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A Study of Modern College Student Activism: The Relationship to the School and How Groups Form

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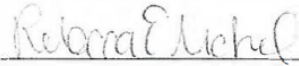
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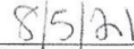
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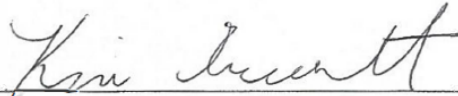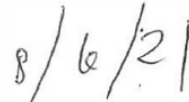
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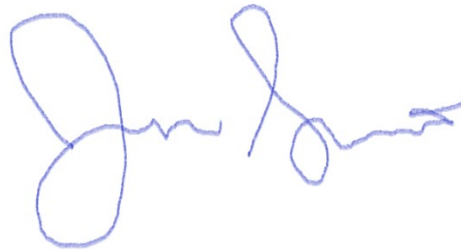
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of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized,

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ABSTRACT

Activism is occurring in an increased manner with Generation Z college students and the greater society. The definition of activism is an evolving one and unsettled in literature. It is often confused with similar terms like Civic Engagement. In addition, the methods of how an activist networks and forms their group in a period of increased social media and online communication warranted investigation. Finally, an exploration of the modern relationship of college student activists to higher education, especially student perceptions of how activism is supported and hindered. This qualitative study using Grounded Theory and principles of Critical Research interviewed nine college students to understand: (1) their definition of activism, (2) activist activities engaged in by the participants, (3) how they find their activism relates to their university, and (4) how they find their network of activists.   A developed Generation Z Activism Model depicts a spectrum from those Communication-Oriented activists who feel support and engaged mostly in communication to the other end of the spectrum as Action-Oriented activists who engage in a multitude of activities, critique activism as just communication, and do not feel as much support in their activism from higher education. These findings give a model to consider how activism can be embraced as multifaceted and how administrators and students can work to better understand each side's perspective.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Activism from college students, specifically protesting, is occurring on college campuses regularly and in increasing numbers. Recent turmoil of nationalists, right-wing leaders being elected, the Covid-19 pandemic, and an upsurge in activism against police brutality all contributed to protests being regularly in the news at the time of this study. Activism has a complicated definition with large disparities in the scholarship; how do today's students define activism, and how do they see themselves in that definition?

Additionally, activism in the form of protest is almost always a group activity, so the formation of the network and group is an important process to understand. At the time of this research, an influx of social media and technology changed the way students communicate, date, organize, and group (Lee et al., 2016). Given the importance of group formation to activism and the potential impact of social media to disrupt traditional methods, modern investigation of the linkage of these divergent topics was important.

This research introduced a study into the relationship of how students define activism, their own activities of activism, the use of social media, and the support or hinderance from higher education to their activism. In what ways do students see the university supports the formation of groups for activism and protest or hinder their efforts? Historically, identity student organizations like Black Student Unions; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) clubs; and others based on identity or politics were epicenters of protest and activism on campus, but now many students mobilized through social networks and other modern technology means. Students tend to be critical of how the university supports their activism;

both ends of the political spectrum have recently encountered a range of negative administrative reactions (Giersch, 2019).

Historically, college students are the epicenter of protest and protest activity across the nation. From Vietnam War protests to Civil Rights and from Hong Kong Umbrella Protestors to Global Warming, it is often students and college campuses that spark and fuel protest activism. Activism in the United States is an important part of the very history and identity of the country. The Boston Tea Party is well accepted as a starting point toward independence. The Bill of Rights guarantees the right to protest in the first amendment. Freedoms of speech and assembly were also integral to our country's fight for independence (FindLaw, 2020). Activism, especially protest, could be said to be in the DNA of the United States.

Problem Statement

Activism is difficult to understand if not easily defined. Definitions of activism differed widely in the literature. Some mirror definitions of broader terms like civic engagement, and others are very specific. It is interesting that a term as important to society and democracy as activism does not have an easily agreed upon definition. This research focused specifically on how modern activists define the word. College students provided a helpful avenue for investigation because of their frequent engagement in activism and accessibility for research.

Higher Education in the United States expresses a duty to prepare its students to be citizens in a democracy. Colleges and universities ultimately purport to support freedom of speech and democracy in their missions, visions, and aspirations. John Dewey (1916) noted education for democratic citizenship has been crucial to the purposes of schooling, including the higher education years. Surely a part of being an engaged citizen involves activism on issues that are important to you. The history of the relationship between university administration and

students on activism is much more complicated than other citizenship acts like voting. The history of this relationship and perspective is expanded further in the literature review.

Perspectives on the extent to which campus activism is encouraged or hindered differs widely between university students and administration. Activities the university conducts like service learning, classes that engage with critical social justice topics, and structures for clubs and organizations with linkages to activism are all examples of provided mechanisms that are known to increase activism behaviors (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Conversely, many students reported the targets of their protest are the actual university administration or school and also report restrictions on free speech such as time and place rules that can feel limiting to their efforts. It is difficult for universities to support activism if many activists report hindrances in their activities. To what level did the students see and understand the ways activism is encouraged and what are the ways they feel protest and activism are restricted by the university in today's era of activism?

In activism of the past, club and organization membership formed a foundation to organizing for activism and protest for college students (Baird, 1970; Bowman et al., 2015; Hundscheid, 2010; Keeter et al., 2002; Laird, 2003; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Indeed, that is the main way activism occurred for generations on campus. The socialist's clubs, Black Student Unions, and conservative student organizations were the epicenter of the activism. Today as social identity issues again take center stage, clubs related to identity, such as Black Student Unions, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) clubs, LatinX clubs, Jewish organizations, and more, are again heavily involved in activism. These clubs face competing missions to also provide community and leadership development. These competing goals for student organizations occurred simultaneously as students change the way they interact.

Activist networking is change in a world of new communication and tools. Social media made a lasting impact on how most people now network and communicate. Social media's impact on activism was demonstrated through "clicktivism," defined as acts that magnify or supersize marketing for causes (Halupka, 2014), through increasing social capital about how to accomplish change (Warren et al., 2015), and by aiding in identity formation related to minority identities (Valenzuela et al., 2014). Direct interactions between protesters and social media has not been widely studied to date although Pearce and Kendzior (2012) found an increase in protest correlated with increased online activity. Importantly, much of this prior research was not limited to social media and predated much of the social media influx into society as well as modern forms of protest.

Clubs and organizations played a critical role in this organizing throughout history, especially for students who protest with marginalized identities. However, many questions remained. Is social media replacing the role of identity clubs and organizations in organizing for protest? How has the relationship of these items changed over time? In what other ways do activists on college campuses today feel supported and hindered by the university that claims to support these efforts? Answers to these questions can assist activists' mobilization on issues in the future. Further, they can help university administrators to refine how universities support and think about restrictions that place road blocks on these important activities.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do university students define activism?

2. How do university students engage in activism?

3. How do university students describe the relationship between the university and activism?

4. How, if at all, did university students develop a network to support their activism?

Overview of Research Methodology

This was a qualitative study. Qualitative research ultimately allowed the research to make meaning from the lived experiences of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This is important in a topic like activism that is often personal, passionate, and multifaceted. Importantly qualitative research is not linear and allows discover to be reflexive, recursive, inductive, and systematic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Given that activism and protest, especially as of late, can relate heavily to topics of social justice oppression, identity, and rights, it was important for the research to reflect ultimate sensitivity to participants own perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. Furthermore, the iterative nature of discover allowed unfolding of information to occur in the nimblest way in a turbulent era.

The topic of activism was personal and complex. It is ever changing, and the story of activists today is not the story of tomorrow. Ravitch and Carl (2016) said that qualitative research is "a mode of inquiry that centralizes the complexity and subjectivity of lived experience and values these aspects of human being and meaning making through methodological means" (p. 5). Reality was indeed formed by social constructs that build from our culture. Qualitative studies allow participants and researchers to begin to unpack these constructs together to make meaning. In this study, involving participants in a member-check interview allowed deeper exploration and unpacking of their own responses in the first interview.

A wide variety of methodologies have been utilized to study activism in college students. Within the qualitative area, researchers have utilized case studies (Kezar, 2010), phenomenology

(Zimmerman, 2017), ethnographic studies (Chen & Rhoads, 2016), and Grounded Theory (Renn, 2007) in past studies of activism. The current political and social climate in the United States was rapidly changing under a contentious election, pandemic, and important awareness of issues of racial injustice being in the forefront of movements. This unusual situation necessitated a Critical Research lens. Within Critical Research, the analysis utilized a Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In Grounded Theory a specific goal was the generation of a theory from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study results in a theoretical model, the Generation Z Model of Activism, from a deep and iterative analysis of coding and the relationship of the responses to the research questions.

I collected data through interviews with nine participants. Each participant had one initial interview, and seven participated in a follow-up, member-checking interview. The triangulation of multiple interviews, member checks, and journaling led to robust opportunities for discovery of themes about today's college students who protest to contribute to the theoretical model. The model presents a relationship of definitions, activities, views on university supports and hindrances, and community. It presents an alignment between those activists who are more communication-oriented and those activists who are more action-oriented.

Rationale and Significance

This study was important for a number of reasons. It aimed to help both students and administrators. On a macro level, change pushed by activists on college campuses has moved the country toward progress on numerous occasions. Universities purport to support this citizenship development in their students, so administrators should understand the current interpretation of their actions by actual activists. In this study participants named specific actions that hinder their movements, and the ending discussion unpacked potential solutions for

administrators to maintain the multiple missions of a university while still supporting this important activity.

