Privileged Students: White Men as Social Justice Allies

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Christopher E. Bridges

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This dissertation titled

Privileged Students: White Men as Social Justice Allies

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this grounded theory inquiry was to explore the process of White men’s ally identity development. Conducted from a social constructivist epistemological paradigm, and informed by a constructivist grounded theory methodology, the following research questions guided this study: (a) how do White male allies come to understand themselves as allies; and (b) what are the critical influences on this process? I conducted interviews with ten students from a small private Ohio university.

The theory that emerged from this study is grounded in the co-researchers’ experience. My ally identity theory follows White men as they are challenged in their personal understanding of fairness in the world, Recognizing Oppression and Experiencing Tension. Faced with conflict from an outside source that challenges their belief in a fair world they begin to work to ease other’s suffering, in order to contribute to the fairness of the world, Triggering Compassion and Acting as an Ally. Within this work, they come to understand systems of privilege, and at some limited level, their personal relationship with privilege and its connections to oppression, Naming and Owning Privilege. By working as an ally, they alienate themselves from other privileged groups, yet remain non-group members of oppressed groups. By labeling themselves as ally, they create an identity that they hope will communicate support for target groups and set them apart from non-allies, as well as possibly separating them from other non-
ally White men, *Creating an Ally Identity*. The ally identity also allows these men to find a common space with other allies like them, *Claiming a Shared Identity*. Finally allies wrestle with the conflicting spaces created by claiming an ally identity, *Managing Ongoing Tension*.

This theory of White male student’s ally identity development has implications relevant to theory development, research, student affairs practice, and social justice allies.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Peter C. Mather

Assistant Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
Dedicated to my sons, Gabriel, Kelly, and E.B.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Oppression and privilege influence who we are as people and as society (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Johnson (2006) writes about oppression in *Privilege, Power, and Difference*; it is “impossible to live in a world with so much injustice without being touched by it” (p.88). He went on to say, “It is a trouble that shows up everywhere and touches every life in one way or another. There is no escape, however thick the denial” (Johnson, p.9). Higher education communities shape these injustices (and are shaped by them) daily, both as institutions and individuals within those institutions (Kolb, 1984). People are oppressed and marginalized based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, class, and any other category in which difference can be used by one group to dominate another. “These disparities are neither new nor randomly distributed throughout the population, but occur in patterns along such major social divisions as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and physical ability” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 1).

In her book *Becoming an Ally*, Bishop (2002) wrote, “Each form of oppression is part of a single complex, interrelated, self-perpetuating system” (p.19). Oppression affects us all, dominant and targeted—members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, and victimized in a variety of ways by the oppressor and the oppressors’ system or institutions—group members. Activists and allies at higher education institutions are currently challenging these systems across the United States (See Broido, & Evans, 2005; Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Edwards, 2006; Greenwood & Levin, 2005; hooks, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005;

As long as we are in a society that turns difference into oppression, there is no neutral ground (Reason & Davis, 2005). As an individual, and as a professional in Higher Education, I can choose to stand against oppression and unearned privilege. If I choose not to resist systems of oppression, then I am only supporting the system of oppression from which I gain. Johnson (2006) suggested that if privileged groups saw their privilege as a problem it would not be a problem for long. Fabiano (2003) maintained that the concept of ending violence against women needs to be re-framed as a social justice issue, and that men can play an active role as allies in that transition. These same ideas can and do apply to Whites working to oppose racism, men working to end sexism, and all people of privilege working to end systems of privilege.

Privilege and Power

Privilege is the result of oppression—if there is an underprivileged group, there must also be an over-privileged group. We mistakenly learn that only intentional acts of discrimination support systems like heterosexism, rather than learning about invisible power systems conferring dominance to one group and subjection to another (McIntosh, 1995). This invisible system is the system of privilege in the United States of America. Systems include, but are not limited to, straight privilege, male privilege, able-bodied privilege and White privilege. Examples include ideas such as: a White man can come to a meeting late and not have lateness attributed to race; drive a car in any neighborhood without being perceived as being in the wrong place or looking for trouble; turn on the
television or look to the front page and see people of his ethnic and racial background represented; take a job without having co-workers suspect that he got it because of his racial background; and send his 16-year old out with his new driver’s license and not have to give him a lesson how to respond if police stop him (McIntosh, 1995).

Power, closely tied to privilege and oppression, can also be explored through human relationships within a social justice framework. Power is “the capacity and opportunity to fulfill or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs….Power affords people multiple identities as individuals seeking well-being, engaging in oppression, resisting domination” (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, p.7). Engaging in oppression or resisting oppression are both uses of power. My work is primarily concerned with individuals using their power to resist domination and challenge oppression. Prilleltensky and Nelson define oppression as “a state of domination where the oppressed suffer the consequences of deprivation, exclusion, discrimination, exploitation, control of culture, and sometimes even violence (p.12). Goodman (2001) wrote that oppression of persons is most often tied to their group identities (e.g., LGBTQ, women, people of color, etc.). Similarly, Goodman defines privilege as “greater access to power, resources, and opportunities that are denied to others and usually gained at their expense” (p.20).

Understanding this system of oppression within the United States has led to the study of the roles that privilege can play within systems of oppression. When asking an academic question, Moustakas (1990) noted that question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or theme—using personal experience and working with others to discover the meaning of a phenomenon. This topic has emerged from my own
experiences as a privileged man working as an ally. Why do I not encounter many White men working as allies? What can I learn by working with current college students who actively identify as allies? How can I better understand co-researchers’ motivations, challenges, and experiences, and use that understanding to influence the greater development of White straight male allies?

The research question itself will determine whether an authentic and compelling path has opened, one that will sustain curiosity, involvement, and participation with full energy and resourcefulness over a lengthy period (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas grants significance to the research question beyond the study itself, as he highlights its relationship with the researcher and the research process. In hopes of finding and walking an authentic and compelling path I have chosen a topic that I am not only passionate about, but a topic that I will be working to fully understand and appreciate throughout my life.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States of America, some students benefit from their multiple privileges daily. Students with privilege may choose to work with targeted groups to promote social justice. How do individuals with multiple privileged identities (White and male) commit, and retain their passion, to confront issues of oppression directly as allies? Currently there is both a lack of research and understanding about White men in ally roles, as well as low numbers of men in those roles (Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards, 2006). As White men become allies, or act as allies, they create their own meaning of
what an ally is and who they are, as well as wrestle with the concepts of power and their role in power.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory inquiry was to explore the process of White men’s ally identity development. Although this purpose guided my study, I remained open to other concepts and theories that emerged through the course of the study. Conducted from a social constructivist epistemological paradigm, and informed by a grounded theory methodology, the following research questions guided this study: (a) how do White male undergraduate allies come to understand themselves as allies; and (b) what are the critical influences on this process?

Significance of the Study

There have been many studies and much writing about the struggles and challenges of oppressed peoples, cultures and identities, but few studies have examined how individuals develop the skills, commitment, and habits of mind to confront issues of oppression effectively and create social change (Landreman, King, Rasmussen, & Jiang 2007).

Within higher education, leading researchers are calling for more research to understand the phenomenon of privileged students engaging as allies and their development (See Broido, 2000; Reason, Broido, Davis, & Evans, 2005). Broido (2002) wrote about the process of becoming an ally after interviewing six participants within her phenomenological study. Broido’s purpose was to examine how undergraduate students understand their development as social justice allies as well as to expand the current
research on ally development, an area that she describes as having a “paucity of research” (Broido, 2000, p.4). Looking specifically at students that possess more than one privileged identity (White and male) has further informed the research in this area. By working with White male students, I have built theory for ally work with privileged students. These students can have a great impact on those like them with multiple intersecting privileged identities. I pursued questions through in-depth interviews of White male students with multiple privileges to better understand what has fostered these students’ interests in becoming allies, and what steps might be taken to encourage others in ally work. Giving voice to those working as allies can add depth to the existing literature and may give practitioners a more profound understanding of this population (Mueller & Cole, 2009).

All oppressions and privileges are interrelated; they feed off and support each other, as each is a system of raising one group of people over another (Bishop, 2002). However we personally identify our multiple identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) we are a part of a multi-polar system, sometimes benefitting, sometimes losing. I have long considered myself an advocate or ally with “other” groups. The most important steps that I can take are to combat oppression through recognition of my own privilege, and working with others to identify and combat systems of privilege, not taking a neutral stand, but being an active ally against systems of oppression. “Education for social justice begins by increasing one’s awareness of inequality, however social justice education must also equip and empower students to be change agents toward equality” (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, p. 100) Through this research I propose to help educate and equip students
with multiple intersecting privileged identities with the knowledge and tools they need to
fight privilege and oppression.

Assumptions

As a constructivist—reality is created, not discovered—I did not attempt to be
objective in my data collection or analysis. Instead, I sought to identify my assumptions
and make them clear to the reader. I share those more of those assumptions and my story
later in this introductory chapter, and then examine it more deeply in chapters four and
five.

The primary assumptions I brought to this study were; (a) White male students’
identities are socially constructed, (b) these students face different challenges in
becoming social justice allies than do students with strongly targeted identities, and (c)
there will be a common link between White male students who identify as social justice
allies, even if they are allies with different targeted groups.

Methodology

I approached this study from a constructivist viewpoint because the identities of
my co-researchers (and myself), White and male, are socially constructed identities. My
research sought to understand and describe the relationship between these socially
constructed identities which the co-researchers may not have had a clear choice in, and
their adopted identity as a social justice ally. Constructivism focuses on the world as a
socially constructed set of multiple realities, based on mental constructs of participants
and the meanings they attach to the events circumstances they encounter (Tierney &
Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist epistemology focuses on the meaning making of the
individual student and acknowledges that understanding is socially constructed (Torres, 2009).

In accordance with a constructivist paradigm, I chose to pursue my research questions through a qualitative process. Pursuing a qualitative approach allows me to share and better understand the voices and stories of privileged students that operate as allies. As with any social issue the experiences, problems, and stories about oppression and privilege are wide and contain many variables. We can add new pieces to the researcher puzzle while we gather data or even later in the process, as opposed to quantitative researchers (Charmaz, 2006).

Over the last 15 years the field has regarded grounded theory as a more positivistic qualitative approach, though this view is changing. Charmaz (2006) wrote about the combination of constructivism and grounded theory; I based my research methods on her methodology. Like Glaser and Strauss (1967), most of the basics of grounded theory are still included in Charmaz’s and my work—gathering rich data from particular samples/individuals (as opposed to random sampling), using coding on top of in-depth interviews to find reoccurring themes, and creating theory grounded in data that can inform (but not predict) future work.

The important contribution to grounded theory from Charmaz (2006) is the inclusion of a constructivist framework. Constructivist grounded theory uses a “systemic approach to social justice inquiry that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions in our analyses” (Charmaz, 2005). This allowed me to “analyze the relationships between human agency and social structure which poses theoretical and
practical concerns in social justice studies” (Charmaz, 2005, p.508). I carried out the steps listed previously, but recognized, and have attempted to help my readers to understand, that I collected and shared my data from a particular viewpoint. I returned to my co-researchers, obtained their feedback, and sought data saturation, but at the conclusion of the research, I reported, coded, and theorized about this truth or these truths through my voice. My point of view is central in this dissertation, and though I used others’ voices in the work, I still retained control over placement and selection of those voices. Co-researchers reviewed my work and representation of their voices, but I was the person representing their voices in the dissertation.

I recruited students with multiple privileges, specifically White males, from a four-year higher education intuition. This selected environment, higher education, is where I began my journey as an ally. Other researchers have conducted a modest amount of research on ally development in higher education settings. I was particularly interested in students who have multiple privileges, as these privileges intersect and build upon one another. I worked with 10 co-researchers to reach saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), with no new concepts or categories emerging from the data. I interviewed 10 White men currently (I interviewed one student who recently graduated because he appeared to be a particularly rich case for this study, and had only graduated 2 months before the interview) enrolled full-time at a 4-year higher education institution (Xavier University) who consider themselves allies.

This was a very purposeful sample in order to be able to understand the phenomenon of interest. I recruited co-researchers for this study by using expert
nominators (key staff members in areas and offices of diversity and ally work on Xavier’s campus) and key informants (Appendix B). I recruited the co-researchers by asking staff who work with traditionally oppressed groups and social justice issues to identify students who met the study’s qualifications.

Upon entering college in 1993, I began developing my advocacy skills and building an understanding of oppression and privilege through the lens of a White male ally, and continue to have formative experiences and educational awakenings. It is important to begin this conversation within the first chapter, because it affects all of my choices for this research. As a White, straight, male, I will be writing from a constructivist viewpoint, with the understanding that there are multiple truths from multiple perspectives in existence and that this work will contain only some of those truths. This theoretical stance implores me to use a constructivist grounded theory approach to this inquiry.

Grounded theory guides methods of data gathering as well as theoretical development (Charmaz, 2006). A qualitative study has allowed me as the researcher, and my readers, a better understanding of the students who do this work, and better informs us about allies in the future when we work with, or help to develop these students as allies.

Different methodologies bring different advantages and disadvantages to modes of inquiry. I have combined a number of methodologies in order to meet the needs of the project, the students involved, and my own goals as well. Grounded theory has informed the analysis of the data gathered and allowed me to use coding techniques to develop
frameworks and pull theory from fieldwork, within context of the above methodological styles. Grounded theory research also allowed me as the researcher to acknowledge a personal relationship with the participants and assumed theoretical understanding will emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This theoretical understanding allowed me as the researcher to propose theory about these White men engaging as allies.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

In constructivist grounded theory, I am not striving for objectivity, but instead I am aiming to be as transparent as possible about the subjective approach and interpretations made within the study (Charmaz 2006). A portion of this transparency involves disclosure about me, my privileged identities, and the assumptions and background I bring to this dissertation.

I am a White, straight, able-bodied, American, male, 36 year old individual who identifies as a social justice ally. I currently work in the Dorothy Day Center for Faith and Justice at Xavier University. Our office’s mission includes pursuing justice. I facilitate workshops centered on White privilege, class privilege, and straight privilege. I am constructing a class on Faith and Justice in the center, advise student groups that strive to raise awareness of social injustices and work with theories of education, action, and reflection as central ideas to transform the world. I consider myself an ally to targeted groups and strive to live up to this label most days of my personal and professional life. Part of being an ally for me means understanding that the designation is not one at which I have arrived, but a recognition that I am working towards every day.
I struggle with questions of race, gender, class, ability, and nationality most days in my work and home life. I am married to my partner of 8 years and we have three children. Being a father and a spouse affects my choices and my research. I am inspired to help create a better world for my children; and I am sometimes hesitant to take additional risks for the present harm it could cause my family. I choose not to take illegal actions against a system I disagree with because I feel I am risking my family’s safety and security as well as my own. I choose not to fight every good fight at my place of employment, or in my studies, because I risk more than my own future. I also question these decisions—are they made for my family, or do I use my family as a convenient excuse to sometimes avoid additional risk? Being an ally means wrestling with these questions most days.

I have repeatedly written “most days” because some days I choose not to be an active ally. This is because I operate from privilege in most aspects of my life. I can choose not pick up the role of ally on a Sunday if I am tired, and just enjoy a day off. Targeted populations do not have this option. I share this aspect because I think it is important to understand that while I work with justice issues and write about privilege issues, I also fail to be the best ally at all moments. I also believe that I am working towards being a better ally, and this work is part of that journey.

My parents raised me to believe in the golden rule, treat others as you would have them treat you. Since my childhood, experiences have challenged me to re-phrase this rule into the “platinum rule,” treat others not as you would like to be treated, but as they would like to be treated. The platinum rule attempts to recognize and support difference. I
support and agree with the basic concept that I need to do more than treat others like I would like to be treated. I also recognize that who I am today is because my parents raised me in a home that valued the golden rule. My values remain rooted in core ideas from my upbringing—everyone is equal and deserves equal opportunity. Since my youth, I have learned more about power systems and built-in inequality, aspects of a system that make treating everyone “equal” impossible. Yet, the ideas of fairness and of justice equaling freedom from oppression, marginalization, violence, and cultural omission for all people still drive me personally and professionally.

Understanding that ideas of equality and justice as portrayed in the golden rule often equate to individual actions and ignore systems of privilege and power was a challenge for me in my development. The student population at my high school in the early 1990’s included males, females and White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students. I was not an ally to targeted groups, and was largely ignorant of systems of power. I did my best to be good to other people, but never understood that others were having a very different experience than me, often largely based on the color of their skin, gender, or sexual orientation.

While attending college at Miami University, a public university in Ohio for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I was exposed to ideas of post-modern critical theory, feminism, anti-racism, constructivist viewpoints, and activism. There, I became an active ally with women’s issues and LGBTQ issues; was active in groups on campus in the classroom, and read more and more to understand systems of oppression. I attended protests and made active justice choices in my dress, behavior, and purchases. I
was also operating from an understanding that “others” had these problems, and it was my role to not only stand by them, but to help them solve these problems.

I researched a lot of topics and literature regarding race and racism, and worked on racism as an ally through undergraduate and graduate school. After graduating from the Masters Program in College Student Personnel, I attended the Social Justice Institute, a 3-day experience that pushed me to move beyond ‘color-blindness’ and ideas of equality to consider my personal role in racism and systems of racism. I began to understand that regardless of my work as an ally and regardless of my best intentions, I carried my privileges with me wherever I went. I learned that no matter what I did, even if I was working to make the world a better place for everyone, systems of oppression and privilege harmed targeted groups and privileged groups. When working with small groups of White people at the retreat I began to question why I didn’t see more people like me being allies.

Scope of the Study

In any research study, certain decisions are made that have implications for the interpretation of the findings. I have restricted the study to a particular region in the United States of America (Southwestern Ohio) because it was not feasible to explore the entirety of the United States. I chose a qualitative approach over a quantitative study. The qualitative approach allows me to share and better understand the voices and stories of privileged students that operate as allies. As with any social issue the experiences, problems, and stories about oppression and privilege are wide and contain many
variables. We can add new pieces to the researcher puzzle while we gather data or even later in the process, as opposed to quantitative researcher (Charmaz, 2006).

The choice to study identity opened the door to many possibilities. Each of us possesses many different identities, and I found a lack of research that focused on students with privileged identities functioning as allies specifically. Many studies in the past have used White men as their subjects, but did not study these men through an identity or ally perspective. I was particularly interested in students who, like me, own a multiple number of privileged identities. While I own a number of privileged identities, White and male are most salient in my day-to-day life. I also believe that in the context of students’ daily experience these two identities are more prevalent. These students and I recognized that as White and males, other identities such as straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled and even nationality are not always as identifiable.

The literature review includes theories and research about oppression, privilege, and allies. I reviewed identity development as an ally, but not general student identity development. I purposefully chose to exclude general identity development and focus on ally development, as I focused the main research question of this work on the student’s role as an ally, not their individual development.

The qualitative methodology employed in this study does not lend itself to generalizability. Other practitioners cannot and should not apply the findings to all allies across the world, or to all White male student allies. The resulting conclusions illuminate the subject of White male students working as allies; they are not definite. Other
practitioners and scholars can use the study to inform their work with White male allies, but not as a prescription for this work.

Definition of Terms

Dominant/Privileged/Agent group: members are privileged by birth or acquisition, who knowingly or unknowingly exploit and reap unfair advantage over members (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Individual racism: The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can occur at both an unconscious level, and can be both active and passive. Examples include telling a racist joke, using a racial epithet, or believing in the inherent superiority of Whites (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Institutional racism: The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for Whites, and discrimination, oppression, and disadvantages for people from targeted racial groups. The advantages created for Whites are often invisible to them, or are considered “rights” available to everyone as opposed to “privileges” awarded to only some individuals and groups. Examples of institutional racism include policies and practices that: arbitrarily govern a person’s credit-worthiness; determine what information, positive or negative, is presented in the media about individuals involved in newsworthy events; or place undue value on selective educational experiences or qualifications in establishing promotion criteria in jobs and schools (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender (sexual), Queer or Questioning
Oppression: The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society.

- Oppression denotes structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person’s life chances and sense of possibility.
- Oppression also signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privilege group’s benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups.
- Oppression resides not only in external social institutions and norms but also within the human psyche as well (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Power: The capacity and opportunity to fulfill or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs….power affords people multiple identities as individuals seeking well-being, engaging in oppression, resisting domination (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002).

Privilege: Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their social group membership (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). “Greater access to power, resources, and opportunities that are denied to others and usually gained at their expense” (Goodman, 2001, p.20).
Queer: Initially a term of denigration aimed at lesbians and gay men; now a political and conceptual category used to critique heteronormativity and “regimes of the normal.” Also refers to the range of non-heteronormative practices and identities that may include, but is not limited to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people, allies, leather fetishists, freaks, etc (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Social Justice: includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Social Justice Theoretical Perspective: “attentiveness to ideas and actions concerning fairness, equity, equality, democratic process, status, hierarchy, and individual collective rights and obligations” (Charmaz, 2005, p.510).
Social Justice Ally: People who have privileged identities working to end the systems of oppression from which they benefit in solidarity with those oppressed by the system. People identified by their visible action in favor of justice on behalf of social groups to which they do not belong (Broido, 2000). “Members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership” (Broido, 2000, p.3).

Social Power: access to resources that enhance one’s chances of getting what one needs or influencing others in order to lead a safe, productive, fulfilling life (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997).

Subordinated/Targeted group: members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, and victimized in a variety of ways by the oppressor and the oppressors’ system or institutions.

White Privilege: Is the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are White. Generally White people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it (McIntosh, 1995).

Summary

This research explored the process of White men’s ally identity development from a social constructivist epistemological paradigm, using a constructivist grounded theory
methodology. Privilege and oppression are factors that affect all Americans’ lives every day. Those students who identify as allies are actively working to leverage their privilege to end oppression. This research sought a deeper understanding of how they see themselves as allies and what factors may have lead to this identity role. This research furthered the contributions of many others by helping answer the question of how educators can promote and encourage ally development with students of privilege.

In addition, as I worked with students as co-researchers, the resulting product served as a catalyst for ally growth for the co-researchers and for me as the author. In the process of examining and understanding privileged based ally work and confronting oppression and challenges around this work, the process itself became an anti-oppression learning tool.

In Chapter 2 I discuss sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2006) for this dissertation, theorists and researchers that have examined, thought about, and researched oppression, privilege, allies, ally development, and ally resistance. In Chapter 3 I review my epistemological perspective, social justice theory, and constructivist ground theory in depth. I also outline the methodology, step-by-step, for the dissertation. In Chapter 4 I present the findings of the interview I conducted with student allies, telling their individual stories, highlighting emerging themes and categories, and my emerging theory. Finally, in Chapter 5 I present my conclusions, theory discussion, and understandings based on the data gathered through interviews.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of prior literature within a qualitative study required developing a balance between reviewing and becoming informed by previous research—that is, being sensitized to theoretical concepts, while remaining open to the fresh ideas, perspectives, and processes experienced by the participants of this study. I had to be careful not to let current sources cloud or hinder my interpretation of the data I have gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concurrently, researchers should not conduct qualitative research without the use of underlying theoretical perspectives (Broido & Manning, 2002). Charmaz (2006) recommends a balance for constructivist grounded theory that results in awareness and sensitivity to current literature and research without unduly informing the coding and theorizing process. Walking this thin line I reviewed literature on privilege and oppression in general, as well as ally development theories and opinions. This literature review allowed me to enter interviews with a developed background on ally experience, without defining that experience.

The disciplinary perspectives that follow provided a place to start, not end, data collection and theory creation. Grounded theory can use sensitizing concepts as tools for developing the process for the collection of data (Charmaz, 2006). This chapter is a review of the literature in the field in order to inform my collection of data and creation of theory within a constructivist grounded theory model.

Social Construction of Oppressor and Oppressed

This study was concerned with how students with multiple privileges work to alleviate privilege and end oppression. “Inequality and oppression are deeply woven into
the tapestry of American life” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p.1). Dehumanization is the result of oppression, and it affects not only those who have had their humanity stolen through oppression, but those that have stolen it as well (Freire, 1970, Goodman, 2001). Bell (1997) defined oppressions as consisting of six significant themes:

1. **Pervasiveness**: inequality woven throughout social institutions and individuals;
2. **Restricting**: structural and material constraints that shape a person’s life chances;
3. **Hierarchical**: dominant or privileged groups benefit from the disempowerment of subordinate groups;
4. **Complex, Multiple, Cross-Cutting Relationships**: power and privilege are relative, as individuals hold multiple identities;
5. **Internalized**: oppressive beliefs are internalized by target groups;
6. **“Isms”**: Shared and Distinctive Characteristics - include racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, (and others), and all are connected. (p. 4-5)

Dehumanization is not a given, automatic outcome, but rather “the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (Freire, 1970, p. 28). Humanization thwarted by injustice, exploitation, and the violence of the oppressors is oppression. Freire wrote that the oppressed must not seek to oppress the oppressors, but rather to restore the humanity of both. “This then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their
oppressors as well” (Freire, 1970, p. 28) Freire called upon the oppressed peoples of the world to work towards Praxis—reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. He also argues that the oppressor (or privileged individual) cannot liberate the oppressed, cannot be in solidarity with them;

…the oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (Freire, 1970, p. 28)

Freire went on to say, “The oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle” (p. 32).

I agree with Freire’s call for the humanization of all people, oppressed and oppressor, and agree that the oppressor cannot lead this struggle. Privileged individuals can be with others in the struggle, though, in solidarity with targeted groups. The key role for privileged students is to be with oppressed others, not for oppressed others. “A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Working with, not for others, is how privileged students can build trust with targeted groups.

Freire argued that oppressors could not help but bring their oppressive nature to the struggles of the oppressed.

They cease to be exploiters…and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their
deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know. (Freire, 1970, p. 46)

I believe when those with power work as allies that they are working on a new model of power that also changes their identities within the new system. Allies have to understand *Conscientizaçao*—learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970) in order to transform themselves and the world around them.

In ally work, White men must develop the power to perceive critically “*the way they exist* in the world *with which and in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, p. 70). With this perspective both oppressed groups and allies can view oppression not as a reality, but as a system that they can transform.

**Privilege**

“In order to construct equal power among all individuals, society must first deconstruct the structures that oppress. This deconstruction requires an understanding of both privilege and oppression” (Torres, 2009, p. 506). Privilege is simply when one group has something of value that is denied to others because of the groups to which they belong (Johnson, 2001, McIntosh, 1995, Lenski, 1984). Quoting Charlotte Bunch, “If you don’t know what privilege is go home and announce to everyone you are a queer.” Privileged people do not oppress in order to gain privilege, but rather to retain it—oppression does not exist on its own merits, but is a result of systems of oppression (Johnson, 2001). As a result, members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites,
heterosexuals) benefit from unearned privileges given in the form of unearned entitlements, things everyone should have, and conferred dominance, things no one should have (McIntosh, 1995).

Johnson (2001) contends that people in general are not oppressors; they are not oppressive people, but they exist in an oppressive system and benefit or lack from particular privilege memberships. Membership in a privileged group does not tell us how a student with privilege acts, thinks or feels. Belonging to privileged groups does not tell us that your life is a happy or successful one, or that you as an individual understand your privilege. Privileged does not necessarily mean good; the privilege may or may not work out for you as an individual.

The nature of dominant group identities leaves them largely unexamined not only in the literature but also for the individuals themselves (Johnson, 2001; Jones, 1997). Researchers have begun to examine the attitudes and behaviors of dominant groups (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006); my goal is to find out how particular privileged students understand their roles as allies to targeted groups.

Privilege is socially constructed; we as people create it. You do not actually have to be White or straight to receive the benefits of those privileges, you just have to convince others that you are of a privileged group. People of color can “pass,” women dress as men, and queer people can play straight. What makes it so powerful is that we rarely experience it as socially constructed (Johnson, 2001). People of privilege, in my case, White and male, have “epistemic privilege, or the luxury of obliviousness”
Johnson, 2001), I often do not, nor do I need to, recognize my privilege, another “benefit” of privilege.

