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Agentive Personhood: Finding Yourself Through Serving Others

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AGENTIVE PERSONHOOD: FINDING YOURSELF THROUGH

SERVING OTHERS

by

SASHA MILLER

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Sasha Miller

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Agentive Personhood: Finding Yourself Through Serving Others

by

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At the core of this study, at the core the transformative experiences that will be described, is agency and what can occur when it is at the forefront of development and learning. I discuss educational spaces that give young learners the opportunity to recognize their ability to shift their perception of themselves and the world and lead to social change. I address this topic through the lens of my own experiences and the experiences of my peers. This study is a reflection on my experiences of participating in a social justice program. I hold a mirror to myself and contemplate on my experiences, how I got there, and how my perception of myself, the future, and my cultural identity shifted. I discuss how, ultimately, educational spaces like the Bonner Program, create ripe environments for young learners to step into their agentive potential, and moreover, it is a transformative experience that changes the way one navigates the world. The transformative experiences ultimately become a defining part of one's personhood. I contextualize my experiences, and later that of my peers, using various critical education frameworks, Transformative Activist Stance (TAS), Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR), and other theoretical frameworks. I also discuss personhood development and how it can be activist occurrence when agency is at the forefront I leave the last pages of this piece to my peers in service, they help paint a clear picture of what could happen when young, marginalized leaners are given the chance to define the world for themselves.

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Introduction

Agency is at the core of the study and at the core of the transformative experiences I reflect on and contextualize in the coming pages. I define agency as the will to act, the desire or ability to choose how or whether to act. In traditional educational settings, ones in which students are not represented in the curriculum, where learners are not encouraged to question norms, and being compliant is rewarded and prioritized, agency is not present. Young learners are rewarded for not using their agency. They do not ask questions and are uncomfortable critiquing power structures and those who represent it. Young learners become aware of their agentive potential and acknowledge their agentive personhood in educational spaces that are safe, democratic and include social justice pedagogy. Believing in their ability to act, to question, to change (and even believing you have that ability) can lead to change, a change happening within themselves and the world around them. I know this is true because I have had these transformative experiences in which I stepped into my potential. I reflect on how I came into my own definition of agency, how it has led me to want to question my development and investigate the connection between discovering my agentive potential and wanting to be an agent of change.

My Bonner Experiences

I often say that I found myself and my purpose through the education I received. Now more than ever, I believe it actually through my examination of my experience. I will chronicle my experience as a Bonner Scholar at Allegheny College, my subsequent transformation, my feelings about myself and the realization I had about how I saw myself. I have been chasing the explanation of how I got to be who I am, a person who is fully aware of their power and agency in a society that thrives off of the denial of that power and agency; someone invested in the liberation and freedom of marginalized individuals. On this chase, I have found that it was what I was taught and how I had been educated. This chase has led me down layers of false truths and systemic oppression, and the subsequent gaslighting that comes from it. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine likens this experience to that of Neo in *The Matrix*:

> The critical educational experience offered might lead the student 'down the rabbit hole' past layers of lies to the truths of systemic exploitation and oppression as well as possibilities for resistance. After he ingests the red pill, Neo ends up in the place of truth, awakening to the reality that his entire world is a lie constructed to make him believe that he lives a 'normal' life, when in reality he is fully exploited day in and day out. What is 'normal' is really a mirage, and what is true is the complete structural domination of people, all people. (Cammorata & Fine, 2008)

According to the movie, the discovery of the "red pill" does not happen everywhere, the discovery itself is not the norm. There are spaces outside of the norm that help create these instances of enlightenment. The Bonner Program created and nurtured spaces where I was encouraged to question everything, power and the structures in place, my perception and what I have been told about people who looks like me, and what I could be.

The Bonner program was my *red pill*. Before I became a member of this program, I believed I lived a "normal" existence, one that included awareness of the status quo, until I realized that I had agency all my life and was just not encouraged to step into that agentive potential. Moreover, I certainly did not realize how revolutionary that could be for myself and other young learners like me, "*The Matrix* infers revolution by showing how Neo learns to see the reality of his experiences while understanding his capabilities for

resistance" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). My perception of myself and my reality, my concept of power, choice, and action shifted completely after my experience. And while, I was always aware of societal injustices and may have had the capacity to understand oppression, my action stopped there. I did not realize my potential to change the world around me. I was later empowered to act on this potential and make the world I deserve to live in; to, essentially, resist.

First, a few comments about my background. I am first a generation college immigrant from Jamaica. In the Caribbean culture, education and respectability is a tool of mobility *and* survival. My family settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where I had stints in public school system, both charter and traditional, before attending a private, single-sex, Catholic high school. I was invited to apply after scoring high marks on the citywide catholic school high school application test. I was a quiet, reserved learner who could've easily fallen through the cracks if I hadn't been such a compliant student, very good at rote memorization. School was not a safe space for me, it was also not a place to express your opinions or question the status quo. Everyone had a role. I had a warped sense of learning and teaching; I was not empowered to be anything but another cog in the wheel to status quo maintenance. I did not know that social change and education were directly related, that one was needed for the other. My perception of social change and my proximity to it was not what it is today or what I thought it was back then. I learned about the Bonner Program only after I applied to my undergraduate institution, Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. While Allegheny was on my list, the gap I would have after financial aid would be too much for me to manage. Service had been a major part of my life and a large bulk of my extracurricular activities before college. With those two qualifiers, I fit the recruitment pool for the Allegheny Bonner Program. Part of the Bonner Foundation's mission is to provide educational access for first-generation and other marginalized students.

The Bonner Scholar Program, under the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, is a national, multi-university, consortium and social justice scholarship program. Propelled by the belief that engaged social change comes from empowering those most affected and giving them the educational and research tools needed to effectively enact this change, the Bonner Program has inspired and assisted thousands of young learners for almost 30 years. From early individual partnerships with colleges and food ministry

services, came a robust social justice programming that has engendered a spark of justice and action amongst more than 15,000 students. "While we are a small family funded foundation and nonprofit organization, our work and approach are not conventional. Rather than focus on short-term initiatives and grants for individual projects, we work as a national network and community of practice to advance higher education through its engagement within communities" (Model). The Bonner Program was incorporated in 1990 at Berea College. Today, it engages over 60 colleges and universities and approximately 3,000 students across the country "in a four-year developmental experience of service and learning" (Model). The program expanded greatly after its inception. Originally, the Bonner Foundation endowed 7 undergraduate institutions. They later secured funding from Federal Work Study, AmeriCorps, various higher education federal grants to bolster their programs and expand. The program has two types of members, Bonner Scholars and Bonner Leaders. Funding and time commitment are the only component that distinguish them:

> Bonner Scholars and Leaders engage intensively in service as well as training, education, and reflection (8-10 hours each week) during all four years of college. They serve in schools, nonprofit organizations, and governmental agencies to address community identified needs and to tackle issues like education, safe and affordable housing, food insecurity, college access and youth development, environmental sustainability, and so on...Effectively, students' experiences correspond with those of high-impact educational practices (Model).

The Bonner Developmental Model (see figure.1), rooted by its 7 core values: Civic engagement, community building, diversity, international perspective, social justice, spiritual exploration, and wellness is designed to guide young learners through their own self exploration and socio-historical position in this world. Within your time as a Bonner, your goal is to develop a praxis of service learning and community engagement. The developmental model (see figure 1) is a cumulative model in which members are gradually exposed to more responsibility, critical activist theory, and civic engagement.
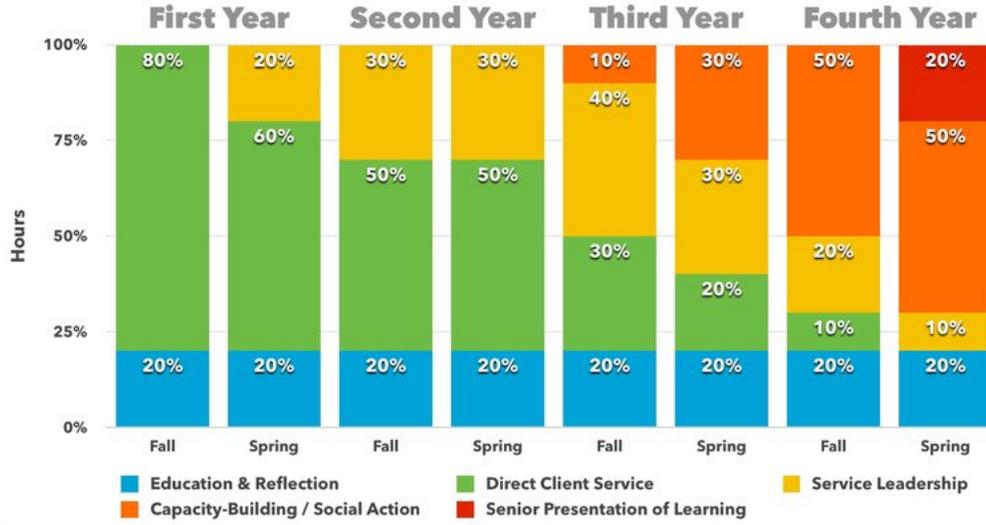
Figure 1. Bonner Program 4-Year Student Developmental Model. Bonner Model. *The Corella &
Betram F. Bonner Foundation*. http://www.bonner.org/bonner-program-model

While the Bonner Program had national standards, each university within the consortium had

slightly different requirements. During my time at Allegheny College, the program requirements included:

completing at least 1,900 hours of direct, capacity-building service over the course of 4 years, dedicating

two summers (and at least one winter break) during college to a, direct and ongoing service project, and

acting as service leaders on campus: "Through students' sustained involvement over multiple semesters and

years, and supported through intentional education and reflection, students develop a range of skills,

knowledge areas, and post-graduate outcomes. The student developmental model also provides structural

supports for students to grow as community leaders and civic minded professional on and off campus"

(Model). We are placed in a local community partner organizations during freshman year as a regular

volunteer. Over the course of four years, we grow and develop alongside community members,

incorporating ourselves into the local community.

