal reflection: [The fifth participant] offers another contribution to this study. She indicates not really understanding the reasons for her interest in s.j. or even participating in this study. Other participants before have been so deliberate in their s.j. developments. I'm glad to have interviewed her, because her interview seems to be a part of my searching for disconfirming evidence in this study. I don't want to only interview participants who can clearly articulate their s.j. interests, privileges, and experiences of oppression. I need to find another participant who has a similar experience.

December 5, 2011
Sixth participant interview.
She talked about coming to her present feminist social justice activism. She talks about being put off to the s.j. piece at first- thinking that it was the stereotype of chaining to a

tree. S.j. just seemed too huge for her. She sees s.j. as taking many sizes and that it is all meaningful. In therapy, helping people see how the context is contributing to their distress. She challenges all the parts of oppression coming from the context (and the effect of that on the individual). – teaching people to do their own s.j. work. Helping people become activists. She sees her personality as part of her activism. –owning her revolutionary identities.

December 20, 2011
Seventh participant interview.
She has many experiences of feeling rejected/discriminated/unaccepted as well as abuse history. She does a lot of teaching, sex educator, sex coach. She sees her experience of sex work as being about recovery from sexual trauma. She enjoys reading things from different perspectives whether she agrees or disagrees. She indicated she learned about s.j. from women's movement and civil rights movement. She identifies as an activist more than any profession.

December 27, 2011
Eighth participant interview.
She sees herself as reading about activist causes rather than participating in them directly. She likes reading about s.j. issues a lot! She believes she experiences some reverse-discrimination because she didn't get scholarships when she was in school. She doesn't feel hopeless about creating change… but she doesn't think she does much to create change… she's not too motivated to get involved… but she cares about being informed and talking about it with people.

She goes to Pride events. She thinks that if you're not involved, it's important to show up and show support. But she doesn't post activism in her fb profile or anything. She's not going to march, but she's into legislation change. Questioning if what she does is really activism. She thinks of stereotypes of activism. She disagrees with some activist things/agendas.

December 30, 2011
Ninth participant interview.
She also saw relationships as hugely important. Being a parent is important as well as honoring her relationship with her partner. She states that it's hard to know if she's being oppressed for certain identities because she has many minority identities. But she emphasizes she doesn't focus on fear b/c fear stops ppl from living their lives. She emphasizes her resiliency and strength. She describes the evolution of her activist perspectives. She currently believes the biggest changes happen through connections with people. She sees teaching as activism. She emphasized opening herself to change and connections with others. She sees the smaller scale activism as having more impact. Parenting is activism. Foster parenting is peace keeping. Adoption is a form of social activism.

Finding of the Day: Activism needs to be authentic… part of our authenticity… because we lose grounding when we do it out of duty. Activism needs to be what we consider

meaningful rather than reactionary… for it to have the most positive impact, we have to believe it… it has to come from within activism is an expression of who she is.

January 2, 2012
Tenth participant interview
What an amazing interview! I love what this participant had to say about her activist work and dedication to s.j. I especially related to many of her political views. I'm really appreciating her description of having limited experiences of oppression, but still having the awareness of discrimination that contributes to her motivation to do activist work. Love it! She loves teaching and sees herself as a role model for young queer people. She thinks the relationship is important in sj work. Relationship is the foundation of sj work. Relationships make the ground stronger for creating change… and are important for supporting each other in the challenging process of creating change. B/c s.j. work isn't something ppl can do alone. Considering which types of activism are most meaningful-building communities changes behavior, respect, etc. in ways that legislation does not.

February 5, 2012
Eleventh participant interview.
Her partner is where she gets her support. She doesn't have too much community outside of her family, although she notes that the university/academia has given her some safety to be herself. Her family is where she is safe- but she didn't receive any positive messages about family as a trans woman. She finds it challenging to find the balance between activism and personal life. She feels she's made into the spokesperson for the cause because of her identities and statuses. Sometimes she tokenizes herself and other times people tokenize her. This can make her feel tokenized, demoralized, hopeless. She describes many experiences of oppression. She talks about her activist work with the DLD. She struggles with organizational activism. Her parenting is activism.

February 16, 2012
Twelfth participant interview.
I loved talking with her! She talks about having an intuitive love for others. It's important for her to have a sense of joy and brightness around. That brightness enables her to do s.j. work. Overall, she likes people. She thinks she's had blessings in her life that enable her to do s.j. work. Her parents were important to her. She loves building bridges among people and getting people to think and talk about challenging issues. She considers herself a healer. Pursuing social work led her to doing s.j. work more deliberately. She talks about doing s.j. work in the university. She loves that this is part of her job. She talks about creating more equity in the university offices. The work makes her feel good. It keeps her going even when she feels helpless. She takes care of herself: gets massages, is honest about what she can realistically do. She'd like to know more about how activist take care of themselves.

February 18, 2012
Thirteenth participant interview.
They emphasized wanting to do activism on their own terms. They described treating someone with respect and still calling them out. The good feeling that comes from

making change isn't always immediate. They disagreed with some activist goals, thinking that there can be too much focus on one aspect and that it's ultimately not inclusive enough.

March 10, 2012
I continue to listen to the recordings and check the transcripts. I'm catching mistakes here and there, and overall this is helping me to feel immersed in the data. Participant recruitment has slowed down. I'll send out email requests soon. I'm wanting to specifically increase the diversity of the sample.

April 20, 2012
Fourteenth participant interview.
She has leadership/activist experience within clubs. She feels driven to be an activist and pulls inspiration from political issues. She thinks it's important to teach others about the history of lgbt activism and rights. She wants to inspire others to become activists. She feels motivated to learn and be challenged. She emphasized learning about activism from friends.

April 23, 2012
Fifteenth participant interview.
It's so interesting how she framed her vegan/vegetarian perspectives as social justice. She also described social justice as living her beliefs and living authentically. She emphasizes that feminism filters into all aspects of her life: volunteering at PP, incorporating it into her work, giving money to feminist organizations. She described not being an activist as often as she wants to be. Her discriminatory experiences made her find her voice. People made her be assertive and stand up for herself. She emphasizes it's important to have a community to feel supported and encouraged. She says this isn't work that can be done alone. She has friends who see things the way she does. She has a partner who has s.j. values, as other participants do.

April 24, 2012
I think there will need to be an activist experiences category (big, general one to begin with) that will include people's descriptions of the activist work they've done. Multiple participants have described social justice not being something realistic. People seem to have connections to other activists, and this helps them do the work they do. It helps them get involved. Also, different types of activism are represented in this sample. These different types stir up positive and negative perspectives in people.

May 1, 2012
Sixteenth participant interview.
His interview is a nice compliment to [name removed] and [name removed]'s interviews. They described not being interested in s.j. issues to a large extent, and he reports feeling similarly during his development. But what's unique about his interview is that he had some life-changing experiences that contributed to him wanting to create change in the world. He talked about trying to find community, based on his identities. This has come up in other interviews. He talks about feeling disconnected from some communities,

being an ally for other communities, but not really seeing himself as belonging to those communities. He's had experiences of confronting others that did not go well. He thinks it's important to hear different sides and allow people to voice their different viewpoints, even if we don't agree. This has come up for [name removed] too.

May 6, 2012
Seventeenth participant interview.
She's big on challenging White privilege. She's into challenging people but also being concerned about her safety. She wants to face the challenge of calling people out but maintaining the relationships. Finding community has been important to her. She struggles with knowing when to speak up about injustices. Her answers were totally similar to other participants. I'm not hearing new information.

May 10, 2012
Eighteenth participant interview.
Her appearance is a political issue- being proud of being a large woman, also a woman of color. She has a lot of negative feelings about herself. She described complex, intersecting experiences of privilege. Her activism is very personal- her personal choices are also political. She likes to plug into an already-existing activist group/community. Her activist groups are also where she pulls from for her romantic partners and friendships… so without activist communities, she wouldn't have any support at all. She emphasized having peer role models- because they need to be people she can relate to in real life.