Students can learn from this research about how activist protestors of today are assembling and networking. This can inform the most effective mobilization efforts on a host of topics. Activists are seeking to recruit and grow their causes, so this information can be vital in moving forward. Students can also see the varied way their peers define activism and consider how all contribute to change.

Finally, this is a new era of protest on college campuses. Protest on campuses was extensively studied in the 1960s and after, but the volume of research has decreased since that period. As protest is occurring in numbers not seen since the 1960s, it is worthwhile to listen and learn from the lived experience of today's activists.

Role of the Researcher and Assumptions

The researcher is an integral part of a qualitative study. As such, a researcher has a duty to engage in criticality, reflexivity, collaboration, and rigor (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Criticality was based on Critical Research methodology techniques and challenges that the hegemony we all live in affects the researcher, the participants, the interpretation, these methods, and everything in society. Critical research challenged the researcher to question these colonial norms and check for them throughout the process. Reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) is connected to criticality and involves ongoing analysis of the positionality of the researcher's identity and impact on the research. Collaboration is useful, and as articulated in the methodology, this study used member checks to further involve participants as collaborators in the research. Finally, rigor was enhanced in this study through member check fidelity, multiple methods of data capture, and coding and theming checks with a colleague.

The researcher is an activist, but I was a much more active activist in my past. Due to my own LGBTQ identity and growing up in a small, conservative southern town, activism on issues of discrimination, hatred, and homophobia became real and felt necessary for survival. From protests to fundraisers, I have participated in and out of the political system on LGBTQ causes and other issues. I am removed enough from my activist experiences in college and beyond to not be able to articulately reflect on what I think influenced and hindered my activism during my college education. Other issues around networking and identity have drastically changed in the twenty years since I was an undergraduate student. University students connect, communicate, and engage in very different ways today.

I entered this research with assumptions that come from experience with prior research on this topic. While the research is dated, I expected research around the importance of community and network (Newell, 2014; Swank, 2012) to activism to have persisted in spite of a social media-centered modern world. Personally, I encountered activism mostly through personal networks and by receiving an invitation to join the cause. I expected students to be highly critical of the institutions and not see support for their activism.

I am a Student Affairs educator, and some of my assumptions come from that experience. In over fifteen years in that profession, I have seen the valuable influence of out of class, co-curricular, and extra-curricular education on students. Skills such as leadership, cross-cultural education, and communication occur in environments as diverse as student organizations to lounges in residence halls. I expect a relationship between student activists and their out-of-class learning environments to be paramount. Being aware and acknowledging such an expectation, I engaged in journaling and peer debriefing to intentionally not allow such expectations to be leading in questions, analysis or findings.

Key Terminology

Activism is the key term most central to this research. Most people can define activism, but for this study, it was important to clarify its distinction from other terms like civic engagement while also being open to how the participants define it today. Activism does not have a simple definition. Altbach, a leading scholar in this area of study, describes activism as a "highly complex, many-faceted phenomenon" (Altbach, 1991, p.247). This is an important area of this study and an area that was of interest to hear from today's generation, Generation Z, of activists.

In other scholarship, Kezar (2010) defined activism based on Altbach's work as "students' efforts to create change on or off campus related to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues using technical outside institutional channels such as protests, demonstrations and rallies" (p. 461). Keeter et al. (2002) provided the broadest definition. That article lists nineteen elements, which include voting, fundraising, displaying buttons or stickers, contacting officials, boycotting, and more. To be as specific and detailed as possible, the definition in this research mirrored Kezar's definition as a basis for understanding today's students' view of activism.

Another key term is institution, which refers to a specific university or college structures or administration.

Social media also has a broad and overreaching definition. A popular understanding of major platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others was expected to be what the student understands. Valenzuela et al. (2014) differentiated social media into strong-tie networks, such as Facebook, and weaker ties such as Instagram. Strong ties have a potential for higher impact on activism and protest because of the personal and larger amount of sharing

possible. However, in this study social media was defined as interpreted by the student interviewed.

Clubs and organizations tend to represent university-recognized clubs within the structure of student activities on a college campus. The main differentiation in this study was the attempt to analyze separately organizations outside of the university organizations versus those that operate within for students only.

This study sought to answer important questions about networking, perceptions, and effects of technology on modern activism. With rich qualitative interviews, the research provides valuable lessons for administrators and student activists. This dissertation is presented as five chapters. Chapter 2 gives an in-depth history of research around activism and specifically college student activism. Chapter 3 is the methodology for this study. Chapter 4 is the research findings. I present the developed theoretical model: A Model of Generation Z Activism in this chapter. Finally, Chapter 5 is a discussion and conclusion to the entire study.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

College student activists in the United States transformed our universities and nation in a variety of ways. Activism efforts changed the focus of curriculum in higher education (Lucas, 1994), raised awareness regarding environmental and economic issues, questioned wars, and brought to light issues of injustice related to race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status (Hunt & Bedford, 1994). Over time, the individuals who participated in activism, the identities of these activists, the reaction of college administration and society, and the influence of technology evolved. Historically, only small numbers of students participated in forms of activism (Klandermans, 2002; Paulsen, 1991; Sampson, 1970). However, the number of college students engaged in activism today reached levels unseen since the 1960s. This chapter provides an overview of college student activism, the building blocks of activism culture and subculture, and the unique profile of today's college student activists.

Terminology

Higher education in the United States is one of the country's most valuable and historic institutions, and it plays an important role in promoting democracy. In existence since before the founding of the nation, higher education provides a variety of specific purposes and institution-specific missions that are often competing for focus (Singh, 2014), including career preparation, research, and education to promote democratic values. Higher education's role in educating people about democratic values traced to the first appointed federal group focusing on higher education: President Truman's Commission on Higher Education (Hutchenson, 2009). Overall, few would argue against universities' role in contributing to what Letizia (2015) referred to as the public good. An important trait of a public good in the United States included democratic participation (Letizia, 2015). Without participation of the citizenry, a democracy cannot

succeed, and education plays a part in laying that groundwork and practice. Most institutions support democratic participation through voting registration, participatory student governments, encouraging stakeholders to stay informed on issues, and community forums to discuss issues or hear from elected officials (Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000). Some universities encourage active civic participation through activism and protest. Regardless of methods, higher education plays an important role in preparing students to participate in a democracy.

Complex and philosophical debates certainly exist on the multitude of meanings of democracy, which created implications for furthering or promoting democracy in education. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) analyzed educational programs relationship to democracy and citizenship, and they defined three types of citizenship advanced through actual practice: personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented. Personally-responsible versions of citizenship and democracy education focused on individual actions such as recycling, giving blood, working, and following laws. Participatory citizenship focused on role of community and government. This type of citizenship and education emphasized processes and mechanisms that require action together such as organizing a food drive or participating in a zoning hearing. Justice-oriented citizenship and education critically challenged norms and processes for change. Rather than rigid categories, some researchers classified a spectrum of participation from concrete knowledge acquisition (such as learning civics) to politics of representation, recognition, and change (Parker, 1996; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Full exploration of those topics diverges off course from the focus of this paper, but any education that imparts importance of activism leans to the latter end of the spectrum and a more justice-oriented view of citizenship. Of importance is the general agreement that an aim of most, especially public institutions, is to foster democracy and democratic participation. While execution at individual

colleges can look different, a popular understanding of the meaning of higher education's role in promoting democracy is sufficient for moving to activism's role in fostering such citizenship and democracy.

Activism has a complicated definition and often interchangeable terms. For instance, some early research only spoke to protesting, which is also a type of activism. Kezar (2010) defined activism within education: "refers to students' efforts to create change on or off campus related to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues using technical outside institutional channels such as protests, demonstrations and rallies" (Kezar, 2010, p. 461). Hundscheid (2010), for example, highlighted student testimonies of activists concerning feelings they had exhausted institutional or normal channels for change which required them to protest. Newell (2014) defined activism very specifically as involvement in protest or political discussions. In every definition an element of drive for change intersects with moving the effort more outside normal or institutional channels. For example, an institutional channel could be proposing an idea to a representative or voting in a local election. However, when an institutional channel did not work or is inaccessible to that group, for example non-citizens or non-unionized workers, a protest or other action outside normal channels can increase the advocacy and attention for needed change.

Many scholars use the term civic engagement in a related way to activism. Paulsen (1991) called civic engagement "involvement in non-institutional politics such as protests and community problem solving" (p. 96). Keeter et al. (2002) gave and a broader definition of civic engagement and used simply the term engagement to describe nineteen factors which include volunteering, voting, membership in organizations, fundraising, displaying buttons/stickers, contacting officials, emailing, boycotting, and protesting among other similar traits. This type of

broader definition comprises most methods an ordinary citizen uses to engage change, including institutional ones with outside institutional channels. Regardless, these larger, more encompassing terms still included protests. Therefore, it is useful to include some scholarship on broader civic engagement.

While individuals participate in activism, it is ultimately a group experience. People advocate for some institutional or cultural change together and against another group of people or institution. It always occurred in relation to others. In literature on this aspect of the topic, it was often called collective action (Paulsen, 1991) or, if addressing the broader change desired at a more societal level defined as social movements. While one could, in theory, protest in solitude, that action most likely will transform into a collective effort by engaging others, thus becoming collective, or it fails. Therefore, activism or civic engagement occurred as actions to support social movements. The desired change itself, such as increased Women's Rights, are referred to as social movements. Some research on social movements and collective action is included for this group analysis of activism. As indicated later in the paper, the group element of activism and protest is essential.