Figure 2. Bonner Program Logo. Bonner Model. *The Corella & Betram F. Bonner Foundation*. http://www.bonner.org/bonner-program-model

By the time a Bonner Scholar (or Bonner leader) is a senior, they have of a wealth advocacy, organizing, program management skills and a greater sense of self as an agentive and active citizen. The program is designed to be an interdisciplinary praxis of learning and action; "Students identify, develop, and integrate service and civic engagement passions, academic studies, and career interests. Students are challenged and supported to grow as leaders as well as demonstrate active citizenship. At service sites, in courses, in Bonner meetings, and in special roles (like Bonner Congress), students take on challenging responsibilities as they advance" (Model). As a student functioning within this pedagogical framework, I was reading and studying works from Paulo Freire, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Stokely Carmichael, Desmond Tutu, Lila Watson and other activist authors and theorists. I was being exposed to work across disciplines and diasporas. While we were encouraged to major and minor in whatever we liked, Bonners (as we were called) were required to take social justice education classes. During my time at Allegheny those classes were called VESA courses: Values, ethics, and social action classes. Recruited in cohorts by year, we were required to biweekly with our cohort (approximately 8-12 students) and monthly meeting with our entire program (approximately 50 students). These meetings were spaces for us to reflect on our experiences and to also place activist theory behind them as well: "Our approach to civic learning and community engagement is inclusive and integrative. At the core, we believe in educating the whole person, and that learning occurs in multiple contexts and developmentally over time. Learning doesn't stop at graduation, and neither does our work" (Mission). Our learning about ourselves and the interconnectivity of the world around us did not stop. We were constantly reminded that liberation for one is not liberation for all. One of

my favorite quotations the director would share is Lila Watson (activist and academic), "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together" (2012). That quotation summed up the spirit of the Allegheny College Bonner program, one of mutual support and collective action.

We put our theory of reflection into action (what Freire and others call *praxis*) through embedding ourselves into the local community, proposing policy, organizing large scale service projects (Freire, 1993). We're taught that the newfound knowledge and awareness that we have for ourselves and the world around us would be for naught if we did not collectively act. More importantly, we learned that it was our right to do so and within us was the power and agency to change our world to what we deserved it to be.

During my senior year at Allegheny, myself and other Bonners, marginalized students, and staff formed a coalition to address social justice issues. We had seen professors and administrators of color fleeing/being pushed out of the institution because of lack of support. There had also been a rise in vandalism, hate speech, and assault amongst students fueled by the innate culture of white supremacy present on campus. Moreover, students who found themselves at the margins due to their identity were silenced. We felt displaced in their school community and abandoned by the administration which had heavily recruited us (marginalized students). And while Allegheny is a predominantly White institution, we were not complacent with the status quo; we demanded the reform and equity we deserved. The coalition an intersectional group of students, created a safe space for students to freely express themselves, commune with others and mobilize for change. Ultimately, I was unable to witness the beginnings of the crumbling of this racist structure and simultaneous rebuilding of inclusive community on campus. I know that we created experiences for the students that came after us, free from oppression and full of autonomy and collective cultural acceptance, because of the space we occupied and our refusal to be silenced.

I developed a particular desire to act, one that was uncomfortable, because I am continually fighting against a society that tells me this is the way the world should be, and this is the role I play in it because of who I am and how I may identify. Below is an excerpt from my reflection journal from a VESA class on voice, location, and community:

There's so much I didn't know. I mean, I knew about the different forms of discrimination and I knew I experienced challenges because of it but, I didn't have the vocab to describe my experience. I wasn't confident that I even knew what I was talking about. Voice, being able to speak up and about oppression is a part of being liberated. As I am preparing for my final year here, my voice and how I use it has been on my mind a lot lately".

I saved this excerpt for years and have gone back to it several times. It serves as a reminder that, my voice (my agency) and how I use it, can be powerful. Reflecting on how I didn't feel equipped or qualified to push against what I knew reminds me that I will be constantly learning about ways to problematize our world to always welcome opportunities to push against the status quo and define life for myself. Essentially, I was in spaces created for young learners to come to their own moment of transformation where they fully see themselves as agentive, meaningful people, whose lives are intrinsically connected to the greater society around us. I began to understand that everyone is exceptional, and everyone can be creative.

Moreover, I have become almost obsessed with giving young people the red pill and unveiling the true intentions of the education that most of them have received because it is an education of maintaining the status quo. Given my background and experience, I was compliant, not comfortable deviating from the norm and questioning things in fear that I would be punished or cast aside. We are intentionally taught to not question or examine because we shouldn't problematize things, like myself. That has become my vocation, in every workplace and position, in every role I have held since graduating from Allegheny and that transformative moment. There is no one moment that exemplifies the removal of the veil, it is not temporal, it is an ongoing process, through action in which you discover your intrinsic agency. It is a practice that you develop by challenging and questioning the world you grew up in. It is a constant upheaval of what you know and have known all your life. It is an intentional direct choice that you make every day to be the best version of yourself and work collectively to create the best version of society that you know is possible.

I learned how history has not been truthfully portrayed; I learned about the unspoken connection between my identities and oppressions I faced. I learned how to speak about my experience in ways that honored what I had to offer; more importantly, I learned how powerful my potential is and how I have been

institutionalized to not believe that. As a group, we confronted the harmful norms and lies we internalized. We learned to humanize ourselves, that we were missing critical parts of our understanding of who we could be and who we really were. We also learned that we were insidiously made to think our development was not detrimental to our true selves and society.

Being in this program was one of the first times in my life I felt like my story had more to offer than challenges., according to and created by societal institutions. It was the first time I was asked, "who" I wanted to be rather than "what". When I realized how much I had to offer, I slowly began to understand that I had the tools to make change within me, I just did not know how to use them. It was as if I found my vocabulary (for change). It is a truly radical thing, allowing marginalized youth the opportunity to recognize the power they have in their voices; because once I recognized my own, I became obsessed with wanting to help others like me find it for themselves and honoring it various ways. When you realize that there is potential beyond the status quo and that it is ok to desire accountability and critique and question the institutions of power, you begin the journey of manifesting and taking back your agency. For me, getting to that point required genuine validation and acknowledgement of my feelings, a group that pushed me to challenge and question my complacency with the status quo, and safe space for vulnerability and dialogue because that is where true learning begins. The Bonner Program did that for me.

While I am certain that there are others who have had similar experiences in Bonner (the research interviews I conducted for this project will prove that), no experience is exactly the same. More importantly, I must stress that it was the people I interacted with who shaped the experience as well. They formed the policies and designed the curriculum that created the spaces, the institution itself was merely a vessel. I center on Bonner solely because it was the first place I experienced/ witnessed this transformation, albeit not the only. I have experienced similar spaces and in more recent years, I have been charged with creating those same spaces for young people.

Contextualizing My Experience: The Need for Critical Activist Education

There is no doubt that the education we received prior to this experience, was a replication of the same oppressive conditions young learners face outside the school walls. We are conditioned to think that oppression is inevitable, that we have no other option than to passively passing through life (Frymer, 2005). We are taught that we are only receptacles of acceptable information. The truth is not ours to make, just for us to believe. Paulo Freire, father of emancipatory and critical education, talks about this type of education as banking education (Freire, 1993). We were passive learners, almost complacent in our idea of action. It is a pedagogy that paints us objects, not subjects or conscious actors. Reflection, collective or otherwise, does not occur. There is an air of imposed, or almost forced, complacency about the world; it is simply just the ways of the world and are not intentional or targeted.

Benjamin Frymer frames this experience in his article, "Freire, Alienation, and Contemporary Youth: Toward a Pedagogy of Everyday Life", as alienation: "For Freire, alienation resides in the separation of the subject from her ontological vocation of active human participation in the world. The oppressed, submerged in conditions of existential violence, do not exercise their human capacities. They do not reflect on their lives, their experiences, their misery, or the reasons they find themselves among the dominated" (Frymer, 2005). This alienation is normalized, an expected part of our educational experience as marginalized students. To be clear, I define "marginalized students" as learners who have been historically discriminated against or silenced due to their social status and identity (SES, race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, etc.) It creates instances where our identities and how we identify and define ourselves is not privileged and passivity and nihilism are rampant and expected. (Frymer, 2005). Moreover, when a young learner is actively against the system and questions the authority of the institution, they are punished; reminded that they have no agency over themselves or their education. Peter McInerney says that youth alienation within schools is basically a subset of dehumanization of the oppressed student, a side-effect of the purposeful poisoning of our inherent agency: "If we deny subjectivity, silence student voices, show scant respect for children and their culture, suppress the creative capacities of individuals and close down spaces for inquiry, we are likely to reinforce existing patterns of alienation and disaffection amongst young people"

(McInerney, 2009). Alienation was commonplace in the education I received. If you did not comply and remained satisfied with what you were receiving, you were labelled as a trouble-maker or even as "uneducable" (Stanger, 2018).

Camilla Stanger in her article, "From Critical Education to An Embodied Pedagogy of Hope: Seeking a Liberatory Praxis with Black, Working Class Girls in the Neoliberal 16-19 College", is discussing similar conditions I experienced before Bonner. And while Stanger's focus is young, black women in the UK, the experience of being labelled and tracked is very real in our American educational spaces. In her piece, Stanger classifies two categories of labelling: uneducable and educable. The educable are compliant and almost complacent with the current status of the world. I could say that I was placed in the "educable" category. As she writes,

> A discourse of educational success that covertly excludes the possibility for cultural difference in this way, as well as sidelining the tangible effects of structural inequality, positions those who fail to 'embody [educational] success', in both their academic performance and their embodied ways of being and learning, not only as uneducable, but also 'at risk', and implicitly at fault (Stanger, 2018 p. 50).