May 20, 2012
Nineteenth participant interview.
I related to her a lot. She feels she has power to enact change in society with the privilege she has. For her, s.j. is all about research. Trying to do research with groups that are excluded (e.g., trans). Checking biases during research process to be sensitive to multicultural issues. She thinks about how to make her s.j. work most meaningful. Influence public policy with research! Thinking that we all have our expertise and approach to s.j. having a holistic picture of change- awareness, action, etc.

May 17, 2012
Sent follow-up email to participants with questions. I asked them to respond to the email with their answers or schedule a follow-up interview.

June 25, 2012
Participants have responded to emails. Several people are choosing to answer the follow-up questions via email rather than having phone interviews. However, I've had multiple phone interviews, and it's so great to be talking with them again after immersing myself in the data for so long. I just love these people! The follow-up questions touched on early experiences of awareness of injustice and how people became involved in activism. It feels like participants are filling little gaps in their activist histories by answering the follow-up questions. Nothing ground-shaking. But the info is totally helpful, and providing more depth to some of their stories and descriptions.

Open Coding

March 15, 2012
So I've purchased ATLAS.ti. I've started coding the first participant's transcript. I'm trying to stick to her words when I create the code name. I feel like coding everything though, because it's hard to know what will be important later. When I look at my analytical memos, I wonder if I'm being too big picture. Am I focused too much on pulling out the big themes and not looking carefully enough at details?

March 20, 2012
I feel pretty immersed in the data. I'm going back and forth between the second and third participant. Open coding is time consuming. I'm referring a lot to Charmaz and consulting with my research team. I'm trying to make the codes stick to my participants' language. I'm making them action-oriented and starting codes with verbs as much as possible, per Charmaz. Second guessing, but keeping going…

March 22, 2012
I consulted with my research team about my codes. I was discouraged from going line-by-line as I had been doing. Sue suggested I block larger sections of quotes that have more content. She and other research team members pointed out that there are a lot of lines that don't have meaning. They explained that parts of the interview that are not related to the research questions and the topic of my study will not be used in the analysis, so they don't need to be coded. This was really helpful feedback. Feeling a bit more certain and confident now.

April 15, 2012
I've been moving faster in my open coding. It's helping to block larger sections for coding. I'm noticing how the same quote can have multiple open codes and multiple meanings. I feel immersed in the data. Although this process is tedious, I'm feeling optimistic about the immersion part of things.

April 28, 2012
I continue to do transcription checks before open coding. That helps a lot. It takes time-adds time to this process. But it helps to hear participants' voices as I'm reading their words. I'm still trying to make codes begin with verbs and be action oriented, but it's definitely not happening every time. My codes seem longer than they should be. Sue emphasizes that the codes should serve as little post-it note reminders to the researcher. But I just keep thinking I won't remember what the codes mean unless I include some context in them. So for now, my codes are longer. I am noticing it gets easier to open code with each transcript. I think I'm getting better at this.

May 2, 2012
As I'm working on coding, I'm noticing how participants are so often talking about the importance of relationships. They talk about activist communities, their relationships with other people in their lives. They emphasize doing social justice work and creating change

in the context of relationships. There's also a lot of talk about learning activism from other people. Lot of role model talk.

May 14, 2012
I second-guess myself so much while doing all this data analysis. I get that I'm fragmenting the data, so it's not meant to be clear to me yet what the results will be. This process is tedious and frustrating. I don't see how it's going to come back together.

June 2, 2012
I've made so much progress with open coding. Getting so much closer to being done this, I think. I'm moving faster through the data, which Sue recommended. I hear my participants' voices when I read the transcripts. So all the transcription checks and re-listening to the interviews is really helping me. I keep asking myself how each participant would code their own interview. I try to write codes that I imagine they would have come up with. I'm also feeling more confident about where the little gaps are that need to be filled in. Overwhelmingly, I believe I've passed redundancy. I stopped getting new information around the 13th or 14th participant. Still there are little gaps, just a need to have participants expand upon their answers, such as how they initially became involved in activism, that would be helpful. So open coding is solidifying the follow-up interview questions.

July 29, 2012
Continuing open coding. I meant to have finished this before I left Utah. I've been working on coding my autoethnography interview.

August 1, 2012
As I'm working on my autoethnography chapter I was wondering if I asked my participants about working on their own racism, classism, sexism, etc. while doing their activist work. So when I go back through to look over the transcripts in the next few days, I'm going to want to make sure that came up somewhere. At the moment, I'm pretty exhausted from working a long week and cannot recall if this something that participants talked about in their interviews. As I review participants' transcripts for analytical memoing in the next few days, I must search specifically for this theme.

August 3, 2012
Open coding my autoethnography. Connection with other people was something that came up a lot in my interview. I also talked about trauma as oppression in a way that seemed different from a lot of participants in this study. My activist work began by having a political analysis of the world- thinking about things critically. I began thinking about activism is a more realistic way when I did my practicum with the WRC. That new knowledge led to seeing activism more subjectively, openly, and different depending on the specific style of the activist. Most importantly, I started seeing how the real change (as I perceived it) occurred through developing relationships with others. And that having healthy, respectful, open-minded relationships with others was the way to reach people. I described feeling discouraged when feeling alone… but feeling hopeful when connected to community of s.j.-oriented people. Being taught by others, being willing to learn from

others… having community is hugely important. The healing from the past happens through connections with others.

October 4, 2012
Open coding and memoing continues. I'm feeling sick of it… I want this process to speed up. Tonight I'm gonna go back through my memos for each interview, including my autoethnography and be sure that I've give each one sufficient attention. The next step will be to pull out major themes and categories and begin to memo about how those seem relevant. I'm referring to Charmaz's "Constructing Grounded Theory" at this point. Tomorrow I will dig out notes from Sue's class and see if I can refer also to her notes and articles for instructions about shifting into analytical memoing and creating open code categories. That will be exciting and good. Also I need to contact the new participant who is interested in talking with me for my 20th interview. That interview will be shorter and reinforce saturation. Something I'm thinking about is how this participant had experiences that triggered their awareness of activism.

October 6, 2012
Reading Charmaz and Strauss and Corbin re: memoing. Charmaz points out that many researchers find the freedom of memoing disquieting because it requires tolerating ambiguity. Analytical memoing is about exploration, discovery. I'm reading over [name removed]'s dissertation to get an idea about how she did her data analysis as well as generally what she included in her dissertation. I emailed Sue to inquire about my approach to data analysis.

October 8, 2012
Reading more from Strauss and Corbin (1990)… I'm going back to their open coding chapter to think about the beginning of categorizing. I have all these codes for all these meaning units. What I started to do yesterday was to group concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena (i.e., category). I'm keeping the category names loose and provisional because they can change at any time as the analysis continues. The category name is abstract (different from the codes that used the participants' same, specific words). The categories have to have conceptual power in order to pull together many codes and eventually the categories will relate to other categories/concepts.

Strauss and Corbin point out that the *categories* have to be analytically developed by me. This goes back to what [name removed] said about me being the expert. I am the person immersed in this data- so I have power to conceptualize categories in a way that no one else could. That's why it's more meaningful than just a list of codes or even a group of codes. They need to link together conceptually.

At this point I'm feeling anxious… I start to second guess myself. I'm wanting to move faster than I am… So… I'm looking at [name removed]'s diss. description of her data analysis… and wishing I was feeling more confident about my procedure.

October 17, 2012
Getting started creating open code categories feels overwhelming. As I look over my list of almost 6,500 codes, I feel like I don't even know where to start. I entered my focused codes into atlas as preliminary family names. But then it felt like too much to try to use the family manager. I remembered that [name removed] said she printed lists of codes and started sorting through them by hand. So I saved the list of codes to a word document and found out the document is about 128 pages long. I printed the first 20 pages. My plan is to sort through them by hand and see if that works. I feel a little confused about the value of focused coding tonight… seems like it didn't really help me… at least not yet. I also feel overwhelmed by the corpus of data I'm having to now sort through. I went back to the Charmaz book and read her description of grounded theory being part work and part fun. We're meant to "play" with our data and allow the categories/families to emerge from the data rather than us imposing our own conceptualizations and ideas on the data. I think tomorrow I'm gonna pick this up again, and start organizing categories by hand. I'm also gonna get some more paper to print more pages.