Though I have a privileged outlook or point of view, this combination does not have to limit me; I can still build many bridges. I can be in solidarity with others who share aspects of my privilege, as well as their own oppressed identities. It will take all of us, privileged and oppressed, to change the system of privilege and oppression we live in. It may easy for Whites to think of racism as a problem for people if color, or for men to think of sexism as a problem for women, or able-bodied people to think of access as a problem for the disabled. However, we cannot talk about up without down, or you or them without me or us. Privilege is always in relation to others (Johnson, 2001).

Allies

If I do not recognize the fact that we live in a society that attaches privilege to White men then I am part of the problem. “This problem can’t be solved unless those in privilege take up the fight” (Johnson, 2001, p. 10). Self-interests motivate most people who will choose their groups over others when making decisions (Lenski, 1984). Allies can and do understand that there is a cost of oppression for those in privilege, as well as for those who are oppressed (Johnson, 2001).

Members of privileged groups suffer a “loss of authenticity and humanity” because of their unearned privilege (Freire, 1970). Goodman (2001) identified areas in which systems of oppression may negatively affect privileged people. This included social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual and material costs. Examples for White men include society socializing them to conform to certain rigid codes of behavior, dealing
with denials of emotion and empathy while being taught to love others, but simultaneously expected to treat others in inequitable ways and limited self–knowledge and a distorted view of the self. White men can experience a discrepancy between external perceptions and internal realities. They often do not feel themselves to be the privileged powerful people others may presume them to be. Privileged groups can experience fear and pain because of their privilege. They may experience the fear of losing entitlement and power or losing respect in their community if they side with the oppressed: a man functioning as ally for women, or a White student being ally to students of color. Privileged groups may encounter pain upon viewing the damage done to others by systems that support the privileged groups. Finally, privileged people may experience diminished mental health as they develop unhealthy mechanisms such as denial, false justification, and disassociation to deal with the fears of target groups. To ignore the oppression that exist within intergroup interactions inhibits the expansion of consciousness and supports the status quo (Landreman, 2007). The work of an ally benefits oneself and others. Working as a social justice ally may benefit those in privileged positions as well as targeted groups, “with greater social justice, people could have a fuller, more authentic sense of self; more authentic relationships and human connection; greater moral consistency and integrity; access to cultural knowledge and wisdom; and improved work and living conditions” (Goodman, 2001, p.123)

The use of the term ally entered the student affairs literature in the early 1990s, most often in reference to straight students working as advocates on queer issues (e.g., Washington & Evans, 1991) and White students addressing racism (e.g., Bourassa, 1991;
Broido, 2000). Bell (1997) defined allies as working towards a “vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p.3). Building on Washington and Evans (1991) definition, Broido (2000) defined allies as “members of the dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to the end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership” (p.3). My research specifically defines social justice allies as people who have privileged identities working to end the systems of oppression from which they benefit in solidarity with those oppressed by the system. In this case, allies become workers in their own liberation (Bishop, 2002).

**Intercultural Maturity**

King and Baxter Magolda (2005) constructed an intercultural maturity model for college students adapted from Kegan’s (1994) theory of development. Development in all three dimensions (cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal) proceed “both within and across three dimensions of maturity … as college students become increasingly capable of understanding and acting in ways that are interculturally aware and appropriate” (King & Baxter Magolda, p. 547).

Kegan’s (1994) theory focused cognitive dimensional development on how one constructs one's view and creates a meaning-making system. He focused the intrapersonal dimensional development on individuals’ understanding of their own beliefs, values, and sense of self as well as how these understandings are used to direct choices and behaviors. Finally, Kegan focused the interpersonal dimensional development on how
people view themselves in relation to other people and how they make choices in social situations. Development in all three dimensions is required for a person to be able to use one's skills.

According to King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) model, students move through three stages of development in each of the dimensions on their journey to intercultural maturity. Within the initial stage of cognitive development students assume knowledge is certain and categorize knowledge as right and wrong; they are naïve above different cultural practices and values; resist challenges to their own beliefs and view differing cultural perspectives as wrong.

In the intermediate cognitive stage, students develop an evolving awareness and acceptance of uncertainty and multiple perspectives and an ability to shift from accepting authority’s knowledge claims to personal processes for adopting knowledge claims. Finally, in the mature cognitive stage, students have the ability to consciously shift perspectives and behaviors into an alternative cultural worldview and to use multiple cultural frames.

Students also move though these three stages in intrapersonal development (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). In the initial intrapersonal stage, students demonstrate a lack of awareness of their own values and the intersection of social identity, and have a lack of understanding of other cultures.

Within the intermediate intrapersonal stage students develop an evolving sense of identity as distinct from external others’ perceptions and the tension between external and internal definitions prompts self-exploration. In the intrapersonal mature stage students
have a capacity to create an internal self that openly engages challenges to their views and beliefs and that considers social identities in a global national context.

King and Baxter Magolda (2005) repeat these three stages in interpersonal development. In the initial stage of interpersonal development students’ dependent relations with similar others is a primary source of their identity and social affirmation, perspectives of different others are viewed as wrong, and awareness of how social systems affect group norms and intergroup differences is lacking.

In the intermediate stage students have a willingness to interact with diverse others and refrain from judgment, and rely on independent relations in which multiple perspectives exist. In the interpersonal mature stage students have a capacity to engage in meaningful, independent relationships with diverse others that are grounded in an understanding and appreciation for human differences, an understanding of ways individual and community practices affect social systems, and are willing to work for the rights of others. King and Baxter Magolda (2005) wrote that the intersection of these three developmental areas and development in each area enables intercultural maturity for students, enabling these students to effectively function in a multicultural environment.

Identity Development

Worrell and Remer (2003) developed an identity model within a feminist framework to address privileged and oppressed identities. Their model simultaneously incorporates positions of privilege and oppression. They highlighted that identities
intersect and influence each other, including multiple privileged identities, such as White men.

The dimensions begin with preawareness in which the privileged and oppressed person accepts the majority status. The privileged individual also believes her or his status to be superior to others. The oppressed person, in turn, has learned to devalue her or his status.

The second dimension is encounter when both the privileged and oppressed person recognizes the privileged or oppressed values that are part of their identities. The privileged person typically experiences discomfort, guilt, and begins an internal struggle with this concept. The oppressed person often feels relieved as well as conflicted about the disparity. As the name implies, experiences usually facilitate the beginnings of the encounter stage.

Worrell and Remer (2003) engagement by both privileged and oppressed individuals is the mark of the third dimension, immersion. A privileged individual will access more information about the oppressed group and learns about their role in oppressing others. An oppressed person then engages in learning about her or his status, often feeling anger regarding the oppression and oppressor.

The final dimension of Worrell and Remer’s model is integration and activism. In this final status, privileged and oppressed identities fully share aspects of this dimension. The person’s identity becomes more fully integrated. This model, like other ally models, explicitly states social justice activism as part of the process. Worrell and Remer’s decision to recognize social justice activism as an integral part of healthy
development is reflective of other identity theories regarding social justice ally development.

*Becoming an Ally*

Bishop (2002) provided a six-step framework for the development of social justice allies. Bishop considered these six-steps as stages through which an individual moves. The first step involves understanding oppression, how it began, how it is maintained, and how it affects individuals and institutions. “We carry within us a blueprint of the culture’s oppressive patterns to be reproduced wherever we have influence” (Bishop, p.73). If we hope to combat oppression, we need to examine our own experiences and our roles as oppressors, the blueprints within us, and our privileges.

The second step is to recognize and understand the interactions between different oppressions. “As long as separation, hierarchy, and completion are the underlying assumptions, this interweaving of power roles helps keep the whole system in place” (Bishop, 2002, p.78). My co-researchers and I have multiple intersecting power roles, male, straight, White, for many of us able-bodied and American, and for some of us, upper class. ‘The basic common dominator among different forms of oppression is power and hierarchy…” (Bishop, p.84). This study identifies some common dominators among those with power who choose to challenge power systems.

As students understand their role as oppressor and oppressed, they feel pain—step three is healing this pain (Bishop, 2002). “What makes justice possible is the amazing ability of human beings to grow in consciousness and heal” (Bishop, p.96). As people understand oppressive systems, painful realities including the interactions between
different oppressions and their individual roles in the systems are exposed. To work to change systems, they must also work to heal themselves.

The fourth step is becoming a “worker in your own liberation” (Bishop, 2002, p.100). People do this by understanding where and how systems of oppression affect each of us, including those in power. This is the beginning of the move from consciousness raising and healing into analysis and strategy building required to change systems.

Step five, actually becoming an ally, requires students to examine past behaviors and learn new skills (Bishop, 2002). This requires an understanding of the systems of oppression and one’s own role in those systems. “Those who do understand have usually worked their way to their insights through their own experience, reflection, and efforts to work towards social change” (Bishop, p.111). Bishop wrote about several characteristics of allies:

1. A sense of connection with other people
2. A grasp of the concept of social structures and collective responsibility
3. Their lack of an individualistic stance and ego; although they have a strong sense of self
4. Their sense of process and change
5. Their understanding of their own process of learning; their realistic sense of their own power
6. Their grasp of “power-with” as an alternative to “power-over”
7. Their honesty, openness, and lack of shame about their own limitations
8. Their knowledge and sense of history

9. Their acceptance of struggle

10. Their understanding that good intentions do not matter if there is no action against oppression

11. Their knowledge of their own roots (p. 111)

Bishop acknowledges that this list is neither comprehensive nor all-inclusive, but a start towards a better understanding of what an ally “looks” like.

The sixth and final step is maintaining hope and idealism while working for social change. “Commitment to social justice means beginning a completely unknown journey…with confusion and danger along the way, and where the end is a mystery” (Bishop, 2002, p. 149). Bishop wrote that we have to not only seek hope but also build it into social justice organizations and structures to help ally and activists continue their hard work.

*Ally Development*

Edwards (2006) has defined progressive stages of development for allies beginning with Allies for Self-Interest leading to Allies for Social Justice. Each linear stage has different motivations, understandings of oppression, focuses, and relationships to privilege.

Allies for Self Interest are students who see the world as a fair place, find injustice shocking, and are working to protect those they care about from being hurt. The people in the allies’ life who have been hurt by injustice are the sole motivators for the allies’ work. Allies for Self Interest view the ‘problem’ as individuals hurting other individuals and are
not interested in the system, they are interested in stopping the “bad people.” Their focus is stopping perpetrators and do not see any privilege within themselves.

Aspiring Allies for Altruism are students who are wrestling with guilt, shame, and self-despair in their ally work. Social justice for the “other” remains the motivation for this group. The category of other has expanded beyond those they know personally, but they still fail to recognize that they must speak with oppressed groups, not for oppressed groups. They see the other as being the victims of oppression and seek justice for those groups. This group recognizes the system and aims to be an exception to the system, yet in doing so perpetuates the system. By pretending that one can exit the system through work or choice, they deny the existence of an all-inclusive system that affects targeted groups and privileged groups. Aspiring Allies for Altruism recognize privilege, but feel guilty about their own privilege and try to distance themselves from that privilege. The focus of their work is on other members of the dominant or privileged group.

Allies for Social Justice are students who work with those from target groups, recognize that systems of oppression harm members from privileged groups, and are not allies to individuals, but to issues such as racism, heterosexism, and sexism. This group is motivated to help others and themselves through this work, they understand that the victims of oppression are targeted and privileged groups, though each group is “victimized in different ways unequally” (Edwards, 2006, p.47). Allies for Social Justice focus their work on changing the system(s) and not only recognize privilege, but see the “illumination of privilege as liberating and consciously uses unearned privilege against itself” (Edwards, p. 47). My co-researchers will be working against these systems of
oppression, possibly in one of the stages of ally development. Being an ally in one area may allow them to become an ally in other areas. Working with other good allies in a targeted identity may allow them to become an ally for other target groups as well (Edwards, 2006).

College Ally Development

Broido’s (2000) work on the development of college allies remains the only research conducted directly involving college student ally development at this time. Broido describes ally development beginning in precollege attitudes, growing through experiences in college, and resulting in an ability to act as an ally. After students reach the ability to act as an ally, Broido reports that chance and recruitment are equal factors in that student actually behaving as an ally.

Precollege Attitudes are the first pattern, important identifiers of college allies. Allies enter college with open to learning but lacking theoretical frameworks for oppressions and privilege. They do share “a basic egalitarian belief in the espoused values of American culture that everyone should have equal opportunity” (Broido & Reason, 2005).

Broido also identified Acquiring Information as an important pattern for ally development. Participants in her study reported acquiring information in the classroom, from targeted group members directly; from dominant peer group members, independent reading, and college staff (Broido, 2000). Within this pattern, participants also learned about the existence of allies, strategies for conducting social justice, and the importance of activism.
Participants used three forms of Meaning Making in their development as allies, discussion, self-reflection, and perspective taking. Through this pattern, they were better able to understand and articulate their views and perspective on social justice (Broido & Reason, 2005). Broido also identified Confidence as playing a large role in ally development. Confidence in themselves, in their views and in their knowledge, increased their abilities to speak about and act on social justice issues.

Skill Development was the fifth key pattern described by Broido (2000). Combining Confidence, Acquired Information, and Meaning Making, these student allies were able to develop the skills to be active allies. Finally, Broido highlighted the roles of Chance and Recruitment. While the patterns above are important for the development of allies, chance also played a large role in their development of ally behavior. Student allies had opportunities presented by chance, such as a particular friend or roommate, a reading for a class, a particular class or faculty or staff member interaction, or faculty or staff recruitment that directly led to them becoming allies.

Resistance

Societal change is the focus of allies working for the benefit of all members of society—not just the oppressed (see Edwards, 2006; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Freire, 1970; and Johnson 2001). Often, when students begin to learn they belong to a privileged group they do not understand the concept, are unwilling to embrace it, or get angry and defensive (Goodman, 2001). This reaction, of anger and guilt has, “done more than perhaps anything else to keep us stuck in our current paralysis by preventing each of us from taking the steps required to become part of the solution” (Johnson, 2001, p. viii).
White men are often the most resistant to social justice (Goodman, 2001). “Male psychology, socialization, and social position” often encompass all the reasons for resistance (Goodman, 2001, p. 76). These students tend to have an individualistic and separate sense of self, to see themselves as rugged individuals, and not often see themselves as part of social groups or understand their or other’s roles in systems (Goodman, 2001). They also tend to see relationships as hierarchical, with an emphasis on competition. Finally, our society socializes most men to repress or suppress feelings and fears. This denial of feelings and fears makes it more difficult to connect with others, to use empathy, and to work for social justice (Goodman, 2001). Yet, some students are eager to become part of the solution, but must understand how to do so. Becoming an ally is one-step in the direction of change. White men have received the greatest benefit from oppression, and thus have the most to lose (Goodman, 2001). White male students must face all of these challenges in order to become affective allies.

An aspect of ally development or experience is resistance to that development (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005). “The concept of resistance emphasizes that individuals are not simply acted upon by abstract structures but negotiate, struggle, and create meaning of their own” (Weiler, 1988, p.21). As White men become allies, or act as allies, they must create their own meaning of what an ally is and who they are, as well as wrestle with the concepts of power and their role in power. Resistance is part of the ally community, as a stage allies can pass through, live in, and struggle to understand.
Volunteers

Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) present three profiles of White students working in service-learning opportunities. They are careful to label the voices as profiles, because the voices are not hierarchal or necessarily stable positions for students.

The “Good Volunteer” is not asking for relationships with recipients of service, they exhibit an attitude of entitlements in expressing they are going to help “those people out there” (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005, p. 11). This position is similar to Edward’s first stage of Ally development, Allies for Self-Interest. They are both interested in helping those less fortunate, but not willing or interested in examining their own roles at this point.

The “Politely Frustrated” Volunteer corresponds with Edward’s, Aspiring Allies for Altruism. They have begun to recognize systems of oppression, but often blame service recipients for their own situations. Like Aspiring Allies, they are wrestling with guilt and anger around their own positions of power and privilege (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005).

Finally, Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) describe “The Active Resistor” who is disruptive throughout the process of service and class. These students are angry about the idea of service, as well as any suggested role that they might play in terms of privilege. They actively resist the class, the service learning opportunities, and the literature. By labeling material that is uncomfortable as irrelevant, these students can avoid the inner conflict of engaging with questions of privilege (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005). Rather than fuming over these students’ resistance to growth, we can
embrace their resistance as part of the journey to becoming allies. Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski suggest enabling opportunities for in the field, in readings in the classroom, and by not silencing resisting students, but rather allowing and supporting their voices in the classroom, encouraging self-authorship. This also encourages the growth of a community of learners and the opportunities for peer support in ally development. By allowing and identifying resistance, we can work with students to help them cross developmental bridges towards higher levels of cognitive and interpersonal development, and possible formation in roles as allies.

Social justice attitudes are “beliefs about and judgments regarding the current status of achieving this goal [social justice]. “Social justice actions are behaviors taken on behalf of this goal of social justice” (Reason & Davis, 2005, p. 7). In order for social justice allies to develop, they must recognize unexamined privilege and power (Washington & Evans, 1991). The focus of social justice ally development is not on preventing negative behavior, but rather encouraging positive actions (Reason & Davis, 2005).

Critical Whiteness

Critical Whiteness is a framework that explores the racialization of systems of oppression and unearned advantage and the inscription of that system by an ideology that identifies and supports White as the normal and privileged racial identity group (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005). Whiteness as a system of oppression allows students to acknowledge only heinous race incidents, and leaves the deeply ingrained racism of a privileged system unacknowledged. White students on journeys to becoming
allies often react to critical Whiteness, or exposure to the idea of race privilege, with guilt, anger, avoidance, and confusion (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005).

Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) wrote that when White students engaged in service-learning are exposed to ideas of White privilege they react with resistance in order to protect their positions of power from a perceived threat. Resistance is not bad, or something to be fixed. It is often a necessary part of the journey as White students seek their authenticity in presenting themselves as they are and agency in their struggle to make meaning of their experiences (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005).

Summary

I present the theories here to develop a balance between what currently exists in both current research and theory, and my work within the dissertation. These underlying theoretical perspectives (Broido & Manning, 2002) have informed the data collection process, resulting in awareness and sensitivity to current literature and research. This review allowed me to enter interviews with a developed background on ally experience, without defining that experience.

The roles of social oppressor and oppressed are socially constructed. These roles are harmful not only to the oppressed groups and individuals, but to the oppressors as group and as individuals. Oppression and privilege are not de facto elements of life, but are created and supported by anyone who has a privileged identity.

White and male are privileged identities that gain privilege through the oppression of other groups. Recognizing, understanding, and wrestling with concepts of privilege
and privileged identities are steps on the path to becoming an ally. Allies are privileged individuals who leverage their privilege to stand with oppressed, or targeted, groups.

There are a few ally identity developmental models currently in existence. These models have progressive stages that potential allies travel through to become allies. In addition, Edwards (2006) has conceptually identified different stages to being an ally. Some of these models also recognize resistance as a part of the journey for privileged students as they develop into allies. This journey may be particularly challenging for White male students who live in the intersection of at least two privileged identities.

There is still more to understand—how do White male students define their roles, how did they enter these roles, why do they stay in their roles? Chapter 3 reviews my epistemological perspective, social justice theory, constructivist ground theory in depth, and outlines the methodology I used to answer these questions for this dissertation.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Epistemological Paradigm

My epistemological paradigm (e.g. constructivist, subjectivist, and objectivist) informed my choice of theoretical perspective and thus my methodological choices as well (Crotty, 1998). My constructivist epistemological perspective informed the choices I made throughout this project, from formation of the research questions and methods used, to the conclusion and theories drawn from the research.

This epistemological perspective views all knowledge and reality as having been constructed, or created. All knowledge, all reality is “being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Broido and Manning (2002, p. 436) list characteristics of a constructivist paradigm:

1. The researcher–respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and inter-dependant
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable
3. The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research
4. The research product (e.g., interpretations) is context specific

I approached this study from a constructivist viewpoint because the identities of my co-researchers (including myself), all White and male, are socially constructed identities. My research sought to understand and describe the relationship between these
socially constructed identities that the co-researchers did not have had a clear choice in, and their adopted identity as a social justice ally. Constructivism focuses on the world as a socially constructed set of multiple realities, based on mental constructs of participants and the meanings they attach to the events circumstances they encounter (Tierney & Lincoln, 1994). A constructivist epistemology focuses on the meaning making of the individual student and acknowledges that understanding is socially constructed (Torres, 2009).

Qualitative Approach

Tierney and Lincoln (1994) noted over a decade ago that qualitative research has come of age. It has existed in one form or another for the last century. The number of qualitative books, articles, and dissertations has only increased over the last fifteen years. My work continues this tradition by drawing on the methodological perspectives in order to present a rich, deep, understanding of the experience of being an ally for students, in particular those with more than one privilege, White men at a four-year higher education institutions, including myself and my co-researchers.

The qualitative approach allowed me to share and better understand the voices and stories of privileged student who operate as allies. As with any social issue the experiences, problems, and stories about oppression and privilege are wide and contain many variables. A qualitative approach allowed me to add new pieces to the research puzzle as I gathered data or even later in the process, as opposed to the quantitative process. In this method, my interviewees became co-researchers.
Social Justice Theoretical Perspective

A social justice perspective is central to my work because I operate from a constructivist paradigm. Working from this perspective, I assumed that systems of oppression (e.g. sexism, racism, and other forms) function on individual, institutional, cultural, and societal levels to advantage some members and disadvantage others based on understood group membership (Bell, 1997).

Scholarship conducted within a social justice perspective reflects awareness of oppressive structures and seeks to eliminate forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, and heterosexism (Charmaz, 2005). My research did not ignore these structures, nor did I assume that they would emerge from the data; rather I understood these structures as implicit assumptions when I began my study. These concepts (e.g. sexism and racism) became sensitizing tools to expand rather than limit the data collection and analysis (Broido & Manning, 2002).

A social justice perspective is appropriate for this study because the nominators identified co-researchers based on socially constructed identities and self-identified roles as social justice allies, working to end oppression from a privileged identity. As stated, an expected outcome of the research itself was an increased understanding for co-researchers and me of the roles of allies, and an increased ability to function as a social justice ally to end oppression.
Researcher Perspective

When presenting research the question is not if I have bias or not; but how I will present (or not) the biases that are inevitably part of me. Biklen and Casella (2007) defined “social location” as the identity markers and a figurative place where a researcher stands in society. Qualitative research itself is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world; the observer seeks to interpret the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

My social location provides a particular viewpoint and set of experiences as I construct, write, and perform the work within this research. Being White and male shaped and informed my perspectives, and although I identify these aspects in my writing, as well as strive to be aware of them as I perform my research, the shades of perception these identities create exist and inform my experience and writing regardless of my, or the reader’s, awareness of their existence.

Virtually all qualitative researchers now acknowledge that their research is interpretive (Tierney & Lincoln, 1994). My goal is for the reader to both understand and appreciate my interpretation as mine.

Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss first published their work on Grounded Theory in 1967, using positivism to frame the theory, and incorporating qualitative study to more rigorous guidelines and articulating strategies for developing theories from research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. “Essentially, Glaser
and Strauss joined epistemological critique with practical guidelines for action” (Charmaz, 2006, p.6).

Charmaz (2006) proposes the combination of constructivism and grounded theory, her methodology has provided the base for my research. Like Glaser and Strauss, most of the basics of grounded theory are still included in Charmaz’s and my work—gathering rich data from particular samples/individuals (as opposed to random sampling), using coding on top of in-depth interviews to find reoccurring themes, and creating theory grounded in data that can inform (but not predict) future work. The important addition from Charmaz for my work is the inclusion of a constructivist framework around grounded theory.

Grounded theory is substantive because it addresses delimited problems in specific substantive areas (Charmaz, 2006). My research looks at a specific kind of privileged student in order to offer a deeper understanding of their reality. In the past, grounded theory has provided a way to do qualitative work with a stamp of positivism (Charmaz, 2005). My research moves away from that stamp of positivism, utilizing constructivist viewpoints, while retaining the strengths of grounded theory (see Bryant, 2002, 2003; Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2006; Clarke, 2003, 2005; Seale 1999). I am still able to utilize the procedures of grounded theory, including coding, constant comparative method, and theory creation, while also being able to move past its positivist roots, operating within a constructivist framework. I was able to use the tools of grounded theory within a subjective framework; I did not have to pretend toward objectivity. “In short, grounded theory methods demystify the conduct of qualitative inquiry—and
expedite your research and enhance your excitement about it” (Charmaz, 2006, p.5).

Grounded theory provides me as researcher with a tool to understand privileged students, as allies, as well as a tool to increase my personal interaction with privilege and ally work. In knowing others I come to know myself (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Grounded theory is particularly suited for working with allies and social justice issues. The critical stance of social justice combined with the analytic stance of ground theory locate subjective and collective experiences in larger structures and increase understanding of how these structures work (Charmaz, 2005).

Development or Identification of Instrument

As Guba and Lincoln noted in 1981, the researcher is the “instrument’ in the case of qualitative research. In this case, I am operating from a constructivist viewpoint, using grounded theory. “We share the assumption that reality is created and that the interaction between observer and observed is of paramount importance” (Tierney & Lincoln, 1994, p.111). Operating as a constructivist means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them, and locating me in the realities (Charmaz, 2005).

My approach explicitly assumes that this research offers an interpretive portrayal of the allies studied, not an exact picture of them (see Charmaz, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994).

A constructivist grounded theory adopts grounded theory guidelines as tools but does not subscribe to the positivist viewpoint (Charmaz, 2005). These grounded theory methods are a “set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of

Glaser and Strauss (1967, Glaser, 1978, Strauss, 1987) defined components of grounded theory practice this research will undertake through a constructivist lens:

1. Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
2. Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived hypotheses
3. Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
4. Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
5. Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
6. Sampling aimed towards theory construction, not for population representativeness

It is also important to note that good educators cannot ask students to take risks they would not take themselves (hooks, 1994). All voices will be a part of the final product. Voice means both letting the researcher have a voice and the research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).
Identification of Population and Selection of Sample

Those with privilege must see privilege as a problem in order to solve oppression and privilege (Johnson, 2006). Operating from this viewpoint, I worked with students who have made the choice not to be neutral, and to work to end privilege from a privileged identity.

Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher should choose a sample size appropriate to the research questions and the methodology. I worked with 10 co-researchers (as a target number) to reach saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), no new concepts, or categories emerged from the data. This number of co-researchers was based on similar grounded theory studies on women’s identities (10 participants) (Jones & McEwen, 2000), gay identity development (11 participants) (Stevens, 2004), wisdom development (10 participants) (Brown, 2004), and male identity development, (10 participants) (Edwards & Jones, 2009). I also considered Broido’s (2000) phenomenological research on social justice ally development with a total of six participants. I interviewed 10 White men who are currently attending a 4-year higher education institution fulltime and consider themselves allies.

I was particularly interested in students who have multiple privileges, as these privileges interest and build upon one another. “Both individual and group identity are complex-influenced and shaped not simply by a person’s race, class, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, sexuality, religion, or nationality—but by a combination of all of those characteristics” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 6).
This was a purposeful sample in order to be able to understand the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative research uses purposeful sampling to information rich individuals most familiar with the topic being studied (Patton, 2002).

I recruited co-researchers for this study by using expert nominators and key informants (Appendix B). I recruited the co-researchers by asking staff who work with traditionally oppressed groups and social justice issues to identify students who meet the study’s qualifications. Expert nominators on Xavier University’s campus included; staff from the Center for Faith and Justice, the Director of the Women’s Center, the Director and Assistant Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Vice Provost for Diversity, the Chair of Psychological Services, the Dean of Students, faculty advisors for Alliance (a Queer issues group on campus), Jesuit priests active in social justice issues, and faculty teaching diversity classes on Xavier’s campus. I also asked identified students for other ally recommendations who might meet the qualifications in a snowball method.

In this process, I worked through an institutional review board (IRB) at Ohio University in order to protect my human subjects, or co-researchers (Biklen & Casella, 2007). I performed the data collection with the assistance of 10 co-researchers. The final number was determined through the participant selection process, based on the number of respondents, social location of respondents, and respondents’ roles as allies.