The idea of being labelled as 'educable' falls within the realms of Freire's 'banking education'. It is a normalized view of education that will exclude marginalized experiences and label people by how compliant and supportive of the status quo they are. An important tenet of critical education is acknowledging that education is, indeed, a political act and thus, never neutral. Recognizing this means putting into context how power dynamics and politics have grossly adulterated education: "Through this view of education, every act of learning takes place in the context of, and so is fully shaped by, power relations. To ignore this, for example in viewing education as a depoliticized 'DIY project of self', would ultimately be to maintain and even collude in processes of marginalization, or, in Freirean terms, oppression" (Stanger, 2018). Our current system of education in the US is a neoliberal and politicized space where individual success, compliant-ness, and workforce development are privileged; because that is how you maintain the status quo. Indeed, the status quo is maintained and bolster by dividing the marginalized,

because of the prospect of collective agency and, by denying the voices of those who often silenced, and by convincing us of how powerless in our lives and the world around us.

Stanger also calls to mind some of the gaps in Freire's educational theory. He did not consider or speak of the differences of identity within oppressed groups and the challenges that come with that internalization (Stanger, 2018). Moreover, the relationship between the teacher and student within his transformative educational experience may still be replicating the same authoritarian roles traditional settings. This is something Sarah Galloway (2012) brings up in her comparison of Ranciere and Freire in her article, "Reconsidering Emancipatory Education: Staging A Conversation Between Paulo Freire And Jacques Ranciere". Ranciere believed that the traditional teacher-student roles were inherently oppressive and would always make emancipatory education counter-productive. Ranciere also claimed that liberation is really the ability to have and give education opinions (Galloway, 2012). And while I do not think Ranciere's explication of emancipatory education is complete, it does bring up ideas that Freire does not mention. Stanger also invokes bell hook's interpretation of critical pedagogy. In hooks' version of engaged (critical) pedagogy, "...a key way in which an open learning community can be created is in the collective recognizing of everyone's presence and 'unique being' in the classroom. hooks explore this in terms of everyone, both teachers and students, drawing on their own, personal, lived experiences, in bringing 'narratives of their experience into the classroom", so that everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all must work. These are the same gaps Stanger also found in the work. She and hooks give reference and voice to those gaps; Stanger, with her inclusion the body (and the politics of female bodies holding space within the framework), and hooks, with her insistence of incorporating feeling and emotion into Freire's liberatory praxis (Stanger, 2018).

While I can find commonplaces within Stanger and hooks' interpretation of critical pedagogy, Gert Biesta's examination of critical pedagogy also gives my experience in critical educational spaces more context. Collaborative reflection and unity are important facets of the Bonner Program. We are encouraged to place ourselves, our lives and experiences, within a collective experience. Our success, the knowledge we glean (in particularly in educational settings), must always be shared and collaborative if we are to change

our society: "There is a long tradition which focuses on education as a process of individual emancipation conceived as a trajectory from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence. Critical Pedagogy has helped us to see that there is no individual emancipation without societal emancipation" (Biesta, 1998).

In "Against Learning", Biesta talks of the education of today, the education I received prior to Bonner. Education and how we talk about learning and teaching have been warped, according to Biesta. Postmodernism and neoliberalism has assisted in the commodification of education, shifting even the language around education. Accountability, what is taught in school, and how students are graded can all be tied back to a rising reliance and guidance from neoliberal norms. Learning is more of an economic transaction with the consumer as the learner and the teacher becomes supplier. This version of learning, notwithstanding the already oppressive norms of Western traditions, has misconstrued the roles of teacher and learner. Emancipatory education, or education that respects and honors the agency of learner, problematizes the education I received prior to Bonner. It is not a transaction between teacher and learner. It is not preparation for the workforce. Critical education supplies young learners with the tools to examine where they stand and what they could do, "If education is indeed concerned with subjectivity and agency, then we should think of education as the situation or process which provides opportunity for individuals to come into presence, that is, to show who they are and where they stand. What does it mean to provide such opportunities?" (Biesta 2005). Ultimately, critical education was on just one facet of the transformative experience I had. Critical activist pedagogy created the foundation for the action to take place; it created a safe avenue of critical human development and learning to take place. I was focusing only the spaces (and the instances that come out of those spaces). As I realized, the space is just the catalyst or the spark or the house in which action can occur, the development taking place within those spaces is what is truly making the difference.

CHAPTER 2: Personhood and Human Development

To be self-aware is to be awake

As I stated earlier, it was my Bonner Director who first asked me *who* I wanted to be rather than *what.* The Bonner Program - all the requirements, social justice, etc. - created spaces for me to really investigate my character, who I thought I was and who I actually became. It was one of the few institutions directly concerned about my character development, my growth. Like Neo from *The Matrix,* the transformative education I experienced had me questioning everything I knew to be true, even the development of personality, my values, my agency, and my perception of justice. Critical educational spaces, that are democratic, like Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) or social justice pedagogy spaces make conditions ripe for this type of experience (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

At its core, emancipatory education is about agency, development discovery and becoming a more humanized and aware version of yourself; it is about using the knowledge and reflection to act, praxis (Cannella, 2014). The following is an excerpt from Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine's anthology on YPAR, Revolutionizing *Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (2008). In the excerpts, Caitlin Cahill reflects on her experience with her peers and the action she took thereafter: "Collectively we shared our desires and what got in the way of us accomplishing our dreams. We argued, laughed, and compared our experiences in our neighborhood and our perspectives on the world." Cahill speaks about how her and her peers were allowed to come together and reflect on their personal experiences, connecting the dots between state sanctioned violence, oppression and the challenges they face daily. They were united during this reflection phase. They had a greater sense of self and an awareness that they did not have before: "Without an understanding of our personal situation we are unable to make or 'see' a possibility of change. Many young people feel demoralized by the 'system' taking responsibility for failing institutions…" because their transformative experience gave them the tools to see beyond what was given, ponder on the lies they'd been told about and its effect on their perception of themselves and others. The young learners internalized the banking education that thought of them as mindless receptacles of sanctioned knowledge.

When critical education honors agency and internal reflection, young learners begin to think of world different or better than what they currently have: "Our recognition and personal experience of unconscious denial and hopelessness is what inspired us to try to wake up other young people with our research, to force them to think about stereotypes and motivate them with anger, to force them out of the comfort zone as a prelude to engagement"(Cahill, Moore & Threatts, 2008) The comfort zone mentioned is one of complacency and comfort with long established norms and status quo. Moving young people out of it requires a problematizing of almost everything they know. What Cahill is ultimately discussing is Freire's "praxis" in real time, reflecting or "reading the world" (Freire, 1993). Cahill shared the process of her collective praxis; her excerpt is from a reflection on YPAR project she worked on with several of peers. This project led to the creation of an ongoing initiative to meet the unconsidered needs of underserved students, Cahill and her peers. It is important to note that Cahill was experiencing transformative critical education that privileged agency but also was one in which the development of student and their learning went hand-in-hand (Cahill, Moore & Threatts, 2008). While we sometimes dichotomize the act of learning and the process of human development, education and psychology theorists, like Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Stetsenko, believe that they cannot and should not be separated. I realized I needed to dive more into the concept of identity, development, and agency to get a better understanding of my transformative moment.

Human Agency, Historically Speaking

Svend Brinkman in "Character, Personality, and Identity: On Historical Aspects of Human Subjectivity" (2010) traces how society has discussed and normalized human subjectivity and identity in general. Using an approach on human subjectivity, popularized by Charles Taylor, Brinkman examines human subjectivity and the idea of self. He breaks down the progression of understanding and theory around subjectivity throughout the years, trailing it to present-day or postmodern leanings. Historically, human subjectivity has been framed and examined in 3 changing ideals of self-determination: "From a premodern notion of character through a modern notion of personality, to a postmodern idea of identity" (Brinkman, 2010). Each stage legitimized by a social factor and have crafted different versions of agency, here, are

defined as the historical interpretation of self and the intermingling of general society and other. In the premodern era (character), the question asked was, "who you are?". This was inspired greatly by the heavy religious undertone of society. In the modern era, shaped greatly by the industrial revolution and the beginnings of democracy, the question became, "What am I?". In our current time, the question presently asked is "Who am I?" in an era of constantly changing communities and subculture:

> Our individual self-interpretations thus derive their contents and legitimacy from the practices of society and from what Taylor refers to as the social imaginary. Taylor defines the social imaginary as 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (Brinkman, 2010 p. 68).

Using Taylor's approach, Brinkman claims that there is a dialectical connection between our perception or interpretation of ourselves and social practices. Other popular frameworks of thought attribute agency and its development to the Westernized ideals of freedom.

Jeff Sugarman and Bryan Sokol in their article, "Human Agency and development: An introduction and theoretical sketch", categorize agency in 3 different ways. According to the authors, human agency and freedom has always been a tenet of Western normative thought but it has been contested and denied by many in the same society. Psychology and human development theorists can classify agency in three categories: agentive internalism, agentive externalism, and the combination of agentive externalism and development. Agentive internalism is concerned with recognizing agency and it significance within individuals. One's uniqueness and personal capacity are used to create meaning through representation. This view is concerned with being distinct from the physical world, i.e., society. It is a very western and old perspective of agency:

> According to this view, human agents are deemed capable of reflecting upon their immediate circumstances and, through their choices and actions, changing themselves and the course of their lives. The second, or materialist form of internalism is more in accord with contemporary attempts to naturalize, and often reduce, individual mental life to more basic, physically determined,

properties. On this view, the notion that individuals possess the ability to control their actions, or

assert their wills, is significantly minimized or even denied (Sugarman & Sokol, 2012, p. 2).

People are agents not only because their actions create effects, but also, because there is agency in the

undertaking of being self-aware of one's actions, intentions, and consequences. Agentive externalism is

concerned with not only the agents but the context in which agency is present. According to this perspective,

agency is sourced from interactions between people and their environments, reducing it to one person is

inadequate; "Thus, where internalists consider context as correlative, but nonetheless only contingent in

shaping the deliberations and actions of human agents, externalists hold that context has a more profound

role in providing conditions necessary for, and constitutive of, agentive choice and action" (Sugarman &

Sokol, 2012). Context and the conditions surrounding decision-making, greatly influence agency, according

to externalist. Agentive externalism and development is a mixture of an externalism perspective and

development psychology. There are both several varying and similar trends occurring within the

perspective, but all still have the focal point of human development, activity, interactivity and their roles

within psychology agency. Stetsenko's work and her continuation of Vyogotsky's socioculturalism falls

under this category of agency. Through her examination, Stetsenko claims theorists, "have paid insufficient

attention to subjectivity, agency, and their role in the transformative processes of psychological and social

life. She asserts that objects and agents are part of ongoing and perpetually evolving dynamic processes"

(Sugarman & Sokol, 2012). While agentive internalists and externalists do consider external forces and

context, it is not enough to capture critical look at agency and transformation and the dynamic process.