October 20, 2012
I'm gonna spend the first hour today reading through my codes and looking for major ideas/themes/categories… I'll take notes about these categories and then report them here. Hopefully this will help me begin to group things…

Making families in my autoethnography.
I started looking over [name removed]'s dissertation to see how she did her analysis and subsequent focused group to get feedback on her conceptual model. This is helping me understand the big picture of data analysis. Making me think that I might want to go back to analyzing my autoethnography so I can give that to the team on the Tuesday research meeting.

Moving faster as I'm putting codes in families. I think the "identity" family should probably be more like "describing self" because that's more accurate for the experiential activity and what I asked parts to do. Ha! And as I look back, I already see I made that change- means I'm agreeing with myself on different days about this data analysis. Good.

October 28, 2012
Creating baby families.
6066 codes to go… I'm trying to figure out how to best utilize my time. Should I set a goal to get through 500 codes a day? I'm frustrated by the amount of time it's taking to organize these families. I came up with a list of questions to ask Sue and the research team about this process. I'm excited to see them over Skype.

November 5, 2012
Creating baby families.
5608 codes to go… Feeling frustrated with coding. Sue was right- I'm just wandering in the Forest right now, wondering what's going on and where I'm going. Tonight… I want to work on getting all the codes related to whatever peeps are doing that they consider activism all together in one family. It's just too confusing otherwise to break it down into

baby families. I do already have some smaller families re: activism in teaching, and activism in research, and activism in parenting, campaign work… but for my own clarity, I'm gonna put all the personal activism codes together in one big family. Once they're all in there, I'll organize them into smaller families that are more meaningful.

November 10, 2012
Creating baby families.
Looking back to Charmaz… categories are meant to be conceptual rather than descriptive… and these concepts will specify dimensions of a larger category. I'm seriously contemplating switching to sorting things by hand… because I'm tired of using the computer. [Name removed] uses envelops to sort through the codes, and I'm thinking I might need to do that. Then I could update the computer- atlas program to have the data saved in multiple places.

November 11, 2012
Creating baby families.
All my envelopes are laying out on the floor… I'm starting over and feeling better with this more visual and kinesthetic approach. Liking my categories more. Trying to be more conceptual as I create category names… checking myself to try not to be to therapist-y in my concepts. Trying to think like someone without a degree in psychology might in finding themes and categories. Maybe there needs to be a category about life stuff that is related to peeps' activism/pro-social interests but not directly? Like the sex coach stuff… and the studying zen meditation stuff…

November 14, 2012
Creating baby families. Going easier today. Back to using Atlas… taking it one code at a time… listening to music… resting my laptop on my lap-desk and laying in bed. The coding is going…

December 3, 2012
Creating baby families.
Feeling like my categories are more interesting and accurate the further I go in this process. I'm getting better at this. Earlier categories that are getting deleted and modified as I go seemed more based on my interpretations. The newer categories are more solid and less subjective, I think. As I move forward I'm thinking about creating categories based on the processes… and not only focusing on the content. It's not just about there being multiple perspectives, but about the fact that participants accept multiple perspectives and are willing to appreciate that.

December 20, 2012
I'm gonna put open codes that are opposites in the same family for right now… example: "don't fear struggle" and "afraid" will go in the same "feeling afraid" family… which will be renamed later. "don't get burned out" is in the same "burn out" family with open codes about people feeling burn out… once I get through this open code list, I'll go back through the families and clean them up and make sure they're specific.

December 26, 2012
I'm thinking about the high awareness the participants who engage in activism have about issues (including power and privilege) and can recognize oppression. Whereas two participants tended to think things were good in society and people just need to work hard to be successful. I think awareness is going to be a part of the model that develops…

The family-making is moving faster. 3080 codes left to sort… more than half-way through codes now. As I go back into families, I'm feeling confident about my organization. I feel optimistic that the larger families will get smaller and more specific after I finish with this larger list of open codes to sort through.

December 28, 2012
Creating baby families.
2300 more codes to go. As I'm sorting open codes… I'm trying to be sure that I'm sorting them and thinking about what activism and social justice mean to my participants. I'm letting the families emerge from the data… but I also want to be keeping in mind the context of what people discussed. People talked about loving certain parts… struggling with other parts… and I want to be sure to capture that.

December 29, 2012
Creating baby families.
I'm going back to my baby families and trying to consolidate them. I've got a lot that only have one or a few codes in them… so this should help. Consolidate them according to conceptual similarity. Combining "advocating for self" and "asking for help" because they both pertain to participants expressing their needs and asking for something. Putting "backlash" into "not working out how I hoped" because they're both about things going badly.

January 3, 2013
Creating baby families.
Major theme idea: "SJ = expression of who I am." I think "being open" and any family about "multiple perspectives" should go together. I think "burn out" is really about activism not working out sometimes, so I wanna keep that in mind when I organize families. "Intrapsychic activism" is now called "Doing your Own Work."

January 6, 2013
Refining baby families.
As I'm cleaning up my baby families, I'm noticing how they relate to each other. So far there is a strong emphasis on connection and relating to others. It's about having a communication style and interpersonal approach that facilitates connection. When people criticize activism, it's because it appears to be lacking these things and risks excluding and attacking others.
Major theme: Connection/Working with Others

There also seems to be a major theme around doing your own work. Participants talk about doing intrapsychic activism, challenging themselves to grow and be open.

Major theme: Doing Your Own Work

January 9, 2013
Refining baby families.
Back to thinking about the family/context/developmental/evolution families: "Activism in Childhood," and "Early life events that triggered awareness."

Things like activist interest and awareness of discrimination developed over time for participants. How to organize that in families? Do I have "past awareness" and "current awareness?" But then, activist evolution… I think the time difference/ developmental piece needs to be taken into consideration here… because a research question is about how people's experiences contribute to their activist identity… I've got to demonstrate how their past awareness about discrimination has led up to who they are now and the work their currently doing.

January 19, 2013
Refining baby families.
At 193 baby families now. Making progress! I'm working on getting some of the bigger families (re: privilege, oppression, feelings, etc. down to reasonable sizes).

January 22, 2013
Refining baby families.
I emailed [name removed] to ask about knowing how big is too big for a baby family. She says she divided up the families conceptually… not based on the number of codes. It's just about getting the families as specific as possible.

February 3, 2013
Refining baby families.
I'm at 147 baby families. I'm writing my memos about families in Atlas.ti, which feels convenient and most helpful. Based on Sue's feedback, I'm writing my memos and keeping in mind that these memos are going to become my results chapter. It's going well. I'm liking my families.

Axial Coding

January 31, 2013
Axial coding. I'm analyzing my autoethnography. I wrote out the different baby family names on pieces of paper and sorted them on the floor. I'll do this with the baby families from the 20 participants as well when the time comes. The following organization/larger categories developed:

Trauma and Oppression
    Ongoing Oppression
    Awareness of Injustices

- Oppression
- Past Trauma
- Trauma aftermath
- Worldview
- Accountability
- Ineffective activism

Privilege

Community and Connection
- Connection
- Connecting with Others
- Community
- Collaboration
- Building community
- Love
- Empathy
- Core values
- Peace

Becoming an Activist
- Learning about SJ
- Activist Development
- Role models
- Seeing mistakes

Creating Change
- Disagreeing with dominant views
- How change happens
- Creating change
- Considering how to make change
- Seeing activism broadly (activism general)
- My activism (personal activism)
- Helping others
- Empowered choices
- Authenticity

Benefits for Me
- Positive feelings
- Hope
- Empowerment
- Resilience
- Patience
- Positive impact on me
- Growing
- Healing

Struggles

Inner struggles
Childhood anger
Worries
Feeling rejected
Feeling disconnected
Activist challenges
Not standing up
Negative feelings
SJ is too big

February 16, 2013
Axial coding.
Families were refined and I just grouped them according to conceptual similarities into larger families. Memos about each baby family are kept in Atlas.ti. Below is a description of the Activist Development/Evolution family:

Category: Activist Development/Evolution
Subfamilies:
-*Early Awareness*: figuring out at an early age that things were not ok/right. Having an early awareness of injustice. This is also about the first awareness that things were not ok.
-*Activism in Childhood*: things participants were doing in childhood that were pro-social and activist. just beginning to get involved as a kid with volunteering and requesting PP materials. Caring about sj issues as a kid. Getting involved in civil rights as a child. This is different from the "getting involved" family. It's about stuff participants were doing in their childhoods that was relevant to sj.