Tierney and Lincoln (1994) noted that:

Sites should be selected for their presumed utility in providing critical instances of the phenomenon of interest; for their ability to provide maximum social constructions related to the set of phenomena under investigation; or because they
happen to be arenas of experimentation, innovation, or particularly around the research interests of the inquirer. (p.115)

I recruited White males from a four-year higher education institution. This selected environment, Higher Education institutions, is where I began my journey as an ally, and has some surrounding research available on allies currently. My preference was to find all co-researchers from a private four year institution because of the shared additional privilege of attending such an institution.

The institution is a private Jesuit University, Xavier, located in Cincinnati, OH. Xavier has an undergraduate population of roughly 3,500 students and a graduate population of 1,000 students. Xavier’s undergraduate tuition is twenty-nine thousand dollars, with an additional ten thousand dollar fee to live on campus (required for first-year students), for a total of thirty-nine thousand dollars.

Xavier University supports diversity and justice issues officially through its’ Vice Provost for Diversity office (1 administrative staff member), Office of Multicultural Affairs (2 administrative staff members), Women’s Center (1 administrative staff member), and the Center for Faith and Justice (6 full time administrative staff members). Xavier has also recently included a diversity requirement as part of its core curriculum. The University has identified a number of existing classes which will count as diversity courses and students must complete 3 credits within the cultural diversity requirement.

The Xavier Student Government Association funds diversity and justice focused student clubs such as Alliance (LGBTQ support and advocacy), Students for Economic Justice, 1 in 4 day (sexual assault awareness), Black Student Association, Society of
Latinos, South Asian Society, SNAC (disability awareness and support), Voices of Solidarity (Central and South American justice concerns) and has a Diversity Advocacy position on the Student Senate.

Data Collection Procedures

Methods facilitate the flow of the investigation and aim toward yielding rich, accurate, and complete depictions of the qualities or constituents of the experience (Moustakas, 1990). In this case, I used an in-depth interview process, including initial interviews, member checking, and follow up interviews. This evolved over the course of the research, reacting to my experience and my co-researchers’ experience in performing the research.

As I sought a richer, deeper understanding of White males’ ally identity development, I determined the interview process would be the most informative. “The interviewer seeks to understand the topic and the interview participant has the relevant experiences to shed light on it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25).

The data collection procedure began with an initial short interview to determine suitability for the project, including self-identification of race, sexual orientation and gender, and role as an ally. I then conducted in-depth intensive conversational interviews with the co-researchers.

Seeking to both inform participants and develop trust I developed a set of instructions that informed potential co-researchers of the nature of the research design, its purpose and process and what is expected of them, and developed a contract with them, (Appendix C). It was also important to communicate with the co-researchers throughout
the research about what they think they and the researcher are doing, and what I think they are doing (Moustakas, 1990). As the interviewer, I assumed more direct control over than the construction of data than other methods such as participant observations or ethnography. I balanced this control by continuously involving my co-researchers in the process (Charmaz, 2006).

I used an evolving design, so that the questions could be changed, deleted, or added to as the interview process evolved. I used my own identity as a White male ally in order to build rapport and create trust with the co-researchers.

I formatted the interview as an intensive conversational interview (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25), with some pre-determined questions designed to guide the conversation (Appendix A). This format permitted an in-depth exploration of the student’s roles as allies and was a useful method for interpretive inquiry.

Intensive interviews allow an interviewer to: go beneath the surface of the described experience, stop to explore a statement or topic, request more detail or explanation, ask about the participant’s thought, feelings, and actions, keep the participant on the subject, come back to an earlier point, restate the participant’s point to check for accuracy, slow or quicken the pace, shift the immediate topic, validate the participant’s humanity, perspective, or action, use observation and social skills to further the discussion, respect the participant and express appreciation for participating. (Charmaz, 2006, p.26)

The intensive conversational interview or dialogue was most clearly consistent with the rhythm and flow of constructivist exploration and the search for meaning. This
format allowed for the building of trust, and encouraged co-researchers to express their most honest thoughts and feelings around their work as allies. This format was also the most supportive of my own self-disclosure, and self-analysis with co-researchers. Self-disclosure also elicits disclosure, creating trust and fuller, richer, more comprehensive depictions for the co-researcher (Jourard, 1968). One way of respecting participants is through establishing rapport with them (Charmaz, 2006). I structured interviews not by adhering to the clock, but by the ability of the person to tell their story (Moustakas, 1990).

I began by gathering data from each co-researcher through intensive, one-one-interviews, taking notes and taping the interviews. This process provided the rich data needed for this research “Rich data get beneath the surface of social and subjective life. An inquiring mind, persistence, and innovative data-gathering approaches can bring a researcher into new worlds and in touch with rich data” (Charmaz, 2006, p.13). After each taped interview, I transcribed the discussion verbatim. I deconstructed each interview, first line by line, then section by section, and identified reoccurring themes and/or statements (See Data Analysis below). I did this after each interview, so each that interview informed the next interview (Charmaz, 2006). Using this method, I then refined the following interviews based on emerging codes and themes from the preceding interviews. Coding can highlight assumptions, and inspire the interviewer to examine hidden assumptions of their own and their participants (Charmaz, 2005).

After conducting initial interviews with each co-researcher and coding all interviews, I began making notes and writing short essays about possible themes
emerging from the data. I shared these notes and memos with co-researchers and asked for their feedback. This gave co-researchers an opportunity to confirm and/or correct anything I had written at that point in the process. I then utilized this feedback to hone my theme and theory development.

The qualitative research approach asks that the researcher examine the world in detail, that nothing is trivial (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The key to this research is thick description; I gathered the data for that thick description through these interviews.

My preset questions guided dialogue with co-researchers. Although researchers can formulate general questions in advance, genuine dialogue cannot be planned (Moustakas, 1990). I used self-concept and identity as concepts of points of departure to form interview questions (Charmaz, 2006). Generally, these questions are points of departure, planned to elicit more dialogue from each question, with probing and follow-up questions from me as interviewer based on co-researchers responses (Appendix A).

Data Analysis

In grounded theory research, data collection and data analysis can and do inform and focus each other (Charmaz, 2005, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1964; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) outlined the procedure for data analysis in grounded theory.

1. Build rather than test theory
2. Provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data
3. Help the analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena
4. Be systemic and creative simultaneously
5. Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of the theory. (p.13)

Charmaz (2006) advises that a researcher can and should use a more flexible approach when working with a constructivist epistemological approach. The researcher is defining and naming what happens in the interviews from a subjective viewpoint, not pretending to an objective viewpoint (Broido & Manning, 2002).

As recommended by Charmaz (2006) I used the four types of coding procedures in my analysis; initial, focused, axial, and theoretical. I implemented these four types of coding throughout the data collection and analysis process.

I used an initial phase for line by line or segment by segment, (Glaser, 1978) to examine the data line by line and begin to discover the phenomena under investigation. I generated more than 3000 lines in the transcription process and each line was reviewed for emerging codes, in particular searching for “in vivo” (the language of the participants) clues to emerging codes. Codes generated at this stage included “parents”, “dictating punch”, and “fixing things.”

Within the realm of focused coding, I then grouped these initial codes into categories supporting the concepts within the codes. Charmaz (2006) recommends this focused selective phase that uses the code from the first section to sort, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. These processes produced 26 categories including ‘using privilege’ “male identity” and “outcasts”

Charmaz (2006) advocates for a more flexible version of axial coding when conducting constructivist ground theory. I followed this recommendation and explored
relationships not only among a core category and others (as might be done with grounded
theory using a more positivist approach), but among all categories and sub-categories. I 
experimented with relationships with categories, examining how they influence, relate, 
contradict, or supported each other. Within this process, I wrote memos to describe the 
relationships between categories and participants.

These memos became the earliest version of my emerging theory and were shared 
with co-researchers who offered suggestions for changes, rising questions, and 
inaccuracies. This format allowed member checking to take place through the process 
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but 
always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself” (hooks, 1994, 
p.11). This process evolved as it happened, from co-researcher to co-researcher and 
throughout the coding process as well. I tried understanding my co-researchers’ points of 
view, even if I did not agree with them; I interpreted these points of view (Charmaz, 
2006). This validation took place face to face and over email with my co-researchers. 
This process resulted in the first draft of my findings and conclusion. I then shared these 
findings with co-researchers as another member check in the process.

I then used theoretical coding to organize the data once again and tell the co-
researchers’ stories. Each story presented unique and shared aspects of becoming and 
being an ally.

Following grounded theory methodology, I conducted my research using a 
constant comparative approach, undertaking data collection and analysis simultaneously. 
This allowed me to compare all data and allow the data analysis to influence the next
round of interviews and coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I gathered all information for a group coding and themes discovery process. I used constant comparative methods to establish analytic distinctions—looking for similarities and differences, making sequential comparisons, comparing early and later data, and noting if the interviewee held beliefs opposed to or in line with mine (Charmaz, 2006). This additional theoretical coding helped to organize categories back together into a whole (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). Memo writing and a continuous review process enabled me to use current data collection to inform future data collection and analysis.

Finally, I again revisited co-researchers for their input on the developing product; seeking saturation. My goal was to make sure I reached saturation with all co-researcher input, as well as code saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Because interviewing is not a neutral exchange, it involves two people creating the process, it was important to return to the co-researchers to ensure that I accurately represented their viewpoints (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Summary

In this study, I employed grounded theory methodology to explore White male college student’s ally identity development process from a constructivist epistemological paradigm using a social justice theoretical perspective. Expert nominators and key informants nominated co-researchers that could provide in-depth rich information about the process of identifying as an ally at a traditional four-year higher education institution. I interviewed these co-researchers and used line-by-line, categorical, and theoretical coding procedures to develop a better understanding of ally identity development based
in the co-researchers’ experience. I also used the constant comparative method, member-checking, and follow-up conversations with co-researchers to ensure saturation and that my interpretation was consistent with co-researchers experiences.

Throughout this process, I sought a better understanding of ally identity development and understanding for White male students. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the interviews I conducted with student allies, telling their individual stories, and highlighting emerging themes and categories as well as presenting my theory for ally development and conceptualization of identity.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Each co-researcher shared their personal story of how they became allies and how they understand their identity as an ally today. I share participants’ cases in the “voice” of the co-researcher, wrote and interpreted the passages based on our interviews, and each co-researcher reviewed my writing for accuracy. Following the case presentations is my exploration of shared or unique themes and categories. Table 1 identifies each student, their age, and class year. All students agreed to use their actual names in the study. I changed one name to avoid confusion over shared first names.

Table 1

*Student Co-Researchers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Graduate 2010</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>19</td>
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Student Interviews

Nicholas: Change through Personal Action

I got out of college and now sort of decided to dedicate at least the next few years to various causes of social justice and, I mean, moving into an egalitarian community, or I hope to sort of look at my own privilege sort of issues that I have as a White heterosexual male and hopefully tackle a lot of other things, such as inequality of wealth and racism and sexism and that sort of thing.

Nicholas graduated three months before our conversation, working at an upscale food specialty shop (previously an independent coffee shop) two miles down the road from the university. At the time of our interview Nicholas was planning to move to Seattle and live in an intentional community, with self-styled anarchists. These anarchists range in age from 22 (Nicholas will be the youngest) to their mid-forties and work as teachers, graduate students, and counselors. Nicholas will be joining them to live in intentional community in which they share responsibility for the home and the duties of the home, including bringing money in, making meals, and deciding how to best live with a low environmental impact.

Nicholas lumbered into my office for our interview. He is close to 6 foot, and is a thick guy- this sense of thickness is augmented by the items that are always with him, an army or leather jacket, ripped and torn pants, chains hanging from one or the other of these items, and the ink across his arms and legs. The ink led to our initial meeting in 2009. Another staff member introduced us because of a shared interest in tattoo art and in
social justice. We built a relationship in the 2009-2010 school year and our friendship has continued since Nicholas’ graduation. We have never actually sat down and examined Nicholas’s role as a social justice ally. This interview was our opportunity.

*Protests and Class Work*

Nicholas began his journey as an ally in high school and has continued in that role until today. “It essentially all just built on top of each other. Like it got rolling halfway through high school, and it just kept going till where I am now.” His involvement with the annual protest against the School of the Americas (SOA) influenced his development as an ally. He attended the demonstration his junior year with his class to protest the United States government funding of the SOA.

To learn about the existence of this school and that this school, which was funded and run by the U.S. government to train paramilitaries from Central America, and then those paramilitaries used by dictators, right-wing dictators, to suppress any uprising or any sort of organization from peasants and poor and farmers and that sort of thing...it kinda shattered the whole American Dream sort of thing that was going on, and so that was a big sort of eye opener that first time.

The experience affected Nicholas intellectually and emotionally as a high school student. And that also made it hit home a lot more because they would pronounce the ages [at the faux funeral protest] , and it was just like babies and mothers and fathers and brothers and nuns and priests, and the list went on and on and on, and it was just a really sort of heart-wrenching, eye-opening experience for me.
This experience in combination with the classroom work Nicholas was doing led him to be a social justice ally.

Then I think coming back from that [SOA protest] and then being exposed to Liberation Theology at St. X and seeing that these are liberal Catholics….I first started to sort of branch off on my own and become much more interested in social justice issues.

Parents and Teachers

Within this exploration of social justice identity, Nicholas was challenged by his mom’s “traditional” catholic beliefs and separating those beliefs from his own as he became an active justice ally.

When I was younger, when I didn’t really have any of my own sort of independent thoughts, I was told a lot of different things by my mom….And so at the time, you know, I just took it as what it was. But then as I started to form my own opinions and then saw that we are actually not a whole lot alike, it’s just . . . it’s been . . . Trying to talk to her about it [social justice] is difficult without getting into sort of a yelling sort of fight…. And so essentially, the way I try to approach her and the way she approaches me, I think, in the end, is just out of respect, respect but disagreement. And so because she is my mom, confronting her as someone that is really different than me has definitely been a challenge, but there’s the whole love part that I think also plays a role in the whole thing.

Talking and working with his mom, Nicholas has been able to define himself as an ally, while maintaining respect for those that may not identify as an ally, or see issues
differently from the way he does. He leaned on his teachers and professors for conversations about the values he was exploring as a justice ally.

It was like meeting after class and talking about issues that were going on in my life...Like, you know, when I was beginning to question what my mom was telling me and sort of creating confrontations with her, like they sort of took to the time to like talk to me about it after school. And so that was probably the biggest sort of—I don’t know—influence, I guess, in helping to sort of find my way and keep going.

Nicholas learned about liberation theology through religious studies at his Catholic Jesuit High school, and cited this class as an impetus for his ally development. The teaching of liberation theology led him to explore justice issues in general; “I first started to sort of branch off on my own and become much more interested in social justice issues.”

**Ally as Compassion and Privilege Tensions**

When defining his role as an ally, Nicholas spoke about compassion being a key factor for his identity as an ally. “The most important characteristic is to be able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and try and look at it from their viewpoint, because chances are…it’s going to be a lot different for me than it is for them.”

Nicholas also identified his own privilege, and use of that privilege, in his understanding of his role as an ally. Nicholas struggles with his privileges as well as how to implement his role as a justice ally. “As a White straight male, private-school educated, I’m probably one of the least oppressed people in the world.” He went on to
Nicholas was able to identify ways to use his privilege as an ally. “Realizing my position in relation to that type of oppression, whether or not it’s as being oppressed or somehow being tied into oppressor, and then working with whatever said group to help confront that and hopefully change it.” Nicholas notes that addressing White privilege is tough, even defining it is not an easy process. “I guess it’s my belief that, in our current system, that if you’re White, there’s privilege attached to that…But to me, being part of that majority and therefore having this White privilege, it’s sort of invisible to me.” Even while wrestling with White privilege itself Nicholas is advocating for others to enter the struggle with him.

If every single White person in this country realized that they have White privilege and where it comes from and how it affects others, I think it would be a huge deal. So I feel like the biggest thing is realizing that it’s there and that it exists, and then somehow figuring out how to use that to get rid of it.

Challenges and Commitment

Nicholas also encounters challenges identifying and acting as an ally. He reported struggling with his roommates’ and other’s reactions to him being an ally.

Just with my roommates in college, you know, trying to talk (about) issues that were important to me to them. And they’re probably not important to a lot of people, but they just, you know, they didn’t care, they don’t care. And so it was just really frustrating, like little things like that. Or, you know, actually opening
up to someone about your views and then being called, you know, some sort of derogatory name because of those views, because they’re not popular views. Nicholas identified Xavier’s community having preconceived notions about justice work and the people that do it.

You know, you have the sort of perception from a lot of people that like social justice issues and Dorothy Day [former Peace and Justice center on campus] as like a bunch of hippies… and there’s a very sort of negative connotation that the public and Xavier students have with that sort of thing.

Recognizing these challenges, Nicholas still identifies strongly as an ally, even as he exits the relative “safety” of the university setting. He stated, “So to like be comfortable with calling yourself a social justice ally, I think does take some courage and some sort of being comfortable with it.” Nicholas is following his calling.

_Bill: A Friend’s Story_

Because I believe that if the cause that you are aligned with, if it is just, if it is good, if it is something worth fighting for, I see no problem with taking advantage of anything that you have, and that includes privilege, to further that issue, further that fight for the issue. (Bill)

Bill is a junior at Xavier and one the most genuinely friendly and upbeat students I know. I have not worked directly with Bill in the past, but due to some moves on campus my office ended up next to his work space, so we have had the opportunity to interact for the last 6 months. Bill presents a somewhat typical Xavier appearance, close-cropped hair, relaxed style of dress (T-shirt most often) and a general affable manner. In
some ways this appearance, so like that of the majority of White men on campus is deceiving, or rather I should say it deceived or challenged some of my personal notions about White men functioning as social justice allies. Beginning this project I assumed, based on my past experiences, that the students I interviewed who presented themselves most outside the cultural mainstream would have the most to say, or more insights about being an ally. Bill proved me wrong and has done a good deal of reflection and discernment about his role as an ally, and even has particular goals for his role. Bill also challenged me because of his positive attitude. I consider myself the most optimistic cynic I know, but Bill is genuinely a positive person living in a world of sexual harassment and assault, as his role as a social justice ally has been shaped by it. Understandably, it was a friend’s experience as a survivor of sexual assault that propelled Bill on his journey as an ally.

Other co-researchers in the study (Tim, Chris, and Taylor in particular) cited their parents in their ally identity development: the parental roles in ally work themselves or their parent’s exposure of social issues to their children. Bill, like me, did not have these direct experiences or conversations with his parents about justice issues growing up.

My parents tended to . . . not keep us in the shadows, but they were still fairly protective about certain issues, about certain topics, and this was one of them. I mean, it’s not like any parents really sit down and talk about, you know, sexual assault.
A Friend’s Story

Bill was the only co-researcher who identified a particular conversation with a friend as the event that changed his perspectives and led him towards being a justice ally. That conversation, in conjunction with an on-campus event and opportunity, led Bill to his work as an ally today.

The day I found out one of my best friends was a survivor of sexual assault. I believe it was freshman year… I’m still to this day curious why this person told me, but she did, and it kinda changed my outlook on things… And after the hooking-up event [a university sponsored event addressing the sexual culture on Xavier’s campus], which I thought was really good, Xavier Students Against Sexual Assault had a little blurb at the very end that said when their meetings were. I started going.

Hearing the story of the sexual assault of a friend opened Bill’s eyes. This experience of empathy became Bill’s template for ally work. “A social justice ally would be someone who aligns themselves with a certain issue…that you can relate to and that you can, at times, empathize with.” Bill was able to make a personal connection with a victim of oppressive systems, and understand the impacts of privilege systems on an individual with whom he could relate.

Wrestling with Privilege

Bill named his class (upper middle), gender (male) and race (White) privileges and asserted that he had been born into them. “So, you know, there are times where I will have an easier time over someone…who sits a little bit closer to the poverty line than I do
or someone who isn’t White.” While Bill identified being White as a privilege, he also described it as “normal.” When asked if being White impacts his role as an ally Bill shared, “The only way that it does is in the fact that it doesn’t, I think. Because being White, being a male, you’re just normal, if that makes sense.” Bill repeatedly saw White men leading social justice groups. Leadership of social justice groups was a role that fell naturally to White men in Bill’s experience, and a common occurrence.

It’s not surprising when you see a White male on Alliance [LGBTQ group on campus]. It’s just, you know, we’re White guys, it’s what we do. You know what I mean? …it’s just another White guy, you know, stepping forward and pushing another issue. And that seems to always be the case.

Being an Ally, Growing a Pair

It seemed natural for White men, including Bill, to use their privileges to combat inequity in his experience. “What I can do is exploit it [privilege] to the fullest extent….I see no problem with taking advantage of anything that you have, and that includes privilege, to further that issue, further that fight for the issue.” Bill used the masculine peer pressure phrase “grow a pair” in challenging other men to use part of their privilege, their recognized male voice, to take a stand against sexual assault. “So the way I look at it is that can be where the most good can come from, is when guys start growing a pair.”

Bill struggles with the reality of his privilege, but also urges more men to use their privilege to positive results, or to combat the privilege itself. “A lot of times men can do a lot more in this issue just because statistically the majority of sexual assault offenders are
men….I just think in general guys can be taken more seriously, or at least are taken more seriously.”

*Costs of Being an Ally*

Being an active ally has a price as well. Bill has lost friends being an ally “You start drawing lines in friendships….And one of the biggest issues is just having people just flat-out—there’s not too many people that flat-out hate you, but you do get that.”

These lines are drawn when Bill challenges his friends, including confronting their use of language.

When someone says something stupid like “Oh, I just raped that test”…I tend to be that guy that steps in and (says), “Did you really rape that test?... And normally they stop and think, but it tends to pass right through and I’ll hear ‘em saying it again. So I try to keep bringing it up, but it doesn’t always get anywhere. But I try.

Bill identified Xavier as campus that hosts many groups and individuals concerned about different justice issues. In this space, Bill challenges himself to define what his best actions as an ally are for those he seeks to support.

You know, you stand outside screaming something and you’re not going to get anywhere; it’s pointless. You stand outside, you know, passing flyers out; at times, pointless. You stand outside with a microphone and a boom box and you start dancing with a sign, and people will probably pay attention to you.
Though Bill faces challenges as an ally in his personal life, and in trying to be the most effective ally he can be, he continues to define himself as an ally. Being an ally is now simply part of Bill as a person.

What keeps on spurring me and spurring me to keep on working is unfortunately the fact that once your eyes are open to this issue, you start realizing things, you start noticing things, you start picking up on those little side comments, you start being someone who people feel like they can talk to.

*Bobby: Being Present*

Being present means being aware, being awake, being alive to what’s going on around and not being closed-off and closed-minded to the people that you surround yourself with…and knowing the needs and concerns of the people that are in your life, whether they may or may not be aware of that. (Bobby)

Bobby is in his sophomore year at Xavier. I hired Bobby at the work fair on campus in the beginning of his first year at Xavier in 2009 and have been supervising him since, including working together over the summer of 2010 on web related projects. Bobby and I have a strong relationship and I have shared with him that he reminds me of a combination of my sons and younger brother—Bobby has the goofy wit of my brother, and I hope my sons grow into men with the values and work ethic of Bobby. We have a bit of a mutual admiration society happening (or so I believe—I am still his boss after all). Bobby is a loose-limbed person who presents himself as stress free—in some ways his hair is a good illustration of where he is coming from. It is brown and mid-length, seems to know no other length (I cannot recall it longer or cut), grows, and lays in
whatever direction seems to suit it, yet gets the job done—just like Bobby. He is mature for his age, cares for himself and his peers, actively invests in all aspects of his college experience, and is wrestling with what it means to be an identified ally as a White man.

A Slap in the Face

Bobby identified a service trip as having a deep impact on his understanding of the “other.” He travelled to Belize on a service trip during the summer before his senior year in high school. This trip would help lead him towards more work as an ally, to be in solidarity with others. The city he worked in is below sea level, so people have to build their homes on fill, which is often gathered garbage with a 6-inch overlay of dirt. It was here that Bobby first saw a different kind of life, and was able to compare or contrast it to his own experiences.

We built a house for this family that literally had nothing…So, at a lot of places, there was just garbage and filth that came up through the dirt…because it was so rainy and muddy, we took the scraps of wood from the ends of the like 2 x 4’s or whatever, and we used them as like stepping stones on the ground…. We came back after like the second or third day…on the road, Zenobia [6 year old girl] was playing with the blocks….But then we realized that she was playing build-a-blocks… with these blocks that we had used as trash…and I remember remembering when I was like that age, when I was like six or seven, I had a build-a-blocks set…. And seeing her play with it was like a slap in the face to realize… the privilege and the opportunity that I had just because of where I was born, growing up in a middle-class suburban town in Louisville….It was an experience
that you realized how blessed it is to be where you are and you realize because you have all of these opportunities and all of these gifts that have been given to you that you shouldn’t hoard them over and you should share them.

Bobby also shared his exposure to different perspectives in a social problems class during his first year in college. The readings and discussion in this class allowed him to see oppression from the perspective of the oppressed.

And it was one of the most interesting classes because it gave you a perspective on … different “isms” from their perspective…. And just listening to that angle and putting yourself in their shoes, I guess, it was the perspective of the old line: “Walking a mile in their shoes.” … I think the teacher was great in the fact that sometimes you can’t necessarily walk a mile in somebody else’s shoes for the fact that they may not have shoes, and then she took it a step further with saying that “Sometimes you just have to carry someone for a mile,” and I thought that was really, really cool.

Within this metaphor, Bobby was able to identify as the person carrying another person. Bobby works during the summer as a camp counselor, and in addition to working in my office during the school year he also works as a Peer Leader in the office of Student Life, and as a site leader for an Alternative Breaks trip. I was not surprised to hear Bobby immediately gravitate towards the carrier, as opposed to the carried, in this metaphor.

In addition to the high school trip, and the classroom experience in college, Bobby also pointed to his family as having a deep impact on his development as an ally. “But to be honest with you, it really kind of is my mom and my grandparents and my
family and my dad and everybody like who kinda surrounds me.” Bobby described his
grandfather as contradiction, a man who would say racist statements aloud, but who also
risked his job for a Black man who was a friend in the 1970s.

**Being Present**

Being an ally goes beyond language or terminology for Bobby. He repeatedly
described the experience of being an ally in actions, particularly in the acts of solidarity.

Being present and trying not to be arrogant….being aware, being awake, being
alive to what’s going on around and not being closed-off and closed-minded to
the people that you surround yourself with…being present to them, and knowing
the needs and concerns of the people that are in your life, whether they may or
may not be aware of that.

In our conversations, Bobby took a unique approach to the question of being a
social justice ally, deconstructing the idea itself. During the pre-interview, we determined
through conversation that Bobby self-identified as White, male and a social justice ally.
During the interview itself, Bobby shared another perspective on the idea of identity as a
social justice ally.

I’m not maybe defining myself as a social justice ally. I’m really just defining
myself as a person and the fact that there shouldn’t be a need for a social justice
ally, that it’s simply something that people should just act…And the fact that I’m
aware of the fact that I’m a social justice ally, but I’m not consciously thinking
about that on a daily basis, like “I am a social justice ally.”
In a paradox, the term social justice ally for Bobby seemed to restrict his ability to act as an ally. By claiming the label, it seemed that he would then have to conform to an unknown set of expectations, or face others labeled as an ally. Interestingly, Bobby compared this awareness to his understanding of his identity as “White.”

That just being a social justice ally is really just being a person who’s aware of the people around them…. I realize that for like your research and for your dissertation, you have to like identify people as social justice allies, but I’d rather there not have to be that. It’s like what I was saying with like I’m White and I know that I’m White but I’m not consciously aware of that.

Bobby is viewing others as the same and arguing that defining people as allies separates rather than unites. “All people, while they are the same—there are more things that make people the same than make people different.” Bobby believes this to be true for race or for ally definitions. He describes everyone as being the same under their skin, regardless of the skin’s color. Race exists, but recognizing our similarities is more important than recognizing our differences for Bobby. “I remember like saying, “If you ripped off my skin and you shaped it around their body, there wouldn’t really be any difference, that we’re the same sort of person.”