In summary, activism is advocacy for change outside of normal institutional channels. It can be considered a part of the call and mission of higher education to advance democratic values. Activism is a part of civic engagement and both are collective in nature and referred to as collective action. The goals of activism are some type of change referred to as a social movement. Collective action has occurred in and out of settings of higher education, and this study focused on college student activism.

History of College Student Activism

Activism from college students is not a twentieth century phenomenon or even a new phenomenon. The riots in 1355 England known as the St. Scholastica Day riots are one of the earliest recorded upheavals that started from students (Hundscheid, 2010). Students internationally have led protests that sparked literal national revolutions (DeConde, 1971). This paper's focus is on the United States to limit confounding factors of differences in culture, relations to power, democracy differences in a governmental aspect, and views on speech and rights. In the United States, protests on college campuses began in earnest with socialists and communists' movements on campuses in the 1920s (Altbach, 1971). Following those earliest protests, students contributed to many curricular reforms from classics-based education to more vocation and career focus throughout a period leading up to the Second World War (Lucas, 1994).

The 1960s encountered large increases in student activism on college campuses. Hundscheid (2010) said, "The fundamental relationship between the student and university changes" (p. 225) during this period. He articulated a change from a principle of *in loco parentis* to one of student voice and shared governance in universities. Student activists at this time were concerned with a variety of topics, including Vietnam policies to civil and reproductive rights (Altbach & Cohen, 1990). Indeed, student activism and the associated uproars on college campuses were identified repeatedly in public opinion polls in the 1960s as Americans "most important concern," and indicated as a major reason Johnson decided to not seek reelection as President (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; DeConde 1971).

Much of the activism on campuses in the 1960s started with student groups. This trend began with socialists and communists' movements including the Young People's Socialists League and Young Communists League (Altbach, 1971). Groups were especially powerful in

the 1960s in spreading methods of activism, information on issues, and tips on mobilization. Examples include copied sit-ins from Non-Violent Action Groups on campuses (de Graff, 1970), techniques of protests from Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and organization structures recommended from Black Student Unions (Foster, 1970). Ultimately, these student groups provided vitally important aspects to the growth of activism in the 1960s.

Since the 1960s in America, protests and activism continued and sometimes started on college campuses. The 1970s produced a relatively quiet period in mass activism (Hundscheid, 2010), but in the 1980s, several policies from Regan and calls for institutional divestment caused protests across the nation to increase slightly (Altbach & Cohen, 1990). The 1990s and 2000s encountered yet another relatively quiet period in activism, further contributing to assigned waves of activism on campuses. Since the 1960s, none of these events produced the dramatic and societal notice on college protests until quite recently.

The modern campus is experiencing a new, dramatic increase in activism. Among the topics include sexual violence (Watson, 2012), high costs of higher education (Ozymy, 2011), and financial issues from 2008 which inspired Occupy Wall Street in New York and created similar responses on campuses (Hundscheid, 2010). In addition, the right side of the political spectrum responded to the often left-leaning activism in organized ways in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Right-aligned students protested on racial and diversity topics, centered typically through organizations forming nationally often under the name Youth for Western Civilization (Hundscheid, 2010). Today, protests around Black Lives Matter, police brutality, undocumented students, and policies of former President Trump dominate protest topics, and activism occurs in numbers not seen for a generation.

Protests and activism occurred since before the nation existed and are an important part of the history of higher education in the United States and will undoubtedly continue. Activism does not just occur on college campuses, and given dynamics that relate to politics, psychology, sociology, and more, a rich amount of research covers the foundation of activism and social movements.

Overview of Relevant Theory

Overarching activism contains theoretical elements in education, sociology, political science, psychology, and more. Foundational theory about modern activism usually emerges from political and sociological theories related to social movements that date to Marx. From Marx and with growth in scholarship in the 1960s due to upticks in protests, Political Process Theory (PPT) contributed as the dominant and foundational theory of movements. Since the 1990s, PPT has endured criticism for being overly complex, not useful, rigid in its terms, and containing too many oversights to what is occurs in grassroots movements (Maiguashca, 2011). Goodwin et al. (1999) issued a chief criticism for not accounting of intersections with cultural factors in how groups navigate political processes. In other words, theory needed to acknowledge that identity intersects with navigating political structures with built-in oppressions and privileges. Goodwin and Jasper (1999) were, in turn, criticized though for attempting to get the field to abandon theorizing about movements altogether to simply describe cases after the fact through case study. One critic said this was "abandoning social science" related to social movements altogether (Maiguashca, 2011, p. 187). Nonetheless, the theory behind activism is controversial in some academic circles.

Researchers are seemingly at a pause as to what to do with social movement theories in a period in which they are rapidly occurring again. Maiguashca (2011) stated, "in our own

research and participation in the environmental, global justice, and anti-war movements, we have found that these activists are not choosing to read the dominant contemporary social movement theory, and moreover those activists who have encountered it have generally not found it useful" (p. 189).   Further, she adds, "most critics of PPT have sought to step away from large-scale theories in favor of an emphasis on case studies and narrowly defined causal relationships" (Maiguashca, 2011, p. 191). After near complete rejection of overall PPT theory, a new outgrowth has emerged called Movement Relevant Theory. It is explicitly created with a goal that research is useful to activists.   Movement Relevant Theory, like Feminist Research, creates a central goal is to always assist the given movement. As Maiguashca's (2011) article articulated at length, this conceptual and theoretical framework of studying activism is becoming a methodology in and of itself. This version of the theory as a methodology seeks to maintain engagement even after the research study is complete to see to the utilization of scholarship by the activists (p. 199) and further produce scholarship on that process of utilizing the first research, creating an on-going iterative process. While this method is too much in infancy for application in this small study, the relevance of the usefulness and principles of Movement Relevant Theory and Feminist Theory are important to remember in any study of activism and how the results of even this one study are shared with activists in useful implications to further their own activism and causes.

Social movement theory and Political Process Theory are bodies of research analyzing the organizations of activism in collective action and the individual desires to join or not to join groups to create change (Meyer, 2002). The study of this field comprised an interweaving of aspects of culture, economics, dialogue, and political process theory. A review of important contributions of these theoretical backgrounds provides a lens for analysis of the subset of

college students in activism today. This study utilized aspects of Movement Relevant Theory and Feminist Theory to create relevant and useful implications for diverse stakeholders.

Mobilizing Groups of Activists

Ultimately, activists who engaged in a topic did so in concert with others. Unless one possess incredible power, they cannot change society alone. Thus, activism required that individuals on a particular topic group together to create a similar collective identity. Identity is simply one's place in society (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). A collective identity is ascribed to a group of people, such as gender or race. Of course, as Hunt and Benford (1994) describe, "identities are interactionally constituted, that is, they are constructed, reinforced and transformed by interactions" (p. 494). Ultimately, an identity congruence must exist between one's own identity and the group's identity on that cause. With this collective identity, one can choose to act as a group for the change desired in these interactions, but the action with others and against others actually creates the collective identity in activism. This intergroup relationship allows consideration of the very culture of activists including the constructed interactions through symbols, meaning, and customs. Further, the groups' methods to communicate this culture to members, participants and audience is important. These interactions relate to recruitment, motivation, and participation of the individuals.

Hunt pioneered social movement research (Benford & Hunt, 1992). Hunt and Bedford (1994) traced four stages of development of one's own identify into participating in a social movement: becoming aware, becoming active, becoming committed and becoming weary. Oliver (1993) noted that a grievance does not automatically generate action but instead needs resources, capacity, and some event, such as policy change, to the spark action. To simplify, one becomes aware of an injustice or change needed, adds resources and capacity to become active

and committed, and usually ends with change or weariness. As an example, one realized a discriminatory policy against one's identity. To advocate for change though, one needed some foundation of resources and capacity. A cost benefit analysis must occur of how the issue weighted against limited resources and capacity. If one found necessary resources and capacity, then one elected to act in collective action for the social movement.

An analysis of culture is important in any research on a group of individuals. Berger (2000) defined culture as thoughts, behavior, and symbol patterns that a group acquires socially. However, activists conformed more closely to a definition of a subculture. Johnston and Snow (1998) defined subcultures as possessing five traits. First, subcultures consisted of individuals with similar values and enforced norms. Second, they exhibited specific behaviors, styles, and demeanors that differentiate them from the main culture of society. Activists naturally advocated for a change from the norm, which differentiate them from current norms and attempted non-institutional methods to get this change. The third trait included the "beliefs, interest, attributions and values" (p. 474) shared among the group, and next, "the common faith or dilemma derived from their position in the larger social structure" (p. 474). This was a common discrimination faced or common understanding of why a policy is wrong. Finally, traits included the patterned interactions and relationships that form within the subculture. For instance, most environmental activists would judge and perhaps passively convey the non-conformity of a fellow activist who did not recycle or appeared to unduly waste. Environmental activists believed, in a Dewey religious sense (Dewey, 1934), that better care for the environment is required and would not find this open for debate within their group. They worked to maintain the subculture and expel a person who was not exhibiting the correct values, norms, and beliefs. An example occurred in criticism of Al Gore for speaking on global warming but traveling by

private plane, which is less fuel-efficient travel than shared commercial or non-flying methods. Ultimately, the subculture of activism is held together by these traits and a common set of thoughts, behaviors, and symbols.