There's some overlap between this family and "activist beginning" but the difference is that activist beginning could happen any time in life- and parts note it being the beginning. This is about stuff that specifically happened in childhood.
-*Activist Beginning*: this is about how it started for participants. They describe the beginnings of their interest in sj work. How they developed initial interest in it. it's where that initial flame got lit. for some participants it was earlier in life than others. They talk about the flame getting lit when they were in childhood, high school, college, or even in the past few years getting going with their activist interests and work.
-*Getting Involved*: initially finding out about activism and social justice. It's about getting involved in the sj process. How they got involved.
-*Activist Evolution*: this is about changing their activism over time. Changing their perspectives on activism over time. They describe having early views on activism and this changed over time. They developed ideas about activism that worked for them and fit with their own lives and choices. They talk about understanding things differently over time. They shift their focus on sj issues over time. This is about evolution and change. Growing interest in sj/creating change.

February 17, 2013
Axial coding.
I'm going through the descriptions for all the larger families and making sure the they make sense and only include subfamilies that are conceptually similar. As I'm looking

over the families. I see some baby families that need to be moved around. Also, I read through Jo's master's thesis and now I'm thinking about being more broadly in my big categories. Since I have about 20 large families… I think I can do better at combining families further into larger themes. Yes, I need to go back through and think about it in terms of *themes*. This will help me group families conceptually. For example Community as the amazing large family might need to have sub categories of large families (like [name removed] did in her diss study).

February 19, 2013
I've been creating the first feedback form for participant 1 feedback session on Thursday. It's coming along… but there's more refining to do. As I look at [name removed]'s diss, I'm realizing I need to pull back and think about how I can further group these categories based on conceptual similarity. Maybe "Creating Change" is a great over-arching category. And it will encompass multiple large families re: taking action and different types of activisms. Maybe "Community and Connection" is another large family that will include things about all the relationships and connection with others that participants find important. But these two families are strongly related. People commented on believing that change happens in the context of relationships.

February 20, 2013
Axial Coding
Before I get back into the data and consolidating my large families as I work forward in the conceptual model. I want to remember that grounded theory is particularly meaningful in counseling psychology because of the emphasis placed on understanding processes. I'm not forcing the data into preconceived categories (which is Charmaz's criticism of Strauss and Corbin).

I've been organizing categories into broader key categories. But I need to further consolidate. I want to pull back even further and look for relationships. Maybe this is when I need to think about properties and dimensions of categories. Key categories may be subsumed by a broader category or construct.

So I can feel good about breaking my key categories down a bit more because I'm going to cluster them further into broad categories/constructs. Here is an updated list of key categories (with properties/baby families listed below them):

Recognizing Oppression & Privilege

Recognizing Oppression (key category)
(properties:)
Recognizing oppression
Oppression in family
Seeing others oppressed
Being oppressed (includes dimensions of baby categories: discrimination, harassment, stereotyped, disadvantages, invalidated)
Messages we got

Reaction to Oppression: Negative feelings/ Feeling angry and frustrated/ Feeling afraid

Recognizing Privilege (key category)
(properties:)
Recognizing my privileges/ Advantages
Awareness of privilege
Reaction to Privilege: Negative feelings

Becoming An Activist

Activist Development/Evolution (key category)
(properties:)
Early awareness
Activism in childhood
Activist beginning
Getting involved
Activist evolution
Past influencing present strength

Learning about Social Justice/Activism (key category)
(properties:)
Learning Activism
Learning Oppression
Education relevant to SJ
Learning

Being An Activist
Social Justice Identity (key category)
(properties:)
Activist Identity
Being a SJ Activist
Feminist Identity
Identity-political
Representative/Leader/Contact person
My skills
Having purpose and direction
Spirituality
Seeing the Bigger Picture (key category)
(properties:)
Bigger picture
Never-ending activism
Connecting SJ issues
Believing in Fairness and Equality (key category)
(properties:)
My beliefs

Respecting and honoring others
Considering the other side

My Activism
Choosing Activism (key category)
(properties:)
Choosing activism
Finding fit
Activist interests
Types of Activism (key category)
(properties:)
Types of activism (with dimensions ranging from small scale to large scale, from direct to indirect)
Language
Parenting as activism
Teaching approach
Counseling as SJ
Research as SJ,
Employment & SJ
Volunteering
Creativity

Doing the Work
Doing the Work/Taking Action (key category)
(properties:)
Taking action and steps
Attending SJ Events
Challenging dominant views
Challenging others
Political analysis
Advocating
Helping others
Doing Your Own Work (key category)
(properties:)
Doing your own work
Advocating for self
Being challenged
Reading/Being informed
Working with Others (key category)
(properties:)
Activist groups
Collaborating
Wanting to Do More (key category)
(properties:)
Goals
Wanting to Do More

Creating Change
- Creating Change
- Making a Difference (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Progress/Seeing change
  - Impacting others

Having Community & Connecting with Others
- Getting People Involved/Reaching People (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Reaching people
  - Getting people involved
  - Talking with others
  - Teaching others
  - Telling stories
- Seeing Others Doing It (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Role models
  - Seeing others doing the work
  - Inspired by others
- Community and Connection (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Community
  - Connecting with others
  - Relationships
- Activist Community (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Activist friends and community
  - Activist family
  - Activist partners

Benefits for Me
- Positive Impact on Me (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Benefitting from activism
  - Impact on me
  - Liking what I do
  - Positive Feelings: Empowerment, Happiness, Hope, Pride, Excitement, Inspired
- Being Supported (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Family support
  - Feeling supported
  - Supporting each other
  - My people

Being Engaged in the Process
- Questioning Activism (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Questioning their activism
  - Evaluating activism/criticizing ineffective activism
  - Bad activism
- Taking Breaks (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Stopping activism
  - Taking breaks
  - Limits of what we can do
  - Balance and boundaries
- Coping (key category)
  - Focus on positive
  - Self-care
- Being Engaged in the Process (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Making mistakes
  - Being challenged
  - Being open
  - Being authentic
  - Approach to communication
  - Process vs. Outcome
  - Motivated to do SJ
  - Modest

Struggles
- Negative Impact on Me (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Negative feelings
  - Can’t do anything
- Struggles (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Struggles
  - Self-criticizing
  - Not seeing change
  - Not working out
  - Community-Not Good
- Not Doing Social Justice/Not Taking Action (key category)
  - (properties:)
  - Not understanding early on
  - Not knowing how to get involved
  - Not having language
  - Not taking action
  - Not doing SJ

Not doing much

Feedback Interviews & Selective Coding

February 21, 2013
Selective coding.
I am meant to choose a central theme or category that other themes will revolve around in the conceptual model. I have thoughts about "Community and Connection" being a central theme, but I want participants to agree with that before I put it together in a visual model. For now, I think I'll just present the list of 10 key themes to participants and ask for their insights about how they relate to each other.

February 22, 2013
First feedback interview.
I just had my first feedback interview with [name removed]! She described seeing herself and her experiences represented in the model. We discussed the major constructs and she likes the idea of representing many of the families on a spiral. She thought the "Recognizing Oppression and Privilege" family should be written on the lines of a box that would frame the spiral. She said that theme is "limiting and boxing in our ability to be activists." She emphasized believing that theme frames her experience. At first she thought it was the beginning, but as I explained the "Becoming an Activist" theme, and how early awareness of oppression is represented in that category, she went back to believing "Recognizing Oppression and Privilege" should be written on the box framing the model.

As I described the "Being Engaged in the Process" family, Jenny said she thinks of that as a struggle. So I want to go back into the codes and think about how that might be related to struggles. I don't think the Coping subfamily of that theme is about struggling… but I want to revisit the codes and think about her feedback.