Privileges Sound Horrible

Bobby also struggled with naming privileges, the act of naming them seemed offensive to him. Though he did not want to name them and was uncomfortable doing so, he did. Bobby seemed challenged by tension in his worldview: on one hand, recognizing
that everyone is equal, while at the same time still recognizing that he has more privileges than others, in fact creating an unequal status.

I guess, [what] aggravates me is when you look at the privileges that you have and you’re not aware of them and what can be done with them, and the fact that because of wherever you were put in the hierarchy of life … that you are going to be sadly above somebody. That’s just—I hate to say that’s how things work, but that’s . . . how currently things are structured.

Bobby struggles with White privileges and male privileges. Bobby continues, “I don’t know if it [White identity] really has influenced it [ally work] one way or the other.” He is aware of his privileges, but uncomfortable with them as well. Bobby described being born into a set of privileges and expectations as a male, and expressed discomfort with both.

That being male is portrayed in society—or at least here in America—for the fact that you’re supposed to be a certain way, you’re supposed to act a certain way, but realizing that there’s a lot more to it. Knowing that, I guess, I have some sort of advantages over people, which sounds horrible and which shouldn’t be true but is.

Functioning as an Ally

Bobby finds himself defining himself not as a justice ally, but as a White man with privileges who is uncomfortable discussing or recognizing those privileges.

Recognizing the privileges challenges the worldview he understands and believes in, that
everyone is equal. Bobby is exploring these questions and apparent contradictions in what he sees as a safe and progressive environment, the Xavier Bubble.

Outside of campus, as a whole, may not necessarily be at that point where they accept homosexuals, and being someone who does accept may put you in the minority; but here at Xavier, it’s the opposite: The people who aren’t accepting are the ones who are in the minority, and the people who are accepting are the ones who are in the majority. … that it’s easy to do it at Xavier, and it’s easy to do it in the Bubble of our campus.

As Bobby wrestles with the questions of an ally identity, he holds his basic definition close, simply being there for others.

I think is kind of the building block of what it is to sort of be an ally, to be someone for somebody else, that you’re not just there, you know, for being present to them, but you’re there to realize that they’re no different from you.

_Sammy: This Kills Fascists_

Sammy is a red-bearded, ponytail wearing, shoeless senior at Xavier affiliated with justice clubs at the university. Sammy’s appearance is the epitome of the typical White men who work in this area, a hippie on Xavier’s conservative campus, declaring his leftist leanings in words, deeds, and appearances. His guitar case has a homemade sticker inspired by Woody Guthrie declaring “This kills fascists.” Sammy and I bonded over a discussion of the Woody Guthrie poster in my office, homage to what Woody calls good songs. Sammy has a particular calling for working with third world cultures and Catholic Social Teachings. He started identifying as a social justice ally in high school
after a classes focusing on the Catholic call to social justice, and has continued this journey through his college years. While other co-researchers have moved away from politics, Sammy is in them—having run for office in November 2010 and making plans to work in a politics related field after graduation.

Class and Clubs

Sammy broadened his perspectives on Catholicism and justice during his senior year in high school when he learned about the Catholic Church’s comment to social justice. It was through class, not church, that Sammy became aware of the teachings that would help guide him to becoming an ally.

Senior year is when I first learned about Catholic social teaching. I’d been at Catholic school since kindergarten. It was like my thirteenth year of Catholic school, and they started mentioning it. I’m like, “What? This is cool. Why didn’t anybody say anything?”

Sammy’s development as an ally continued through classroom interactions and club membership in college. A professor, who encouraged student participation in class, including inclusive class discussion of readings and current events, was something outside of Sammy’s definition of traditional teacher/student experience when he entered college. Sammy noted that this class, Christian Doctrine, offered him new perspectives as a justice ally. “We did like Karl Rahner, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, and Vatican II. So like all those were sort of looking at the different perspectives, especially from, you know, poor/marginalized people, of how they viewed theology.” These
perspectives, shared from an educational, acknowledged authority position, allowed Sammy more entry in social justice circles.

Sammy also stated that the clubs and organizations for students interested in social justice and service at Xavier propelled him on his path to calling himself an ally, including Students for Economic Justice, Fair Trade, and Voices of Solidarity (focusing on Central and South America justice issues). While these clubs and activities were important to Sammy, particularly during his sophomore and junior year, as a senior he asserted that he finds less worth in their activities in terms of trying to meet his social justice goals. “Well, let’s go a little deeper.” Like it’s not just, you know, show up and plan a fundraiser for Fair Trade stuff.” Sammy shared that he is looking for that next step, beyond college clubs. Sammy’s involvement in clubs helped him develop as ally, particularly after he realized that for him the club focus was not so much on what the club could accomplish, but how that space was preparing him and others for future ally opportunities and challenges.

I guess now that I’m almost out of college and looking back a little bit, I’m like, “yeah, it seems like student groups are a lot about helping you get ready for like the later, and they don’t really have as big of an effect as I maybe thought they might in like the larger world….I think the importance of that is really having that experience doing that gets you ready for maybe doing something bigger later more so than that Students for Economic Justice is going to really change a whole lot itself.
Choosing Compassion

As Sammy changes and redefines his role as an ally, he adheres to some basic definitions of what it means to be an ally. “Someone who hasn’t sort of like grown up or been raised in whatever form of oppression or marginalization that they’re helping to advocate against…they have chosen to help work against it anyway.” Sammy includes within this definition the role of compassion as the defining characteristic.

You have to be compassionate. You have to, in some way, look at somebody and go, “You know, I haven’t experienced that, but I can see why that’s bad and that’s something that needs to be changed.” You need to be able to look past just like your own personal interest or experiences and try to empathize with people who have experienced something different.

Struggling with Naming Privilege

Looking past himself and to others has allowed Sammy to examine some of his own privileges as an ally, though he does not see all parts of his identity as privileged. Sammy did not see many advantages to being a man, nor did he define power and privilege to his gender in particular. Sammy saw male privilege as manifesting later in life, citing pay discrepancies in the work place, but not naming any discrepancies in his current environment. Sammy believes that White is an experience different from others, but is not quite sure how it is different.

Being White there’s definitely a lot of things that I don’t experience that somebody even maybe of a similar economic class might’ve gone through…I don’t know. I think it’s mostly just minor things that, you know, somebody else
who—you know, if somebody had a similar family, middle class in the suburbs, but were Black, you know, they probably wouldn’t have maybe a vastly different life, but just some little experiences.

While Sammy saw little male privilege currently in his life, and could not directly describe any White privilege, he still recognized that he does occupy a unique role as a privileged ally. He recognized and named his privilege when reflecting on college opportunities he has experienced.

I was like kinda struggling with this….The best I’ve come up with so far is that basically like I was raised around White middle class people, like been at private schools my whole life….And then I kinda look at other people and go, “Oh.” Like they don’t even have these opportunities at all.

Within this space, Sammy seeks to manage his privilege, naming that management as a goal and a challenge. “Try not to take it [privilege] for granted. Recognizing that yes, I have these opportunities and other people don’t, and try to, I guess, make good use of them. What good use is sometimes is a struggle.” Sammy also identified challenges being a White male ally.

I guess sometimes I kinda think like I am a straight White middle class man, what gives me the right to sort of like go in and try to be like, “Oh man, you guys, you gotta get these things together.”

Sammy is trying to be the best ally he can be as he works to understand his multiple identities, White, male, and ally. He is currently working towards being an ally,
but like many of us, remains confused as to what the best and most appropriate steps are to reach that goal.

*Michael: Service as Justice*

Michael is an active pre-med junior at Xavier, involved in the Xavier Players (Theater) and serving on the Alternative Breaks (AB) Board. AB is a student directed club that sends 24 service trips around the country and the world over spring break and summer, and is a club that I advise. Michael and I met his sophomore year in 2009 when he was invited to join the club as the youngest member of the board. In the course of this interview, I got to know Michael better and gained a deeper understanding of his service background and identity as a social justice ally. Michael is also heavily involved in the theatre program at Xavier as a leader and it shows—he speaks with confidence and often functions as a de facto leader on the AB board. Michael is dark haired and presents as a typical Xavier student; looking at him you not be aware of his commitment to social justice through service. He traced his involvement back to the earliest stage of life of any of the co-researchers as he spoke about his involvement in community service in junior high and continued his narrative through his current position on the AB board.

*Community Service*

Michael began his life of service at his Catholic junior high by joining the Kettering Youth Council.

In like junior high, the council I was on where I was like the community service chair, so I was planning all these events, and I think that’s kinda when I started
noticing like “Wow, there really is a need for a lot of this to go on,” and then moving into like high school with key club and things like that.

Faith traditions were driving forces for Michaels’s entire educational experience. “I went to a Catholic kindergarten, Catholic elementary school, a private college preparatory Catholic academy, moving on to the private university.” This education continued through his senior year in high school. “[A teacher] who was just phenomenal… he tried to really make us aware of so many issues. We would do current events and social justice every day….I guess that whole awareness factor I was talking to, [he] really pushed that. “

In addition to his pre-college school experiences, Michael’s work and home life influenced his development as an ally. “My parents always stressed the importance of doing service projects together as a family…and how it’s important to share your resources both financially and your time… with others who could use your help in some way.” He also cited his position working as lifeguard with disabled students as a turning point in his development as an ally during high school. “Just because somebody doesn’t have full use of their legs or…has a cognitive delay doesn’t mean they’re living on any different level than I am…we’re so much more similar than I guess I thought we would be.”

Entering college Michael took advantage of a number of opportunities that have influenced his growth as an active ally in and out of the classroom. He recently completed a course at Xavier, Ethics and AIDS, that exposed him to the ally work he could do as a doctor, through programs like Doctors without Borders and medical
missions. Both this class and the class his senior year of high school helped broaden his perspectives and describe paths he could take as an ally.

I’ve kind of seen, you know, what I can do with that besides just the daily life of, you know, working at a hospital or practice or whatnot, but kind of the outreach you could do there, too. So I think those two classes have probably been really influential, actually.

Michael’s involvement in the Alternative Breaks club at Xavier had a large impact on his identification as ally, raising his awareness of the issues of oppression happening around him.

I think that like just making yourself experience how difficult other people are living or have these big difficulties in their life, and trying to understand the magnitude of it….And so I think that awareness is key because that’s really where everything stems from….But just becoming aware, I think, and then trying to get other people to become aware, kind of like the idea of Alternative Breaks, like sparking a change, I think that is really the biggest and most important aspect or quality.

Ally identity development is not always the result of a “positive” experience. Michael described how his Alternative Break trip challenged his ideas about being an ally.

My freshman year when I went on the Charlotte trip and we were working in like a welfare-subsidized lunch program for elderly people….I remember just feeling like really out of place, like these people weren’t charity cases…. A lot of the
people that were actually coming to the program were just kinda like “Why are you here? We were fine without you.”…An experience where I was trying to be a social justice ally, I guess, but it wasn’t really . . . The people that I was working with didn’t really feel like they needed you.

Understanding Others

Understanding himself as an ally meant understanding others. Michael emphasized education and understanding of the systems that contribute to social injustice and inequity. “I think that like just making yourself experience how difficult other people are living or have these big difficulties in their life, and trying to understand the magnitude of it.” He went to claim that allies recognize issues in the world and work to change them. “I think someone who’s is a social justice ally realizes that those problems exist …why they occur and then also does their best to do their part to change those practices and thoughts and ideas and processes.”

Michael recognized that part of being an ally involves wrestling with one’s own privileges. He noted that his privilege was achieved through the luck of his birth.”I would say privilege results from just the luck of being born into a family.” Michael struggled with naming White privilege and being an ally in that space.

I think that being White, as bad as it seems to say, I think it is, in many instances, a privilege. It’s not fair, it’s not right, but there are just certain situations where that is unfortunately how society works…it’s almost like being White, you feel like there are so many problems you don’t have that other races do seem to have or other cultures seem to have.
Michael, like other co-researchers also noted that there are more women than men who define themselves as allies, or who do service work. Michael stated that this was because of common gender roles, and it points to a need for males to work against their own gender’s stereotypes.

It seems to be so dominated by girls, and I’ve never really understood why that is.

I think it might be sort of a gender-roles issue, you know, where the male is just fending for himself and blah blah blah, and the female is seen as more compassionate or caring or nurturing. . . . it’s definitely harder [as a male ally].

*Being Accepted*

Michael also encountered challenges defining himself as a White male ally. He noted that he is both inside and outside the system he is working to change.

It’s because you realize the problem is there; you know that it’s really unfair, it’s really messed up, it shouldn’t be that way, you know something is wrong; but you’re looking at it from the outside, so it’s harder to become like accepted as someone on the inside.

Michael has not let this challenge turn him away from his work as an ally. He functions best as a justice ally currently through his service work (AB) and sees himself continuing service work in the future as a doctor. In addition, Michael’s experiences lead him to seek others’ support and commitment to social justice, in an appropriate way.

You should at least present them [other people] with the material [on justice]; not harass them with it, but let them know that, you know, “This situation exists” or
“There is this problem.” And then they become a social justice ally themselves later down the road, you never know.

Chris: Considered Reflection

When Chris, a senior at Xavier entered my office in the fall of 2010, his black hair was long, spilling almost to his shoulders. It would soon be short again, cropped to his scalp, as Chris continued his annual participation in Locks of Love, repeatedly growing his hair, and then shaving it and donating to children with long-term illnesses. Chris has been an acquaintance of mine through our shared involvement in the Office of Peace and Justice, but we had few conversations prior to our interview, an interview that lasted twice as long as any other I conducted. Chris spoke with me about his ally involvement, and his reflections on masculinity and what his roles mean to him. He produced his journal during the interview and was kind enough to share some of his writing with me. Chris is a student who has participated in a number of opportunities offered in both his high school and college career and used these opportunities to consider, repeatedly, his role. We concluded our interview; we spoke for another 30 minutes, and had lunch later that week and repeatedly since then. Through this project, we have been able to develop a relationship of mutual support as allies and as men.

Great Power and Great Responsibility

Chris grew up in a home that emphasized service to others. His role as an ally began early, as his family purposefully shared the role of serving others with him. “Before Spider Man came out with the ‘With great power comes great responsibility,’” my dad said, “To those who are given much, much is expected.”’ Chris’ family taught
him the value of thinking outside himself, an ally trait. “Just the giving, the thinking outside of yourself, you know, love…I guess not selfishness, trying to avoid selfishness.”

Chris’ dad purposefully gave him experiences in other’s poverty, shaping who he is today. During his sophomore year in high school, his dad took him to Haiti on an annual service trip.

The fact that that was a priority for my dad whenever, you know, you’re growing up, you’re becoming who you are, you know, he wants to remind you: “Hey, look. Even though you’re at this prestigious high school that, you know, we’re paying more than some people make in a lifetime for you to go there, remember that’s not the whole world…. But yeah, I think that the fact that that was a priority, that was something that he wanted to instill, something he wanted to make evident.

In addition to learning from his father as a role model, Chris also reflected that this trip changed his perspectives in general. “It was one of the first experiences I had of like being outside the country and seeing….And I don’t know if I had all the tools [to process the experience]….But just kind of learning what it’s like to be a minority.” This experience with his father transformed Chris’s high school experience, as he felt called to delving deeper into poverty and global issues.

I ended up being really fortunate and running into a buddy [in high school] who wanted to start a mission trip down to Mexico where we could go build houses…..And I think this was better because it was like meeting the people and
like actually interacting with them as opposed to just seeing people or having people wanting to like buy stuff from you.

Within his high school career, Chris was able to move from a place outside of poverty to a shared experience, solidarity with those different from him.

These experiences before college influenced Chris’ college choices, resulting in his attendance at Xavier. He came specifically to the university to take part in a live-in semester learning project in an economically challenged area of the city. During his senior year of high school, he took part in a similar project in his home town of St. Louis by working in East St. Louis for a month. Chris described looking for answers in these experiences, searching for the reasons these areas are called ”dangerous” and why he has always been advised not to go to these areas. Chris entered college actively exploring his identity and the privileges he was born with in his family.

Chris found that in college class work challenged his perspectives. He described this experience as being “cracked”; classes, including ecofeminism, advanced his personal identity development as class work and discussions challenged earlier ways of thinking. Being exposed to ideas that challenged earlier ways of thinking, and finding that he agreed with these new perspectives challenged Chris. As he discovered “new” answers, Chris came to understand that he didn’t “have all the answers”. He described being on the right path to success as he entered college and discovering that he might have more than one choice to reach “success.”

The first point where that cracked was, I think, that semester where I had that class….you know, like this isn’t all legit, like this isn’t all right and truth and
perfectly put together, like it’s not perfection anymore? … But I think that the larger crack was like the one where it was like “I’m not perfectly confident, you know, I’m not righteous,” you know?

Chris also cited the importance of friends and family as he went through educational and experiential learning.

We [friend at Xavier, Austin] went down to Over-the-Rhine together and we were constantly trying to bounce off our experiences, like “We’re recognizing the disparity.” …we tried to take a history seminar together that was called Race, Reparations and Reform, … we were constantly questioning, we were constantly asking questions as opposed to necessarily like try to find the answer and move on to get on with our lives.

Friends and family, in combination with exposure to poverty and people different from him, as well as coursework, led Chris to be the ally he is today.

*The Dictating Punch and the Maintenance of Privilege*

Chris described being an ally as changing and shaping his own behavior and interactions with the world around him.

I would say that actively in my being an ally it is more in conversations and a personal building and developing a personal awareness… trying to question even my own inclinations to judge people, to stereotype people, you know, and trying to get rid of those things.

Chris repeatedly described questioning himself, his actions, and his thoughts. Being a justice ally was about exploring his interior self in relation to the world around him. Chris
wondered about comforts in regards to privilege and what “things” we can give up to better allies to others. “I think it’s going to have come back to the balance … And it’s all about what comforts are you going to give up, you know? And what some just luxuries you’re going to give up.” Within this questioning framework Chris identified his privileges as have been given, not earned. “Certainly not something you earn… It’s something that you are, unbeknownst to you, just given.” Chris spoke about being born into privilege and maintaining privilege, and that as White men, other people of privilege expect us to support our privilege. By being justice allies, we are not working to support privilege—this leads to conflict. “You know, it’s a level of security…I think it would be a side effect of privilege, maybe. The maintenance of privilege. But it all started with the same battle [creating privilege].”

Chris went on to describe power and privilege exercised through everyday male violence, using his own phrase, the “dictating punch.”

So, the inclination to go for that dictating punch, either it’s violent or insult or disregard, that just by nothing else but power elevates you over the person. So you’re like, “Okay, good. My personhood is restored again. My manhood is restored again. Not because I am full in who I am and who I think I am, but it’s that you’re below me.” I know this has like a lot to do with like this conversation right now, whenever we’re talking about being a White male, you know, and how historically, that is what goes on.

Through his use of journaling and constant reflection, Chris was able to identify causes of, and threats to, privilege.
Chris spoke about privilege in general, and spoke about the challenges of operating as a male ally. He also identified the fact that his White race gives him particular privileges and experience. “That our reality as White people is not the reality for everyone and that, you know, there are certain privileges that are unrecognized.” Challenges for Chris as an ally include wrestling with his identities as a White man and determining his role. He identified how being a White man has both helped and hurt him.

I’m in a point of flux because at one point in time I really thought that being White was the key… because I’m in a position of privilege, I’m in a position of power, I’m in a position of influence….I was going to be… someone who’d have to lead the way, you know, to form this reconciliation, you know, and the ideal like “I’m going to fix everything” kind of mindset. But just recently, I was talking to a friend who’s homosexual, and she, you know, is adamant about the need for people in the situation of oppression leading their own revolution, you know, and causing the change like from their position of, you know, a minority, in a way. The tension Chris describes here surfaced throughout the interviews—students asking themselves what their role is as an ally.

Though these struggles are real, Chris points out that there are not many areas where others can oppress White men, particularly if they are straight. Chris stated, “At this point in time, I am abled, White, young, male who is seeking to be a man,
heterosexual…. Yes, people can hate me, can have like prejudice against me…[but] there’s not many levers, you know, that people can really pull me down.”

Chris identified being an ally as an act of courage. He pointed out, “I ended up defining the biggest danger is that like whenever we talk about this person, this man that we want to be, we’re exposing ourselves, and whenever you expose yourself, that’s vulnerable, a position of vulnerability.” Chris continues to expose himself, to be vulnerable in this work. Once Chris got started on the path to social justice work, he could not stop. “I’ve found that once you get on that path of giving… you find out that you receive a lot…you just start figuring out, “Well, who else can I give to? Who else can I give to? Who needs giving?”

Brian: Multiple Identities

Because people don’t know [my] background, so they may not know where I live or they may not know the different experiences I’ve had. (Brian)

I met Brian, a junior, in 2010 at the Summer Service Program at Xavier University. Brian volunteered at the Holocaust Center and lived in community with 20 other summer service students. The summer staff member recommended Brian for my research name with me and unlike the other two students from the program, Brian did not return my email. I was surprised by this as we had spoken earlier in the summer about the project and he expressed genuine interest. Later, when I saw Brian in person I inquired about his interest. Brian expressed concern that he could not or should not participate in the research because had heard from others that I was interviewing straight White men, and that that as a gay White man I could not interview him as ally. We discussed his role
as a social justice ally and determined that while part of his identity is a target identity, he also uses his privileged identities in ally roles for others. Brian presented a unique perspective in these multiple roles, gaining and losing voice as an ally depending on which identity is foremost in his or others’ understandings of him as an ally/activist.

Brian arrived in my office comfortable, wearing a t-shirt, thick black glasses, unshaven, his hair sticking out at odd angles. While other co-researchers claimed to be LGBTQ allies, Brian stated that although he had met supportive people at Xavier, friends and acquaintances who were very comfortable with gay people, he did not know any actual allies, straight men who stood up for and with him. I explained to Brian my self-identification as ally on campus, and shared examples of being an ally to help establish trust in our relationship.

*Multiple Paths to Ally Identity*

Brian began his journey as ally in his home, citing his mother’s choice to stay in a neighborhood that was changing. Brian identified his family’s class status as upper middle class, but the area where he lived was morphing into a lower class neighborhood. His family had historically lived in the house where he grew up, and his mother refused to move because of changing demographics around her home.

Because of her choice of where to live, but her choice of also trying to bring me up to recognize the privilege I have but also see how it should be used… she tried to instill that in me: that even though I may go to private institutions and have a lot more privilege than other people that I’m not better than other people.
Brian was impacted by his mother’s work on social justice issues; he states that one of the biggest influences on his development as an ally was his mother.

Brian also cited class work in college and co-curricular experiences at Xavier that influenced his development as an ally. Political Philosophy, a class Brian took in Europe over a summer broadened his perspectives and allowed him to see issues from other viewpoints, including different culture’s views of each other. It allowed Brian to understand perspectives outside his own reality. Religious classes, including Eastern Orthodox Church and Islam, also widened Brian’s perspectives. “I can work with others and kind of see them as the same and kinda speak for them, if needed, but let them speak for themselves, too.” Brian also listed his involvement on an Alternative Break trip as one that gave him additional understanding of other people’s life experiences.

Brian’s involvement in Summer Service was pivotal for his identification as an ally. “I would say defining myself was this summer, actually seeing that I was an ally. Before that, I didn’t realize that I was an ally.” Brian pointed to an increased understanding of language and terms as an informative step on his path through his work at the Holocaust Center and education sessions in the program. “We did a lot of different reflections and we had a lot of different talks, and so that prompted me realizing I was an ally. And then at my job, too, we talked about what an ally was.” While Brian was beginning to function as an ally in college, it was not until he had an understanding of the theoretical concepts about being an ally that he chose to label himself as an ally.
Solidarity

Brian identified with solidarity as the crux of being a good justice ally. “[Being an ally] is not only helping others but kinda being with them through it. So it’s not just like helping others; you’re kinda in the struggle, I guess, so I would say solidarity with others.” Brian underlined this approach to being an ally when he spoke about solidarity. “I think solidarity is a broad definition and can be described in many different ways, but I think it’s not fighting for others but fighting with others and helping others and struggling through the issues with them.” Action and being with the other were key aspects of Brian’s definition of himself as an ally. He wrestles with voice in this space, bringing his own and giving others the space for theirs. His goal as an ally is:

To make sure that your voice is not the only voice that’s heard; even if you’re fighting for a person or for the group, to make sure that their voice is still present; even if you do have to kind of be the one to shout out to be heard, make sure that they’re seen and they’re present . . . and to just keep learning.

Brian is also working to use his male privilege to end privilege by recognizing and identifying it, and then using the privilege to work against oppression. “Being male… I guess, the privileged class, so I think it gives me more of a voice to speak out. I think people listen more because, in America, people listen to males more than they listen maybe to females.” Brian is uncomfortable with having these privileges, and seemed uncomfortable having to communicate them.
People Listen More, or Less

Brian’s identity as a gay man affects his identity as an ally. Brian was hesitant in the interview to begin speaking about being gay, not because of his reluctance to speak about his identity, but because he did not know if it was appropriate for the interview. We discussed that being gay is part of his identity that it only made sense to discuss it in light of being an ally. “I feel like I have less of a problem with this [privileged identities] because I am gay, so people do listen to me more because they think I have something to say, they think I’ve been through the same things.” Brian noted that when he presents as only privileged, White, male, upper-middle class he finds more challenges in entering target groups, an experience similar to the description of other White males in the research. In his identity as an ally, his identity as a gay man often functions as an asset. “Because I’m part of a target group, that doesn’t happen as much [rejection], I feel like that doesn’t really happen for me; people are interested in what I have to say, even if it’s not on my target-group issue.” On the other hand, unsurprisingly, Brian’s gay identity also has negative impacts on his work as an ally, particularly at Xavier.

At Xavier, I feel like sometimes it completely shuts the conversation down if people know I’m gay. So I wait. Even this summer with my group, I waited to say I was gay. Because people may think you’re gay—or think I’m gay—or have views, but until you actually say the words, it’s different….Because for me, if I say I’m gay, in some people’s minds, it completely shuts their views down, they don’t listen anymore.
Depending on the time and space, Brian finds his target identity is part of his ally identity, and sometimes it is outside that role.

*Different Roles*

Brian knows that White males present in a particular way to target groups. “But they [others] think, ‘Why can you speak on an issue you’re not necessarily related with or you haven’t come from. If you’re upper-class White male, how do you know about different things?’” Brian spoke about dealing with this challenge and the fact that people respond differently once they know he is gay. He had similar experiences working with lower income communities at home; in his home town but feels uncomfortable in low-income communities outside of it. He shared that others only identify him as a White male, and feels the need to prove himself to be accepted. Again, this response is dependent on people’s awareness of his identities.

I feel like for a lot of White males, at least what I view it as, people are like “Ugh, another person just speaking over and over again. They don’t really know what they’re talking about.” But because I’m part of a target group, that doesn’t happen as much, I feel like that doesn’t really happen for me; people are interested in what I have to say, even if it’s not on my target-group issue.

While acknowledging his target identity as a gay man, Brian also recognizes that he still operates much of the time in a place of privilege in regards to gender, race, and socio-economic class. Brian reaches out and asks others for help as he recognizes how easy it for him to rest on his privileges.
I think what really helps me is to have kinda people knock me down a little sometimes, because I think I do... forget that I’m so privileged. I think sometimes it’s easy on a day-to-day basis, especially at Xavier University, to forget how privileged we are to even be in a classroom.

Brian has chosen to operate with all parts of his identity is in his experience at Xavier, target and privileged spaces alike, and is trying to use these different parts of himself to support each other and better battle social injustice in general as an ally.