Building on the basic definitions of subculture, Johnston and Snow (1998) divided all subcultures into two types: of accommodation or opposition. Numerous subcultures such as those of majority identities, groups in power, or those with no active disagreement from institutional power existed in some form of accommodation. These groups lacked any desire for change in society and want to keep the status quo, to accommodate it. Those without or with limited access to accomplish their desired change through institutional power are in opposition. This is the building block of activism and social movements: being in common opposition to something those in power are interested in continuing. Those in power have systematic methods to change a policy or action they do not like and thus do not need to engage in activism.

Even subcultures in opposition sometimes fail in mobilizing activists. Movements collapse or reinvent themselves constantly as society and people change. Klandermans (2004) demonstrated that groups that are more exclusive succeeded more than inclusive groups at maintaining the movement and participation. Complicating this, individuals do not hold only one identity, and some identities can be in conflict with the movement. Feminism existed in a multitude of waves partly due to changes in framing of major issues and essentially collapsed in its second wave due to disagreement on integration of sex-positive attitudes and a lack of racial focus (Thomspon, 2002). Learning from this, Klandermans suggested narrower movements that focus on few specific topics related to most in that identity group are more successful at maintaining subculture and thus membership.

This subculture aspect that specifically named an opposition and defined traits of the subculture contributed to the principle of framing, an important and often cited theoretical aspect of movements and activism. Snow et al. (1986, p. 486) suggested activists must "frame" the identity of what action or topic area is in question in order to recruit, especially in topics without a pre-existing membership. To use gun rights as an example, a group recruiting on gun control rights must frame their opposition to or support of more gun rights. Further, nuance can exist even within those two camps on issues such as background checks, training, and licenses. Framing assists an individual in knowing if the cause and their views align. Framing exists to explain to others the focus of the activism. As an example of framing, the framing of the LGBT identity issue with marriage legality assisted to advance changes to marriage policies and put that issue above others for LGBT people such as housing or employment discrimination. Polletta and Jasper (2001) said this about framing, "When successful, frames make a compelling case for the 'injustice' of the condition and the likely effectiveness of collective 'agency' in changing that condition" (p. 291). This is an important key to organizing activists that Snow and McAdam (2000) summarized framing as one of the most important aspects that impacted recruiting efforts. Hunt and Benford (1994) utilized literary terms of protagonists and antagonists to describe this process, calling it the "social movement drama" (p. 294). Nearly literally, a movement that defined protagonists and antagonists specifically and the desired opportunity for change accomplished the first step to recruitment and engagement of individuals.

Steinberg (2002) fiercely challenged the application of framing to social movements through theoretical elements of dialogic models from Bakhtin. Steinberg argued that an overt focus on framing and the result of a protagonist and antagonist simplifies the important dialogic relationship between the two and, as important, the journey getting to that point of contention.

He argued fundamentally that the nature of social movements is one of intersecting parties, identities, and events of those involved directly and of spectators. All of this happens in relationships that are continuously in flux. The only constant is the dialogic relationship that creates "unanticipated and sometimes contradictory consequences for movement development" (p. 208). He critiqued that much of the other scholarship ignores the "mutlivocality" of social movement discourse (p. 210). Any action has different meanings for different participants. There is not a pausing of the clock that allows always-clear protagonists and antagonists, and the reality of a situation is often a complex weaving of intersecting issues and different backgrounds and perspectives. An illustrative example by Naples (2002) introduced two different ends of political spectrum both advocating for more local control of schools. A rural California group was upset by a book in the library and wanted more curricular control to ban this book. A similar outcome of local control was also being advocated by New York City liberals for less testing focus in curriculum. Both want similar results, but the intersecting discourses supporting why could not be more different. Political issues are rarely simple and even those in power may actually be subservient to stakeholders, debt, and norms that perhaps lead credence to Steinberg's view that too much research on the issues of subculture and framing in activism oversimplifies issues and participants.

Simply the naming of protagonists and antagonists by a group does not create activists, protests, or a social movement. Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) added important requirements of resources and political opportunities. They joined their own research on efficacy, the personal perceived power to accomplish what one sets out to accomplish, to add a three-part equation of necessary elements to move subcultural in opposition to political collective action and activism. The end result of actual action comes from sympathy with the cause, knowledge

of an upcoming opportunity to act, and ability to participate (Van Stekelenburg & Klandersman, 2013). Overly focusing on framing left out important aspects related to how to act, or knowledge of upcoming opportunity, and having the ability. One with limited access, time, and mobility could desire to act from framing and know of opportunity and still be unable.

Platt (2008) studied motivators for Black Americans to be involved in activism specifically for policy changes and found the studied group more likely to be involved when attached to social networks that encourage it; he called it "opportunities for interaction" (Platt, 2008, p. 403). The impact of this membership affected activism participation more than income or education level. Again, one finds the repeating importance of the group to activism and opportunities afforded from that group.

Existing research repeatedly demonstrates that precondition for activism is existing alignment with a group identity and subculture, just as Platt's opportunities for interaction (Bowman, et al., 2015; Oliver, 1993; Platt, 1998). This must occur differently for issues not related to inherited identities such as race or sex. The invitation to join a group on a topic, and thus conform to the collective identity and subculture, must occur (Kennelly, 2011). This invitation materializes through print or word of mouth referrals to join which greatly controls membership (de Rooij, Green & Gerber, 2009). Groups frame their cause and views on it. Members self-select to join or not due to congruence. Activists working towards their goals might recruit via a variety of methods, but they will likely intentionally target efforts to potentially supportive people with similar identities.

Even satisfying above requirements of framing, knowledge of event, and ability to participate, one cannot ignore that most people do not engage in any type of collective action and are still, in theory, wronged by the actions of the oppressors (Klandermans, 2002; Paulsen,

1991). Olson (1965) utilized economic principles to explain this by citing the principle of the free ride. Rational people did not contribute to activism, as they can gain without participation. In essence, the accomplishment of the change aimed for by the protestors is a collective good. All who care about a particular topic or cause benefit whether or not they actually engaged in the activism. Put simply, why participate in protest on a given Saturday if others will and you will still get the benefit? Klandermans (2002) ultimately found that alignment with the group identity can overcome the hindrance of the free ride concept. Put another way, the more closely you align with the identity of the social movement subculture, the more likely you will participate. He built this relationship into a circular relationship: "group identification makes participation in protest more likely, and in turn participation intensifies group identification" (p .892). College students have numerous opportunities to group with those of similar interests and identity. The prevalence of protests on campus thus makes such bonds stronger by intensifying that connection.

In addition, identities, which are based on societally imposed characteristics such as gender or ethnicity, can make for easier alignment with group membership (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). This differs from identities on topics such as an environmentalist that must be acquired throughout life from experiences or opinions. Regardless, any group or collective identity must move into a political state to begin seeking change (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). For example, movement from being just a religious club, to being a religious club whose members are upset because they cannot practice a worship in a certain space, moves from a state of being upset to becoming political and seeking change.

Activists exist as a subculture. Further, the specific topic of activism, such as Black Lives Matter protesters, existed as an even smaller subculture within the greater activist

community and within the Black community. Dialogic philosophies challenge fixed analysis on the relationship of these subcultures to the larger culture of society. Analysis of dialogic nature challenged framing and brought more chaos and nuance due to the ever-changing nature of relationships, which is important to consider. This perspective still does not erase the fact that activists want a change those in control are not allowing or not allowing on a satisfactory timeline. Most important in this research is the alignment an individual must have to the identity of the subculture and that the most effective alignment happens when a frame existed around a specific wrong that is named and focused on with little overlap to other issues. The stronger the alignment against the specific antagonist, and the stronger the group membership the more likely to overcome free ride principles.

Research on College Activists

One must also focus on the actual individuals within these subcultures and groups. As discussed above relatively few people engage in activism and principles of free ride, improper framing, and limited resources contribute to less engagement (Muller & Opp, 1986). Strong alignment to the group identity or subculture appears to assist in overcoming lack of participation. Colleges have historically been an epicenter of protests and activism and populated with researchers, which make them prime for study. Much of this activism has been student initiated. Many universities included encouraging civic and democratic action in their mission or goals (Thorne, 2010), but as Keeter et al. (2002) stated, "engaged students do not create themselves" (p. 2). Numerous studies seek to analyze activists on college campuses to determine what skills make them stand apart from non-activists.

Sadly, especially older analysis and research on activism in college students included implicit and sometimes near explicit editorial. Hundscheid (2010) quoted Levine and Wilson

(1979) and referred to activists as the "channel for mischievous or rebellious student impulses" (p. 226). Sampson (1970) stated how administrators often refer to the students as the "enemy in residence" in the 1960s (p. 9). Administrators viewed students as not mature enough to make informed decisions. This was especially palpable in the 1960s with long-practiced *in loco parentis* ended. *In loco parentis* emphasized administrators as replacements for parents. This more parental role faded in the 1960s and caused an even harsher critique on protesting as it viewed students more as children than adults.

Stating with an inverse, why don't all students engage in political activism, Brady et al. (1995) answered, "because they can't, because they don't want to, or because no one asked" (p. 271). Speaking to the 'they can't' rationale, the research, with some exceptions explained below, repeatedly stated that income, ethnicity, and citizenship status related to engagement in activism (Swank, 2012). Low income, minority, and non-citizens are least likely to engage in activism regardless of student status (Foster-Bey, 2008; Halleck, 1970; McBride et al., 2006; Newell, 2014; Paulsen, 1991). The majority of those students who engaged in activism possessed higher income and privileged identities. Ultimately, the resources needed to engage in activism did not overcome what might be a desire to participate by low-income individuals (McBride et al., 2006). Simply put, some students may need to work to afford to live and that might be a higher priority than the protest, even if a worthy cause. Those that *do* want to engage in activism may possess statistically significantly different traits compared to non-activists that simply do not hold desire for this type of activity. Research below will highlight differences in moral reasoning, communication, and leadership skills among activists as potential answers to overcoming this barrier.