Overall, her feedback was totally helpful. She said she understood what I was saying. It was helpful to hear all of her agreement throughout. That helps me feel good about what I'm doing. Because I have some time before the next interview, maybe what I'll do next is to start writing the results chapter. This will help me feel like I know my families, and as I move forward with getting feedback from participants, I will be more confident about accepting or challenging feedback. Her feedback helped!

March 2, 2013
Feedback interview.
They liked the visual representation of the spiral. They did think, however, that the spiral might be too uni-directional, and the addition of arrows along the spiral would help the reader see that people may move forward and backward and forward again in their social justice/activism experience. They liked the sequence of themes along the spiral. They agreed with the first feedback interview participant about moving the "Being Engaged in

the Process" theme closer to "Struggles." She liked the idea of putting it after "Doing the Work" because she believes the families within "Being Engaged in the Process" suggest activist maturity… things activist may not know until they are further along in their activist developments.

Additionally, they really liked the spiral, but they thought it might potentially appear too much like one activist's experience and not capture or emphasize that multiple participants agreed on these themes and had these experiences. They suggested a visual representation similar to the "map of the internet" might be useful.

March 4, 2013
Third feedback interview.
She was super helpful in conceptualizing the model. She strongly disagreed with the spiral idea because it made her think of a "downward spiral" like depression. I definitely don't want the model to make people think of depression! We collaborated on another visual representation to include the "Community and Connection" on a circle in the center as the central theme. She emphasized believing that she the most important theme, and I agreed completely with that conceptualization. Need to be sure to check that with the next three feedback interviews! She thinks the "Being Engaged in the Process," "Struggles," and "Benefits for Me" themes should be a layer immediately outside of the "Community and Connection" family. She thought those should represent a process going on throughout. Then the five remaining themes that kinda go in sequence would go on the outside of that as circles. She liked that. I'll put it together as a visual representation and show it to my next participant. Otherwise, she was down with my themes. She read through them in advance and said she agreed. She was excited to see the results.

March 11, 2013
Fourth feedback interview.
Her feedback interview went great. She always talk about second-guess herself and not being sure what's most helpful to say… but her interview really helped me understand how I need to organize the visual representation/model. She's in a place right now of seeing the struggles and questioning activism, coping more than the other themes. So it was helpful to hear her articulate why she thinks the struggles and the being engaged in the process families need to go together. I moved them to overlap with Community and Connection (among other themes) based on her descriptions. She really sees that central theme as contributing to the benefits and struggles associated with activism. And especially the "being engaged in the process" family! So now all 4 out of 4 participants see the struggles and being engaged in the process families as being connected. I'm still not convinced that they should be the same key construct/theme… but I've moved them to be directly next to each other on the model so it's more clear that they are related. And I agree with the feedback that they need to be represented somehow as occurring throughout their activist experiences and processes. When I get into writing that part of the results chapter, it will be clear to me, I think whether they need to be combined. As it stands right now they are still separate.

March 13, 2013
Fifth feedback interview.
She agreed that the theme "recognizing oppression and privilege" should be a frame for the model. As I described the "Community and Connection" family, she agreed as long as it was inclusive to activist and non-activist relationships that it made sense to have that as a central theme. She offered alternative names for several of the families that would be more specific to the baby families within them. And this was helpful feedback as I didn't love my category names and wanted to change them to be more specific/accurate.

L. suggested I combine the "My Activism" and "Doing the Work" themes. As I've looked them over, I agree those are both about the doing of the work, so it makes sense to consolidate them. She renamed the "Benefits for Me" family to "Positive Outcomes" by integrating one of the themes about the positive outcomes/seeing positive social change as a result of doing activism. She also indicated believing the "Struggles," "Benefits for Me," and "Engaged in the Process" families needed to be represented as occurring throughout their activist work.

March 13, 2013
Sixth feedback interview.
The fifth participants suggested two of the larger themes be integrated into other themes. As I returned to the data, I realized this made the most sense. That change was made, and I discussed the updated model with the sixth participant, who confirmed and agreed with the new model. I described and explained each of the families, and she liked them. She further renamed the "Doing the Work" family to "Doing Change Work," which fit way better. I'm happy that my participants are naming these themes-makes it more accurate for their experience and meanings. She agreed that "Struggles," "Benefits for Me," and "Engaged in the Process" families needed to be represented as contextual processes occurring throughout their activist work. Per this feedback, I further updated the visual representation. It looks like I won't stop with 6 feedback interviews, as I initially thought. I want to hear from more people to know if these changes I'm making are accurate and true for their understandings, experiences, and meanings of social justice work.

March 16, 2013
Seventh feedback interview.
I described the themes and the visual representation of the model. The participant really liked this! She especially felt happy that the "Community and Connection" was at the center. This was certainly consistent with her previous interviews, in which she emphasized relationships as central to the meaning of social justice for her. She liked the contextual processes, and she thought the themes made sense. Looking good! This might be the last feedback interview. I'm not sure.

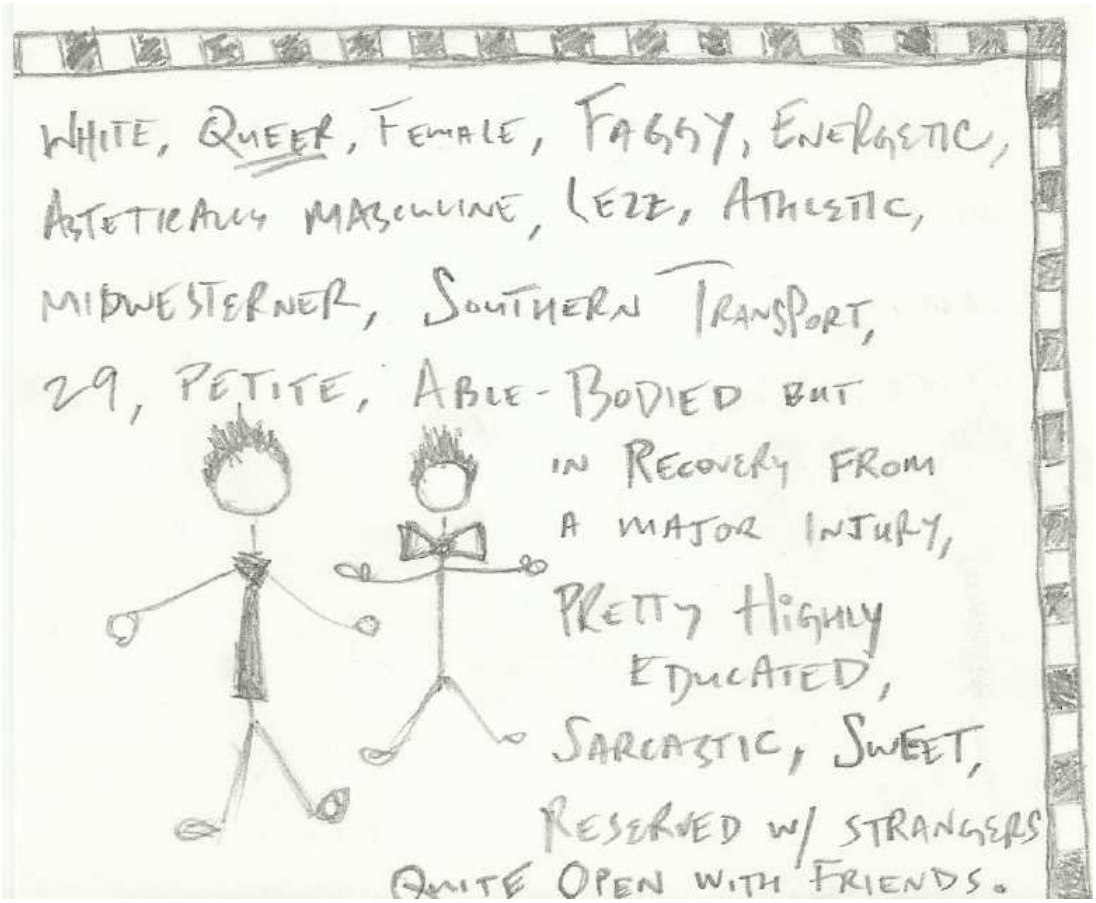
March 17, 2013
Eighth feedback interview.
One last interview. It went so well!! I love talking to this woman! She was clear right from the beginning that she intended to tell me if she disagreed with any of the results, and I definitely trusted her to do that. I walked her through the themes, and I asked her

for feedback about each one. She liked every one and provided examples from her own experiences and understandings to illustrate how they each made sense. I was somewhat nervous during this interview because I thought she would really tell me if something was off. But she LOVED it!! It felt great to hear her feedback. She had amazing ideas about how this conceptual model can be used for training purposes, and it was truly wonderful to hear that she thought it had true potential for real life use.