True Development, Recognizing and Honoring Agency

Anna Stetsenko's work within this ideology is very relevant to my work. While I plan to address her

Transformative Activist Stance and its presence in my experience later, her interpretation of Vygotsky's on

Becoming and personhood also captures what I am trying to say about this experience. If we go back to *The*

Matrix comparison, we know that the "red pill" is the pill that opens Neo's eyes to the true, bland, and

oppressive life he is living, is critical emancipatory education (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Neo learned that

was deceived. He then shifted his perspective and made deliberate choices to rebel against all he had known every day. This "choice" or decision is the moment I referenced earlier; it is one not necessarily temporal, because it happens more than once and, eventually, becomes a staple in the decision-making about yourself and how you can move through the world. It becomes more of a personality trait or identity in which honoring your agency and nurturing a belief of collective action, justice, and hope. I have been searching for the language or a model that captures this phenomenon and properly describe it; Stentseko's theoretical framework on collective identity and agency along with her activist stance bolsters what I am trying to say. In her article, "Personhood: An Activist project of becoming through collaborative pursuits of social transformation", Stetsenko claims that activist leanings or desires are cultivated parts of one's personhood which ultimately suggests that agency and the quest for what is right are developmental processes (Stetsenko, 2012).

As stated by Sokol and Sugarman, Stetsenko believes that personhood has different models or forms but, in the end, the idea of personhood is lacking (Sugarman & Sokol, 2012). The common, or mainstream, definition makes it seem that personhood, and the creation of it, is just our response to the indiscriminate whims of life. Moreover, the traditional definition is very individualized. Stetsenko asserts that this common definition implies that people are simply "puppets" blindly following and maintaining the status quo. She goes on to say that this common thought process is detrimental to society "...they all cut personhood-along with mind, agency, and meaning-seriously down to size, leaving us bereft of a sense of personhood and of a hope of grasping foundations for our society that might assist the advancing of social agendas needed to reform it." I agree but I push this a bit further and claim that the idea of being "puppets" is only detrimental to a society that doesn't thrive on underrepresented groups not knowing their power, personhood, collective action (Stetsenko, 2012).

Stetsenko writes that traditional approaches to understanding personhood are not nuanced enough and don't consider cultural or historical implications. Personhood is a social and collective process. It is not stagnant. There are institutions in place that make us think about agency and power and potential in a very rigid lens of tradition, decorum, and respectability all in the attempt to maintain the status quo. I also argue

that status quo maintenance is a reason for this rigidity as well but, considering what Stetsenko says about traditional thought being detrimental, it is evident that keeping certain groups of people aloof or content with the status quo is safe for the oppressor and allows for further propagation of this type of society. While Stetsenko is saying is society is lacking in its understanding and handling of agency, I believe it is purposeful. Society has constructed a mindset in which people are encouraged to maintain the current status because it is necessary to maintain the oppressive and isolating power structures in place. This is a core tenet of my argument and a tangible part of my experience - individuals, especially marginalized people, are made to think, blatantly and insidiously, that life as we know it is something out of our control. I agree with Stetsenko when she says that tradition has supported "common thought" but I must mention the intentionality of this. Stetsenko said we should be using the "weight of tradition" and the need to fit in, to innovate "and find our own solutions to dilemmas that had existed before and can only be glimpsed as likely to emerge in the future." (Stetsenko, 2012). Yet, not everyone has this option. How do marginalized young learners learn to resist the weight of tradition, especially one that has directly denied their agentive personhood? Who is the desire to innovate to truly accessible to? Marginalized, underrepresented students are often told and taught that there is only one way to do things and be content with the harmful norms. In the earlier sections of this paper, I talk about how I did not feel empowered to believe there is something more, something different. Before my experience with Bonner, I was undoubtedly subjected to this normalized (and harmful) form of thinking.

Stetsenko, ultimately, argues that there isn't a critical method that considers these historical, social, and cultural implications while also "leaving ample space for human agency and personhood" (Stetsenko, 2012). Personhood is relational and methodological tools must reflect it as well. Personhood, its development and maintenance, are intrinsically connected to the world and *its* development and maintenance. I am comforted by the idea of people determining and, also being determined by, the world as a theoretical framework. Essentially, development (true development and I make this caveat because this is not the status quo in educational settings), is an activist project, because true development of personhood and agency is a collective transformative experience for self and society, "... human development is an

activist project that is not only imbued with dialogism, ethics, and interrelatedness but also, and more originary, is grounded in collaborative, purposeful, and answerable deeds ineluctably colored by visions of and commitments to a particular project of social transformation"(Stetsenko, 2012). Young learners should be growing into their potential and stepping into their power, empowered to think outside of the status quo and question it (Stetsenko, 2018). In the Bonner spaces I speak of, we were able to learn hidden truths about our development (creative agency, history, etc.) and given room to enact change in our lives and the world around us. This is tantamount to my work and truly grounds my experience and validates what I have been feeling about it.

Towards the end of her personhood piece, Stetsenko says Vygotsky incorporated Darwinist ideals of continuous evolution instead of predestined existence (as I'd say young, underrepresented learners are insidiously told this daily). This seems to be a grounding idea behind Stetsenko's personhood argument. Evolving is more than merely adapting. With acknowledging the symbiotic connection between activism, agency, and personhood. Evolving is proaction and collective transformation; "In this logic, the beginning of a uniquely human life...marked by a shift from adaptation to a given environment... to an active and even pro-active (that is, goal directed and purposeful), collaborative transformation of the environment with the help of collectively invented and gradually elaborated, from generation to generation, cultural tools" (Stetsenko, 2012). Yet ultimately, I believe the activities and settings Stetsenko talks about, the spaces that nurture and bolster this idea of agency, are critical pedagogical spaces because those are the spaces that the transformation occurs. This piece has provided me with a foundation and connection of agency and development, that is, personhood. It has also encouraged me to take a deeper dive into Transformative Activist Stance and use it as the theoretical grounding for my work.

I found it prudent to look deeper into human development and its connection with/to teaching and learning in the article, "Teaching–Learning and Development as Activist Projects of Historical Becoming: Expanding Vygotsky's Approach to Pedagogy". Stetsenko calls on Vygotsky's definition of development. Vygotsky's project of development was unique because it included ideology, ethics, politics, and social justice. Learning and development go hand in hand. Even more so, Vygotsky's vision considered,

"individual attains freedom and autonomy in and through contributing to the freedom and autonomy of others, thus blending one's self-realization with that of others in a truly collaborative endeavor" (Stetsenko, 2009). Vygotsky's perspective was unique because it included individual *and* group self-realization. This is the type of development I am referring to social justice pedagogical settings, a democratic space in which knowledge is disseminated in ways that are affirming and therefore liberatory. Moreover, as Stetsenko says, this type of development cannot occur in traditional settings for obvious reasons.

Essentially, development and the transformation that comes from (true development) must be collaborative and is almost symbiotic. People come to know themselves and the world around them by working to transform their society and world around them. Through working to change the world, young people transform themselves. An individual act transcends 'the dichotomy of social and individual" because that contribution was to society (Stetsenko, 2009). Human development is an activist experience because of the individual contribution to the collaborative experience of changing the world: "In other words, it highlights that human development proceeds as a continuous unfolding of activist, answerable deeds united on the grounds of one ceaseless process of "ideological becoming' in pursuit of meaningful changes in the world" (Stetsenko, 2009). What kind of development and learning have our young learners experienced if agency and individual contributions were not centered? What or who are our young people Becoming? Stetsenko also writes that culture and history are deeply connected to *Becoming*. They are tools for understanding. Culture is collective, and something constantly enacted by people, it's not in or given to people. This is important to mention because culture has often been used to define people and Becoming.

Vygotsky's project, the idea propelling this framework, can be used to overcome the disconnect of development and teaching-learning. Together, the three processes create a continuous, unified, cycle of Becoming for individual and community transformation. Education is more than acquiring knowledge and is an integral part of identity-building. Becoming is activism because creating identity comes from finding one's unique way to contribute to society. This is reminiscent of when I said I found myself and discovered who I could be because of my unique experience, the development and growth was not singular, my peers and the community we served with also developed and grew. Stetsenko says that knowledge is not only a

tool but a map for action. It then becomes part of a reciprocal relationship between action and a person's knowledge in which they inform and build upon themselves (i.e. Freire's "praxis''). This relationship is important to recognize because it reminds us how meaningful and necessary knowledge, and learning, is for identity development. Learning is a meaningful project, especially in the educational spaces I referenced earlier. Learning is a pathway to development, it is more than conveying facts and the tradition of leaving your feelings and activist stances at home instead of inspiring youth to power; "...any act of knowing and understanding is a deeply personal act- inevitably and ineluctably infused by goals, commitments and beliefs that represent dimensions of one's identity, thus making knowing and identity intertwined" (Stetsenko, 2009). Stetsenko says learning becomes a dehumanizing experience when it is just summed up as facts with no meaning or purpose (banking education). Learning has been this way for many learners and, it was intentionally designed to be that way. This is why social justice pedagogy and critical pedagogy are utterly important. Instances in which young, marginalized learners are experiencing learning in these safe and agentive spaces are what support their development and civic engagement. Stetsenko's interpretation of Vygotsky's project and teaching-learning is useful because it reminds us that learning is an activist project when learning and development are centered on self and social realization, collective contributions and agency (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: My Experience Through A Transformative Activist Stance Lens

Transformative Activist Stance: A Lens to Study and Effect Change

My Bonner experience was certainly one of becoming. Becoming a person empowered enough to care about creating the world they desire. Developing yourself, creating your personhood is an agentive experience because of the self-determination that takes place.