Studies of the student activist greatly increased in the 1960s. Studies conducted using various psychological tests analyzed moral reasoning, perceptions of control, and attitudes (Laird, 2003). Laird (2003) replicated a 1960s study on students engaged in pro-life and pro-choice student organizations and compared against a control group of students involved in other ways (e.g., fraternities, athletics, non-political clubs). He found a statistically significant level of higher moral reasoning in both sides of students involved in the abortion debate than the control group. He raised an important point of which came first though: was the student already higher in moral reasoning and that attracted them to the activism or did involvement in the activism increase the moral reasoning (Laird, 2003)? This question has still not been answered in research.

Researchers studied the changes the students encountered over time to indicate an impact of the college experience on activism. Lott and Eagan (2011) studied changes in civic values and the relationship between distinct items within that term, specifically factorial validity and invariance. Using the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) First-Year and College Senior Survey tests (Lott & Eagan, 2011), their model found all to be significant and have relationship that is stable and reliable between items meaning the instruments are accurately measuring change in behavior. Lott and Eagan (2011) further supported these measures as strong and highly correlated. Similarly, Astin (1993) extensively studied changes between first year and senior year on these civic values indicators. From data samples starting college in 1985 entering class and graduating in 1989, he noted several statistically significant differences. African Americans were most likely to protest when controlled for other variables. Men became more conservative and women more liberal over their college years. The gender changes were in conflict with a study Astin (1977) completed with data from the seventies when men became

more liberal and women more conservative. This change could demonstrate generational

changes.

Many researchers have sought to better understand attributes of those who engage in

activism. A large study by Baird (1970) in the 1960s utilized the American College Survey, now

called College Senior Survey and National Survey and Student Engagement, to survey over

12,000 college students. He found several statistically significant attributes of activists in one of

the first, and largest studies, which have since been verified in other studies. First of his

findings, the activists had higher grades in high school and more high school involvement.

Activists scored higher and were "socially ascending" [in] "leadership, popularity,

aggressiveness, and speaking ability" (p. 125). They also had higher emotional intelligence

indicators scoring significantly higher in "understanding others, sensitivity to needs of others and

social ability" (p. 125). Trent (1970) presented similar data with scores of activists in the 1960s

being statistically significantly higher in leadership, speaking, empathy, independence, and self-

confidence. Baird's (1970) study only found men reported statistically significantly higher self-

confidence, not women. Women activists in his study scored higher than non-activist women in

artistic expression and perseverance. Baird found students did not necessarily come from

wealthy backgrounds but instead families that participated in educational opportunities such as

visiting museums, owning encyclopedias, and traveling to name a few. Leadership experience

and higher emotional intelligence repeat in literature, but several items existed in some studies

but not repeated in others or only apply to select populations such as higher grades, speaking,

self-confidence, and parents with more education experiences.

Parents demonstrated another effect on their child's participation in activism in the

future. In a specific example of environmental activism, Horwitz (1996) found an increase in

student engagement, if the parents engaged in activism on the environment, even while controlled by factors of income. Paulsen (1991) also found evidence for a hereditary nature of activism. Perhaps an early indicator of the college student to be an activist is how much the parent exposed the child to educational opportunities or participated themselves in activism. Given that activists usually have higher education and at least membership in middle class, researchers have not differentiated if this hereditary nature is the activism or the well-studied hereditary elements of education and class.

The socioeconomic status of those who engage in protest has been studied by several researchers. Gerber (2009), in his large, multi-city, ethnographic study, laid out an interesting, blurred class line which he stated described a "downwardly mobile children of professional class and upwardly mobile children of working class" (p. 253). This grouping blurred a line between middle- and lower-class individuals. In essence, those children of middle-class families, which are downwardly mobile, either due to parents or child, and those that are upwardly mobile from lower class. Examples from middle class as downwardly mobile could include family status change such as divorce and children who did not succeed well in schools. Upwardly mobile lower class could be a child from that background who is excelling in school or whose parent's have afforded opportunities such as college. This creates a line that straddles two socioeconomic classes and blurs some of the other more consistent research perhaps adding explanation to why some middle class and lower class students engage and others do not.

The prevailing research of activism having occurred from middle and upper class has other exceptions. Oxymy (2011) wrote on such an instance of low-income college students overcoming barriers to protest specifically on high loans and increasing costs of education. Oxymy deducts that college students, even low-income ones, still have better access to resources

to be involved in activism than the general public. Other civic engagement indicators among college students support this theory of college students still being more active than the general public. For example, Pritzker et al. (2012) found college students more likely to vote than the general population. A popular argument to support this trend states college students have more intangible resources such as time.

Paulsen (1991) found similar results to the prevailing correlations between activism and parent's education, income, and ethnicity, specifically the more likely to engage if college educated parents, middle to high income, and white, but he did find that students from an urban high school participated in higher rates in activism when other factors were controlled such as income and race. It was expected, due to especially 1990's trend of suburban areas to be wealthier, that those students from suburbs would yield higher rates of activism, but that was not found (Paulsen, 1991). Paulsen in that study did not postulate as to reasons, but perhaps more opportunities and groups for interaction on a cause existed in the urban environment.

An example of opportunities for interaction potentially impacting engagement, Keeter et al. (2002) showed that students who engaged with volunteerism in their youth and with high school student organizations were more likely to be involved in activism while entering adulthood, which is presumed to include college and beyond in his research. Paulsen (1991) linked traits of efficacy that develop from these involvement experiences. Efficacy defined as a sense "that one can accomplish what one sets out to do" (p.96). In a statistical study, Paulsen (1991) found that high political efficacy correlated with participation in collective action, specifically protests. The effect was even stronger for racial minorities. High school experiences are not alone in impacting engagement.

College engagement has research support for increasing activism engagement. Bowman et al. (2015) studied activism that resulted from involvement in multiracial student organizations in college, which have historically been central to activism. They found these students not only found a community in these groups but also a group with which to mobilize for action. Baird (1970) echoed this in his study of activism showing organization membership was higher among activists. These results support theories of the importance of a subculture as described by Hunt and Benford (2004) above and groups that allow identity alignment and mobilization. These groups can provide the alignment to overcome free ride principles (i.e., not getting involved since they will benefit anyway).

Swank (2012) studied specifically social work students and found that "belonging to an activists' network and maintaining activists' identity" (p. 245) overcame factors typically to discourage activism like low income. This effect was true across all identities of students except within conservative activists for women and African Americans. This gives increased credence to the power of group and belonging. In addition, the difference for the minority women and African American students could be explained by the small diversity among conservative audiences. These minorities, even if conservative, might not have overcome feeling like they belonged with the activist group. This is an important contribution to thinking about why students engage in activism and do not.

Traditionally, community college students are much less involved in campus life and activism, but some research indicates time on campus might overcome barriers. Researchers assume student societal class level being lower might explained this usual difference in engagement of college students compared to four year (Newell, 2014). Newell (2014) conducted a large study measuring differences between two and four-year institution students engaged in

activism, controlling for certain demographic variables. She used the measures of 'involvement in protest in last year' and 'discussed politics in last year' to conduct this comparison. She found, when adjusted for all other factors, that two-year students exhibit higher rates of involvement in protests, especially when a full-time student lives on campus. In fact, when controlled for these other factors, black, two-year college students engaged the most activism of all groups (Newell, 2014). This suggests credence to Tinto's (2006) theory of Student Development that time on campus is single best indicator of success and achieving out of class learning outcomes, whether in community college or at a four-year institution. Tinto's theory used to explain this difference is a theory within college student development.

Student Development theory is a foundational term used for the various forms of interpersonal and intrapersonal growth and development college students experience during the college years. Student engagement, whether from faculty interactions, participation in campus clubs, or a variety of other experiences, positively effects student success (Tinto, 2006). The National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the largest umbrella Student Affairs associations, combined to release a document outlining agreed-upon guidelines of seven overarching outside of class learning outcomes institutions should strive to achieve to benefit students. Among the seven identified overarching outcomes was Civic Engagement and Humanitarianism (Keeling et al., 2004). With all possible items of learning to outline civic engagement spoke to the importance as a national outcome encouraged of all student affairs educators at all campuses.

Because of this importance, researchers continue to study methods to impact student civic engagement. A study by Pritzker et al. (2012) analyzed how the university might encourage student political behavior, which is core to many school missions. They found students were

more driven to political interest behaviors, such as seeking out information on an issue, but much less engaged in sustained or intensive political behaviors such as protest. They ultimately suggested factors external to the university might play the largest role in determining the inclination individuals have to engage in more intensive activism, such as parental influence and close alignment to group identity. Ultimately, researchers continue to look for the main drivers for engagement in this area.

Some institutions took a more active role in promotion of activism by integrating topics known to increase activism into curricular requirements. Classes on topics of social justice or diversity were shown to increase "political participation, civic engagement, and multicultural activism" (p. 411) when compared to control class for which the topics were not discussed (Krings et al., 2015). Institutions as diverse as University of Michigan (Gurin et al., 2004) to University of Illinois at Chicago (General Education < University of Illinois at Chicago, n.d.) required portions of their students to take such classes as a part of core liberal arts curriculum.