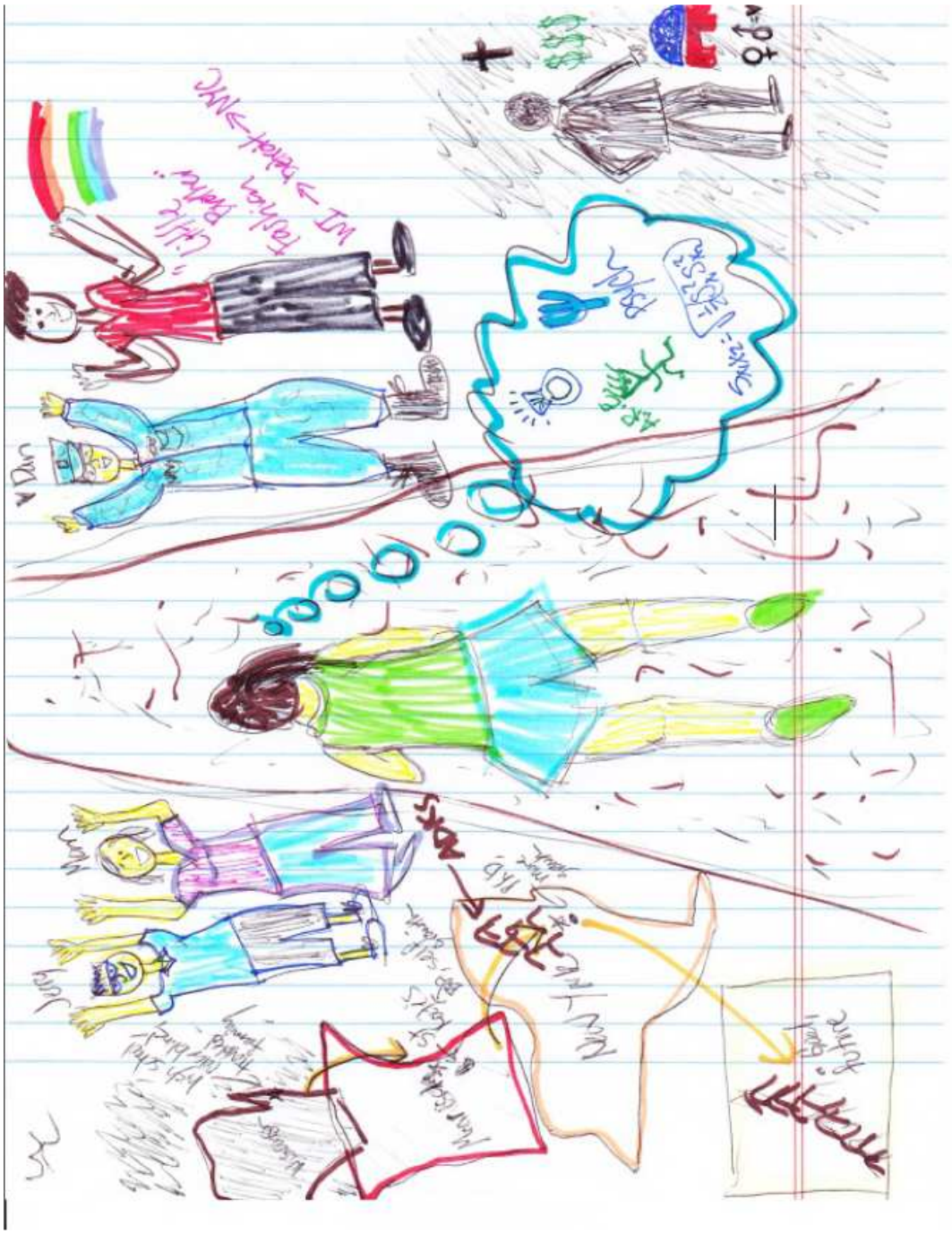
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT DRAWINGS