It involves thinking about yourself in the context of creating the world you'd like to create. It is a collective and encompassing experience and, if done right, leaves you feeling empowered, exceptional and worthy. This experience of transformation, outside of what has been said in the sections above, has not been truly contextualized and explained in theory the way Stetsenko's Transformative Activist Stance does. The Transformative Activist Stance (TAS) is a research approach and a lens that can be used when challenging harmful norms and a theoretical framework to ground your theory on power, privileged, agency and development. Moreover, in educational spaces, TAS can be used to further investigate structural injustice within the institutions while also helping suggest formulas and solutions outside of the general threshold of normalized thought and perceptions, a framework from equitable learning. For me, TAS has helped me further elucidate not only the transformative experience I had years ago but this current process of reflection and examination. TAS is future-oriented meaning, it encourages learners and researchers to think beyond the societal status quo, seeing potential in all facets of life and engagement that were especially unavailable or unfeasible for certain parts of stratified society. The stance is centered on the implications of human agency, identity/personhood, and activism. TAS builds on Vygotsky's ideas on collaborative practices as grounds for human development, Bakhtin's notion of 'Becoming", and Freire's critical pedagogy, along with feminist, ecological, and critical approaches. The world is constantly shifting and is made up of people acting individually and collectively; "TAS has been developed as an extension of Vygotsky's project interpreted through a political-ideological, rather than value-neutral lens. This interpretation highlights the project's exemplary close ties with the egalitarian practices of social transformation premises on a commitment to ideals of social justice and equality" (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015). Collective and collaborative interactions are necessary and are unique. Moreover, TAS examines this idea of considering

teaching-learning and development as an educational model. TAS encourages the problematizing of the status quo by learners and helps to unite the ideas of development, learning, and activism. Within TAS, being future-oriented, means the acknowledgement that our current way of life is unacceptable, in need of change, and can be changed through collective, activist work. The current status quo, the oppressive norms it perpetuates and the disempowerment it begets, must be problematized. Human agency should disrupt and question commonly-held beliefs in our society, a society that was built on group think, patriarchal capitalism, racism, misogyny, and homophobia. "Instead of reacting to the world 'as it is,' we actually face a much more complex reality in which we often ignore the obvious and stretch the possible, extrapolate from the past and predict the future, challenge the taken for granted and forego the expected, grapple with the uncertain, hope for the unlikely, and desire the impossible" (Stetsenko, 2018). Through TAS, we are reminded that we need to look beyond where we are currently and that we are all worthy and capable to do so. Just as I mentioned before about the type of educational spaces that create and honor agency, there is also a certain type of society (specific forces within it) that inhibits our desire to talk about changing our world. Using TAS as a lens and a tool for action, it helps see how society conditions us, especially marginalized and voiceless people, to continue to passively participate in our world; too focused solely on individual achievement, and ultimately, survival.

Transformative Activist Stance reminds us, also, that the work towards creating a better future must be done together, with the help of one another. Just as how we ascertained learning, development, and the creation of activist leanings are developed with the help of others coming to their own agentive identity, TAS applies the same rhetoric to engaging in research, and ultimately, changing the world. The work done must be collective and collaborative. "The resulting transformative worldview suggests that is directly through and in the process (rather than in addition to) of people constantly transforming and creating their social world that people simultaneously create and constantly transform their very life, therefore also changing themselves in fundamental ways while in process , coming to form their own ways of being, doing, and knowing" (Stetsenko, 2018). Vianna and Stetsenko, in their article, "Research with a Transformative activist agenda: Creating the future through education for social change", talk more about

"being, doing, knowing" and their interconnectivity. This is directly related to the idea of development and teaching-learning being intrinsically connected and necessary for all parts to be successful, per Vygotsky' theory. In the vein of TAS, learners can collaborate to make meaning of things once denied the educational integrity deserved by the academy and think beyond banking education. Operating from within the TAS framework, we can acknowledge that human development is supported by the notions that *everyone co-authors and co-creates their world through the agentive, creative, and innovative ways that question the status quo* (Stetsenko, 2018).

Considering this approach, exceptionality or the idea that only a "chosen few" are destined to change the world (and, in turn, themselves) is wrong. This idea that creativity is only reserved for the "chosen few, from my personal experience, has often been attributed to a particular type of person (Stetsenko, 2018). This person is often non-marginalized, white, male, straight, or wealthy. This person, often has resources available to them, if not, they have miraculously pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to successfully navigate a world already made for them. This a very neoliberal way of thinking that dominants and defines our current educational system. Moreover, when this "exceptional" person does scoff at the norm, they are usually not beaten down, silenced, or ignored, they are considered innovators and change makers. This person, in our educational tradition, rarely looks like me and if they do, they are canonized as the miraculous leaders, superhuman. They are not normal, agentive citizens. It is as if we are not supposed to be exceptional. Considering that, it makes sense that we've become almost stupefied into inaction, not believing there's anything we can do about it. Within the TAS framework, everyone is exceptional, and everyone can valuably contribute to our world. Armed with the power of understanding one's potential, young learners within this framework come to know themselves through working towards a self-built future. This is a very Vygotskyian approach, "This implies that all human beings have unlimited potential — and are thus profoundly equal regardless of any putatively 'natural' endowments or 'intractable' deficits— if provided with access to requisite cultural rolls within collaborative spaces of shared communal practices "(Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015). Imagine what young, marginalized learners could accomplish, could

open up within themselves, if they all believed they had unlimited potential. What could be said of their development?

In the previous sections, I discuss, with the assistance of Stetsenko and others, about how learning and development are directly related. The origins of TAS are directly sourced from that same framework and help add more nuance to the argument and my work. In "The Dialectics of Collective and Individual transformation: Transformative activist research in a Collaborative Learning Community Project", Stetsenko and co-authors, further analyze TAS and detail a research project in which they try to agentify marginalized students. They talk about how TAS further supports the idea that true development, one in which honors, supports the development of students in ways that shows:

> From a transformative activist stance, persons are agents not only for whom 'things matter' but who themselves matter in history, culture, and society and, moreover, who come into being as unique individuals exactly through their own activism, that is, through and to the extent that they take a stand on matters social significance and find ways to make a difference in these processes by contributing to them (Vianna, Hougaard, & Stetsenko, 2014, p. 63)

Recalling my point about being in a space in which my identity development was privileged, honored, and activated in a way that inspired me to be a change maker, TAS harmonizes with the activist pedagogy and can act as a vehicle for praxis for students involved within the framework, students who feel empowered.

Situating Myself Within the TAS Framework

On top of affirming my argument on theory of development, teaching and learning and its importance in creating agentive young learners it is also one of the only research tools that can truly capture the educational and research journey I am currently on. TAS is another way to contextualize it. As a research tool, TAS has been invaluable to me during this process. As a research model, it is a shift away from the traditional mode of research. This is a model that acknowledges how knowledge is not neutral and can be harmful. Research and participant are almost one in the same, and the work is collaborative and highly personal for both researcher and community. The researcher is subjective rather than neutral. I can

confidently place myself among the type of researchers who is not "objectivist". I am looking to give voice to participants (and myself) and reflect on our collective experiences. I am among the researchers and community-members who need frameworks like TAS because we cannot afford to be politically non-neutral. It is resistance, an answer to this problem of education gatekeeping, " Acknowledging that all human activities and inquiries, including educational research, are inevitably enmeshed in webs of pier relations saturated with values, ideologies, and politics, more and more researchers realize that the trajectory for participating in a democratic practice of educational research is "not away from or beyond politics, but through it" (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015). There's a familiarity I feel within this research framework, I feel affirmed and heard. Notwithstanding my comfort within the framework, there are some things I believe are lacking within it. I believe the beauty of the TAS is the inclusivity, its denial of taking knowledge a face-value, and its amplification of marginalized and silenced voices. Stetsenko writes that the framework should not be sourced from knowledge traditions of the past in order to not replicate the same oppressive stances on education and research. Yet, there have been marginalized voices, knowledge, and traditions that have been locked out of academia and not legitimized; ancient and indigenous knowledge stolen and co-opted. Researchers have seen the gaps with research and traditions and, in the agentive vein, have created their own versions of subjective research frameworks (Brayboy 2005).

One of these frameworks, Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR), coined by professors John O. Calmore and john a. Powell, is a research orientation used by social scientists to investigate and examine the implications of race in research. This method draws on critical race theory, participatory action research, Critical Afrocentricity and various feminist scholarship. Like TAS, the BEAR method allows researchers to problematize and question the Western/ individualistic norms and barriers around knowledge formation, research, and ultimately, power. It was originally created to question and critique the Chicago School's ethnography model. The research within that model generally shut out Black researchers and knowledge sourced from their traditions and communities. BEAR incorporates an African-centered approach with participatory action research. Also, like TAS, transformation is an overall goal. It also fills gaps TAS left for me. BEAR centralizes the canon built by Black theorists and also highlights here those gaps are present:

...scholar/activists such as Carter G. Woodson, St. Clair Drake, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod

Bethune and others provided critical grounding for the development of community based

participatory research (CBPR) precisely because of their determination to give primacy to

'community issues', apply alternative conceptual frameworks and research methodologies to explain

racialized opportunity gaps and unfair working conditions, and a determination to use scholarship

for the purpose of 'community uplift' embedded in the research process...other proponents of AC

scholarship are important to a BEAR approach because of their framework demonstrates the

necessity of examining all data from the perspective of subjects and human agency rather than

examining individuals, communities, and resources as 'things' to be possessed- which has often been

the case in the European frame of reference. (Akom, 2011 p. 119)

In TAS, the "European frame of reference" is definitely challenged as the contributor's request that the

voice and work of those traditionally looked out of academia is honored and lifted up. The TAS framework,

in terms of knowledge production, pushes forward-thinking and a future-oriented perspective. BEAR, along

Thomas Brayboy in his article "Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education", remind us to privilege

their work, my work. Another tenet from this perspective that I appreciate is the incorporation of healing as

agentive action: "Healing is central to Black community development because of the historical trauma

White supremacy has and continues to inflict upon our communities as well as the inter-personal and

internalized ways we have and continue to inflict trauma upon ourselves. Love is 'the will to extend one's

self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (Akom, 2011). Healing is deemed

a necessary part of this research work because it as a way to create the world we deserve. In imagining and

creating a future we deserve, the healing and education of communities historically pilfered and exploited

cannot be separated. One cannot happen without the other. Working toward communal healing as research

goal certainly falls within the activist stance framework.