Not all researchers and scholars agreed that civic engagement and other activism education is good. Thorne (2010) counters this intentional exposure from the university contributes to a problem that activism today in higher education is not coming from the student. He saw administrations and institutions setting an ideological tone that is creating a movement that is "top-down" (p.212). He cited issues around social justice, sustainability, and diversity as modern issues in which the activism is being forced and threatening the in-class curriculum and "muddles the university's academic mission and leaves students knowing less about math, history, and public policy than about ways to rally an angry mob" (p. 213). Keniston (1970) went as far to say the creation of honors colleges "Is one particularly effective way of creating a critical mass of protest-prone students" (p. 173). He goes on to cite on-campus housing as an

offending contributor given credence to Tinto's theory of student involvement and time on campus (Keniston, 1970). Nonetheless, it is important to realize some marginal disagreement on this role of education.

Often the activism in higher education is not occurring in isolation from faculty and staff involvement, even if extracurricular, and their opinion is valuable to further study. Kezar (2010) conducted a qualitative study of faculty and staff in a variety of institutions to gage their perceptions. Faculty and staff described how the students' involvement in activism developed their skills. The surveyed faculty and staff reported high marks in student's sense of empowerment, knowledge of structures of power, and tactics for creating change in society among activists (Kezar, 2010). Faculty and staff reflection, as educators, is important to see how they analyze development.

Perhaps for some individuals, the role of activism is attached to other interests, such as leadership. Poletta and Jasper (2001) argued that often higher leadership roles within such identity groups may require even more activism and activists activities, "highly regarded roles within communities may come to be linked with activism in a way that makes participation a requirement of that role" (p. 290). Therefore, a motivation for some appears to be leadership or the role they seek or hold. In essence, leadership requires activism for your group from time to time. Pre-existing activism is as a high qualification for leadership. Baird (1970) also found higher leadership scores among activists. Of course, all of this created an argument of which came first, the desire for leadership or activism given the strong relationship among the two.

Other researchers studied the personal outcomes from activism as motivators, such as identity development and emotions. For instance, Litcherman (1996) sees a self-oriented satisfaction to personal identity that comes from the collective action through activism. Activism

assists participants in understanding and satisfying their personal identity. Litcherman noted this

especially true as activism moves from economic causes and war to personal identity items like

gender and race. Melucci (1995) assisted by linking motivation and how interaction with others

constructs identity.   Again, that community aspect exists as a vital relationship in connecting

individuals and activist activities and motivations. Melucci built on this implicating the identity

development as a motivator itself. For instance, Hunt and Benford (1994) did an ethnographic

study of peace activists in 1980s and early 1990s. Many articled joining to engage with "an

intelligent, caring group" (p. 495). Indeed, which peace activist group the individuals in that

article joined related to the level to which they experienced an intangible fit. One interviewee

articulated not joining one peace movement because "everyone was wearing same shoes, tie dye

t-shirts" or not joining another group because they "were too angry" (p. 495). This emotional

connection to the subcultural traits is reinforced in research from Klandermans (2004) who stated

activists work hard to "weave tougher a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes" (p.

365). Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013) critiqued that emotions were long considered

the 'error term' (p.892) in motivational theories about protests. They argued they function as

vital accelerators and amplifiers to participation that must be taken as an important part of a

motivation formula for activism. Students in a 'Take Back NYU' rally in 2009, literally cite the

'high' that comes from protesting (Hundscheid, 2010). The role of emotions arrived as an

acceptable item in the study of motivation and involvement of activism. Satisfaction, identity

development, and other emotional connections to the group resulted from these studies.

Self-verification occurred as another important result of activism and engagement with a

group on a cause (Pinel & Swann Jr., 2000). Self-verification worked as people seek to find

validation in their own view of self. It is highly linked to collective action because some may

remain a member due to the validation the group provides. Alternatively, some left due to the lack of validation or even conflict with a self-view. In this way retention and attrition of group membership are similarly related to a self-verification motivation (Baumeister et al., 2000). Freedman and Kanzar (1970) compared the groups' transition to activism as an opportunity to be more like a team sport when they stated, "Giving meaning to all participants, such as race and income, a common end is desired by all the team" (p. 115). Individuals obtained self-verification needed emotionally especially if the dominant identities or those in power are imposing demoralizing policies or views. In this way, activism performed a therapeutic value to those engaged through self-verification.

For many minority students, the most accessible group for identity activism and self-verification existed in these student organizations based on identity. The popularity of identity-based groups increased along race in 60s with civil rights protests (Bowman et al., 2015; Chang, 2002). Indeed, Black Student Unions formed as the epicenter of many 1960s protests and activism (Foster, 1970). These groups provided numerous benefits for participants including increased cultural and racial awareness (Antonio, 2001), leadership development (Harper, 2005), cross racial relationships (Park & Kim, 2013), and even lasting effects including increased engagement across eleven civic outcomes even six years after graduation (Bowman et al., 2015). These groups served to define subcultures, provided a motivated group fit, and supplied a structure for an activist leader.

In summary, activism from groups of people can occur when individuals see personal congruence with the group, or said differently, activism is related significantly to group memberships and alignment to that group's identity from the individuals. These alignments aided in verification and satisfaction with the activism experience. Further, influences of

parents, especially educational exposure and their relationship to activism, highly influence the student's likelihood to engage in it. Ultimately, students engaged in activism experienced growth in a number of leadership (Baird, 1970), efficacy, and moral reasoning scales (Laird, 2003). The next section describes how today's activists exist in a world with drastically different technology especially in relationship to others and communication.

Modern Protests

A new wave of protests began in earnest in the 2000s (Eagen et al., 2015). First with Occupy Wall Street (Hundscheid, 2010), which aimed to address income inequality and bank bailouts, and building into the current decade with Black Lives Matter, which addressed police injustice and systematic racism, (Dixson, 2018), immigration issues related to undocumented individuals, and continuing under the administration of President Trump, students protest in numbers unseen since the 1960s (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017).   In common, all of this activism's desired change is not easily accomplished through institutional channels. Today's protests coincide with the infiltration of social media into almost all aspects of our lives. This raised questions that researchers seek to answer related to social media, technology, and activism.

Movements on and off campus heavily relied on social media for mobilization (Dixson, 2018). Starting with "clicktivism" in the 2000s which is considered to be easy, awareness raising in purpose only (Halupka, 2014), technology intersected with activism. Hashtag activism became a term and movement fueled with the Occupy Wall Street movements (Dewey, 2014). Just a few years later, #blacklivesmatter was hash tagged over 120 million times (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). Cabera et al. (2017) considered the term slacktivism, which opposed to hashtag activism and perceived success, challenges that internet activism is lazy and ineffective.

They differentiated slacktivism as existing online only and not producing action in real life. Regardless, the new political medium of social media served distinct purposes related to activism that deserve consideration.

Social media assisted in students' obtaining social capital related to participation in activism (Warren et al., 2015). For instance, other users gave tips and access instructions for a first timer at a protest to decrease apprehension. Social media assisted in formation of student's own identity and framing oppositional identities (de Zuniga, 2012). Social media allowed, arguably most importantly, awareness raising. Earl and Kimport (2011) referred to this as "supersize effects" (p.13) or "theory 2.0 effects" (p.14), for the large aid it allows in communication efficiency. Examples include fast mobilization or the ability to organize simulations protests worldwide. As indicated above all of these activities are important parts of the building blocks of activism. These activities existed before social media in simply different mediums such as fliers, activist group newsletters and later email. Further, social media served to activate behaviors, in essence, facilitating joining the collective action online more quickly than in person. In person collective action might spring slowly after meetings and trust builds. Online relationships can be facilitated much faster due to the frequency of interaction. Awareness of groups, invitations to join, research on the groups, and framing of opposition all occur more easily online now. Lee et al. (2016) countered that too few studies look distinctly enough at actual effect on participation in collective action because of social media separate from other online activity. In essence, some groups exist both online and in person, so studies of totally separate effect from social media is difficult and not done to date.

Online political participation (OPP) is studied by researchers as an umbrella term for online activity related to politics that pre-dates social media's existence but include it now

(Velasquez & LaRose, 2015). Not everyone used the internet or social media for political related activities. OPP allowed for analysis for effects on in-person participation, satisfaction, and mobilization. Research found online activity increases protest participation in young people (Pearce & Kendzior, 2012). It is theorized this aided in spreading the word, providing the identity development space to find others of similar beliefs and backgrounds, and facilitate relationship building (Valenzuela et al., 2014). A study by Valenzuela et al. (2014) revealed that 'strong-tie' networks such as Facebook had a statistically stronger significant effect on protest behavior than weaker tie such as Twitter.   This gives credence to continued importance of relationships in activism.

Velasquez and LaRose (2015) used aspects of social cognitive theory and OPP to create a social media political efficacy scale. Their study found efficacy in general social media use translated to social media political efficacy. The comfort and command of utilization of social media relates to higher confidence in efficacy that also increases similarly with political items. In essence, feeling that one can accomplish something in general with social media translates to increased political efficacy.

A theoretical model of activism updated to include social media would aid in explaining the relationship of distinct items and their impact. Lee et al. (2016) worked to combine individual elements known to impact activism, such as recruitment, ability, and identity alignment, with social media elements to create a new theoretical model of social media use and political protest participation. They analyzed psychological factors in this model and did not consider sociological factors. They propose that first one has social psychological factors that input into social media use. These feed into one's attitude about protest and movements. This can lead to collective action participation and/or digital participation which both contribute to

personalized political action. To test the model, they analyzed it through a lens of the Beijing Umbrella movement. They found the psychological factors to be stronger contributors to the model than the social media use data but called for further studies. In essence, the impacting factors previously known related to activism such as identity alignment have stronger impact than social media. This is certainly an area for further study.