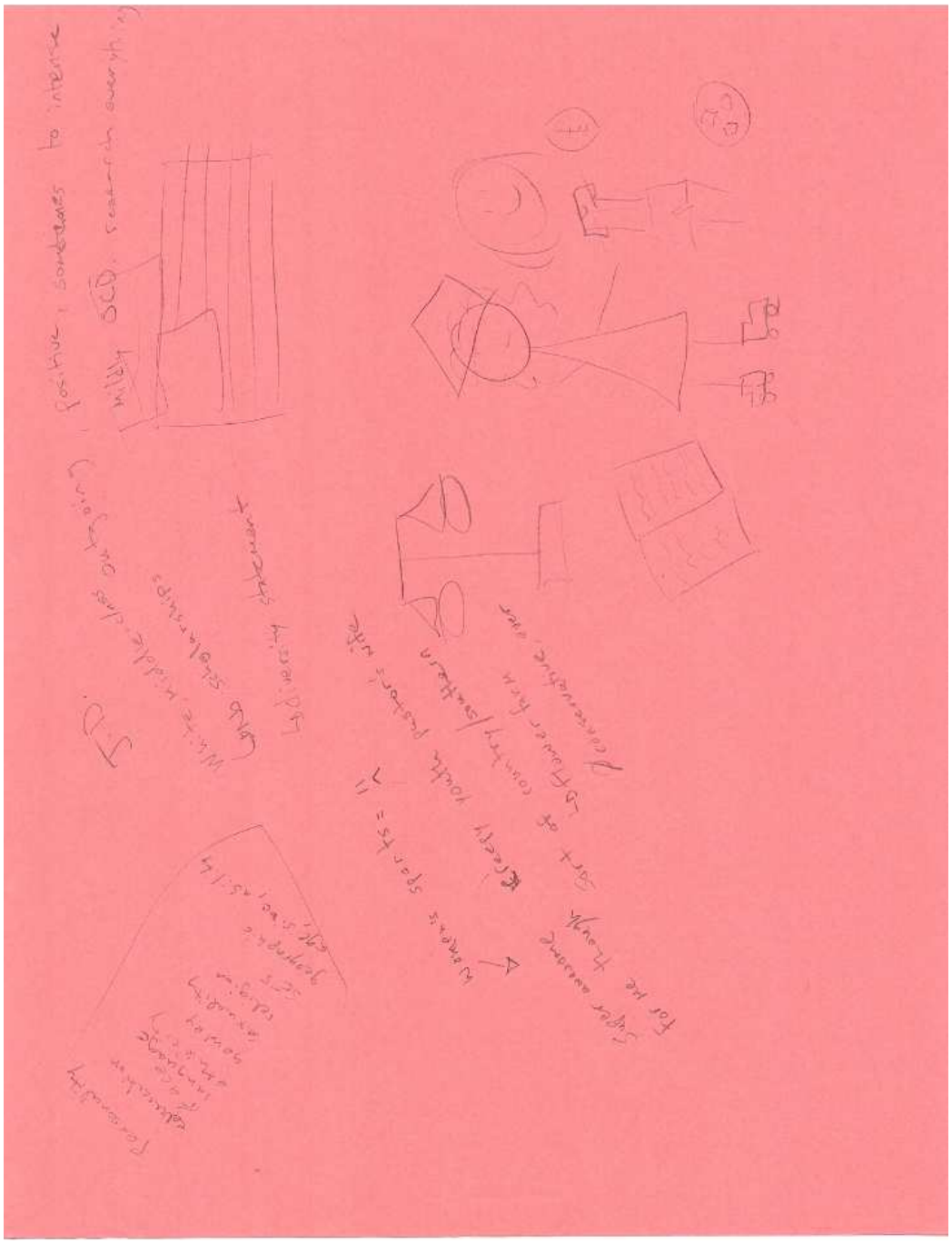
Noah's Drawing



Jennifer's Drawing



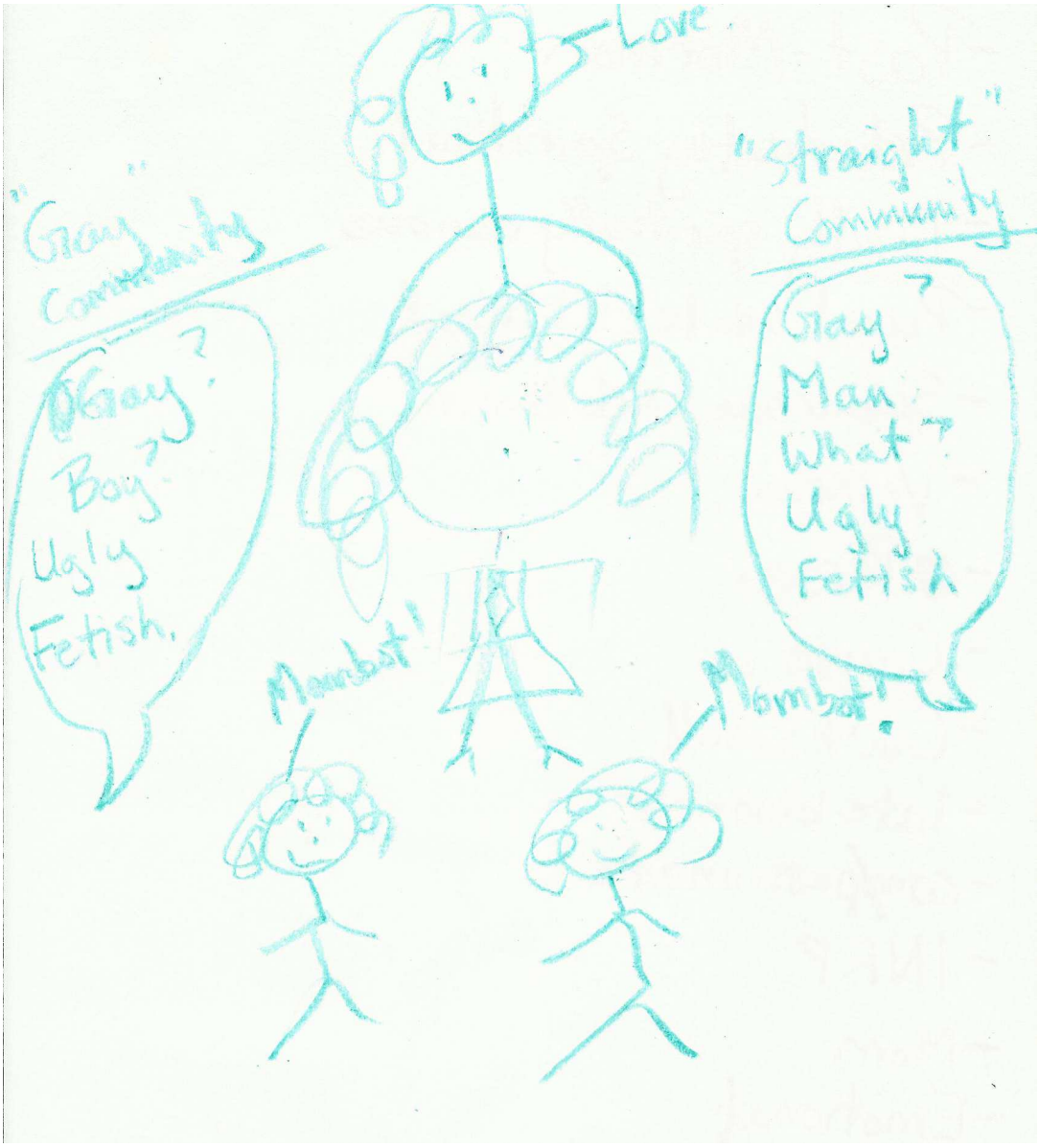
Sarah's Drawing



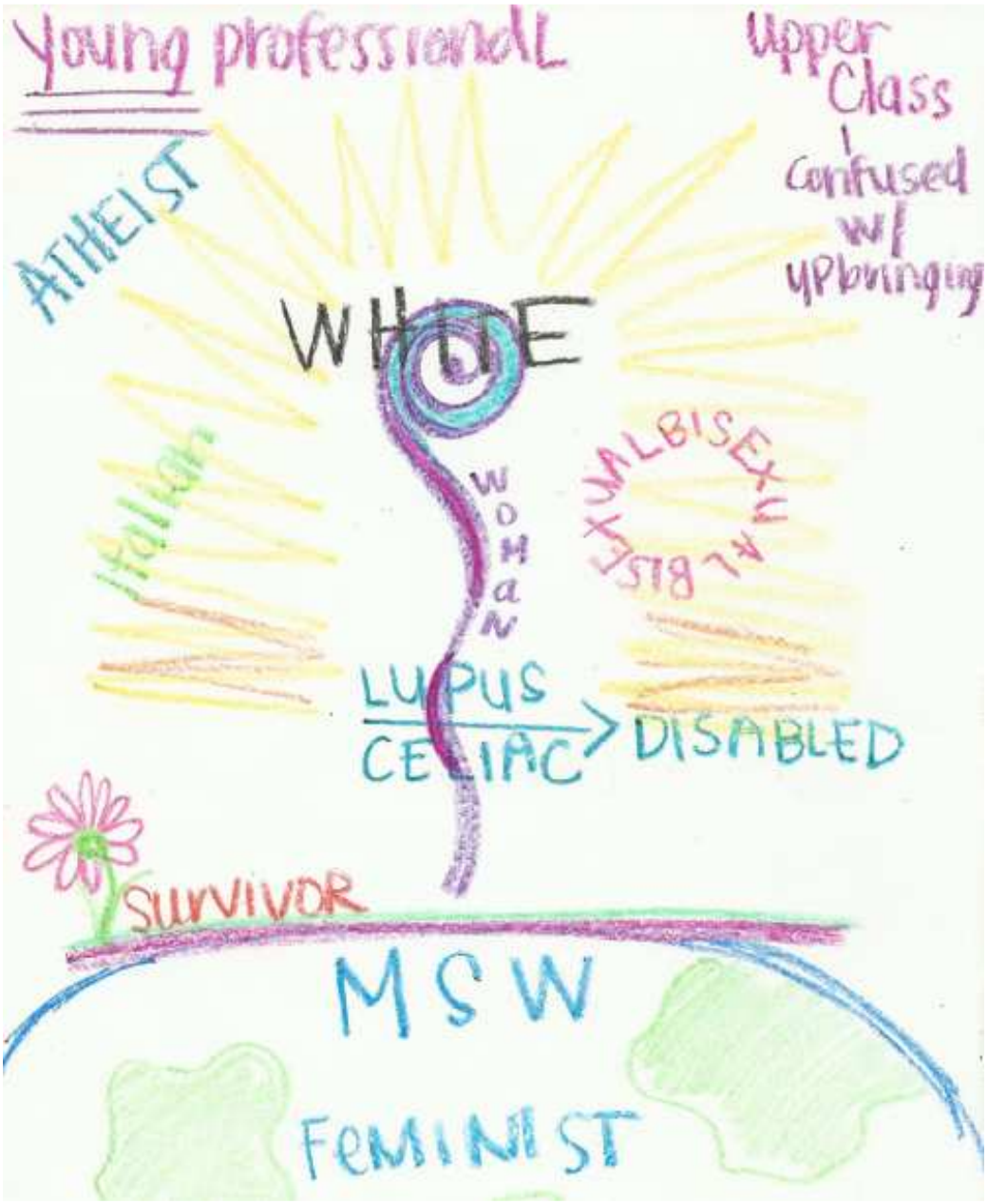
D's Drawing


Heart
SAD
Empathetic
Gifted SJA sparkle
(too) OPEN
Daughter
mother
Black Woman
HAPPY
disorganized
LD
TBP
Proud
Powerful
Healer
Lover
FAT
Outgoing
56 y.o.
ANXIOUS
Lesbian
SMART
Giving
Caretaker
(too much)
Brave
Blessed
INSECURE
Educated
not smart