Considering this activist stance, legitimatizing activist research can be hard because it clashes with

the tradition and 'normative' ideas of how people think about and come to know the world around them.

Indeed, "The cornerstone of this research model is formed by commitment to social transformation that

uniquely positions researchers to see what is through the prism of how the present situations and conditions came to be, and also in light of what ought to be" (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015). Social transformation is the underlying goal and, ultimately, my end goal as well. The very endpoints mentioned in this research framework are a direct interrogation of society, of what we are experiencing, and we believe should be, what we deserve, what we can build. The 'we' are the people most invested in the project, which is always both researcher and participant. TAS questions whose voice is heard and more importantly who speaks in general; who determines the future: "TAS provides the grounding for educational research as an active project of intervention into the status quo while creating conditions and providing the tools for participants to transcend it." Research and participant are committed to an "imagined possible future" (Stetsenko, 2014).

The major trend in critical research today is the claim that there are multiple realities, all understandings are contextualized, and knowledge cannot be achieved from 'nowhere' because it is entangled with social and symbolic resources, contexts, practices, and interactivities. TAS reinforces this trend by boldly reminding folks that education is not neutral and has been used as a tool for power. It cannot be easily disconnected from social practices. It is important to remember that, historically, power dynamics constructed knowledge and its mining. In order to combat that and not maintain the same oppressive stance, TAS is future-oriented and forward-thinking; the historical present is not the focus and knowledge not attached to or stripped of transformative power is "knowledge that is local, partial, and shaped by immediately given discursive and practical constellations" (Stetsenko, 2014). The transformative power comes from people's ability to see outside of, and beyond, the status quo, what does not yet exist, what could be (recall the endpoint mentioned earlier). In this approach, "knowledge that is merely situated in the present and the local is tacitly adapting to the world rather than challenging its status quo and as such, is not sufficient for social agency and activist position in dealing with matters of social significance including goals of overcoming alienation and social injustice" (Stetsenko, 2014). This is the complacency I reference in earlier pages. Adapting without question or push back, quietly accepting the world as is, will always keep people stagnant. I agree with Stetsenko when she mentions that the authority of established cultural and social norms must be deconstructed and questioned. Unadulterated knowledge does not exist. The academy

cannot know everything because they have always only privileged the "knowledge" and norms of the oppressor. TAS remind us of this.

Beyond the theoretical grounding in agentive human development and its function as a research tool, TAS helps contextualizes my experience; a path of discovery and coming into my own personhood, realizing my power as an informed citizen. The following quote is resonant with this:

> The realization of this activist stance through one's answerable deeds— possible only within ongoing collaborative practices— forms the path to personhood and knowledge. In this perspective, the ethical, future-oriented goals and endpoints appear as foundational because they are integral to acting, through which we become who we are and also get to know our world, all while contributing to collaborative pursuits of social transformation. (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015 p. 581)

TAS has reinforced the belief that my voice and the voice of my peers are important for us and for our society. The potential to act and effect change has always been present. The potential is unlocked when we find value in our voices and have questioned the current status of our world:

> For TAS, persons are agents not only for whom 'things matter' but also who themselves matter in history, culture, society and, moreover, who come into being as unique individuals through talks or activist deeds, that is, through and to the extent that they take a stand in matters of social significance and commit to making a difference by contributing to changes in the ongoing social practices (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2015 p. 581).

This encapsulates my work presently. The educational journey I am on has been enlightening. This project has forced me to reflect on my experience and examine how I felt about myself once. I didn't realize it then, but the Bonner Program had TAS aspects incorporated into its overall operating structure, mission, and curriculum. While there are areas in which the program could grow and develop, the graduates of Bonner no doubt leave this post-secondary institutions more inclined to act and live in ways that directly challenge it, "In this sense, our approach simultaneously embodies and expands the goals of integrated learning, which seeks to prepare students to be informed citizens who understand their role in and act responsibly in a globalized world" (Vianna, Hougaard, & Stetsenko , 2014).The program did so by carrying out exactly what

was mentioned in the previous excerpt. The red pill, allowing/encouraging us to make a habit of stepping into our potential, daily.

CHAPTER 4: Further Illustrations: A Collective Reflection

Results Introduction

The work thus far has been solely of my own perspective, with the help of several theorists, my reflection is what I wanted to be the focus and it has, but I wanted to ensure I was painting a clear picture of my experience, and also, display the goal, depth, and impact of this type of experience with young learners who share similar journeys. The beauty of a program like Bonner, is the community and shared experiences of reflection members have, simply because of the space created. I collected the following data by recording and transcribing interviews from 5 individuals, former members of the Bonner Program. I reached out to friends and colleagues within the Bonner Network, via email, inviting 5 members to participate in an interview about their experience, how they felt about themselves, and how it has impacted them since. The interview consists of 13 full questions (Figure 3). The highlighted responses below validated my reflections on my experiences and the subsequent critical analysis of it. I felt more seen in the pages following that have in the hundreds of pages I have read in preparation for this work. They are further representations and paint a great picture of what I have been talking about. Notwithstanding the personal relationship I have with some of the participants and the program itself, it felt good listening to their reflections. I also appreciated the honesty from each of the interviewees as well.

Interview participants are organized by campus affiliation and years attended: Allegheny2009 (A); Allegheny2009 (B); Allegheny2010; Siena2010; Siena2011. The demographic questions included information on each participant's gender/gender identity, race/ethnicity, age, location, and college university name. I felt like those questions would give nuance to the questions, and the research overall. The interviews took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete and were conducted via phone call. Each interview was also recorded and transcribed. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent form that gave me permission to record and transcribe the responses. Each interviewee was guaranteed anonymity as well. I let each participant answer how they best understood the question only asking for clarity when necessary during the interview. I also left space for participants to mention anything they felt I didn't cover

or my questions did not give them a chance to explore. Many had additional comments to share. Ultimately, not only did their experiences did support and bolster my account but also, opened my eyes to things I did not realize and perspectives I did not think about originally.

Interview questions:

1. What is your Age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity and race?
4. What was the name of your undergraduate institution and where was it located?
5. What was your major?
6. How old were you when you joined the Bonner Program?
7. Describe the Bonner Program in your own words
8. Why did you join the program?
9. Do you think it was a safe space? Did you feel safe?
10. How do you define agency?
    a. What is it?
11. Do you feel you learned something you couldn't anywhere else?
12. What kind of perspective of yourself, your future, and your cultural identity did you have before you joined the Bonner Program?
    a. Did any of those perspectives shift after your graduated and/or completed the program?
    b. If yes, why? If no, why not?
13. Do you feel personally connected/motivated to imagining and realizing a better for yourself and others?

Figure 3. Interview Questions. *Agentive Personhood: Finding Yourself Through Serving Others.* 2019

Excerpts from Interview Responses

Allegheny2009 (A)

This participant, like all Bonner students, came from a working-class family. She identifies as a white, non-Hispanic person; she is cis-gender. This interview shows that her experience in this critical space was one of honoring her latent (agentive) identity and opening her eyes (the *red pill*) to the realities of a society

steadfast on maintaining structures of inequity. Her major was self-designed to have the basis of the Bonner curriculum (at Allegheny College) to be the source of all of her core classes. In her words,

> Allegheny2009 (A). "I self-designed my major to VESA (values, ethics, and social action) ... It ended up becoming a permanent major a few years after I graduated, and they changed the name to Community Justice."

When answering question 9 (Why did you join the program?), she mentions how once she was exposed to the type of environment Bonner was creating, she wanted to take as many classes she could. Those courses fed her in ways that supported her development. I thought her response to the agency question was very poignant. While she mentions and acknowledges the agency in her initial goal it is apparent she is aware of the change it could bring:

> Allegheny2009 (A). Agency is the ability to act. So, when I really think of agency, I feel like its acting in a way that creates change, um, in some capacity. But really, just that initial ability to just act is agency. Where I feel like a lot of us as Bonners, we, prior to getting to Allegheny, we were just trying to get to college. Like that was our goal. And like finally put into positions where they said we were leaders and we were tasked with being the representative for our site. And that really gave us agency, it gave us the ability to act. And on behalf of the site at school and on behalf of the school at the site. So, we were put in that position and that kinda gave us that agency.

The Bonner Program put individuals (young learners) in positions that required them to use their inherent agency. In the excerpt above, Allegheny2009(A) mentions how many Bonners before her experience were just concerned about getting by, ie "getting in college". It wasn't until she had the opportunity to exercise it in ways that weren't just the day to day rigamarole. While answering the next question, agency comes up again for Allegheny2009 (A) when she answers a question 11 on whether or not she learned something from the Bonner Program that she couldn't learn anywhere else she says:

> Allegheny2009 (A). I mean, we were talking about problems that like, you know, people read about in the New York Times. And we're just sitting around dinner, talking about it and creating solutions and talking about what we would do and relating it to our work. And, I mean, it really, it was

exactly what I needed because it helped me to see that I could be a part of something bigger than

myself… Even when we did have those… big trainings they still created a space that we could, you

know, dream in a way that was productive.

Here, she is talking about creating solutions for problems that affect our world, both locally and globally,

with ease. More importantly, Allegheny2009 (A), and her peers, believed in their solutions. She

acknowledged their actions were meaningful and necessary. Bonner held spaces for this interviewee's

imaginative problem-solving, empowering her to believe in her actions. From this perspective, it looks

like Freire's praxis and also very TAS oriented.