Ultimately, social media is a communication tool that provides unmatched efficiency and speed. It is heavily used by activists and just beginning to be studied with how this intersects with modern protests. This popular new tool intersected with a new increase in activism to create an opportunity to restudy a fascinating area of society and higher education.

Activism on college campuses is a storied part of the history of higher education in the United States. Students engage on topics local to international, and they gain valuable skills from this experience including increased efficacy, self-satisfaction with identity, leadership and more. With activism again spreading across the United States, both on and off campus, this topic is ripe for additional research. Today new topics, new technology, and a new group of students are engaging in an age-old activity. Is it having the same effects and same necessary building blocks? Additional research is needed in how modern or contemporary activism, affected by these changes, and today's group dynamics shape today's activists. Additional research is needed on how today's activists define activism. This study sought to investigate these questions.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Research Approach

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do university students define activism?

2. How do university students engage in activism?

3. How do university students describe the relationship between the university and activism?

4. How, if at all, did university students develop a network to support their activism?

These questions addressed unanswered elements of activism research in an era of new protest and with new technology regularly providing means of networking. Qualitative methods allowed the deepest exploration of the actual lived experience of college students who protest.

Qualitative research in non-linear. This iterative, cycle-based process allows an openness to wide discover of information. Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe the parts of a qualitative study as "continuously interacting and building off each other in a cyclical fashion" (p. 2). In an area of study in which the answers and questions are complex, the information gained between the research participants and the researcher is left open to be of the most potential value. This research method allows "understanding the ways people see, view, approach, and experience the world and make meaning of their experiences as well as specific phenomena within it" (Ravitch & Carl, p 7).

A multitude of options exist within Qualitative Research for research design. This study utilized aspects of Critical Research in analysis and Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a main methodology. Critical Research seeks to utilize research and scholarship to effect social justice in society and change power structures and systems (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This

type of research is highly related to activism and utilized in this study as a framework to make this study more like Movement Relevant Theory (Maiguashca, 2011). In addition, scholars agree on the importance of networks to activism, fostering self-verification, and moral development of activists, which can be a basis of comparison to this study's findings.

Critical Research methodology allowed a congruence between activists' goals and the research goals. As stated, Critical Research is a methodology within Qualitative Research that works to investigate and change systems of oppression in society. Ravitch and Carl (2016) quoted the Center for Critical Qualitative Research which provides a foundational definition: "…capacity to inquire 'against the grain'…to question the conceptional and theoretical basis of knowledge and method, to ask questions that go beyond prevailing assumptions and understandings, and to acknowledge the role of power and social position" (p. 105). This inclusion of analysis to change structures and systems was at the core the goal of activists and related to this researcher's interest in the topic and how education to promote activism can change such systems. Further, Critical Research borrows from crucial social theory to state that research needs to be actionable (Ravitch & Carl, 2016); shared findings must be accessible and actionable by the actual participants to contribute to social change.

While an overarching Critical Research approach was utilized as principles for interpretation, Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was the main methodology utilized for research method principles. This methodology has origins in sociology and seeks a theory from the themes about a "process, action, or interaction" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). A theory is the "plausible relationships among concepts and sets of concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 278). Creswell (2014) further stated that Grounded Theory should involve multiple stages of data collection with an iterative process of refinement and interpretation. This study utilized multiple

interviews as described in more detail in data collection to contribute to that iterative process. Findings from the study contributed to existing research by elaborating or modifying current theory or developing new theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

A mixture of Grounded Theory qualitative research and Critical Research methods allowed the best aspects of each to inform this research. Grounded Theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) informed interpretation in data analysis to develop theory. Critical Research was a check on analysis while importantly calling for the findings to be actionable to social change.

Research Setting and Context

The setting for this study was a large, private, religious university in a metropolitan area in the Midwest. This institution had a recent history of bouts of protests, activism, and controversies. In addition, the student body was relatively diverse with sizable student of color population (42% of undergraduates), significant adult student population (17%), and first-generation college students (33% of new incoming, first year class). The mission of this institution connected to social justice and service to the most needed, which surely relates to activism and Critical Research. Finally, the urban setting heavily connected the students to the city. This urban exposure provided a wealth of activism opportunities for engagement.

The current context for protest was upended by the effects of COVID-19. This limited the ability of college students to organize and meet in traditional ways, especially in clubs. To the largest extent possible, data was gathered from participants both on how organizing and relationship occurred before the pandemic and how activism did occur during a large uptick in protests nationally, especially around police injustice and racial inequity issues.

The context of COVID-19 required interviews to be conducted virtually. Virtual interviews are less than ideal; however, as the pandemic continued for over a year, these types of meetings are becoming more normal.

Research Sample

After obtaining Institutional Board approval, participants were selected using the researcher's personal network and solicitation through professional colleagues and contacts with offices that primarily work with activist-minded students, such as campus offices dedicated to social justice and student involvement. The researcher engaged with the offices to use purposeful sampling to find students engaged actively in activism. Purposeful sampling is defined as selecting participants "purposefully chosen to participate in the research for specific reasons, including that they have had a certain experience, have knowledge of a specific phenomenon…" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 128).

The researcher asked colleagues and willing offices to send the recruitment solicitation email and informed consent. Special outreach was also conducted to clubs with political organizing missions, such as socialists, Black Student Union, or Young Democrats. An attempt was made to engage participants of different identity backgrounds and different activism topics or interests to give purposeful sampling contributions. Participants' names were always confidential, and pseudonyms were utilized in the study for the university name and participants. It was especially important to engage with students not already heavily networked with one another and engaged in different topics and areas of activism to attempt to not repeat data on how one particular group mobilized. Thus, an effort was made not to over sample from one specific group that know each other and all engage on the same activism topic.

Data Collection

Students agreed to an informed consent prior to the start of the interview. This statement, which was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sent via email prior to scheduled time. Students were offered the opportunity to agree or ask questions to consent prior to beginning the first interview.

Students agreed to at least two rounds of interviews. In the first interview, questions were asked focusing on exploring their definition of activism, how the student has engaged in activism, and reflections on curricular and co-curricular influences on their involvement in activism. In a second round of interviews, the researcher engaged with each participant about themes and findings from the first interview to gauge reactions and thoughts from the participant as a co-researcher. Finally, a deeper analysis on the institutions efforts that support or hinder their activism were discussed. A full list of questions is in Appendix B.

Because of this research occurring during the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted on zoom with one exception by phone due to technical difficulties. Only audio recordings were made to generate transcriptions. Following transcription, all audio recordings were deleted.

As Ravitch and Carl (2016) state, "interviews are at the center of many qualitative studies" (p. 146). Interviews allowed for full exploration in an individual and dialogic manner with the participants. Interviews have several beneficial elements: individualized, contextualized, non-evaluative, temporal, and subjective among others (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Important interview considerations were made about interview modality and time. Interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews required following an outline of questions while allowing room for the responses to guide the direction and follow-up questions (Lofland &

Lofland, 1995). Especially in investigating a topic in a new era of activism, semi-structured

interviews allowed the potential to discover new information (Gill et al., 2008). For example,

information related to the topic of institutionalism was unexpected in the first interview and

unpacked further with participants in the second interview. Journaling immediately following

each interview and transcription allowed the researcher to reflect on non-verbal cues, contextual

information, and general impressions not easily recorded in the transcript.

All data from the interviews, journaling, and transcripts were protected and secured. It

was important to be gain trust and honesty from participants and provide data security

precautions. All data was password protected and all online records will only use the pseudonym

for each participant, never their real name.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is the process to make all gathered data make sense

by "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has

seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 202).

Analysis of the interview portion of data collection comprised cooperative coding with co-

researchers and the participant as a member check for the first interview during the second

meeting. Member checks are also called participant validation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and

allowed for participants to have voice during data analysis to react and establish credibility.

Utilizing principles from scholarship to inform analysis related to activism and networks,

motivations to engage, time on campus influences from Tinto's (2006) theory, and influences

from the institutions of study, coding occurred to identify statements to create themes that

contributed or disagreed with existing research and provide insight on the research questions.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also promoted that data analysis occurring while data collection was

on-going was a preferred method as it allows for deeper discovery using already emerging information to inform future interpretation.

Coding and theming occurred in multiple steps as outlined as best practices. First, pre-coding occurred. Pre-coding is based on initial engagement with the data and transcripts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this process one identifies distinct segments of data which constitute responses to one's questions to create units of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A unit of data should be able to stand on its own with meaning. Next a process of sorting units of data into categories occurred to complete pre-coding. Following pre-coding, the second meeting with participants discussed what initial findings emerged from the first interview. Following the data from this second meeting, an actual coding process emerged. During multiple readings, the data was coded and checked. Finally, categories emerged from the actual codes from both interviews. These were organized in a variety of ways to finalize the actual theoretical model that most emerge from the data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stressed the important practices of connecting with overall research questions, thinking both big picture and detailed, considering linkages between concepts, and connecting with existing theory and research. Extensive notes and records of coding, themes, and organization were maintained on interview transcripts, journaling, researcher notes, and any other data elements.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Data Reliability

Trustworthiness was the concept to enhance rigor in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Trustworthiness in this study engaged with concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The research design attempted to address the above validity considerations through triangulation, journaling, member checking, audit trails, and utilizing thick descriptions.