*Taylor: Because We Should*

Taylor is a junior at Xavier University, and was the only student I spoke with that attended public high school. Taylor serves on the Alternative Breaks Board as our financial chair, and while we have periodically seen each other on Xavier’s small campus, it was only after this interview that we began to get to know each other. Taylor is a young White accounting major, and is active in social justice on the campus and in the community. During the summer of 2009, Taylor participated in the Summer Service Program, living in community and volunteering at the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Taylor held a job during the summer of 2010 at Bush Gardens, Virginia—one of the few co-researchers who either held a job or referred to it during our interview. Taylor is also one of the most self-aware and confident students that I have had the pleasure to work with. He is not afraid or hesitant to share his opinions or expectations with other students or staff, excels in school and co-curricular work, and holds high expectations for himself.
Give Back

Growing up, Taylor’s mom taught him that being an ally is simply what one does. “Her doing that work [at the YWCA battered women’s shelter]….It… let me know…this is something you need to do: give back. You know, it’s…what you do.” He watched his mother function as a justice ally and actively choose to follow the path she blazed for him. “So going there [battered women’s shelter], it’s been a good experience just to learn, talk to the people, and just see people from a different perspective. So I’d say my mom is someone who’s kinda helped me with that.” Taylor stressed that while his mom helped him on the path, he also has invested a lot of his own time educating himself about social justice issues, and that ultimately has created his own role as a justice ally. Taylor’s home life and father also influenced his development as an ally today. His dad shaped his perception of the world and gender roles.

I grew up in a household where my mother was the primary breadwinner, Dad stayed home a lot with us; he worked at home. So I just grew up with a different kind of male stereotype….I saw Mom and Dad contributing evenly to the family. Taylor grew up with two role models challenging gender stereotypes and acting as justice allies.

Equity

Taylor’s conception of an ally emphasizes helping others as they would like to be helped. “Equity, you know, people want to be treated like they want to be treated; not necessarily equal but how they want to be treated.” Taylor also stressed examining himself as part of the role of being an ally.
To me, that [being an ally] means two things. One (is) looking at my own actions and how those affect everyone around me; …then how I can use my actions to help somebody or just to be a better person, if you will. So it’s looking at myself internally and then how can I help solve a problem that’s external that I usually wouldn’t interact with or I wouldn’t have any control over, but I can if I choose to.

Taylor spoke about trying to understand what others need, not what he might think they need when he functions as an ally. Through his experience in the Summer Service Program he was exposed to concerns and challenges of the blind population in Cincinnati. In this role, Taylor came to understand others’ perspectives, and to define himself fully as an ally.

I was initially very scared, I was nervous to work with them; I didn’t want to offend anybody. That was my biggest fear. … Once I realized, you know, “Okay, these people are like everybody else, these kids are great,” you know, and like “What are the injustices that they have in their life that prevent them from doing something, or why does that exist?” …I started like seeing things like “Hey, there’s no Braille on this sign” … Just as an example of one subset of my life that I just started to work on. So it started about two years ago when I was thrown into a situation where I was kinda forced to be an ally. You know, I was there to protect those kids; that was my job.
Hard Work

Taylor did not see many advantages to being a White man, nor did he define power and privilege to his gender in particular. Taylor shared that he didn’t hold sexist views, but did not comment on particular privileges or advantages he might hold as a man.” I am a male, I understand I have the privileges and stuff like that; but it’s also for me like well, I’m a male, but also a woman can do the exact same things.” Taylor expressed the belief that male privilege enters later in life, citing discrepancies in the work place, but not naming any discrepancies in his current environment. Taylor claimed his White privilege, but also noted that he has “backed it up by hard work.”

I just don’t really see anything that makes a difference for me. I understand I’m White and I know there are privileges for it, and I like to think that yeah, maybe I’ve received some of those privileges in my life, but I’ve also backed them up with hard work…. But being White, you know, I know it affects me, but it’s not like something I think about constantly or something I focus on all the time. Taylor spoke about having privileges, but seemed unaware of what those particular privileges might be. Taylor was frustrated answering the questions about race. “And, you know, other reasons that I’m affected by my color, but . . . (sigh) Again, it’s just not something that I normally think about or it’s something I put a lot of emphasis on”

Always Growing

Taylor noted the tension between “helping” people and not stepping on toes, of being respectful, but not so hands-off that your presence is no longer valuable.
You don’t want to seem like “Oh, you’re that guy up there who can do and get whatever they want and then you’re trying just to help out somebody who you don’t think can do it themselves.” So you don’t want to seem like someone who’s not appreciative, who doesn’t care what other people have to offer and like “Oh, I can help you, I’ll be the one to do it… So I just think people thinking of you as someone who’s genuine and not just trying to do it because you can.

Taylor does not want to offend others he is working with, but also does not want to waste his time or others’ time. This tension is one of his main questions around his ally identity: What is his role supposed to be? Within this space, Taylor was also able to recognize that he is just beginning this journey as an ally and still has much to learn. The willingness to change, and openness to growth, is also a key part of Taylor’s identity as an ally.

I think always learning and always trying new experiences is something important. Because obviously I’m only 20 years old, you know, I haven’t lived that long in comparison…. Because there are things now that I didn’t know a year ago that I would have been dead-set on last year….And now, of course I’ve changed that, you know, new things have come about. So I think always accepting and always growing [aspects of being an ally].

*Tim: Recognizing Privilege*

Tim is a junior, originally from Tennessee and has been involved in Peace and Justice Programs at Xavier for the last couple of years. He also participated in the Summer Service Program in 2010. My colleagues and I know Tim as a student who is often quiet, but offers great insight when he speaks. He also occupies a unique role as a
quiet leader—other students respond to Tim and he often takes this lead as a social justice ally. More often than not, leadership roles on campus fall to the loudest or most charismatic of students in the group. Tim stands out because the leadership role falls to him based on his quiet self-assurance. Tim serves on the board of Alternative Breaks and also occupies a unique role in his studies, as one of four men in the occupational therapy program at Xavier.

Do Something Nice for Someone Today

Tim’s parents’ service involvement influenced his identity as an ally. They were involved in the muscular dystrophy camp where his dad worked. “Just the way they’ve raised [me] and the values they’ve instilled in me kinda like showed me like what it means to be an ally before I actually knew what the term meant.” Tim’s dad in particular shaped how Tim interacts with the world.

My dad every morning for 12 years… the last thing he said as I was walking out the door was “Do something nice for someone today.”…And so my dad and mom have always… done a lot with service but also social justice. They like the idea of not faith alone but more like faith in action.

Classroom opportunities in high school and college have also influenced Tim’s development as a justice ally. Through a class in high school, Exceptional Learner, Tim continued on his path towards becoming an ally in his own terms. He was partnered with a fellow student Will, who has Down Syndrome, sharing locker space and classroom time. Will was developing job skills in the class while Tim gained experience working with people with disabilities. “That was the first time—that was when I really knew that I
wanted to do that kind of thing for the rest of my life.” Tim then began to define himself as an ally in high school, drawing on his parents’ influence, but defining his own space.

It was my first experience on my own, like not with my parents, to see that, kind of, and make my own decisions. So I guess I would call that like the first time I really would have shown that I was an ally, because I was choosing to do that and it wasn’t with the help of my parents doing it….That was probably the first time I defined myself as an ally, in high school.

Similar experiences continued in classrooms at Xavier as Tim found references to social justice in all his classes.

At Xavier, pretty much everything, like all the classes, I feel like that Jesuit undertone of social justice is always there in every class. Even the ones that are not necessarily related directly to those things…the questions I never asked before were kind of brought up in that class[the Challenge of Peace] that really started to make me think and started making me want to learn more, read more. So that was kind of where it sparked my real interest.

Tim was able to combine his home life, high school experiences, and college coursework into an integrated definition of his role as an ally.

*Knowing your Own Limits*

Tim noted that his first step in being an ally was self-awareness: “So I think being aware of the privileges you have and don’t have are very important—like the first step in being an ally for other people is just knowing your own limits and things.” Tim notes that both his gender and race have given him privileges others do not have. “Being a
White privileged male means that when I walk into a room, people start describing me by other things than being White and being male.” Tim understands being an ally as recognizing one’s privilege, and then leveraging that privilege to assist others who lack privilege.

I think, to me, an ally is recognizing that you do have privilege….so that you’re going to be able to use it effectively, but also understanding that you can’t know everything about an issue because you don’t experience it daily. So I think it’s very important to realize that both you have that privilege but also that you don’t understand everything about someone else. (Tim)

Being aware of his own privileges also means Tim wrestles with these privileges as he tries to function as an effective ally. Tim shared that he is still struggling to understand race and White privilege, as his entire experience has been one of “White and other.” “It’s hard to separate that other [people of color] into like the different things that it is, just because I’ve always been told, “You’re White, and this is what everyone else is.” While dealing with these concerns as an ally, Tim is also aware that others may doubt his intentions or his abilities.

I think it’s really easy [for target groups] to say, “Oh, you don’t understand.” And I don’t. … I think that it’s really easy for someone who doesn’t necessarily have the same privilege as I have to like count me off as being some self-righteous White guy who wants to just do something nice… and I think it’s really hard to get past that, to the idea that you do want to care and do want to be an ally and it’s not just so you look good as a White person.
Tim also highlighted some challenges that are a product of his gender. While being male offers privileges, Tim shared that it also created obstacles for him as an ally.

Being male alone just makes it harder because people don’t think that you can be like compassionate…like you’re not supposed to do that….People think it’s strange to show those kinds of feelings and emotions for like other people, especially people that aren’t the same as you.

Overwhelmed

Tim can be overwhelmed as an ally because he wants to “fix the problems,” he is looking for solutions. He is challenged in class when he repeatedly hears that he is part of the problem, “[We hear] of all the problems; and being a White male is kind of …you’re probably the reason that they’re [social injustices] all around.” Target groups may label Tim as part of the problem as he strives to be part of the solution. This dual role, in combination with an understanding of the many social justice problems facing the world, can be overwhelming for Tim as an ally. “I hear all these issues and I don’t really know want to do. I hear all these problems, but I’m just overwhelmed, like I don’t really know what step to take next.” Tim also noted that he could use his privileges when being overwhelmed and walk away if he choose to do so. “[I] have a lot of privilege… since I don’t have to face those issues every day, that if I get too busy… I don’t think about it as much because I don’t have to think about it as much.” Tim has described his ability to walk away, but chooses not to do so. A large part of being an ally is being aware of the choices Tim has as a privileged individual, and then making the right choice.
Not being forced to see the injustices that are out there all the time, being able to slip back into the routine of being a White male and not having to worry about what color my skin is or like my gender, it’s really easy to slip out of it [ally work].

*Kurt: Growth*

Kurt is a junior majoring in Biology and like two other co-researchers, participated in the Summer Service Program at Xavier in 2010. A tall red head actively involved in classroom and co-curricular activities, Kurt shared that it was this pat summer when he actively began to self-identify as a social justice ally.

This surprised me because I had seen Kurt’s lanky frame at many Peace and Justice community events and had assumed that Kurt self-identified as a social justice ally over the last couple of years. Kurt shared that through a combination of working with a mentor (the Diversity Vice Provost on campus), volunteering over the summer, and weekly education sessions he came to better understand his identity as an ally. In particular, Kurt sighted growth in understanding his privilege and roles as a White man by defining race through the disciplinary lens of his biology major in an effort to understand the role it has on his and others’ daily existence.

*Opened My Eyes*

Coursework and co-curricular programs at Xavier have affected Kurt on his path to identifying as ally. Kurt cited a class taught by a Jesuit at Xavier about AIDS and Ethical Inquiry as having providing him the opportunity to increase his perspectives.
You start to catch on to things that people will say a little bit more, and start to catch on....And, you know, after that class, you start to think about it[AIDS and the gay community]...it definitely opened my eyes to what it was, and I was able to make more informed, more educated statements on it.

Kurt also found that the clubs and organizations for students interested in social justice and service at Xavier propelled him on his path to identifying as an ally. Kurt listed Connections (a program that provides weekly service opportunities in Cincinnati with the small; group of 10 first year students), Alternative Breaks (24 groups of 12 students go on service trips over spring break), and Summer Service (Kurt volunteered at a local service agency) as critical influences on his role as an ally. “Through Summer Service, you know, the lectures on like Wednesday nights and such. You know, just hearing about it and realizing, you know, a lot of really interesting stuff was brought up where I would have never thought of it in that way.” The Alternative Break trip Kurt participated in involved painting rooms and other direct service, but it was the conversations he had with those he was serving that most affected his development as an ally.

We would like just kinda sit there and talk, learn people’s stories; and that was just amazing to find out how people [refugees] got here, you know, the hardships, what they were facing now that they were here.... You know, getting information from other people, you know, “I made it to Canada,” you know, just kind of the sense of joy that comes from like knowing the process that it took to get there.

It was additional conversations with friends that led Kurt to identify as an ally. Having conversations with friends involved in the Summer Service Program pushed Kurt
further down the path towards labeling himself an ally. In particular, he pointed to the informal conversations that happened after work at the service agencies and after programmed educational sessions. It was these impromptu meetings with friends that had the greatest impact for him.

It might sink in a little bit more to what was being said, and then you can just continuously educate yourself on it...groups of like five or seven, you know, we’d be sitting around in the common room, and maybe someone would bring up, you know, one [justice] topic, and that would start people going in one direction.

Kurt also shared a story of speaking with a gay friend this summer as an influential process in his development as an ally and coming to understand his friend’s point of view in addition to his own.

It [the conversation] was kinda interesting because…I had my side of this, but I’m actually straight, so like I was coming from a different place and so was he, and we were kind of having this conversation/argument… We both had what, to me, felt like we both knew what had to be done, but there was much different ways of going about it, ways that I had never thought about it.

Privilege Allows One to be an Ally

Being an ally for Kurt meant being there for others in a fight that he does not see as his. “But perhaps it’s not their [allies] fight, in a way, but they will enter into it because they think … whose fight it is … it’s important and worth any risk that they’re willing to put themselves forward for this.” Kurt also noted if you are helping others as
an ally that you are only in a position to help because of privilege—you can only help because your over-privilege has caused their under-privileged state.

But the sheer fact of it is, if you, I guess, can possibly consider yourself helping a group of underprivileged people, then what makes it that you can do this would probably be the fact that you have some sort of privilege that allows you to do that.

Kurt also recognized that he had been born into privilege, “Kind of that certain groups are seen as okay and such, and so my understanding of privilege for me is that I was kind of born into these groups that are acceptable for some reason.” Having identified this privilege, Kurt is attempting to use privilege to help target groups. Kurt has challenged his friends’ use of language in his role as an ally.

If they’re going to say certain things, they’re going to get a rise out of me because I’m going to say something back….I’ve heard racist comments. At one point, they used the “N” word and such, which was one that really ticked me off. I said, “That’s ignorant, and what you’re doing is essentially just wrong…. They’ll kinda brush it aside, it seems, at times. But I’ve noticed that—this was many years ago. Now they’re not using this language, and I think, you know, work in progress.

Although Kurt had identified his privileges as being part of his identify as an ally, he is still working on defining those privileges. In regards to being male, Kurt identified pay discrepancies in the work place as his only example of male privilege. He disagrees with the idea of race, but has recently re-defined his perspective.
Through biology and such, which is my major, I disagree with the whole concept of race, you know, existing biologically…But as I’ve learned through the summer service program here and, you know, different lectures and such, that for me, while I might identify myself maybe not as White but as a human being, that really doesn’t change anything if society is viewing me as White.

**Outcast**

As Kurt comes to understand his privileges and his role as an ally, he is faced with alienation because he is assuming that role and spoke about how society treats allies once they become allies.

You will be still seen as privileged, but at the same time as an outcast. From the people that know what you’re doing, you’ll be seen as the outcast. From anyone that just kinda enters in and sees you, they’ll still see the privileged part until they see what you’re doing at the same time.

Kurt feels that he will become an outsider as he becomes an ally because he is rejecting mainstream understanding of his identity. Inviting rejection as he inserts himself into positions and groups where he is often seen as “the problem” rather than part of the solution. Kurt runs into stereotypes of his role as an ally.

If you’re an ally, you’re going to be associated with a group, and it might be a group that society doesn’t look highly on at that time, so you’ll be lumped into that group… I would say isn’t necessarily bad, but society is going to look at you in a certain way and that’s what they’ll think of you.
So, for Kurt becoming an ally has resulted in changes in others’ perceptions of him. He has become outside of groups, target groups and oppressive groups. It is not surprising that he reports others view him as crazy sometimes.

Certain individuals they just kinda wanna write me off like “Oh, he’s doing that crazy social justice stuff. Just let him go, whatever,”…anytime you’re doing some sort of… service work, you know, through the different organizations—I’ve had people look at me and be like, “Why do you do that? People just sit around and laugh at you while you do that.

Cross-case Analysis

In addition to reviewing each co-researchers’ interview and coding them individually, I gathered all information for a group coding and themes discovery process throughout the process. I used constant comparative methods to establish analytic distinctions—looking for similarities and differences, making sequential comparisons, comparing early and later data, and noting if the interviewee held beliefs opposed to or in line with mine (Charmaz, 2006). This additional theoretical coding helped to organize categories back together into a whole (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). Memo writing and a continuous review process with co-researchers enabled me to follow up on any remaining questions and complete the cross-case analysis. My goal was to make sure I reached saturation with all co-researcher input, as well as code saturation (Charmaz, 2006). Because interviewing is not a neutral exchange, it involves two people creating the process, it was important to return to the co-researchers to ensure that I accurately represented their viewpoints (Fontana & Frey, 2005).
This cross-case analysis resulted in descriptive answers to the questions that guided this study: (a) how do White male undergraduate allies come to understand themselves as allies?; and (b) what are the critical influences on this process? The following two sections use cross-case analysis of the 10 co-researchers to explore the themes of influences on ally identity development and understanding of self as an ally.

**Critical Influences on the Process of Becoming an Ally**

The individuals I spoke with each found his own path to becoming an active ally on Xavier’s campus. Though all co-researchers approached their ally identity from their own place of understanding and knowledge, common themes were evident. I identified the following themes as critical influences that led to or influenced these White men to define themselves as social justice allies; classroom experiences, co-curricular clubs and experiences, and role models and family.

**Classroom**

The first point where that cracked was, I think, that semester where I had that class….you know, like this isn’t all legit, like this isn’t all right and truth and perfectly put together, like it’s not perfection anymore? … But I think that the larger crack was like the one where it was like “I’m not perfectly confident, you know, I’m not righteous,” you know? (Chris)

Students were challenged by their teachers, professors, coursework and discussions in and out of the actual classroom to expand their worldview as well as their personal identity. The majority of students (9 of 10) attended a parochial high school and
all attended a Jesuit University. These institutions often focused on justice, faith, and
target populations.

Chris found that college course work challenged his perspectives. He described
this experience as being “cracked.” Classes, including ecofeminism, advanced his
personal identity development and changed earlier ways of thinking.

Michael cited a teacher who pushed him to broaden his perspectives and raised
his awareness of the world around him. He completed a course at Xavier, Ethics and
AIDS, that exposed him to the ally work, possibilities in programs like Doctors without
Borders and Medical Missions. Learning about the Catholic Church’s comment to social
justice broadened Sammy’s perspectives during his senior year in high school. It was
through that class that Sammy became aware of the teachings that would help guide him
to becoming an ally.

Tim’s experience partnering in a high school class with Will, a fellow student
with Down Syndrome, allowed him the space to explore his own ally identity. “That was
the first time—that was when I really knew that I wanted to do that kind of thing for the
rest of my life.” These experiences continued in classrooms at Xavier as Kurt found
references to social justice in many of his classroom experiences.

A Xavier professor who encouraged student participation in his Christian
Doctrine class, including discussions of readings and current events, exposed Sammy to
new methods of teaching, learning, and perspectives. These perspectives, shared from an
educational, acknowledged authority, allowed Sammy more entry in social justice circles.
Understanding that social justice was a concern for those he perceived as authority figures legitimized Sammy’s work in social justice for himself.

Bobby shared his exposure to different perspectives in a social problems class during his first year in college. The readings and discussion in this class allowed him to see oppression from the perspective of the oppressed. “And it was one of the most interesting classes because it gave you a perspective” (Bobby). Similarly, Political Philosophy, a class Brian took in Europe during the summer of 2009, broadened his perspectives and allowed him to see issues from other’s viewpoints, including examining how different cultures view each other. It allowed Brian to understand perspectives outside his own reality. A class taught by a Jesuit about AIDS and Ethical Inquiry opened Kurt’s eyes. “It definitely opened my eyes to what it was, and I was able to make more informed, more educated statements on it.”

Classroom experiences broadened allies’ perspectives and understandings of the “other.” The classroom provided a familiar place for the student to explore himself and explore others’ perspectives. Classroom also provided structured spaces for the allies to explore ideas about oppression, privilege, and ally identity as well as fostering the development of a language to communicate their social consciences.

Co-Curricular Experiences

“I think that like just making yourself experience how difficult other people are living or have these big difficulties in their life, and trying to understand the magnitude of it”(Michael).
Opportunities outside of the classroom also led these White men to define themselves as allies. These opportunities included parent and class sponsored travels to new places, school clubs, and protests. Chris specifically came to Xavier to take part in an experience outside the classroom, a live-in semester long learning project in an economically challenged area of the city. Chris described looking for answers in these experiences, searching for the reasons these areas were different than the neighborhood he grew up in as a child.

Nicholas’ involvement with the annual protest against the School of the Americas (SOA) impacted his development as an ally and broadened his worldview. “It kinda shattered the whole American Dream sort of thing that was going on, and so that was a big sort of eye opener that first time.” The experience affected Nicholas intellectually and emotionally. This experience in combination with the classroom work Nicholas was doing led him to be a social justice ally.” I first started to sort of branch off on my own and become much more interested in social justice issues.” Nicholas continued going to SOA protests and cites these as the eye opening experience that got him to where he is today as a social justice ally.

Student Clubs

Tim combined coursework with co-curricular experiences in high school to create a deeper understanding of others’ experiences. “That was probably the first time I defined myself as an ally, in high school.” Kurt and Sammy found that the clubs and organizations for students interested in social justice and service at Xavier propelled them on the path to calling themselves allies. Kurt listed Connections, Alternative Breaks, and
Summer Service as critical influences on his role as an ally. “A lot of really interesting stuff was brought up where I would have never thought of it in that way” (Kurt).

Sammy’s involvement in clubs helped him develop as ally, particularly as he realized that the organization’s focus was not so much on what the club could accomplish, but how it prepared him and others for future ally opportunities and challenges. “I think the importance of that is really having that experience doing that gets you ready for maybe doing something bigger later.”

Michael and Brian’s involvement in the Alternative Breaks Club at Xavier had a large impact on their self-identification as ally, raising their awareness of oppression happening around them. “I think that awareness is key because that’s really where everything stems from…and then trying to get other people to become aware” (Michael). Brian’s involvement in Summer Service was also pivotal for his identification as an ally. “I would say defining myself was this summer, actually seeing that I was an ally. Before that, I didn’t realize that I was an ally.”

University Programs

Having conversations with friends involved in the Summer Service Program brought Tim closer to labeling himself as an ally. In particular, he pointed to the informal conversations that happened after work at the service agencies and after programmed educational sessions. “It might sink in a little bit more to what was being said, and then you can just continuously educate yourself on it.” Brian’s experience during his time in the Summer Service Program helped lead him to identify as an ally. He pointed to an increased understanding of language and terms as an informative step on his path through
work at the Holocaust Center and education sessions. “We did a lot of different reflections and we had a lot of different talks, and so that prompted me realizing I was an ally. And then at my job, too, we talked about what an ally was.”

Travel

Travel signaled important transformations in defining the ways that some co-researchers came to understand others. Bobby travelled to Belize during the summer before his senior year in high school. He cited this trip as one of the first times he was exposed to understanding his own privilege. “And seeing her play with it was like a slap in the face to realize . . . the privilege and the opportunity that I had just because of where I was born.” The Alternative Break trip Kurt participated in involved painting rooms and other direct service, but it was the conversations he had that most affected his development as an ally. “We would like just kinda sit there and talk, learn people’s stories.” Chris defined his high school trip with his father to Haiti as impactful: This was the first time he experienced severe poverty. “And it was one of the first experiences I had of like being outside the country and seeing poverty that’s outside of United States poverty.” This experience with his father transformed Chris’s high school career, as he felt called to delving deeper into poverty and global issues.

Travel sometimes transformed through difficult experiences. Michael’s Alternative Break trip challenged his ideas around being an ally.

My freshman year when I went on the Charlotte trip and we were working in like a welfare-subsidized lunch program for elderly people….I remember just feeling like really out of place, like these people weren’t charity cases, these people
didn’t think they were charity cases; we didn’t think these people were charity cases, it seemed like a lot of the people that were actually coming to the program were just kinda like “Why are you here? We were fine without you.”…An experience where I was trying to be a social justice ally, I guess, but it wasn’t really . . . The people that I was working with didn’t really feel like they needed you.

Exposure to travel, new experiences, student clubs, and university directed experiences outside the classroom led many co-researchers to label themselves allies. A deeper understanding of the world, their own country, themselves, and others enlarged their perspectives and called them to serve as justice allies.

Role Models and Family

“Before Spider Man came out with the “With great power comes great responsibility,” my dad said, “To those who are given much, much is expected’” (Chris).

A number of the co-researchers citied their families’ presence and influence as a key component of their identity today. The interactions, lessons, and conflicts with family members influenced the ally identity they claim. Family members include mothers and fathers individually, parents as a team, grandparents, siblings, and uncles.

Tim’s parents’ commitment to helping those that were less privileged than they were influenced his development as an ally. “Just the way they’ve raised (me) and the values they’ve instilled in me kinda like showed me like what it means to be an ally before I actually knew what the term meant.” Chris’s family taught him the value of thinking outside himself, part of the definition of an ally. “Just the giving, the thinking
outside of yourself, you know, love…I guess not selfishness, trying to avoid selfishness.” Chris’ dad purposefully gave Chris experiences in other’s poverty, shaping who he is today. “I think that the fact that that [increasing Chris’ perspectives] was a priority, that was something that he wanted to instill, something he wanted to make evident.” Chris’ dad directly challenged him to serve others with his privilege. “What’s outside of yourself, that was like very much instilled in me from my dad.” Bobby said it was his family who shaped his identity as an ally. “My mom and my grandparents and my family and my dad and everybody like who kinda surrounds me.” Michael’s parents guided his development as an active justice ally as well. “My parents always stressed the importance of doing service projects together as a family from … it’s important to share your resources both financially and your time.” Taylor grew up watching his mother function as a justice ally and actively chose to follow the path she blazed for him “So going there [battered women’s shelter], it’s been a good experience just to learn, talk to the people, and just see people from a different perspective. So I’d say my mom is someone who’s kinda helped me with that.” Taylor’s dad and home environment shaped his perception of the world and gender roles. “I just grew up with a different kind of male stereotype….I saw Mom and Dad contributing evenly to the family.” Taylor’s mom taught him that being an ally is simply what one does. “It kinda, you know, let me know like, you know, this is something you need to do: give back. You know, it’s just kinda like what you do.” Brian was also influenced by his mother’s work on social justice issues; he states that one of the biggest influences on his development as an ally was his mother.
Because of her choice of where to live, but her choice of also trying to bring me up to recognize the privilege I have but also see how it should be used… she tried to instill that in me: that even though I may go to private institutions and have a lot more privilege than other people that I’m not better than other people.

Some students found support and/or models in their family for their work as social justice allies; others defined themselves as social justice allies in conflict with their families. Kurt noted the inherent challenge in working on justice issues within a non-supportive family “Some people in like the extended family kinda look at you kinda funny, especially if you’re calling out somebody on something.” Nicholas’ mother’s beliefs challenged him, as did separating those beliefs from his own as he became an active justice ally. “Trying to talk to her about it is difficult without getting into sort of a yelling sort of fight…. And so essentially, the way I try to approach her and the way she approaches me, I think, in the end, is just out of respect, respect but disagreement.”

Talking and working with his mom, Nicholas has been able to define himself as an ally, while maintaining respect for those that may not, or who see issues differently than he does.

In contrast, Bill did not have the conversations growing up that some other co-researchers had with their parents. While Taylor was visiting battered women’s’ shelters, Bill’s parent were sheltering him from some of the harsher realities of life.

My parents tended to . . . not keep us in the shadows, but they were still fairly protective about certain issues, about certain topics, and this was one of them. I
mean, it’s not like any parents really sit down and talk about, you know, sexual assault.