In the remaining questions, Allegheny2009 (A), expands on this praxis and how a social justice

education program like Bonner, got her to this point of acknowledging her agentive identity and constantly

work towards honoring it. When asked (Question 12) if her perception of self-changed due to her time in the

Bonner Program, she said:

Allegheny2009 (A). Bonner really helped me to kind of hold a mirror up to myself and really look

at what I wanted for the first time and really like realized who I was as an individual outside of my

family, outside of my circumstance, outside everything else. And really focus on what my potential

was and that was really the first time I was asked to do that. Um, and that really changed me in a lot

of ways

I want to highlight this section specifically. That "mirror" the program created, showed us that we are

constantly told we do not have internal potentialities to do amazing things. Bonner showed us that it was a

lie. The program emphasized the need to define yourself as a person with much to offer. Once again, here is

another example of Bonner simply illuminated what was latent within but just not seen yet. She realized she

was an agentive person all along. Allegheny2009 (A) mentions this inner drive again in the second part of

the perception question (12) about future:

Allegheny2009 (A). So, my future, um, yeah. I think that I always had this inner drive that I

wanted, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I wanted to make the world better and that was um

supported by Bonner in a way no one else has ever supported that before. Everyone else had kinda

looked at that as being naive, um, and Bonner instead, kinda opened doors first and showed me

avenues I could take to really follow that dream.

For this participant, Bonner was a refreshing space where 'changing the world' was possible and welcomed as a mode of operation. It's important to note that Allegheny2009 (A) was never satisfied with the status quo, she was simply just never in a space that honored that. It is apparent in her responses. Until she became a part of the Bonner community, she had not been empowered to step into this potential or to believe that it was even possible. Once this desire was honored and supported, she realized that it was not a temporal moment, but an experience that she couldn't see herself in any other way. In her response to the last question (Do you feel personally connected or motivated to imagining and realizing a better world for yourself and others?), Allegheny2009 (A) says this when if she feels connected to realizing a better world:

Allegheny2009 (A). Absolutely, well I feel like what happened to me as a Bonner; the process of,

it's like the process of opening your eyes and seeing where you can be a change agent in the world.

Once that happens to you, you can't undo it. Like its done. You are forever changed, and it feels

like its a thing where I could choose to do a different path, but I don't want to do a different path

because it is not aligned with who I am as a person.

This was a process of reckoning, almost. This interviewee sees herself and the world around her differently after having this experience. She cannot see herself operating in the world otherwise:

Allegheny2009 (A). No. Now that I have seen that I can be aligned with my values and walk with

integrity in a way that creates positive change, I don't want to do anything else. It doesn't feel

good."

The truths revealed during her time in the Bonner Program completely aligned with who she as a person. This interviewee cannot deny the activist development she received and how it was inherent. From this participant's account, it is apparent that some people within this program were able to have fully transformative experience in which they see themselves completely different. She was more empowered, her agency was nurtured, their imaginative planning of dismantling the status quo and building a world she wants.

Allegheny2010

This interviewee, who identifies as a ci-gender, Black woman, joined Bonner after witnessing the transformation her peers had. She was already aligned with work that examine educational inequality before she sought out Bonner, knowing the space would give her the tools she needed to effect change. Here, she answers question 9, Do you think it [The Bonner Program] was a safe space? Did you feel safe?

> Allegheny2010. Bonner was a beautiful bubble. It was a space place because we knew to access resources and we were informed about the resources we couldn't access that a lot of people on campus were not informed…,

Allegheny2010 describes Bonner is a safe space and defines it as a place of resource sharing. It was a space where you could become a leader. It is not lost on me that Allegheny2010 attributes safety to access to resources. It was very telling of her experience. Considering the location of the campus, Allegheny was predominantly white institution in rural Pennsylvania, it makes sense that Bonner was also a place to go to for immediate support. This is directly connected to feelings of isolation and out of placeness many marginalized students feel. Recall what Frymer says about this (Frymer, 2005). Allegheny2010 already got to this point and is very cognizant of the violence present in academia and beyond. From her responses, you can see that she is aware and is looking for spaces that continue building the knowledge needed to be a change agent. Here, Allegheny2010 discusses agency in Question 10 (How do you define agency?):

> Allegheny2010. Agency put into words is being able to use my own words to voice my concerns and address what brings me joy and what brings me concern to authorities and/or people in positions of power for my own community. Because sometimes, agency does not always mean a power difference, it also means a lack of communication. So even within your own community, you can think you're having effective communication...

For Allegheny2010, agency and voice are intertwined. Using her voice and recognizing the power in using it to speak up and out about what matters to her. It appears that agency, to her, is accountability and dialogue, speaking truth to power. If we, again, recall Frymer, it is possible that she did not have believe she had the

opportunity or ability to use her voice. Another notable excerpt from Allegheny2010 was her response to Question 11 (Do you feel you learned something you couldn't anywhere else?):

> Allegheny2010. Oh of course, without the Bonner Program, I probably would not be where I am right now, to be quite honest...Um Bonner, encouraged me to become a teacher and public speaker. It is through Bonner, that I learned how to teach...Yea, it is through Bonner that I learned how the class dynamic is not really, the instructor with the power and the students absorbing the information but rather a conversation. And learning can be fun, it does not have to be authoritative, or extremely rigorous. And, although like teaching training now wants to make, um, classes student-centered. Bonner was always student-centered. The students were the teachers.

Bonner showed her what was possible, and that banking education was not the only option. This participant had a very transformative experience. It is apparent that the program and the experience shifted the participants outlook on society. Inspired to continue creating these spaces, like myself, the work she does now is aligned directly with the process of imagining a future we deserve.

Trends Across Responses

Beyond the individual highlights shared in the previous section, there were also important trends I found amongst the interviews. The most noticeable commonality, and it is one that I shared myself, was the age of interviews and the level of community engagement before joining the Bonner Program. Each interviewee was active, participating in some form of service or community engagement. Everyone was under the age of 21 by the time they became a member of the Bonner Program. All of the interviewees were young learners. Siena2011 was a girl scout and volunteered in youth programming,

> Siena2011. Growing up, I did a lot of community service. I was in Girl Scouts, I was a junior firefighter, I was in a mentoring program. Um, so I knew what it felt like to volunteer."

Siena2010 also regularly did service work. The affinity for service work amongst the interviewees was very telling. From their accounts, each had an idea of some type of need or change in the world. Many of the participants were also already considering professions or studies that would allow them to be of service to

others in some way. Here, Allegheny2010, talks about her experience before Bonner when answering

Question 8:

> Allegheny2010. All my friends were there and previously I worked for the diversity office with our
>
> former vice provost or provost, Dr. Lawrence Potter and I was working there, um, building capacity
>
> and doing data work on students of color across liberal arts, small liberal arts colleges along the
>
> East Coast, for the Big 13, and Oberlin, Allegheny.

Another instance in which the interviewees were already acting in spaces of intentional change. Many were

volunteering and assisting their families and others. Her idea of addressing and handling the world we live

in is by studying gaps of educational inequity: "I had already done a lot of service and things, so it just

sounded like right up my alley. It was something I was used to, something I have done," Allegheny2009 (B)

when she answered Question 8.

The responses from Question 12 (What kind of perspective of yourself, your future, and your

cultural identity did you have before you joined the Bonner Program), really resonated with this work. They

all fell into held a similar thread line of supportive spaces of agency or spaces in which they were able

to examine false truths when discussing how their perception of themselves, their futures, and their cultural

identity shifted before and after their Bonner experience. The first part of the Question 12 (What kind of

perception did you have of yourself) shows that Bonner was a place that allows for the interviewees to grow

and develop into something they could never have imagined- a place that taught them how to challenge the

status quo. Siena2011 speaks about it here,

> Siena2011 I think, um, Bonner helped me find my voice a little bit. Instead of just doing what I
>
> thought was good and to look at something kinda of little bit more critically".

Bonner allowed for participants to examine themselves while also encouraging them to think about

themselves outside of normalized bounds and, instead, through unapologetic confidence in thyself.

Each participant shifted in what they thought their occupation should be. Two out of the five

interviewees had already wanted to work in the social justice and non-profit field; other participants wanted

to be teachers and lawyers or work in the corporate field. The two interviewees, Allegheny2009 (B) and

Siena2011 who already wanted to work in social justice spaces, their purpose changed, they were more

intentional in selecting a career that fed their desire to create the world they wanted. The exposure to this

type of critical education appears to have that kind of effect on interviewees. More importantly, all

participants believed they had a greater sense of their potential and agency. They were being all certainly

more empowered.

> Siena2010. I think that I feel like I thought I knew what the world looked like, but I don't think I
>
> know as I thought I did. But I feel like it helped me realize my place in the world.

When answering the future portion of Question 12, all noted changes in their outlook on what they could,

post Bonner, especially something with greater impact.

The third portion part of Question 12, perception of cultural identity, also revealed themes. The

pattern of investigating oneself and defining identity in ways that were empowered and not harmful to

others, came while reflecting on cultural identity. With her response from the future portion spilling over

into this portion of the question, Allegheny2010 ponders on her cultural identity: "…

> Allegheny2010. I look towards becoming a Spanish teacher. And then, one of my professors, um,
>
> Wilfredo Hernandez, said that I was limiting myself. And because of the lack of awareness of
>
> Garifuna community, he said I had enough information and enough research about myself, that I
>
> could write a dissertation.

She saw potential that was not there before. Her life is full of knowledge, theory, and research. Musing over

how her cultural identity shifted, this participant mentions the importance of reflection, communal problem-

solving, and building awareness. She went on to discuss how she's been able to engage in dialogue,

reflection and hold institutions and people accountable. While Allegheny2010 learned a valuable lesson

of meaning-making within her cultural spaces, Allegheny2009 (A) had a reckoning about her social

identity:

> Allegheny2009 (A). Bonner helped me understand and begin the journey of like unpacking what it
>
> means to be white in America and the baggage that that carries and the history of white supremacy
>
> in America. Um, and how it's really woven into the fabric of our country, um, and where I fit in

with that. I mean I don't think that before Bonner I hadn't really wrestled with that truly. Um, and

it's something that I'm like is truly a part of who I am now.