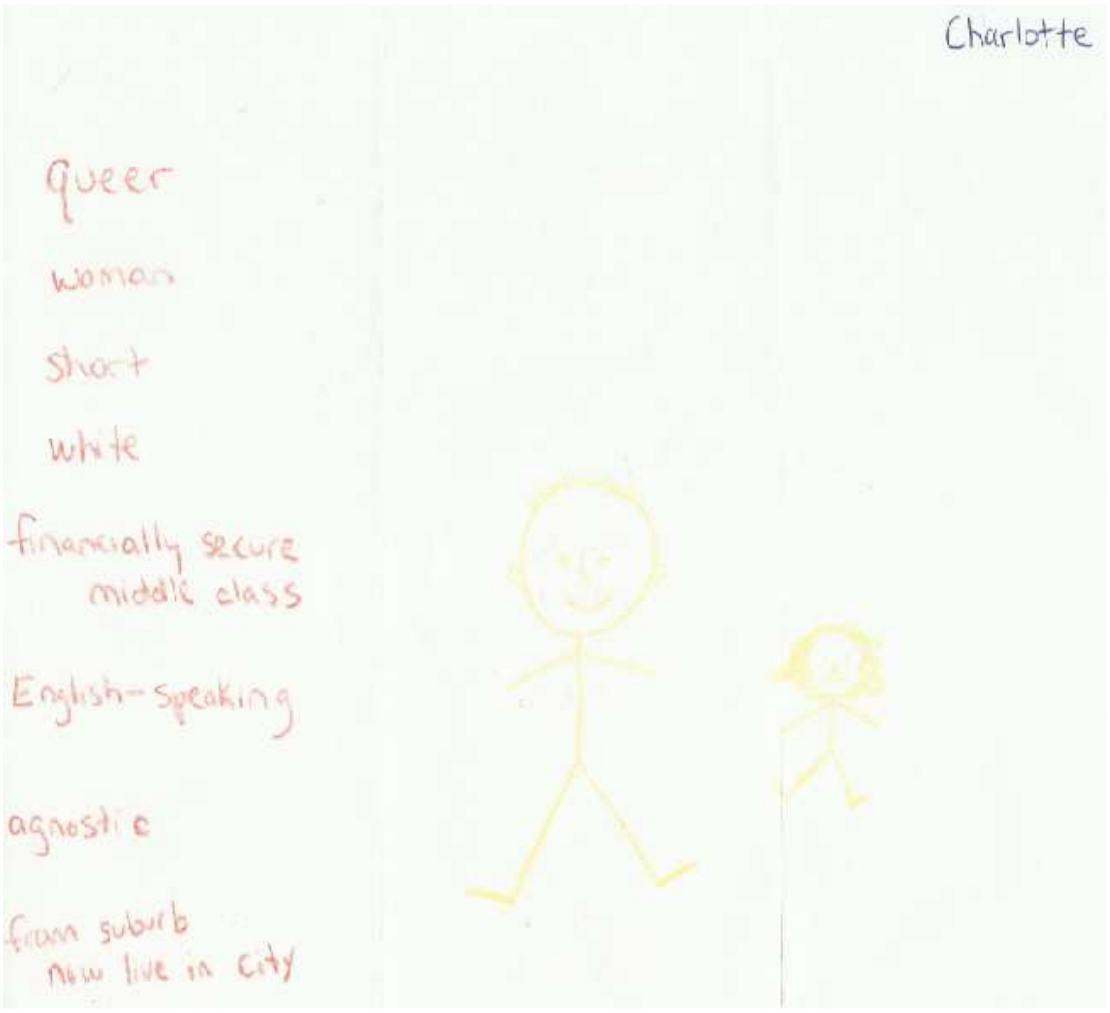
Bri's Drawing



Jenny's Drawing

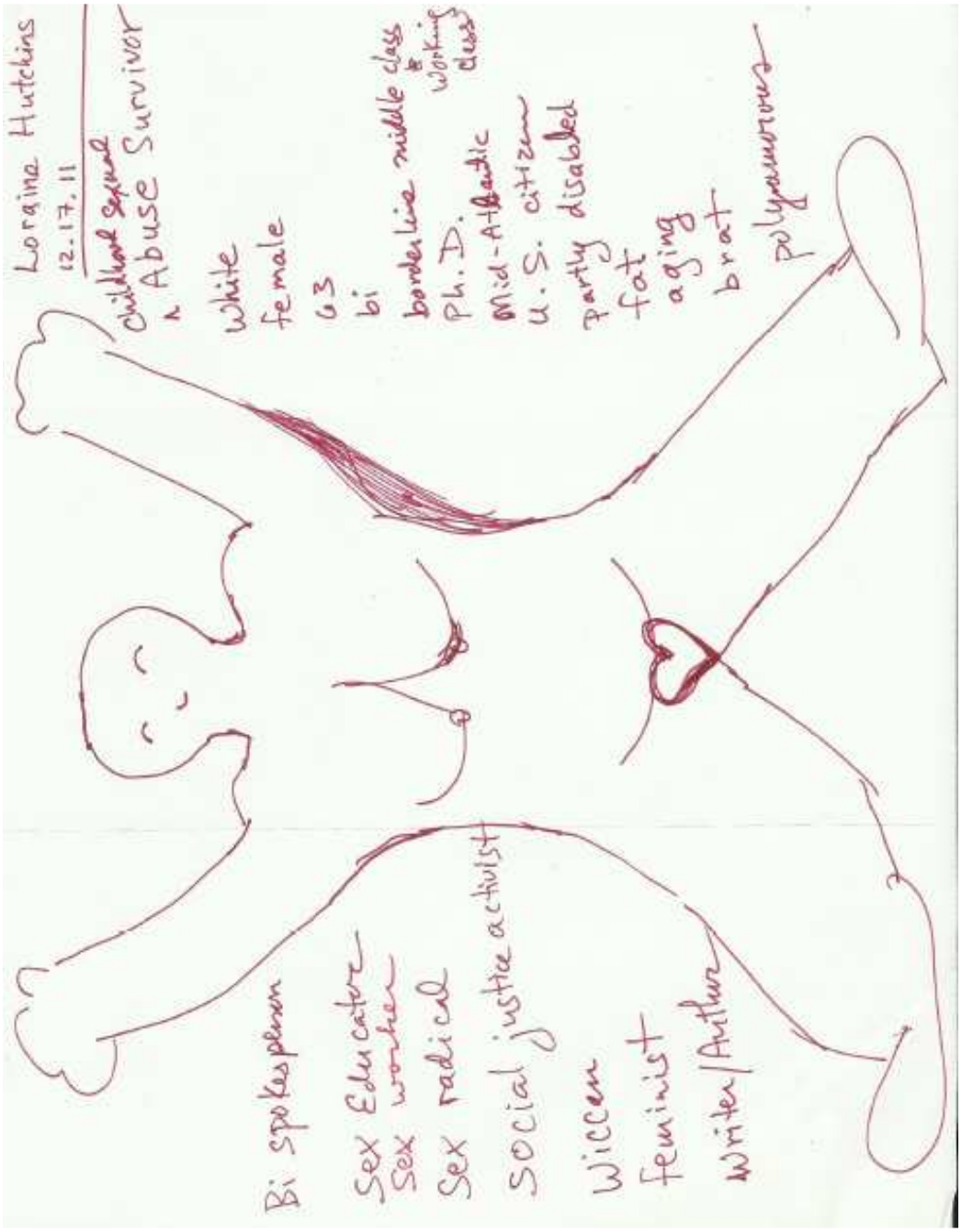


Charlotte's Drawing



Alexis' Drawing

Loraine's Drawing



Whitney's Drawing

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