Nicholas learned to lean on his teachers and professors for conversations about the values he was exploring as a justice ally. “Like, you know, when I was beginning to question what my mom was telling me and sort of creating confrontations with her, like they sort of took to the time to like talk to me about it after school.” Chris also pointed to the importance of friends and family as he went through educational and experiential learning. “We [a friend and I] were constantly questioning, we were constantly asking questions as opposed to necessarily like try to find the answer and move on to get on with our lives.” Sammy also leans on his friend as allies: “When I have like some really crazy new idea, I’m like, “‘What do you think about this?’” Kurt cited speaking with a gay friend this summer as influential in his development as an ally, coming to understand his friend’s point of view in addition to his own.

Bill was the only co-researcher who identified a particular conversation with a friend as the event that changed his perspectives and led him to become a justice ally. That conversation, in conjunction with an on-campus event and opportunity,”Hooking Up”, led Bill to working as an ally today.

Co-researchers approached and developed their roles and identities as allies through a variety of paths—family and friends, classes and course work in both high school and college, work, travel, student clubs, integrated learning opportunities, and organized protests were instrumental in shaping the lives of these young men.
Understanding Self as Ally

The co-researchers all have unique definitions of what it mean to them to be an ally and share challenges understanding this identity. Each student defined ally in their own words in terms of giving to others, or doing for others.

After examining the development of these White men as allies, I turn to their understanding of themselves as allies. Themes here include self-growth, awareness of privilege, exploring the self, compassion, empathy, and solidarity as well as privileges, being male and of being White, challenges as allies, and personal commitment to staying strong in their identity as an ally.

Solidarity and Being There for Others

Students defined solidarity is different ways, and practiced it in different settings. Bobby defined being an ally as being present to those in his life and being aware of their needs; being in solidarity with those around him.”Being present and trying not to be arrogant.” Brian also identified with solidarity as the crux of being a good justice ally. “[Being an ally] is not only helping others but kinda being with them through it. So it’s not just like helping others; you’re kinda in the struggle, I guess, so I would say solidarity with others.” Taylor’s definition of an ally stresses helping others as well as examining his own actions. “Looking at my own actions and how those affect everyone around me; …then how I can use my actions to help somebody or just to be a better person.”

Sammy defines being an ally as working for a cause that is not your own cause, as did Kurt “One who sticks up for, you know, other people…But perhaps it’s not their fight… but they will enter into it” (Kurt). Tim discussed being an ally as being all about
recognizing your privilege, and then leveraging that privilege to assist others who lack privilege. “The first step in being an ally is that you know that you have it [privilege] so that you’re going to be able to use it effectively…but also that you don’t understand everything about someone else.” Bill also defined using privilege in a positive manner against itself as part of the definition of an ally.”What I can do is exploit it [privilege] to the fullest extent…. to further that issue, further that fight for the issue.”

Chris defined being an ally through changing and shaping his own behavior and interactions with the world around him. “I would say that actively in my being an ally it is more in conversations and a personal building and developing a personal awareness.”

Michael emphasized education and understanding of systems in his definition of self as an ally.

I think someone who is a social justice ally realizes that those problems exist and seeks to learn kind of the meaning behind them and why they occur and then also does their best to do their part to change those practices and thoughts and ideas and processes.

Bobby took a different approach to the question of being a social justice ally than the other co-researchers. Within the other nine conversations every student identified as a social justice ally, explained what this meant to them and how they made sense of this identity. Bobby was resistant to this identity, and described it as confining to a degree.

I’m really just defining myself as a person and the fact that there shouldn’t be a need for a social justice ally, that it’s simply something that people should just act…And the fact that I’m aware of the fact that I’m a social justice ally, but I’m
not consciously thinking about that on a daily basis, like “I am a social justice ally.”

Bobby described the term as something he needed to use for my work and pointed out that he did not own the term himself. While he functioned in similar ways to the other students I spoke with, and described similar experiences, actions as an ally, and challenges, he did not label himself consistently as a justice ally.

Being a social justice ally is really just being a person who’s aware of the people around them…. I realize that for like your research and for your dissertation, you have to like identify people as social justice allies, but I’d rather there not have to be that. It’s like what I was saying with like I’m White and I know that I’m White but I’m not consciously aware of that.

Bobby is viewing others as the same and arguing that defining us as allies separates us.” All people, while they are the same—there are more things that make people the same than make people different.”

Students saw their identities as allies through different lenses. The term described only their interactions with the “other” for some co-researchers. Some saw their identity as an ally as a place to explore and examine self-growth, awareness of privilege, and self-identity. Other co-researchers defined being an ally as a combination of education about self and others and action for or with others in light of social justice concerns. Bobby claimed the term itself simply was not needed. Bobby did describe working on behalf of others, working to understand his own privileges, and acting as an ally, but found the term redundant.
Compassion and Empathy

Compassion and empathy also figured strongly in many co-researchers’ experiences. These kinds of connections led some men to being an ally, and defined how they thought of themselves as allies. People do not often expect men to talk about compassion and empathy, which makes their choice to be allies of compassion unique.

Sammy and Nicholas identified compassion as the defining characteristic of their role as an ally. “You need to be able to look past just like your own personal interest or experiences and try to empathize with people who have experienced something different.” Nicholas identified that his experience is different from others, and in order to work with and for others needs he needs to try to connect with them. “The most important characteristic is to be able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and try and look at it from their viewpoint, because chances are…it’s going to be a lot different for me than it is for them.”

Bill highlighted empathy as a part of his identity as a justice ally, empathizing with those affected by injustice and oppression. “A social justice ally would be someone who aligns themselves with a certain issue…that you can relate to and that you can, at times, empathize with.” Taylor spoke about trying to understand what others need, not what he might think they need when he functions as an ally. “Really trying to work on what people want versus what you think they should want. I think that’s also just part of being an ally.”

Brian underlined this approach to being an ally when he spoke about solidarity. “I think solidarity is a broad definition and can be described in many different ways, but I
think it’s not fighting for others but fighting with others and helping others and struggling through the issues with them.”

Bobby is working towards being an ally, and describes being in solidarity with others, being present. Within this definition, he is defining others as being the same as he is. He describes his actions as working for equality, as opposed to Taylor’s described goal of equity as an ally.

I think is kind of the building block of what it is to sort of be an ally, to be someone for somebody else, that you’re not just there, you know, for being present to them, but you’re there to realize that they’re no different from you.

(Bobby)

Compassion, empathy, and solidarity are how many co-researchers defined their identity as an ally. Co-researchers shared these phrases repeatedly as key aspects of being an ally. The co-researchers identified understanding, caring about, and learning about others as key components of their ally identity.

*Privilege*

The sheer fact of it is, if you, I guess, can possibly consider yourself helping a group of underprivileged people, then what makes it that you can do this would probably be the fact that you have some sort of privilege that allows you to do that. (Kurt)

The co-researchers recognized and spoke about privilege in general, and White male privilege in particular. They were able to recognize the broad definitions and systems of privilege, but often uncomfortable or unable to speak about how specific
privileges they have, benefit them as a person directly. Within this conversation, they also noted ways they work against their own privilege, or ways to lessen the impact of that privilege. Many expressed the desires to give up their privilege, an impossible action with our current system of oppression and privilege.

Chris wondered about comforts in regards to privilege and what “things” we can give up in order to be better allies to others. “I think it’s going to have come back to the balance … And it’s all about what comforts are you going to give up, you know? And what some just luxuries you’re going to give up.” Sammy also examined managing his privilege, and wrestled with the question of how to best use his privilege as an ally. “Try not to take it for granted. Recognizing that yes, I have these opportunities and other people don’t, and try to, I guess, make good use of them. What good use is sometimes is a struggle.” Brian is also working to use his male privilege to end privilege “Being male, I am in, I guess, the privileged class, so I think it gives me more of a voice to speak out. I think people listen more because, in America, people listen to males more than they listen maybe to females.”

Tim noted that the first step in being an ally for others for him is a recognition of his own privilege; “So I think being aware of the privileges you have and don’t have are very important—like the first step in being an ally for other people is just knowing your own limits and things.” Kurt noted if you are helping others as an ally that you are only in a position to help because of privilege—you can only help because your over-privilege has caused their under-privileged state. “Consider yourself helping a group of underprivileged people, then what makes it that you can do this would probably be the
fact that you have some sort of privilege.” Sammy recognized his privilege when reflecting on college opportunities he has experienced. “And then I kinda look at other people and go, “Oh.” Like they don’t even have these opportunities at all.”

Bill recognized that he was born into privilege. “I was born into an upper middle class, I was White, and I was male. So, you know, there are times where I will have an easier time.” Chris also identified his privilege as something that was bigger than him, something he did not earn. “Certainly not something you earn… It’s something that you are, unbeknownst to you, just given.” Kurt and Michael shared this recognition of the nature of privilege. “Kind of that certain groups are seen as okay and such, and so my understanding of privilege for me is that I was kind of born into these groups that are acceptable for some reason.” Michael said, “I would say privilege results from just the luck of being born into a family.”

*Maintenance of Privilege*

When we as White men do not work to maintain our privilege, and especially when we actively work against it, we meet challenges and obstacles. Chris spoke not only about being born into privilege, but maintaining privilege, and that as White men, other people of privilege expect us to support our privilege. By being justice allies, we are not working to support privilege—this leads to conflict. “You know, it’s a level of security…I think it would be a side effect of privilege, maybe. The maintenance of privilege.” Chris described power and privilege through everyday male violence, using his own phrase, the “dictating punch.” “So, the inclination to go for that dictating punch,
either it’s violent or insult or disregard,—that just by nothing else but power elevates you over the person.”

Kurt works to use his privilege to help others “And then hopefully someday using that education. Whether it be in these conversations with people so that you can continue to educate other people.” Nicholas has taken a similar approach, subverting privilege for his own use when he can. “Working with whatever said group to help confront that [oppression] and hopefully change it.”

Male Privilege

Some co-researchers recognized their privileges, but were sometimes uncomfortable naming them or even talking about them. Nicholas spoke uncomfortably about his male privilege: “And I do, I receive a lot of privileges as a male, and I don’t want to, but I do.” Bobby also did not like naming the privileges, the act of naming them seemed offensive to him. “Knowing that, I guess, I have some sort of advantages over people, which sounds horrible and which shouldn’t be true but is.” Taylor had a similar experience in our conversations, becoming frustrated with discussing race and White privilege.

No co-researcher denied their privileges as men or as White people, in fact they almost all called these privileges by name. On the other hand, the majority of students could not name specific actual privileges in their life, and some seemed uncomfortable naming the privilege, or the effects of the privilege, in our conversations.

The students spoke about being men, being male allies, and the challenges that come from claiming the male gender. Bill used the typically masculine peer pressure
phrase “grow a pair” in challenging other men to use part of their privilege, their recognized male voice, to take a stand against sexual assault. “I just think in general guys can be taken more seriously, or at least are taken more seriously.” Bill struggles with the inequality of this privilege, but also urges more men to use their privilege to positive results, or to combat the privilege itself.

Sammy and Taylor both did not see many advantages to being a man, nor did they define power and privilege to their gender in particular. They both assigned male privilege to later in life, citing pay discrepancies in the work place, but not naming any discrepancies in their current environment. Kurt also centered his male privilege in the future pay discrepancies.

White Privilege

Co-researchers often avoided conversation about their White identity or had trouble speaking about it. “But being White, you know, I know it affects me, but it’s not like something I think about constantly or something I focus on all the time.” Taylor was frustrated answering the questions about race. “And, you know, other reasons that I’m affected by my color, but . . . (sigh) Again, it’s just not something that I normally think about or it’s something I put a lot of emphasis on.” Bobby knows that race exists, but feels that recognizing our similarities is more important than recognizing our differences. “I remember like saying, “If you ripped off my skin and you shaped it around their body, there wouldn’t really be any difference, that we’re the same sort of person.” Bobby continued, “I don’t know if it [being White] really has influenced it one way or the other, or at least consciously has influenced me.” Bill described being White as being normal
“The only way that it does is in the fact that it doesn’t, I think. Because being White, being a male, you’re just normal, if that makes sense.”

Michael struggles with White privilege and being an ally. He was also uncomfortable just naming White privilege. “I think that being White, as bad as it seems to say, I think it is, in many instances, a privilege.” Sammy believes that White is an experience different from others, but is not quite sure how it is different.

Being White there’s definitely a lot of things that I don’t experience that somebody even maybe of a similar economic class might’ve gone through….I don’t know. I think it’s mostly just minor things that, you know, somebody else who—you know, if somebody had a similar family, middle class in the suburbs, but were Black, you know, they probably wouldn’t have maybe a vastly different life, but just some little experiences.

Tim identified his own challenges with understanding race as he strives to understand how privilege works. “It’s more just kind of being White has kind of made me think of like White and an other, almost… I’ve always been told, “You’re White, and this is what everyone else is.” Kurt disagreed with the idea of a White race from a biological perspective, but has recently re-defined his perspective as he begins to understand ideas of White privilege. “I disagree with the whole concept of race… existing biologically…But as I’ve learned …while I might identify myself maybe not as White but as a human being, that really doesn’t change anything if society is viewing me as White.”
Chris and Nicholas spoke directly to aspects of their White privilege and the different experiences it has granted them in life. Chris identified that White people actually live in a different reality. “That our reality as White people is not the reality for everyone and that, you know, there are certain privileges that are unrecognized.” Nicolas noted that addressing White privilege is tough, but also that he is struggling to define White privilege.

The “system” is set up in such a way that there are certain . . . Oh, wow, this is a difficult question…I guess it’s my belief that, in our current system, that if you’re White, there’s privilege attached to that…But to me, being part of that majority and therefore having this White privilege, it’s sort of invisible to me. (Nicholas) Nicholas shared that part of White privilege is not naming White privilege, and keeping White people ignorant of that privilege. Nicholas did speak directly to his White privilege.

If every single White person in this country realized that they have White privilege and where it comes from and how it affects others, I think it would be a huge deal. So I feel like the biggest thing is realizing that it’s there and that it exists, and then somehow figuring out how to use that to get rid of it. (Nicholas)

The co-researchers were all in different stages of understanding their privileges, and each researcher had a different understanding of being male and of being White. They define their ally identity as involving their own identity, standing outside of a target group, and helping to right those wrongs. Others identify themselves and their privileges as part of the original “problem” and stress that their role as ally is required.
Allies of Privilege

Though these struggles are real, Chris points out that there are not many areas in which others can oppress White men, particularly if they are straight and middle class or above. Chris stated, “At this point in time, I am abled, White, young, male who is seeking to be a man, heterosexual…. Yes, people can hate me, can have like prejudice against me… [but] there’s not many levers, you know, that people can really pull me down.” As White male allies, we also have privileges as allies that targeted groups do not. Tim highlights this area, “I don’t have to face those issues every day, that if I get too busy, like my schedule is too busy… I don’t think about it as much because I don’t have to think about it as much.”

We always have the choice and the ability to step away from some of the “hard” issues. Brian reaches out and asks others for help as he recognizes how easy it for him to rest on his privileges. “I think what really helps me is to have kinda people knock me down a little sometimes, because I think I do. . . forget that I’m so privileged.” Brian knows that White males present in a particular way to target groups; “But they [others] think “Why can you speak on an issue you’re not necessarily related with or you haven’t come from. If you’re upper-class White male, how do you know about different things?” Brian also occupies a unique space as a gay White male, sharing privileged and target group membership. “But because I’m part of a target group, that doesn’t happen as much, I feel like that doesn’t really happen for me; people are interested in what I have to say, even if it’s not on my target-group issue.”
Environmental Impact

Xavier itself functions as a unique and distinct environment for students acting as allies, creating what students refer to as the Xavier Bubble. The Xavier Bubble can remove students from the surrounding community and outside sources of information. The campus becomes the center of their lives, and campus norms and attitudes seem to be all-pervasive as the students spend the majority of their time on campus and with other Xavier students. The Bubble is a challenge for their work as a White male ally for some students.

I think that not really being forced to see the issues every day, because I’m in a like a Xavier Bubble almost, like not being forced to see the injustices that are out there all the time, being able to slip back into the routine of being a White male and not having to worry about what color my skin is or like my gender, it’s really easy to slip out of it[ally work], and so it’s a challenge just like becoming apathetic because I’m just not really forced to think about each day. (Tim)

Bobby experienced the other side of the Xavier Bubble and saw the Bubble as a place of support for ally work.

Outside of campus, as a whole, may not necessarily be at that point where they accept homosexuals, and being someone who does accept may put you in the minority; but here at Xavier, it’s the opposite: The people who aren’t accepting are the ones who are in the minority, and the people who are accepting are the ones who are in the majority. … that it’s easy to do it at Xavier, and it’s easy to do it in the Bubble of our campus. (Bobby)
**Challenges to Being an Ally**

Part of the co-researchers’ identities as allies involve the challenges of being an ally. These challenges include wrestling with their own identities as White men, being outcasts, losing friends, experiencing guilt, and feeling overwhelmed. “As a White straight male, private-school educated, I’m probably one of the least oppressed people in the world” (Nicholas). All but one of the co-researchers and I fit this profile (Taylor and I attended public high school), yet we have chosen to remove themselves, to distance themselves from other people or systems of privilege by becoming or identifying themselves as allies.

Many of the co-researchers identified both being White and male as privileged identities, though not all co-researchers saw these privileges. The co-researchers were in very different places when describing these privileges; many were unable to identify male privilege outside of future privilege such as gender pay differences. Students identified White privilege, but were often uncomfortable speaking about this privilege.

Being a White male justice ally brings its own challenges for the students attempting to function in this space. As people of privilege, they have chosen to enter particular arenas where the privilege becomes a hindrance. Sammy identified challenges being a White male ally.

I guess sometimes I kinda think like I am a straight White middle class man, what gives me the right to sort of like go in and try to be like, “Oh man, you guys, you gotta get these things together.”

Tim also identified similar challenges being a male ally.
But I think being male alone just makes it harder because people don’t think that you can be like compassionate …. People think it’s strange to show those kinds of feelings and emotions for like other people, especially people that aren’t the same as you. And so I think that being male, definitely there’s that whole idea of … being apathetic and being kind of tough and not really thinking about those kinds of deeper issues.

Michael also touched on the issues of gender roles in ally work. “It [ally work] seems to be so dominated by girls… I think it might be sort of a gender-roles issue… the female is seen as more compassionate or caring or nurturing… I think it’s . . . it’s definitely harder.” Michael also encountered challenges functioning as a White male ally. “It’s because you realize the problem is there… but you’re looking at it from the outside, so it’s harder to become like accepted as someone on the inside.”

Some students discovered that acceptance is difficult as a White male ally, while others saw White males as leaders of justice work on campus more often than not. Bill repeatedly saw White men leading social justice groups. “It’s just, you know, we’re White guys, it’s what we do [club leadership]….And that seems to always be the case.”

Chris identified how being a White man has both helped and hurt him as a leader

As someone who’s in that position and recognizes the disparity of privileges… I was going to be… someone who’d have to lead the way, you know, to form this reconciliation, you know, and the ideal like “I’m going to fix everything” kind of mindset. But just recently, I was talking to a friend who’s homosexual, and she, you know, is adamant about the need for people in the situation of oppression
leading their own revolution, you know, and causing the change like from their position of, you know, a minority, in a way.

The tension Chris describes here surfaced throughout our conversations—students asking themselves what their role is as an ally. Others doubt us in these arenas because of who we are. Tim shared, “I think that it’s really easy for someone who doesn’t necessarily have the same privilege as I have to like count me off as being some self-righteous White guy who wants to just do something nice.” There are tensions inherent in being an ally as an ally approaches oppression issues from outside the oppression itself. Taylor noted the tension between “helping” people and not stepping on toes, of being respectful, but not so hands off that your presence is no longer valuable.

I think one of the challenges is “helping people” can be hard because you don’t want to seem like “Oh, you’re that guy up there who can do and get whatever they want and then you’re trying just to help out somebody who you don’t think can do it themselves.” So you don’t want to seem like someone who’s not appreciative, who doesn’t care what other people have to offer and like “Oh, I can help you, I’ll be the one to do it… So I just think people thinking of you as someone who’s genuine and not just trying to do it because you can. I think that’s one of the harder parts of it. (Taylor)

Nicholas struggles with this issue as well. “I find it to be a really difficult struggle to be White and a social justice ally….I see myself as being, in part, someone that’s part of the problem….The privileges that I got came out of the inequalities.” Kurt spoke about how society treats allies once they become allies.
You will be still seen as privileged, but at the same time as an outcast. From the people that know what you’re doing, you’ll be seen as the outcast. From anyone that just kinda enters in and sees you, they’ll still see the privileged part until they see what you’re doing at the same time. (Kurt)

Bill has lost friends being an ally “You start drawing lines in friendships….And one of the biggest issues is just having people just flat-out—there’s not too many people that flat-out hate you, but you do get that.” Kurt and Chris have also confronts friends. “You know, if they use certain words, I will go off and say, “That’s not cool. You can’t use stuff like that”…. this was many years ago. Now they’re not using this language, and I think, you know, work in progress” (Kurt). Being an ally means challenging and sometime losing friends. As White male allies, the co-researchers can feel alone. Nicholas struggles with his roommates’ and other’s reactions to him being an ally.

I mean, for example, just with my roommates in college, you know, trying to talk (about) issues that were important to me to them. And they’re probably not important to a lot of people, but they just, you know, they didn’t care, they don’t care. And so it was just really frustrating, like little things like that. Or, you know, actually opening up to someone about your views and then being called, you know, some sort of derogatory name because of those views, because they’re not popular views.

Nicholas notes other’s views, “There is a very sort of negative connotation that the public and Xavier students have with that sort of thing.” Kurt has also run into stereotypes of his
role as an ally. “If you’re an ally, you’re going to be associated with a group…. but society is going to look at you in a certain way and that’s what they’ll think of you.”

Students are actively functioning as allies, and at the same time trying to understand and cope with feelings of guilt around their own roles in oppression. Nicholas spoke about this guilt space in conjunction with being White. “I have a lot of guilt, I guess, over it, and knowing that White privilege exists and that whether I like it or not, I still benefit from it.”

In this struggle, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Tim can be overwhelmed because he cannot fix the problems. “I hear all these issues and I don’t really know want to do. I hear all these problems, but I’m just overwhelmed, like I don’t really know what step to take next.”

Students face challenges as allies and they respond with a fierce commitment to the work of social justice allies. The role of an ally requires commitment to the role itself. A number of students spoke about this commitment.

Commitment

Chris and Nicholas call being an ally an act of courage, a willingness to take on danger, or be open to vulnerability. Nicholas stated, “So to like be comfortable with calling yourself a social justice ally, I think does take some courage and some sort of being comfortable with it.” This courage comes into play, because as Chris points out, “I ended up defining the biggest danger is that like whenever we talk about this person, this man that we want to be, we’re exposing ourselves, and whenever you expose yourself, that’s vulnerable, a position of vulnerability.” Once Chris got started on the path to social
justice work, he could not stop. “Well, who else can I give to? Who else can I give to? Who needs giving?”

Bill’s experiences opened his eyes and he found he was committed to the causes he supports. “What keeps on spurring me and spurring me to keep on working is … you start being someone who people feel like they can talk to.” Michael’s experience has caused him to seek others support and commitment to social justice

I almost think it’s like something that a social justice ally needs to try to do: not push their way into this person’s life, but they need to try to open someone’s eyes to something new….You should at least present them with the material; not harass them with it, but let them know that, you know, “This situation exists” or “There is this problem.” And then they become a social justice ally themselves later down the road, you never know. (Michael)

Benefits

The co-researchers spoke about their commitment to the causes and individuals they support, and the courage and work it takes to stay committed. We also spoke about why they have this commitment, what drives them to continue in what Bobby called “A fight I know I will never “win” in my lifetime, work that I won’t find a solution to.”

They remain committed to social justice because they believe it is the right thing to do, because it allows them to be around people like them, and because they understand a benefit to themselves through being allies to others.

Chris said “I really keep coming to the conclusion that "it just is who I am [ally]." Chris and Bobby identified being an ally, or taking the actions of an ally as simply part of
their identity. Bobby shared that he “supports others by being an ally because of several reasons, but the simple reason is because it’s the right thing to do.”

The co-researchers also work as allies because of the people they work with, other allies and target group members. “I choose to be an ally because of the people I’ve been able to meet” (Bobby). Co-researchers have found connection through their work as allies. “I still strive to be an ally due to several things, but the greatest of these is connection” (Bill). Chris summarized the connection benefit, “Being a social ally has given me a community that I enjoy and who have similar values to me: people who I feel comfortable being myself around and who I feel value my intentions and perspective on the world.”

Finally, co-researchers recognized a direct benefit to themselves through their work as allies. For Taylor, it is growth opportunities, “The benefits I find come from my growth as a person. I am big on experiences and how they can affect your life. By being an ally I get to live my life in a way that I know is right.” Brian felt than using his privilege to combat oppression would also help combat the oppression of his target identity.

I am an ally because I have no right not to be! I benefit myself by helping to destroy prejudiced mindsets…. All minority groups are connected in the same fight so I am fighting back by helping by using my White privilege. Nicholas directly named his work as an ally benefitting himself.

In fighting for the humanity of others, I too am able to redeem my own humanity. In combating the various systems that oppress and exploit others, I am combating
the very structures that enable my own privileges (White, male, straight, able-bodied, etc.) to exist. Thus, my own humanity is intimately tied up with the humanity of others; we are all interconnected.

Though Bobby’s approach to ally work and identity was different than the other co-researchers, he shared a sense of self development.”Not caring about someone’s gender, religion, race, or sexuality, has allowed me to grow in my own personal identity; by meeting others, I’ve learned to meet myself” (Bobby). The students experienced the benefits of being an ally through self growth, understanding, and redemption.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

My goal in conducting this research was to contribute to the theoretical work on privilege, oppression, and allies through theory based on deep understanding of these student’s experience and identities. “Research participants’ implicit meanings, experiential views—and researchers’ finished grounded theories—are constructions of our reality” (Charmaz, 2006, p.10). I based my theory on these 10 students’ experience and my lens of their experiences and identities. The theory depends on the researchers view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it (Charmaz, p.130). The qualitative methodology employed in this study does not lend itself to generalizability. This constructivist grounded theory assumes emergent multiple realities, indeterminacy, facts and values as linked, and truth as provisional (Charmaz).

The experiences of these particular allies are content specific, and I do not assert that their experiences are generalizable to other White, male allies from other settings. The resulting conclusions illuminate the subject of White male students working and
understanding themselves as allies; they are not definitive. Other practitioners and scholars can use the study to inform their work with White male allies, but not as a prescription for this work.

Interpretive theory seeks to: Conceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms, articulate theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power and relevance, acknowledge subjectivity in theorizing and hence the role of negotiation, dialogue, understanding, and offer an imaginative interpretation.

Charmaz, 2006, p.127

Shared identity development themes included classroom experiences, co-curricular clubs and experiences, travel, friends’ experiences, and role models and family. Co-researchers defined their role as ally through the lenses of privileged and targeted groups, including a co-researcher who chooses not to define himself as an ally. Compassion, empathy, and solidarity are how many of these students defined and understood their identity as an ally. Each co-researcher occupied a different space in understanding their privileges, and each co-researcher had a different understanding of being male and of being White. They all defined their ally identity as involving their own identity, standing outside of a target group, and helping to right those wrongs. Rather than only discovering order within the data, I created an explication, organization, and presentation of the data (Charmaz, 1990).

Students shared challenges as allies because of their own identity questions and because of how privileged groups and target groups treated them as allies. These challenges include wrestling with their own identities as White men, being outcasts,
losing friends, experiencing guilt, and feeling overwhelmed. The students have made a choice to remove themselves, to define themselves differently within systems of privilege by becoming or labeling themselves as allies. They identified as outcasts or different because of their role as an ally, and engaged in a continual process of “coming out” as an ally. Co-researchers felt that others doubt them in the role of an ally, and they question what their role as an ally is, yet many also defined the role itself as simply sticking with it, being courageous enough to label yourself an ally.