Young learners from various backgrounds were given the opportunity to examine their culture and racial

identity and how they fit and operate within systems of oppression. Employing activist pedagogy, the

Bonners made space for participants to wrestle with and hold themselves accountable to living and

functioning in a racist, oppressive society. Honoring your identity and rich heritage, regarding it with the

same reverence is radical and a signaling of a shift in overall perception. Bonner helped young learners give

nuance and address each area of intersection within themselves. Here, Siena2011 to the cultural identity

portion of Question 12, discussing how she wasn't able to critically reflect on her identity before Bonner:

> Siena2011. When I was younger, identity has always been kinda harder thing for me. Um, grew up
>
> in a diverse area but just didn't really talk about it, who I am, where my family is from. And you
>
> know, some of those questions I couldn't because that's just part of the reality for a lot of Black
>
> people in America; not being able to answer those questions. Identity has always been kinda sticky
>
> to me… So, when I joined Bonner, and then I started in groups that developed kids in Albany and I
>
> just started learning about myself and being exposed to classes and being exposed to, you know,
>
> topics of equity and equality, and discussions about race that as much as I grew up in a diverse
>
> place, we didn't have. Um, I was able to learn more about my identity through the populations I
>
> helped serve

She learned about herself by also helping others. This is more proof that development and activism go hand-

in-hand. She also acknowledges that due to her heritage, being a black woman in America, she knows that

there are truths she may never be exposed to in a normalized society that privileges its upkeep over the

freedom of its citizens. She has become more confident and staunch in acknowledging parts of her identity

that have historically been exploited and silenced.

There were some other recurring patterns also further instilled some of the points I also mentioned

earlier. There were several instances when space holding space, creating space with institutions, etc. were

mentioned, along with the community that created and nurtured within it. An example of it is when AC. 10-14 mentions how she would often find herself collectively problem-solving and communing with her peers.

> Allegheny2010. And to reflect means that I am not taking this lesson on by myself, but as a community, regardless if you are a Bonner or not, we are going to take this on together. This whole conference room is going to reflect on what it actually means to be present in this space. Here at this moment

That was only one of many instances, but every interviewee mentioned collaborative action and learning and growing together. There was always a space available to reflect, along with the support. Bonner challenged us to think in ways that were normalized sometimes oppressive modes of thought; pushing through and beyond what is uncomfortable:

> Allegheny2009 (B). One other thing too is that this path doesn't mean it is always comfortable, but I always liked when - I don't who it was- would say that you wanna be comfortable being uncomfortable and there's space, know even when you talk about a safe space, sometimes you're comfortable being uncomfortable. Like sometimes it's not comfortable but you know that its creating, that its necessary. That is discomfort is leading towards something positive.

Undermining oppressive ways of operating can be uneasy but necessary. The Bonner program never shied away from it. Moreover, a safe space is one in which that doesn't shield us from discomfort but gives us an opportunity to work through it.

I mention several times how the moment of transformation (*the red pill*) is less of a temporal and singular decision and more like an agentive choice to step completely into their agentive personhood daily.

> Siena2010 I feel like they really bring out what your passions are, and I feel like I why it's so important to live through that and I wouldn't want to do anything else because I feel like I wouldn't be doing my contribution to the world. They somehow ingrain it in you that you make you want to fight for the things you want to fight for.

The interviewees affirm it. This transformation is not temporary but a complete shift of, not only what is wrong and what is right, but also what can be done, individually and collectively to effect change.

Allegheny2009 (A). Um, and it's something that I'm like is truly a part of who I am now... Like I

can't, my eyes have been opened is what I'm trying to say. There was a time where I, um, was

ignorant to a lot of things and Bonner really facilitated a lot of conversations that helped me see a

lot.

Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, the investigation of the agency I inherently possessed led me to this study. It was an

incremental process, that after I became aware that certain truths about my identity were hidden and silenced

(no doubt to prevent others from realizing their agentive potentialities), I felt empowered to examine further

and help locate it within others. Through this examination of my agency and how I came to know it, I

gleaned that being empowered to speak up and out in educational spaces greatly influenced my

development. My desire to change the world around me was more than a desire. I realized that working

towards a better, equitable world did not only influence my development but was actually an integral part of

my development. Moreover, I realized it was a collective process, working and developing alongside

individuals also realizing the power in their potential.

This was an unorthodox research study. Speaking frankly, I have worried that this would not be

enough, accepted as a legitimate body of work even while I was writing from an agentive, TAS lens. Each

interviewee affirmed my experience when they shared theirs. They all recognize how immensely unique

and, unfortunately a rare occurrence, an environment that works to honor agency and learn to accept the

responsibility that comes with potential hopefully individual and collective action. Listening to the accounts

of my peers made me realize journey/transformation, that this experience in itself, was another

transformative moment. The space and community The Bonner Program created *did* shift my perception; it

did encourage us to think beyond the status quo, beyond ourselves. Ultimately, the program revealed to us

the agentive power we already had.

I think back on the reflection of Allegheny2010 describing her educational journey and how she was

made to believe that she has within herself, enough depth and history and culture knowledge to develop her

own research. I'd like to think that a version of this happened within these pages. My colleagues, friends,

and I reflected on our time, examined and made meaning of it. We defined it as legitimate. I imagine what knowledge we could mine if I had interviewed 50 individuals instead of 5, if I would have included questions that could invoke more critique. Ultimately, this just shows me that I must continue this work. Voice and community are integral part of the agentive development. There is no doubt that echoes of Vygotsky's work, of developing individually and collectively, growing into agentive citizens, was present in the words of the interviewees. The fellowship and group reflection in that group, along with the directive to see yourself in local contexts and think globally and the space given to act, created the experience.

Interview questions:

1. What is your Age?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your ethnicity and race?

4. What was the name of your undergraduate institution and where was it located?

5. What was your major?

6. How old were you when you joined the Bonner Program?

7. Describe the Bonner Program in your own words

8. Why did you join the program?

9. Do you think it was a safe space? Did you feel safe?

10. How do you define agency?

    1. What is it?

11. Do you feel you learned something you couldn't anywhere else?

12. What kind of perspective of yourself, your future, and your cultural identity did you have before you joined the Bonner Program?

    1. Did any of those perspectives shift after your graduated and/or completed the program?

    2. If yes, why? If no, why not?

13. Do you feel personally connected/motivated to imagining and realizing a better for yourself and others?

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
CUNY Graduate Center
MALS

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Research Study: Agentive Personhood: Finding yourself through serving your community

Principal Investigator: *Sasha Miller, B.A. English*
MALS Graduate Student, Urban Education

Faculty Advisor: *Anna Stetsenko*
Professor
CUNY Graduate Center
Psychology/Urban Education

Research Sponsor: *NA*

You are being asked to participate in a research study because *you participated in the Bonner Scholar Program as an undergraduate student at your respective educational institution.*

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to [is to discern how young learners feel about themselves and their power and potential after being a part of a transformative, democratic, educational experience. Participants may or may not want to participate in the study based on their own personal experiences with the Bonner Program (whether positive or negative).

Key Information:
- The consent sought for this research and the subsequent participation is voluntary.
- The purpose of this research is to add further support and illustrations of the overall project.
- The expected duration of the subject's participation is approximately 1 hour
- The procedures in the research include an interview (lasting approximately an hour) that will consist of questions that would require the potential subject to reflect on their past experiences with the Bonner Program.
- Foreseeable discomforts to the prospective subject include having the interview question bring an uncomfortable memory or moment in your experiences or being unsure of an answer

- Benefits to the prospective subject or to others that may be expected from the research include positive feelings invoked from reflecting on your experience or being able to reflect on the experience in general.

Procedures:

If you volunteer to participate in this research study, we will ask you to do the following:

1. You will be contacted via email with a schedule of possible interview times and dates and the question of whether you would prefer a phone interview or video call
2. After selecting a time slot and form of communication, you will be contacted [at the time you requested]
3. The interview will consist of approximately 16 questions, taking approximately one hour to answer
4. The questions will be a mixture of, yes or no and, short answer questions.

Audio Recording/Video Recording:

To guarantee accuracy, the interview will be audio recorded for later transcription and review by the research team. You can still participate in this study if you do not consent to audio recording.

Time Commitment:

Your participation in this research study is expected to last for a total of 1 hour

Potential Risks or Discomforts:

- Foreseeable discomforts to the prospective subject include having the interview question bring an uncomfortable memory or moment in your experiences or being unsure of an answer

-

Potential Benefits:

- Benefits to the prospective subject or to others that may be expected from the research include positive feelings invoked from reflecting on your experience or being able to reflect on the experience in general.

- The findings from this research might lead to greater nuance and weight placed on student voice and agency in the world of activist education and social justice pedagogy.

New Information:

You will be notified about any new information regarding this study that may affect your willingness to participate in a timely manner.

Confidentiality:

We will make our best efforts to maintain confidentiality of any information that is collected during this research study, and that can identify you. We will disclose this information only with your permission or as required by law.

We will protect your confidentiality by:
1. Storing all research data (including video and audio recordings) in password protected folder in a private external hard drive.
2. All data will be coded by pseudonyms and years active in the program.
3. Only the principal investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the data.

The research team, authorized CUNY staff, and government agencies that oversee this type of research may have access to research data and records in order to monitor the research. Research records provided to authorized, non-CUNY individuals will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name.

Participants' Rights:

- Your participation in this research study is entirely **voluntary**. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- You can decide to withdraw your consent and stop participating in the research at any time, without any penalty.

Questions, Comments or Concerns:
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the following researchers:
- *Sasha Miller, MALS Graduate Student, smiller5@gradcenter.cuny.edu, 216-225-6544*
- *Anna Stetsenko, Professor, Urban Education/ Psychology, astetsenko@gc.cuny.edu, 212-817-8711*

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have comments or concerns that you would like to discuss with someone other than the researchers, please call the CUNY Research Compliance Administrator at 646-664-8918 or email HRPP@cuny.edu. Alternatively, you may write to:

CUNY Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Attn: Research Compliance Administrator
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Participant Signature for Audio Recording
If you agree to audio recording/video recording please indicate this below.

_____ I agree to audio recording

_____ I do **NOT** agree to audio recording

Signature of Participant:

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent

_____
Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

_____   _____

Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent   Date

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