White Male Ally Development and Identity

Introduction

The journeys have been different for each student, but they share a common destination of increased self-understanding through exposure to different perspectives outside their own. Students identified outside factors as influencing their understanding and ownership of the ally identity—through actions as allies and interactions with people in target groups and other adult allies. These perspectives outside themselves allowed them to develop unique spaces of compassion and solidarity with target groups as White men. By creating the identity of ally for themselves, White men defined their role with target groups and privileged populations through that identity.

Recognizing Oppression and Experiencing Tension

White male allies have a learned sense of fairness and compassion as boys and young men growing up. They believe strongly in fair play, that everyone is equal, and that everyone should have the same opportunities in life.
These young men see the oppression that exists in the world through a variety of events or experiences, including but not limited to: school, travel, parents, role models, co-curricular activities, and friend’s narratives. These new experiences gave rise to an understanding that the life experiences these White males have had are different from the experiences of many other people creating cognitive dissonance between what these students have believed about the world and what they are learning. These eye-opening experiences challenge their understanding of the world and create tensions between their belief in fairness, being “right,” and a fair world, and evidence of unfairness, inequality, and oppression in the world. This tension also challenges their understanding of self and their own role in society.

Triggering Compassion

Accidental or intentional exposure to new experiences and perspectives caused tension and change for the students. Understanding different perspectives, outside of their previous reality, triggered compassion for others. The students have an innate or learned sense of fairness about the world in which they live. Upon exposure to realities that differ from their own, they learned about others’ experience, and examined their own perspectives. These lessons, through class, role models, and experiences in clubs and travel, highlighted disparity between their experience and others. Co-researchers defined these events as being a “slap in the face” or a “wake-up call”, both descriptions highlighting new and unexpected formative experiences.
Acting as an Ally

Upon exposure and reflection to different kinds of perspectives, the students challenge their own worldview and choose to re-evaluate their own roles in the world. This new perspective demands that White male allies work to relieve the perceived unfairness or oppression in the world around them in order to continue to believe in a fair world. New perspectives on the world, others, and themselves create a tension between understandings of what is right and fair and the oppression and unfairness they see outside of themselves. These tensions lead to action as an ally for target groups and a continued re-examination of self-identity. By working or acting as allies, they are then working to “fix” the problems they perceive around them to become part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. As they work as allies, they move into new spaces and communities in which they can claim identities as allies. In these communities their privileged identities may be hindrances. Concurrently, as they work as allies to fight oppression they move outside of privileged groups of White men as they are no longer working to maintain their privilege.

Naming and Owning Privilege

These conflicting worldviews led these White men to begin to function as allies, even if they did not label or understand themselves as such. As they worked to reduce unfairness or oppression, these tensions and conflicts pushed some White men to consider their own roles. Some allies understand that they benefit directly from other’s oppression, while other allies may be working to fight other’s oppression without understanding the connections between their privilege and other’s oppression. Once they
defined their own identity as privileged in some way they could then define others as under-privileged, and fully define themselves as allies. Their actions after these experiences and reflections then define who they are as allies.

Within their work and actions as an ally they may come to understand their own roles as privileged to varying degrees. Students may first name privilege as existing, begin to understand that privilege impacts their lives, name parts of their identity as being privileged, and for some begin to understand that their privilege impacts the people they see who are under-privileged, or target groups. The students’ relationship with themselves, with target groups, and their understanding of the terms privilege and ally affects where on this continuum they identify as an ally. All allies are working to fight oppression, but with different motivations; they may be an ally to help others, an ally to help themselves, or an ally to do both (Edwards, 2006).

Allies personalize their privilege and use their own understanding of privilege to function as allies. All saw privilege, but denied it or did not define it for themselves. Many co-researchers saw their work as ally for the other, not with the other. Those that saw ally work as with the other were older and had more experience functioning as an ally and were able to name their own privilege. Allies are actively choosing (or not choosing) their identity as ally in their day-to-day life. Students choose identities based on their experiences and basic beliefs about systems of oppression or individual experiences of oppression and privilege.
Creating an Ally Identity

Concurrently co-researchers also defined a benefit to being an ally as working with like-minded individuals, and understanding themselves better. Calling themselves allies means, “I have privilege, but am working to fight that privilege and fight oppression with target groups.” It also means that they are setting themselves apart from other privileged White men who do not label themselves as allies, and that they are setting themselves apart from the target groups they are working with. This separation from other privileged groups is intentional, while the separation from target groups may not be. The privileged group members functioning as allies would like to find commonality and community with members of target groups. When this community is not found or created allies experience this separation as a challenge to their ally identity.

The term ally may communicate acceptance and ownership of privileges to target partners, and it may communicate another privilege (the ability to call oneself ally rests on privilege) to target groups. Within the use of the term or label ally exists a danger of separation when trying to work with target groups. The term may help others understand how the ally understands himself in the struggle against oppression, but it may also separate the ally from the people he is striving to work with. Understanding themselves as allies creates tension for the students as they seek an identity outside of other privileged groups and with target groups. Their relationships in both arenas will determine how they embrace or reject the term and identity of ally.

The term ally becomes more about the students’ actions than their understanding of themselves—as others define the student as being in the in-group or out-group. As
they work to benefit themselves as allies, White male allies see social justice work as the right thing to do, or as a way to assist in their personal growth. Some in that group also see their liberation bound up with the liberation of others, and/or in a place where compassion and empathy calls them to act. Many saw the ally identity as a phenomenon that allowed them to be with other allies who share a common or similar worldview.

In order to be an ally White male students not only have to recognize privilege, but recognize that they are working against systems of privilege, and choose to remove or distance themselves in some ways from both privileged and target groups. They continually make this decision or announcement decision each time they interact with others; do they tell grandpa, or the new roommate, etc.? Do they tell the target groups they are working with—when and how do they tell them? They have to name themselves consistently as allies if they choose to be allies. In doing so, they may lose some shared space with other White men.

Claiming a Shared Identity

White male allies can feel rejected, misunderstood, and outcast from the structures and societies in which they have found support in the past. They stand outside target groups as a result of their identity, no matter how closely aligned with the group they may be, or hope to be, and they attempt to position themselves outside of the privileged White male experience. They are even challenging the experience and privileges of other White males, acting aggressively towards their privilege by supporting target groups. In this described space with other privileged people many co-researchers reported feeling rejected, misunderstand and like outcasts. When they stop working to
maintain privilege, they risk the “dictating punch”—other men and privileged groups being abusive towards White male allies. By defining themselves as allies, they find an identity that allows them to balance the tension created by their understanding of fairness and the oppression of the world and a group with which to belong. Labeling themselves as Allies allows them to build community with other people fighting oppression and understand themselves and their own actions. The term ally helps the White male students define their role and their identity as they find themselves outside of many groups; target groups and other groups of privilege. As the students understood different perspectives, they not only learned about others outside of themselves, they also came to perceive their lives differently.

While defining oneself as an ally to target groups is important, it is an even more important in-group definition. As these White men purposefully tried to step away from maintaining and enforcing their privileges (though it is important to note they do not lose the privileges, nor can they lose the privileges ascribed to their race and gender) they risk losing group memberships in their lives.

**Managing Ongoing Tension**

Labeling and calling oneself an ally is an attempt to express support for oppressed groups. Yet, labeling oneself as an ally creates a barrier between privileged and target populations, once again highlighting the privilege that is required to be an ally in the use of the term with others. There is an inherent tension between defining oneself as an ally, and finding a co-equal relationship with members of target populations. Using the term ally creates top down relationships by calling attention to top down relationships. “If I
come as an ally, then I cannot come as an equal” (Bobby). This approach to being an ally returns to the ongoing challenge of maintaining awareness of one’s privileged relationship to others—even as one attempts to reduce that privileged status and be *with* target groups. Students act as allies, understand themselves as ally, but then must perform with others as allies. Within this struggle for clear identity co-researchers remain committed to the ideas of social justice because they believe it is the right thing to do. They fight the “good fight” knowing they will face a daunting challenge, but by continuing to struggle to end oppression, they feel they win.

**Summary**

Each student shared his own personal story of becoming an ally, and each co-researcher found different lessons in different experiences. Though all co-researchers approached their ally identity from their own place of understanding and knowledge, I recognized common themes in their stories.

These shared themes included: classroom experiences, co-curricular clubs and experiences, and role models and family. Classroom experiences broadened allies’ perspectives and understandings of themselves and the “other.” The classroom provided a familiar and safe place for the student to explore himself, explore others’ perspectives, and learn about oppression, privilege, and ally identity. Exposure to travel, new experiences, student clubs, and university directed experiences outside the classroom led many of the co-researchers to label themselves as allies. A deeper understanding of the world, themselves, and others enlarged their perspectives and called them to serve as justice allies. Finally, family, teachers, and friends impacted their development.
Experiences that the students have chosen to participate in outside the classroom, including travel, student clubs, integrated learning opportunities, and organized protest have also led to the students identifying as allies.

Students saw their identities as allies through unique lenses and as a place to explore and examine self-growth, awareness of privilege, themselves, and as a combination of education about self, others, and action for or with others in light of social justice concerns. One ally defined being a justice ally as not labeling oneself as an ally.

Compassion, empathy, and solidarity are how some students defined their identity as an ally. Co-researchers shared these phrases repeatedly as key aspects of being an ally. Understanding, caring about, and learning about others is how these men defined themselves as allies.

The co-researchers were all in different stages of understanding their privileges, and each researcher had a different understanding of being male and of being White. They defined their ally identity as involving their own identity, standing outside of a target group, and helping to right those wrongs. Others identify themselves and their privileges as part of the original “problem” and stress that their role as ally is required. Students shared challenges as allies, both because of their own identity questions and because of how privileged groups and target groups treated them as allies. In these spaces of challenges, some of the student named their privilege to walk away as an ally, and many spoke about their personal commitment to staying strong in their identity as an ally, despite these challenges.
My ally identity theory follows White men as they are challenged in their personal understanding of fairness in the world, Recognizing Oppression and Experiencing Tension. Faced with conflict from an outside source that challenges their belief in a fair world they begin to work to ease other’s suffering, in order to contribute to the fairness of the world, Triggering Compassion and Acting as an Ally. Within this work, they come to understand systems of privilege; and at some limited level their personal relationship with privilege and their connections to oppression, Naming and Owning Privilege. By working as an ally, they alienate themselves from other privileged groups, yet remain non-group members of oppressed groups. By labeling themselves as ally, they create an identity that they hope will communicate support for target groups and set them apart from non-allies, as well as possibly separating them from other non-ally White men, Creating an Ally Identity. The ally identity also allows these men to find a common space with other allies like them, Claiming a Shared Identity. Finally allies wrestle with the conflicting spaces created by claiming an ally identity, Managing Ongoing Tension.

The themes and unique stories, the shared spaces and the unique space as allies, and the resulting theory are the findings of this research. The next chapter examines these findings and theory in context of previous work and reviews limitations and implications of the theory.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The collective experiences and individual stories, that is, the shared spaces and the unique spaces occupied by allies comprise the findings of this research. This chapter summarizes the preceding four chapters, offers a summary of the study, restatement of the problem, restatement of my methods, examines these findings and theory in the context of previous writing and research, and offers implications for this theory as well as suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

As a professional in Higher Education, I have chosen to stand against oppression and work to lessen unearned privilege. Johnson (2006) suggested that if privileged groups viewed their privilege as a problem it would not be a problem for long. This understanding is what inspired the work co-researchers and I have done on this topic. My goal was to create a theory that informed the reader about White men of privilege working to end systems of privilege.

Privilege is the result of oppression—if there is an underprivileged group, there must also be an over-privileged group. This invisible system is the system of privilege in the United States of America. “Power affords people multiple identities as individuals seeking well-being, engaging in oppression, resisting domination” (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002, p.7). Engaging in oppression or resisting oppression are both uses of power, my work is primarily concerned with individuals using their power to resist domination and challenge oppression.
Understanding this *system* of oppression within the United States has led to the study of the roles that privilege can play within systems of oppression. This topic has emerged from my own experiences as a privileged man working as an ally. In hopes of finding and walking an authentic and compelling path I have chosen a topic about which I am passionate and about which I have some understanding, but one about which I also know I will be working towards a greater understanding my entire life.

Re-statement of the Problem

In the United States of America, some students benefit from their multiple privileges daily. Students with privilege may choose to work with targeted groups to promote social justice. How do individuals with multiple privileged identities understand their role as allies? Currently there is both a lack of research and understanding about the experience of White men in ally roles, as well as low numbers of men in those roles (Broido & Reason, 2005; Edwards, 2006). As White men become allies, or act as allies, they create their own meaning of what an ally is and who they are, and they wrestle with the concepts of power and their role in power.

Setting

I recruited 10 White males from a four-year higher education institution. This environment, higher education, is where I began my journey as an ally, and much of the current research available on allies involves higher education environments. My preference was to find all co-researchers from a private four year institution because of the shared additional privilege of attending such an institution.
The institution is a private Jesuit University, Xavier, located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Xavier has an undergraduate population of roughly 3,500 students and a graduate population of 1,000 students. Xavier’s undergraduate tuition is twenty-nine thousand dollars, with an additional ten thousand dollar fee to live on campus (required for first-year students), for a total of thirty-nine thousand dollars.

Xavier University supports diversity and justice issues officially through its’ Vice Provost for Diversity office (1 administrative staff member), Office of Multicultural Affairs (2 administrative staff members), Women’s Center (1 administrative staff member), and the Center for Faith and Justice (6 full time administrative staff members).

Xavier has also recently included a diversity requirement as part of its core curriculum.

The Xavier Student Government Association funds diversity and justice focused student clubs such as Alliance (LGBTQ support and advocacy), Students for Economic Justice, 1 in 4 day (sexual assault awareness), Black Student Association, Society of Latinos, South Asian Society, SNAC (disability awareness and support), Voices of Solidarity (Central and South American justice concerns) and has a Diversity Advocacy position on the Student Senate.

Re-statement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory inquiry was to explore the process of White men’s ally identity development and experience. Although this purpose guided my study, I remained open to other concepts and theories that emerged through the course of the study. Conducted from a social constructivist epistemological paradigm, and informed by a grounded theory methodology, the following research questions
guided this study: (a) how do White male undergraduate allies come to understand themselves as allies; and (b) what are the critical influences on this process?

Significance of the Study

There have been many studies and much writing about the struggles and challenges of oppressed peoples, cultures and identities, but few studies have examined how individuals develop the skills, commitment, and habits of mind to confront issues of oppression effectively and create social change (Landreman, King, Rasmussen, & Jiang 2007).

Within higher education, leading researchers are calling for more research to understand the phenomenon of privileged students engaging as allies and their development (See Broido, 2000; Reason, Broido, Davis, & Evans, 2005). Broido (2002) wrote about the process of becoming an ally after interviewing six participants within her phenomenological study. Broido’s purpose was to examine how undergraduate students understand their development as social justice allies as well as to expand the current research on ally development, an area that she describes as having a “paucity of research” (Broido, 2000, p.4). Looking specifically at students that possess more than one privileged identity (White and male) has further informed the research in this area. By working with White male students, I have built theory for ally work with privileged students. These students can have a great impact on those like them with multiple intersecting privileged identities. I pursued questions through in-depth interviews of White male students with multiple privileges to better understand what has fostered these students’ interests in becoming allies, and what steps might be taken to encourage others
in ally work. Giving voice to those working as allies can add depth to the existing literature and may give practitioners a more profound understanding of this population (Mueller & Cole, 2009).

All oppressions and privileges are interrelated; they feed off and support each other, as each is a system of raising one group of people over another (Bishop, 2002). However we personally identify our multiple identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) we are a part of a multi-polar system, sometimes benefitting, sometimes losing. I have long considered myself an advocate or ally with “other” groups. The most important steps that I can take are to combat oppression through recognition of my own privilege, and working with others to identify and combat systems of privilege, not taking a neutral stand, but being an active ally against systems of oppression. “Education for social justice begins by increasing one’s awareness of inequality, however social justice education must also equip and empower students to be change agents toward equality” (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, p. 100) Through this research I propose to help educate and equip students with multiple intersecting privileged identities with the knowledge and tools they need to fight privilege and oppression.

Methods Summary

I looked at a specific kind of privileged student in order to offer a deeper understanding of their reality. I was able to use the tools of grounded theory within a subjective framework. The qualitative approach allowed me to share and better understand the voices and stories of privileged student who operate as allies. As with any
social issue the experiences, problems, and stories about oppression and privilege are wide and contain many variables.

My constructivist epistemological perspective informed the choices I made throughout this project, from formation of the research questions and methods used, to the conclusion and theories drawn from the research. A constructivist epistemology focuses on the meaning making of the individual student and acknowledges that understanding is socially constructed (Torres, 2009). Charmaz (2006) wrote about the combination of constructivism and grounded theory; I based my research methods on her methodology. Constructivist grounded theory uses a “systemic approach to social justice inquiry that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions in our analyses” (Charmaz, 2005).

Working from a social justice perspective, I assumed that systems of oppression (e.g. sexism, racism, etc.) function on individual, institutional, cultural, and societal levels to advantage some members and disadvantage others based on understood group membership (Bell, 1997). My research did not ignore these structures, nor did I assume that they would emerge from the data; rather these I understood these structures as implicit assumptions when I began my study. These concepts (e.g. sexism and racism) became sensitizing tools to expand rather than limit the data collection and analysis (Broido & Manning, 2002).

When presenting research the question is not whether or not I have bias, but how I will present (or not) the biases that are inevitably part of me. Qualitative research itself is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world; the observer seeks to interpret
the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). My social location provides a particular viewpoint and set of experiences as I construct, write, and perform the work within this research. Being White and male (socially constructed realities) shaped and informed my perspectives.

As Guba and Lincoln noted in 1981, the researcher is the “instrument” in the case of qualitative research. In this case, I am operating from a constructivist viewpoint, using grounded theory. Operating as a constructivist means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them, and locating me in the realities (Charmaz, 2005). My approach explicitly assumes that this research offers an interpretive portrayal of the allies studied, not an exact picture of them (see Charmaz, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994).

I interviewed 10 White men who are currently attending Xavier University fulltime and consider themselves allies. In so doing, I aimed for saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); that is, no new concepts, or categories emerged from the data. I used an in-depth interview process, including initial interviews, member checking, and follow up conversations. I used an evolving design, so that the questions could be changed, deleted, or added to as the interview process evolved. I formatted the interview as an intensive conversational interview (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25), with some pre-determined questions designed to guide the conversation (Appendix A).

After each taped interview, I transcribed the discussion verbatim. I deconstructed each interview, first line by line, then section by section, and identified reoccurring
themes and/or statements. Using this method, I then refined the following interviews based on emerging codes and themes from the preceding interviews. In grounded theory research, data collection and data analysis can and do inform and focus each other (Charmaz, 2005, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1964; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As recommended by Charmaz (2006) I used the four types of coding procedures in my analysis; initial, focused, axial, and theoretical. I implemented these four types of coding throughout the data collection and analysis process. Grounded theory research also allowed me as the researcher to acknowledge a personal relationship with the participants and assumed theoretical understanding will emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I also used the constant comparative method, member-checking, and follow-up conversations with co-researchers to ensure saturation and that my interpretation was consistent with co-researchers experiences. This theoretical understanding allowed me as the researcher to propose theory about these White men identifying as allies.

Research Findings

Critical Influences on Development

Critical outside experiences affected these 10 students in their development as allies. “Critical incidents are the significant events, interactions, and experiences that serve as catalysts for meaning-making, as well as for the decision for folks to continue with engagement in diversity” (Landreman et.al., 2007, p. 283). These shared themes included: classroom experiences, co-curricular clubs and experiences, travel, and role models and family. Classroom experiences broadened allies’ perspectives and
understandings of themselves and the “other”. Classrooms also provided structured spaces for the allies to explore ideas about oppression, privilege, and ally identity. Exposure to travel, new experiences, student clubs, and university directed experiences outside the classroom led many of the co-researchers to label themselves as allies. A deeper understanding of the world, themselves, and others enlarged their perspectives and called them to serve as justice allies. Finally, family, teachers, and friends influenced their development. The interactions, lessons, and conflicts with family members influenced the ally identity they claim. One student was led to his role as an ally through the influence of a friend’s story of surviving sexual assault. Experiences that the students have chosen to participate in outside the classroom, including travel, student clubs, integrated learning opportunities, and organized protest have also led to the students identifying as allies.

**Understanding Self as Ally**

Students saw their ally identities as a context in which to explore and examine self-growth, have an awareness of privilege, explore the self, and as a combination of education about self and others and action for or with others in light of social justice concerns. “No one group can be understood as if outside the relational and structural aspects of identity formation” (Fine & Weis 2005, p. 66). Co-researchers defined their role as ally in conjunction with privileged and target groups, including a co-researcher who chose not to define himself as an ally.

Many of the co-researchers viewed the expression of compassion, empathy, and solidarity as central to their ally identity. Co-researchers shared these words (i.e.
compassion, empathy, and solidarity) repeatedly as key aspects of being an ally. As men, they often are not expected or allowed to talk about compassion and empathy, which makes their choice to be allies of compassion unique.

The co-researchers varied in the degree to which they were able to identify and articulate their privileges, and each researcher had a different understanding of male and White privileges. When we as White men do not work to maintain our privilege, and especially when we actively work against it, we meet challenges and obstacles. Co-researchers spoke not only about being born into privilege, but maintaining privilege, and that as White men, other people of privilege expect us to support our privilege. By being justice allies, we are not working to support privilege—this leads to conflict and identity confusion.

Co-researchers understood that, as allies, they stand outside of a target groups and help to right social injustices leveled against the target groups. Some identified themselves and their privileges as part of the original “problem” and stress that their role as ally is required. All co-researchers recognized systems of privilege, but some were uncomfortable or unable to name their personal benefits from systems of privilege. Co-researchers often avoided conversation about their White identity or had trouble speaking about it.

The environment of Xavier University also influenced co-researchers’ understanding of themselves as allies. For some this meant they had a “protected” space in which to be an ally, for others this meant they were cut-off from real world concerns.
Students shared challenges as allies, both because of their own identity questions and because of how privileged groups and target groups treated them as allies. These challenges include wrestling with their own identities as White men, being outcasts, losing friends, experiencing guilt, and feeling overwhelmed. I carefully labeled these challenges for these White male allies as pain, not oppression—the benefits counterbalance the pain, unlike target groups’ experience of oppression (Johnson, 2001, 40). Students are actively functioning as allies, and at the same time trying to understand and cope with feelings of guilt around their own roles in oppression.

In these spaces of challenges, some of the students named their privilege to abandon their identity as ally (in contrast to target populations whom do not have the privilege to “walk away”), and many spoke about their personal commitment to staying strong in their identity as an ally, despite these challenges. We have chosen to remove ourselves, to distance ourselves from other people or systems of privilege by becoming or labeling ourselves as allies.

They identified as outcasts or different because of their role as an ally, and engaged in a continual process of “deciding to come out” as an ally. Co-researchers feel that others doubt them in the role of an ally, and they question what their role as an ally is. The role of an ally requires commitment to the role itself. Co-researchers had to recommit themselves to the role of ally—sharing this identity with target groups and other privileged group members as they met or interacted with them. In working as allies they are rejecting mainstream understanding of their identity, and inviting rejection as
they insert themselves into positions and groups where they are often seen as “the problem” rather than part of the solution.

Theory

Each co-researcher represented different combinations of the following areas, representing no repeating, definitive pattern of advancement. My ally identity theory follows White men as they are challenged in their personal understanding of fairness in the world, Recognizing Oppression and Experiencing Tension. Faced with conflict from an outside source that challenges their belief in a fair world they begin to work to ease other’s suffering, in order to contribute to the fairness of the world, Triggering Compassion and Acting as an Ally. Within this work, they come to understand systems of privilege; and at some limited level their personal relationship with privilege and their connections to oppression, Naming and Owning Privilege. By working as an ally, they alienate themselves from other privileged groups, yet remain non-group members of oppressed groups. By labeling themselves as ally, they create an identity that they hope will communicate support for target groups and set them apart from non-allies, as well as possibly separating them from other non-ally White men, Creating an Ally Identity. The ally identity also allows these men to find a common space with other allies like them, Claiming a Shared Identity. Finally allies wrestle with the conflicting spaces created by claiming an ally identity, Managing Ongoing Tension.

New perspectives and experiences in young adulthood challenge White male allies in their personal understanding of fairness in the world. Faced with conflict from an outside source that challenges their belief in a fair world they begin to work to ease
other’s suffering, in order to contribute to the fairness of the world. Within this work, they come to understand privilege; and for some, their personal relationship with privilege and their connections to oppression. By working as allies, they alienate themselves from other privileged groups, yet remain non-group members of oppressed groups.

The term ally is significant to the ally himself as well as the target groups he works with on social justice issues. The term ally helps the White male students define their roles and their identities as they find themselves outside of many groups; target groups and other groups of privilege. White men who understand themselves as allies have different reported motivations for labeling themselves allies, but all face similar challenges. When they stop working to maintain privilege, they risk the “dictating punch”—other men and privilege groups being abusive towards White male allies. White male allies can feel rejected, misunderstood, and outcast from the structures and societies in which they have found support in the past. At the same time, target groups do not fully accept them because of their privileged identities.

Labeling themselves as Allies allows for building community with other people fighting oppression and understanding themselves and their own actions. Calling themselves allies means, “I have privilege, but am working to fight that privilege and fight oppression with target groups.” It also means that they are setting themselves apart from other privileged White men who do not label themselves as allies, and that they are setting themselves apart from the target groups they are working with. This separation from other privileged groups is intentional, while the separation from target groups may
not be intentional. The term ally may communicates acceptance and ownership of privileges to target partners, and it may communicate another privilege (the ability to call oneself ally rests on privilege) to target groups. Within the use of the term or label ally exists a danger of separation when trying to work with target groups. The term may help others understand how the ally understands himself in the struggle against oppression, but it may also separate the ally from the people he is striving to work with. By labeling themselves as ally, they create an identity that they hope will communicate support for target groups and set them apart from non-allies. Actively identifying as an ally further separates these White men from other White men (non-allies) and may separate them from target groups as well, as the ally identity is based on and built from a place of privilege. The ally identity also allows these men to find a common space with other allies like them.

Theory Context

I approached the use of grounded theory as “a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (Charmaz, 2006, p.9). Using a constructivist grounded theory model allowed grounded theory to provide guidance to my research without boxing the research into a positivist arena. Like Charmaz, in direct contradiction to Glaser and Strauss (1967),

[I] assume[d] that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices. (Charmaz, 2006, p.10)
Criteria for Grounded Theory Studies


I have developed an intimate familiarity with White male allies, being one myself and working with 10 invested White male students on this research. I have used systemic comparisons between observations and categories to create the logical links presented in this paper between my gathered data and my argument and analysis. Finally, meeting the credibility standard, I have provided enough evidence for my claims in the paper for the reader to make independent assessments and agree or disagree with my claims.

My categories and themes offer new insights into White male students functioning and identifying as allies. My theory bears similarities to Broido’s (2002) description of ally development (exposure to new perspectives as a formation point) and Edward’s (2006) description of stages in ally identity development. Both of these scholars’ findings are incorporated into my larger theory, demonstrating validity. My research was specific and unique to White male allies, a point that is true for no other study that I am aware of being conducted at this point. In addition, while parts of my theory bear resemblance to Broido’s and Edward’s, I have incorporated new deep descriptions of White male allies and included new theoretical directions.

These original aspects include:
Formation of ally identity based on tension between a sense of fairness and the oppression found in the world. In an effort to balance their own conceptualization of a fair world and the evidence of oppression and different life experiences in a shared culture, these White men become allies in order to be able to hold both beliefs.

An ally identity based not only on deconstructing oppression and privilege, but also based on a search for a sense of community or belonging. The ally role extends beyond partnership with target groups and includes community building within privileged groups.

As opposed to other theories, my understanding of the role of the ally is also dependent on others’ understanding and view of the individual, not just the individual’s self-identity. How do target groups and other groups of privilege interpret the “ally’s” actions?

The suggestion of a post-ally identity or post-ally label identity when working with target groups in recognition of the inherent challenges using the term ally within target groups.

The research has offered resonance—connected to lived experience—for co-researchers. As co-researchers have read what I have written, they have found themselves on the page. I have been able to reveal taken-for-granted meanings and delve deeper into them through links between individual lives and larger collectives. We as a group are trying to find common ground and connections within target groups and privileged groups. We as a group are living the tensions between our experiences of life and what
we understand others’ experiences to be. This research has allowed us to understand ourselves as allies.

This theory demonstrates usefulness by sharing information that practitioners, theorists, and allies can use in their everyday world. This research and theory suggests additional areas of research (see Future Research) and development for me and other theorists. This research also suggests a number of ways practitioners can encourage and support White men’s growth and/or development as allies. Finally, this research contributes to the conversations of allies and raises additional questions for people of privilege who strive to work against oppression as allies.

My research and theory meet Charmaz’s revised criteria for grounded theory studies using a constructivist epistemology. I have demonstrated credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness through the work itself and the developed theory.

*Literature Review in Context*

In my literature review I included theories and research about oppression, privilege, and allies. The use of prior literature within a qualitative study required developing a balance between reviewing and becoming informed by previous research—that is, being sensitized to theoretical concepts, while remaining open to the fresh ideas, perspectives, and processes experienced by the participants of this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Charmaz, 2006). In the course of my research I was able to develop original themes and theories, while still being able to contribute to the current “conversation” about allies.
Solidarity

Oppression and privilege are not *de facto* elements of life, but are created and supported by anyone who has a privileged identity. Dehumanization is the result of oppression, and it affects not only those who have had their humanity stolen through oppression, but those that stolen it, the privileged, as well (Freire, 1970, Goodman, 2001). Freire has been understood to argue that the key role for allies is to be *with* oppressed others, not *for* oppressed others. I agree that for privileged college students working as allies, working with, not for others, is how targeted group can find the most trust with privileged students. Concurrently, my theory suggests that finding and building a “*with*” space may be beyond the majority of White men I worked with on the research. Allies are in different stages of their work with targeted groups and should be supported when working *for* others as it may lead to working *with* others. In addition, while these distinctions are important, particularly to the ally himself, the actual impact on the work against oppression may not be as heavily influenced by these distinctions as Freire suggested. I make this suggestion not to undervalue the importance of solidarity for White male allies, but because of the inherent challenges White male allies face in building trust to develop *with* relationships.

My theory, in particular *Acting as an Ally* and *Recognizing Privilege*, suggests that *Conscientizacão*—learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970) in order to transform themselves and the world around them—is a more important aspect of the work that White men can and should be doing as allies. In ally work, White men must
develop the power to perceive critically “the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, p. 70-1).

Privilege

Privileged people do not oppress in order to gain privilege, but rather to retain it—oppression does not exist on its own merits, but is a result of systems of oppression (Johnson, 2001). The nature of dominant group identities leaves them largely unexamined not only in the literature but also for the individuals themselves (Johnson, 2001; Jones, 1997). Researchers have begun to examine the attitudes and behaviors of dominant groups (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006); my goal was to find out how particular privileged students understand their roles as allies to targeted groups. My findings clearly indicate that like the literature itself, personal benefits of systems of privilege largely go unexamined. Every co-researcher recognized the existence of systems of privilege that create “unfair” benefits for White men, but only a few were able to identify these benefits in their personal experience.

On Pain

Members of privileged groups suffer a loss of authenticity and humanity because of their unearned privilege (Freire, 1970). Goodman (2001) identified areas in which systems of oppression may negatively affect privileged people. This included social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual and material costs. White men can experience a discrepancy between external perceptions and internal realities; they often do not feel themselves to be the privileged powerful people others may presume them to be. These
discrepancies lead to confusion over their roles as allies—they experience rejection and loss as an ally, but understand from the world around them that they are the ones with the power.

Privileged groups can experience fear and pain because of their privilege. They may experience the fear of losing entitlement and power or losing respect in their community if they side with the oppressed: a man functioning as ally for women, or a White student being ally to students of color may experience this fear. Many of the co-researchers described not being understood by family and friends (privileged groups for the most part) as well as target groups when they acted as allies. Chris used the term “dictating-punch” to describe this loss of entitlement and the reactions from privileged men around him—a challenge to his person because of his refusal to maintain privilege. Goodman’s description of pain and my theory underline the importance for practitioners of creating safe places for White male allies to express their experiences without comparing their pain to others’ oppression.

Identity Development

Worrell and Remer (2003) developed an identity model within a feminist framework to address privileged and oppressed identities. Their model simultaneously incorporates positions of privilege and oppression. The dimensions begin with preawareness in which the privileged and oppressed person accepts the majority status. The second dimension is encounter when both the privileged and oppressed person recognizes the privileged or oppressed values that are part of their identities. Worrell and Remer (2003) identify engagement by both privileged and oppressed individuals as the
mark of the third dimension, *immersion*. The final dimension of Worrell and Remer’s model is *integration and activism*. In this final status, privileged and oppressed identities fully share aspects of this dimension.

My theory echoes Worrell and Remer (2003) in some ways, though I only worked with students from a place of privilege. Their identification of a pre-awareness stage is similar to the students I spoke with before they gained new perspectives and a different understanding of their own selves through critical incidents, also similar to Worrell and Remer’s encounter stage. Critical incidents included hearing a friend’s story, the experience of third-world poverty, college courses, and clubs on campus to name a few. The co-researchers I worked with are in various stages of immersion, integration and activism. I question White male allies ability to move fully into integration when working with target groups, due to their own identity understanding, that of privileged groups surrounding them, and/or the target groups ability to integrate the privileged individual. This remains another question for further research.

*Becoming An Ally*

Bishop (2002) provided a six-step framework for the development of social justice allies. Bishop considered these six-steps as stages through which an individual moves. The first step involves understanding oppression, how it began, how it is maintained, and how it affects individuals and institutions. The second step is to recognize and understand the interactions between different oppressions. As students understand their role as oppressor and oppressed, they feel pain—step three is healing this pain. The fourth step is becoming a “worker in your own liberation” (Bishop, 2002,
Step five, actually becoming an ally, requires students to examine past behaviors and learn new skills (Bishop, 2002). This requires an understanding of the systems of oppression and one’s own role in those systems. “Those who do understand have usually worked their way to their insights through their own experience, reflection, and efforts to work towards social change” (Bishop, p.111). The sixth and final step is maintaining hope and idealism while working for social change.

Again, these stages are echoed in my theory, but neither I nor my co-researchers experienced these stages as progressive stages. The allies I spoke were experiencing different “stages” simultaneously as ongoing processes of psychosocial phenomena. All the allies I spoke with had a grasp of stage six, maintaining hope, without it they would not have been speaking with me nor working as an ally after experiencing and living in stage three—feeling the pain of your involvement in oppression. Bishop (2002) suggests stage three as working through this pain, but the students I spoke with, no matter their role with target groups, were still living with this pain. Students were in different parts of stages one and two with varying and different understandings of oppression as a system and the relationships between oppressions. Interestingly, students were often trying to work in step five as ally without having a full grasp of stage four and their own role in maintaining oppression. I found that the students I worked with first began to identify and work as an ally before they worked to gain a deeper understanding of their own role in oppression.
Ally Development and Intercultural Maturity

Edwards (2006) has defined progressive stages of development for allies beginning with Allies for Self-Interest leading to Allies for Social Justice. Each linear stage has different motivations, understandings of oppression, focuses, and relationships to privilege. Allies for Self Interest are students who see the world as a fair place, find injustice shocking, and are working to protect those they care about from being hurt. Aspiring Allies for Altruism are students who are wrestling with guilt, shame, and self-despair in their ally work. Allies for Social Justice are students who work with those from target groups, recognize that systems of oppression harm members from privileged groups, and are not allies to individuals, but to issues such as racism, heterosexism, and sexism.

The co-researchers I worked with fit into Edwards’ stages in terms of their motivations to do ally work and their understanding of themselves. Some work as allies to relieve a friend’s pain, others work to combat systems of oppression without seeing themselves in those systems, and others work to help other and themselves benefit from lessening oppression (Edwards, 2006). This stage progression is similar to King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) work on intercultural identity, identifying increasingly complex ways of existing.

King and Baxter Magolda (2005) constructed an intercultural maturity model for students. Development in all three dimensions (cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal) proceed “both within and across three dimensions of maturity … as college students become increasingly capable of understanding and acting in ways that are interculturally
aware and appropriate” (King & Baxter Magolda, p. 547). Development in all three
dimensions is required for a person to be able to use one's skills (Kegan, 1994).

According to King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) model, students move through three
stages of development in each of the dimensions on their journey to intercultural
maturity.

Unlike Edwards, King and Baxter Magolda (2005) take interactions with the other
(in this case, target groups) into account as steps on the journey to intercultural maturity.
Co-researchers were in different stages of this model, cognitively, interpersonally, and
interpersonally. As students progressed in any of the three dimensions, others could
follow. I did not find a repeating pattern in the co-researchers I worked with in these
dimensions, though individuals did often follow the stages of development within a
particular developmental category (i.e. cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal). Bilodeau
and Renn (2005) argued that sexual orientation is not a stage development, but that:

Human development [is] unfolding in concurring and multiple paths, including
the development of a person’s self-concept, relationships with family, and
connections to peer groups and community. … and that human growth is
intimately connected to and shaped by environmental and biological factors.

That same concept of multiple, unfolding paths of development applies to the White
male allies I worked with as well.

Bill’s experience reflects Edwards’ first stage as he was driven by a friend’s story
to combat sexual assault. Tim is currently wrestling with his sense of being overwhelmed
and guilt in stage two. Chris and Nicholas fall into Edward’s third stage as they
specifically identified their ally work as being motivated to change systems and help free themselves from the degradation of privileged and oppressed systems. Missing from Edward’s theoretical construct of ally development is the motivation for students to label themselves as allies (specifically) in order to create a space that explains to privileged groups and target groups who they are. While I agree that the stages as Edwards describe them are progressive, and are so for the co-researchers, I do not think that an ally in stage one cannot have a similar impact as an ally in stage three may have combating oppression (it is less likely, but not impossible). If they are both identifying themselves as allies to themselves and to others they share many of the same impacts in the fight to reduce oppression. The stages described by Edwards do an excellent job of describing the motivational increase of complexity for allies, but ignore the impact of others on identity development. In my theory I also suggest a version of what would be a stage four in Edwards’ model, in which one acts as an ally, but no longer uses the label, again another area for future research.

*College Ally Development*

Broido (2002) wrote about the process of becoming an ally after interviewing six participants within her phenomenological study. Broido’s purpose was to examine how undergraduate students understand their development as social justice allies as well as to expand the current research on ally development, an area that she describes as having a “paucity of research” (Broido, 2000, p.4). Looking specifically at students that possess more than one privileged identity (White and male) has further informed the research in this area.
Broido (2000) wrote specifically about the development of the ally identity. The work I did with co-researchers supported the findings in her study. In Broido’s study participants listed “discussion and self-reflection, and perspective taking (looking through others eyes) as a meaning making tools” (2000, p. 16). Broido described ally development beginning in precollege attitudes, growing through experiences in college, and resulting in an ability to act as an ally. After students reach the ability to act as an ally, Broido reports that chance and recruitment (faculty and staff recruiting students to be allies, or students happening by chance into a classroom or experience that leads them to be an ally) are equal factors in that student actually behaving as an ally.

I found that ally development began for many co-researchers before college, but that similar experiences and critical incidents as described by Broido (2000) led to ally development for the co-researchers I worked with. Though I did not identify chance and recruitment as factors for my co-researchers (they did not emerge as codes or themes), I do not disagree with Broido’s assessment. Conducting more research on why some White men do not become allies could help answer this question. Interestingly Broido does suggest a background reason for the innate sense of fairness that I identified in my co-researchers “a basic egalitarian belief in the espoused values of American culture that everyone should have equal opportunity” (Broido & Reason, 2005, p. 21).

Resistance and Critical Whiteness

Often, when students begin to learn they belong to a privileged group they do not understand the concept, are unwilling to embrace it, or get angry and defensive (Goodman, 2001). White men are often the most resistant to social justice (Goodman,
“Male psychology, socialization, and social position” often encompass all the reasons for resistance (Goodman, 2001, p. 76). Our society socializes most men to repress or suppress feelings and fears. This denial of feelings and fears makes it more difficult to connect with others, to use empathy, and to work for social justice (Goodman, 2001).

Critical Whiteness is a framework that explores the racialization of systems of oppression and unearned advantage and the inscription of that system by an ideology that identifies and supports White as the normal and privileged racial identity group (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005). Whiteness as a system of oppression allows students to acknowledge only heinous race incidents, and leaves the deeply ingrained racism of a privileged system unacknowledged. White students on journeys to becoming allies often react to critical Whiteness, or exposure to the idea of race privilege, with guilt, anger, avoidance, and confusion (Jones, Gilbride-Brown & Gasiorski, 2005).

The co-researchers I worked with did not share any general resistance to work as allies. They were able to share their fears about being an ally, and talk about the compassion they felt towards others. The co-researchers shared challenges as allies and for some a sense of guilt around their own privilege. As a theme, the co-researchers did display avoidance around identifying their own personal role in the oppression of others, and their own personal privilege. They could identify systems of oppression and privilege, but often avoided discussing their personal roles. In particular, with the exception of two students (the oldest in the study) the co-researchers avoided discussions of race and of their privilege as White men. They discussed their roles and challenges as
men much more openly, but in general left race off the table, even when asked directly about it. While avoiding discussions of race, and not always recognizing their own privilege, they did not share any other resistance to ideas of oppression, or working to combat oppression. Even self-identified allies are struggling with discussions and conversations about race and personal privilege. What sets these individuals apart from other White men has not been fully answered by my work here and deserves further consideration.

Implications for Practice

There is a tendency in higher education research to create hierarchal, linear progressions of student’s development. Historically theorists have constructed most models in this fashion because we know there is an increase in the complexity of intellectual, moral, and physical development as college students age (See Bishop, 2002; Helms, 2008; Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Kohlberg, 1973; Baxter Magolda, 2008; and Torres, 2009). My theory of ally identity understanding and development is more dependent on relationships and perspectives than individual motivation. As Bilodeau and Renn (2005) argued, “Human development [is] unfolding in concurring and multiple paths” (p. 28).

“All of us are part of the problem. There is no way to avoid that as long as we live in the world. But we could also make ourselves part of the solution if we only knew how” (Johnson, 2001, vii). Gaining a richer understanding of how White male allies enter the space of ally identity can help inform the experiences we as practitioners encourage our White male students to explore. A deeper understanding of the student’s comprehension
of their own identity as allies will assist us in working with these students. The term ally is a journey, not a destination. The students I worked with who currently identify as allies are still trying to understand this identity.

“For student affairs professionals, developing social justice allies is a key component of working towards social change” (Edwards, 2006, p. 41). My theory suggests some courses of action that can help me help students, particularly White men, make progress in their social justice work. I suggest the following possibilities as courses of action.

Work with first-year White men to help them humanize problems, creating tension between their understanding of the world and recognized oppression. Hearing stories of actual oppression from those who live on the other side of the privilege/oppression divide, or witnessing oppression against real people will help make oppression “real”, similar to when Bobby travelled to Belize, or Bill heard his friend’s story of surviving a sexual assault.

Possibilities include a first-year course that helps students see perspectives outside of their immediate surroundings, international travel and service as well as local opportunities to work with target populations (programs students spoke about at Xavier include Academic Service Learning Semester, weekly service programs like ConneXions, service learning weeks such as Alternative Breaks, and the Summer Service program, offering social justice work, education, and community living and reflection). In addition to offering these experiences, offer the appropriate reflection tools (see Education for Justice, 2011; National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011) and
personnel to implement said tools. Match White men with social justice advocates and allies in mentoring programs or reading programs. Match young White men with active older peers who work as allies in order to combat the feelings of being outcast experienced by the co-researchers.

Fixing problems became an emerging theme for the co-researchers about ally work. They are eager to right wrongs and fix problems when they speak about their ally work. While there are inherent challenges in this mindset, as many problems of oppression cannot simply be “fixed”, there are also inherent opportunities to this approach. Share with young White men that “Oppression and dominance name social realities that we can participate in without being oppressive or dominating people” (Johnson, 2006, p. 13). Identify oppression as a problem and call young White men to work on this problem. Often these young men begin to understand oppression and privilege, and then quickly learn that “they” are to blame for the oppression in the world. This turns many potential allies away. Give them a place in which to address the guilt and confusion that arises after becoming exposed to perspectives outside of their own. Many of the co-researchers listed “doing the right thing” as a benefit to ally work. Help create “ally” as an identity on campus in which White men can own their race and gender with pride as they combat privilege and oppression as allies.

Being a White male justice ally brings its own challenges for the students attempting to function in this space. As people of privilege, they have chosen to enter particular arenas were the same privilege that is usually an asset becomes a hindrance. I think this is particularly hard for White male allies simply because of the nature of our
experiences and privileges. We are often surprised when others discriminate against us due to parts of our identity over which we have no control (Mather, 2008).

My theory suggests that the label ally is equally important to in-group members (White men) as well as target groups. Currently my campus and many others host clubs, groups and offices whose central mission relates to particular target groups—in these environments White men can identity as allies and explore ways to be part of the solution instead of the problem.

Co-researchers spoke about being overwhelmed and feeling outside of target and privileged groups. We as staff members need to help create groups for White male allies, safe space where they can share their struggles, challenges, and the costs of being an ally as well as their successes and pride in being an ally. These kinds of spaces are particular important as White male allies find themselves without group membership from non-ally White men and target groups. These groups are also important because these students need a place to share their pain and challenges, without appearing to compare their pain with other’s oppression. Co-researchers and I have discussed the importance of having the conversations that took place during the research, and the fact that for many of us, this was the first time we spoke about being White male allies with other White male allies directly. Some of the co-researchers have already requested a group meeting of the men involved in order to continue the discussion they began in this process.

Finally, my theory raises implications about the term ally itself and its use with target groups by White men. The theory suggests possible transition from non-ally to ally to non-labeled ally. Working as ally becomes about doing things and less about
labeling. In some ways, it then becomes less about the individual’s understanding of self as an ally and more about others’ understanding. Perhaps using the term ally for in-group understanding and support is the best route. Calling yourself an ally with a target group means saying “I am not you”—when we should be saying “I am you”.

Scope of Study

As with all studies, the subjects of this study are limited, this can potentially influence conclusions drawn from the research. The methodology, the participants, and the research construct the scope of the study. The scope of the study is limited by co-researchers’ reliability and the inability to broadly apply this research.

This study’s scope is limited, as identified in other research by Broido (2000), by participants’ ability to reflect accurately upon their own development. My conclusions are drawn from the students’ self-reported analysis of their own experience and development. While my constructivist based theory building inherently recognizes this theory as constructed from particular viewpoints, is also fair to assume that the reflections from students about their selves may change over time and with increased reflection and perspective on their development. “All knowledge, all reality is “being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”” (Crotty, 1998, p.42). Performing a longitudinal study with the ten participants over the next decade would be one way to increase the area this study covers and is a suggestion for possible future research.

Using a qualitative constructivist grounded theory model to develop theory naturally limits the study. While this process has created a deeper, richer understanding
of these 10 co-researchers’ experience and identity development it cannot be applied broadly to other White male allies. A constructivist epistemology focuses on the meaning making of the individual student and acknowledges that understanding is socially constructed (Torres, 2009). This research can be used to inform practitioners and allies about White male allies, but it may not be used to predict White male ally behavior. The researcher is defining and naming what happens in the interviews from a subjective viewpoint, not pretending to an objective viewpoint (Broido & Manning, 2002). While this perspective is built into the research itself, it still creates a limitation to the use of the research and theory with other populations.

**Future Research**

My research addressed particular questions about a particular group of White male allies. I have increased my and, hopefully the readers’, understanding of what leads some White men to be allies and how these men understand themselves as allies. These answers raise more questions for study in the future.

Questions of how organized advocacy groups for target groups experience White male allies still exist. Researchers have examined the development of target identities and target populations, as well as many advocacy groups themselves, but there is a space for increasing understanding around their experience of working with self-identified allies. This information could create a deeper understanding of the group themselves, as well as inform the theory I propose in this study.

Working with Brian, a White male gay ally, has raised additional questions about individuals with multiple privileged and targeted identities, particularly in regards to
White male allies. What additional challenges and opportunities do these individuals experience as they negotiate different group memberships? How does our understanding of White male allies change when those allies are also part of a lower-socio-economic class, gay, disabled, or have a different country of origin?

Within this study, nine of the ten co-researchers attended a Catholic high school and all co-researchers attended a Catholic Jesuit university. Future research can be conducted with White male allies attending a public college, with public high school backgrounds. Many of the co-researchers identified classes and teachers who had an interest in social justice as impacting their choice to be ally. Would this experience be different for White male allies in a different educational system?

My theory identifies a learned sense of fairness and compassion for these White male allies, but has not identified the origin of this sense of fairness and compassion for others. More research with younger White men (boys) could help us to better understand if this is unique to those that become allies or allies retain this sense of fairness differently. In addition, further research can work to understand the origin of the sense of fairness for White men and identify if this experience is unique to their race and gender.

My research also points to a lack of understanding about White men in college who choose not to act as allies. Future research could look at these White men to create a richer understanding of why they do not work or identify as allies. My theory suggests a lack of exposure to different perspectives and experiences as a possible lack of ally identity development. In addition, these White men may have had exposure to different perspectives but did not balance the tension between their lives and their sense of fairness
and the oppression in the world by becoming allies. What choices did they make and why?

Finally, additional research should be completed using quantitative methods to study self-identified White male allies. The themes discovered in this research could be used as variables in a quantitative study in order to better understand if these experiences and results of this qualitative research could be applied more broadly to White men or allies in general. With inferential statistics, one could draw inferences that go beyond the scores from students participating in order to draw conclusions about a broader group. Do these variables—parental roles, friends, travel, and college experiences have an impact on a student labeling themselves as ally? This kind of research would give us additional understanding about White male allies and White male non-allies.

Conclusion

Allies develop through relationships and exposure to perspectives different from their own. They attempt to balance an increased understating of oppression in the world with their own sense of self and understanding of fairness by acting as allies. As their knowledge base increase they may choose to label themselves as allies when working with target groups, as well as a way to communicate to other people with privileged identities their role. This role leaves the White male ally in a middle space, fully belonging to neither target groups nor groups of privilege, where maintaining that privilege is expected. The term ally can be used to help build common space with other White men who are doing ally work, as well as a device to let members of target
populations know the allies intentions. The use of the term in-group and out-group has both advantages and disadvantages that need to be further explored.

This is an area in which multiple opportunities for increased understanding exist. Does Catholic school influence ally development, how do target advocacy groups experience White male allies, how do White male allies develop their sense of fairness, why do some White men not become allies, and what aspects of this research can we apply broadly to White male allies in the future?

As practitioners and people of privilege we have a responsibility to function as allies, working to change the systems that award us unearned privileges by using those privileges to change that system. This research and additional research in this little understood field can help us combat systems of oppression more effectively. The realization that systems of oppression and privilege negatively impact everyone, target groups and privileged groups, calls us to act together to combat these systems. The better we understand allies the better we can support and encourage their growth. The responsibility to combat oppression does not belong solely to oppressed people, and these systems will not be defeated until people identify their own privileges and use them to combat systems of oppression. As Bill said to other White men, “Grow a pair”.
REFERENCES


Helms, J. E., (2008). *A race is a nice thing to have; A guide to being a White person*. Hanover, MA: Microtraining Associates.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTION FORMAT

Talk about an experience you had with someone different than yourself.

What does it mean to you to be an ally?

What qualities or aspects of being an ally stand out for you?

Please share an experience of being an ally.

How does being White influence your identity as an ally?

How does being male influence your identity as an ally?

Does being White/male influence your perspective in the group (if an ally or social justice group is identified)?

What events or situations are connected with your journey as an ally?

What people are connected with your journey as an ally?

When did you start working as an ally?

What influenced you to define yourself as an ally?

What challenges did you or do you encounter as you define yourself as an ally?

What challenges have you encountered being an ally?

Does being male influence your identity in general? How?

Does being White influence your identity in general? How?

What is your understanding of privilege?

How do you manage your privilege as an ally?

Do you ever feel not privileged?

Are there other important aspects of being a social justice ally you would like to share?
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Colleagues,

I am beginning research for my qualitative dissertation project for Ohio University entitled PRIVILEGED STUDENTS: WHITE MEN AS SOCIAL JUSTICE ALLIES. I plan to recruit undergraduate traditional age students who self-identify as White and male, and identify as social justice allies, and am asking for your help with this process.

I would appreciate it you could identify students that have a privileged identity (White or male) who work with target groups (Men working with women’s groups, White students working with students of color and/or openly straight students working with LGBTQ groups) for my research.

I will be conducting short initial interviews (by phone or in person) to determine if the student self-identifies as White, male and as a social justice ally. The participants may choose to participate using their own names, or an alias. If they do fit the four categories, I will then ask them to participate in a roughly 40 minute intensive conversational interview to discuss their role and identities as social justice allies. These interviews will be followed by information sharing as I build my data and dissertation. After the initial interview I will ask the participants to review the codes and themes I pull from their interviews, during at least two more interactions. Finally, I will share the final project with the participants for a final review. During each stage, I will ask for their input and review, in order to check validity and reliability for my research.
Please share this information with any students you may think are interested and ask them to contact me at 513-312-9113 or xtopherbridges@gmail.com.

Thank you- Chris Bridges
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM AND CONTRACT

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Privileged Students: White Men as Social Justice Allies

Researchers: Christopher E. Bridges

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this research will be to understand and describe how privileged allies, White men at a four-year higher education institution, understand their roles as privileged individuals and how they see themselves as allies. This study will discover what personal and/or developmental experiences have shaped the stories of White male allies. Research questions will include; what particular experiences have informed the development of these students as allies; how do privileged students understand their roles as allies, why have these participants continued their work as allies when meeting challenges to this role? I propose to pursue questions through in-depth interviews of students with multiple privileges, White men, to better understand what has fostered these students’ interests in becoming allies, and what steps might be taken to encourage others in ally work. My research proposes to help in the process of educating and equipping privileged students to fight privilege and oppression.

The data collection procedure will begin with an initial short interview to determine suitability for the project, including self-identification of race and gender, and role as an ally. I will then conduct in-depth intensive conversational interviews with the participants, with some pre-determined questions designed to guide the conversation. Throughout the process, I will seek validation by checking with participants on the evolving themes and theory, in order to move forward with the project. Total time commitment for participants should be 3-4 hours. 90-120 minutes of initial interview time, and 2-3 instances of reading and commenting on researcher’s writing about interviews.
Risks and Discomforts

There is a possibility that through self-reflection participants may become uncomfortable sharing all of their answers in a public forum. If this is the case, an alias can be used for the student so that they are not identified by name in the dissertation, without any loss of reliability for the project itself.

Benefits
Through an intensive conversational interview, which will include self-reflection, definition, and discernment, participants may come to better know themselves and their motivations for acting as allies. This may allow them to become allies that are more informed and be supportive to other allies and targeted groups on campus.

This project will allow the researcher to have and share a better understanding about creating more and better opportunities for those from privileged groups (in particular White straight me) to act as allies with those in oppressed groups, and work towards ending the systems of oppression within our society.

Confidentiality and Records
Participants’ interviews will become part of a public dissertation. Depending on the participant’s preference, data will be labeled with names or aliases. If an alias is used, no document will be created that links the actual name with the alias.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Chris Bridges at xtopherbridges@gmail.com, 513–312–9113 or Dr. Pete Mather at matherp@ohio.edu, (740)593-4454.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593–0664.
By signing below, you are agreeing that:
you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been
given the opportunity to ask questions
known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you
might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
you are 18 years of age or older
your participation in this research is given voluntarily
you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or
loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature________________________ Date________________

Printed Name_____________________

Version Date: [06/18/10]