Triangulation of the data occurs from the above described multiple rounds of interviews with some time occurring between each session. Triangulation is "having different sources or methods challenge and/or confirm a point or set of interpretations" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, pp 194-195). These codes contributed to themes to inform overall findings and development of the model.

The researcher conducted validity checks by sharing transcripts, developing a coding system, and comparing codes between a research auditor and this researcher. As overall similar findings occurred, the researcher considered to have appropriately conducted coding on the study. Seventy-seven percent of participants engaged in the member checking, second interview which discussed initial interview coding.

Audit trails are important record keeping to support the findings of the study. Audit trails for this study included all raw data, interview transcripts, research journaling, coding and theming work. Journaling is another important component in audits (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed how journaling or research memos allow the researcher to record more information about what happened, questions that emerge for the researcher about the process, decisions you make in regards to problems, and a record of interaction with the data.

Thick descriptions are an important principle in qualitative research. Intentionality was necessary to create highly detailed descriptions of the study's setting and findings. The origin of the term came from an attempt to "mimic an insider's account" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 256). The researcher continuously analyzed developed findings to check for use of thick descriptions.

Issues of trustworthiness with participants were especially important in this research relating to activism and often social identity, especially since the researcher is of privileged

identity in race and gender. The researcher always attempted to engage cooperatively and in a trusting manner through empathy, active listening, and genuine interest in hopes of overing any privilege differences that existed between participants and the researcher.

Conclusion

During this study, activism was occurring in increasing numbers again. Historically, activism, specifically protest, occurs as a group activity often emerging from certain identity student organizations on college campuses. However, many questions remained about the landscape of activism on campus today. The exploration of these topics with a qualitative, Grounded Theory study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), allowed the development of a model, as presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings and theory described in this chapter originated from a Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) research study that investigated today's college student activists' views on activism and higher education. This chapter will begin by presenting demographic information on the research participants and the issues they care about in their activism. These issues were varied, as the researcher intentionally recruited students engaged in activism across a variety of topics.

Next, the developed theoretical model, supporting categories, and other findings from the research will be presented. The model explores each research question including 1) how students define activism, 2) how students engage in their activism and reflect on that compared to their definitions, 3) the relationship between higher education and their activism, and 4) how students network to conduct their activism.

Participants

Nine participants engaged in this study, all of whom were currently enrolled, full-time students at Lakefront University in a large urban area. This is a private, religious university with around twenty thousand students. Per the inclusion criteria to include students from a similar generation, all students were traditional-aged college students from eighteen to twenty-three. The students self-identified as an activist in responding to solicitations to participate in the study. All solicitations were conducted electronically by email. Solicitation email was sent, on the researcher's behalf, from offices serving the student government, multicultural students, and residential students. In addition, snowball sampling was utilized and requested that participants share the invitation with others.

The interviews began with the collection of demographic information, including race, ethnicity, LGBTQ status, and religion (see Appendix A). Demographic information is important to consider as these students' identities interact with their activism. Next, all participants were asked a series of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B). To present a variety of topics, an early question asked students what issues they care about and how they act on those issues. What follows presents the wide variety of topics and interests which these students conduct activism on as well as the diversity of ways the students exhibit this activism.

Each participant is briefly introduced below.

Meet Anna

Anna is a second-year student of Latina/Mexicana descent. Anna defines activism as "doing the hard work toward social justice." She further lists protesting, organizing, educating yourself and others, and volunteering as examples. She first answered the question about what issues she cares the most about with "so many." She then stated the main one was racial justice. Anna was active in religious organizations in high school and pushed them to be more outspoken on issues of racial injustice. She then organized a protest in her suburban community for Black Lives Matter with high school friends. With this same group of friends, Anna started a non-profit to focus on activism, especially for minority communities, and to educate on populations left out of history. This non-profit has produced gift drives, Thanksgiving food banks, and spread the word on issues of injustice.

Anna finds elements of Lakefront University very supportive of her activism. She got inspired by the activism she was exposed to in a first-year seminar course relating to women's activism. She finds staff in a Catholic Club and Community Service department very supportive of her non-profit. They assist in editing and reviewing her non-profit materials and are venues for

discussions on these topics. She sees less support for higher administration. She stated an example with Black Lives Matter and police injustice issues: "they sent like one email saying we support Black students. That is like not enough. I don't think they have said very much since." She summed up her frustration as institutions focusing too much on the backlash: "So it is frustrating to see when institutions promote certain value and don't actually show it to their students because they are afraid of what the backlash might be."

Meet Eddie

Eddie is also a second-year student who identifies as male, White, Middle Eastern, and Jewish. He is a political science major, and his major topics of activism previously included gun violence organizing in high school and now includes running for office and involvement on topics such as social justice and educational equity. Eddie defines activism as "any way you show up basically. Any way that you make your voice heard." He further elaborated to include voting, organizing, and contacting elected representatives. Eddie's first major involvement in activism occurred after the Parkland shooting by organizing a large town hall at his high school with several local political leaders. Eddie stayed in touch with many of these political leaders, even serving on a local Congressman's youth advisory council and now running for local office himself.

Eddie does not see his activism heavily connected to the university. As a Jewish student, he articulated not feeling a welcoming environment on campus; "fundamentally because the university hasn't been a welcoming environment for me, I have been more active off-campus." He further stated, "college tends to radicalize some people." Eddie did see experiential learning components and faculty as encouraging activism, but he had sympathy overall that institutions

are made up of humans and are therefore naturally imperfect in their attempts to make rules and order while encouraging activism.

Meet Lance

Lance is a Black, straight junior who is studying education. His major topics for activism are inclusion and education. Within those areas, he sees resource allocation and helping out public schools as important components. He defines activism as "conversation on the basic ground level. People see how like I am going to focus on social media to spread that word. It is about those tough conversations." His main activities of activism included writing, discussions, and influencing his circle. He stated, "my circle of influence may be small, but when you have information out to a few people, you can make a big difference." He shared with pride his relationship with his supervisor on campus for his job discussing movies and documentaries on social justice topics. Further, he discussed how even class assignments can be an opportunity to write and inform others on topics they may need education on. Lance is very explicit that the mission of this university, his faculty, clubs, and voting drives are all examples of how the university has been very supportive of his activism. He could not think of ways the university hindered activism other than rules or regulations relating to protests.

Meet Lee

Lee is a White, non-binary (she/her pronouns), queer, junior, and political science major. Lee cares most about culminate justice, economic and racial issues, LGBTQ+ rights, and voting rights. She defines activism as "community engagement. It is community involvement… Activism is a direct response…it's trying to create change in your community." Lee is very critical of only a performative aspect of activism which stops with the marketing of issues or self-promotion. She started a non-profit to get LGBTQ+ youth involved in politics, and she is

starting another non-profit connected to voting rights in her home state. She also organized

protests, addressed legislatures, raised money, and social media to spread messages.

Lee sees activism generally encouraged from the university, but she also expressed strong

areas of hindrance. She sees supports in the way social justice is in messaging and community

service is encouraged. She sees a connection to the mission. She is also highly critical. She sees

that the upper administration wants to hear from their students, but also "they do try to save their

skin sometimes and try to put it down." She articulated several examples of student asks for

food workers' wages during Covid-19, severing ties with the local police department, and

refusing to condemn a faculty member who engaged in racist rhetoric.

Meet Lisa

Lisa is Hispanic, female, a first-year student, and a health science major. She defines

activism as "standing up for injustice issues. Especially, for those vulnerable that are scared to

make their voice heard." Much of her activism is centered through her local church. She

discusses meetings they have weekly to discuss issues and solutions. The group has protested

bad landlords and even business, such as when Wendy's was reportedly mistreating workers.

Lisa sees the university as very supportive of her activism. She feels the founding figure

of this university exemplified activism. She sees it encouraged in clubs and talks on campus.

Her only articulated hindrance was a lack of promotion of the opportunities available.

Meet Parul

Parul is an Asian-Indian, female, heterosexual, junior, and political science major. She

cares about representation with marginalized populations and immigration. She defined activism

as "representing or voicing our opinions to correct social or political wrongs." She discussed

involvement in raising issues of inappropriate cultural appropriation for one of the university

athletic events, petitions, letter writing, and involvement in state-wide voting advocacy organizations as examples of her recent activism involvement.

She shared support she feels in activism from faculty and professors. She sees activism as present in the mission and vision of the university. She did articulate criticism for the upper administration of the institution as hindrances. She felt they reject student activism, from academic policy lenience in the pandemic to the cultural appropriation issues, without providing explanation or alternatives. She sees this as "administration doesn't connect the mission with the work we are actually do[ing] on campus."

Meet Rubia

Rubia is a South Asian-Pakistani student who is female, straight, a first-year student, and undecided in her major. She is most passionate about women's rights but she stated "I advocate for all and any issues." Rubia defines activism as, "using your voice, using whatever platform you have and using your intellectual ability or resources to advocate for those who don't have the same thing. You use your voice for someone that doesn't have that voice." She is involved in social media activism and writing political commentary on issues important to her.

Rubia sees the institution as supportive of her activism. She specifically stated that activism is in the mission and shows through community service the university strongly encourages. For hindrances, she felt that sometimes the upper administration does not listen: "maybe they are not like listening to students." She went on to state the administration purports to want to hear from the students but does not act on it.

Meet Sara

Sara is a Caucasian, female, bi-sexual, first-year student who is majoring in theatre. She cares about LGBTQ rights, music education, police brutality, but she ended that she cares about

a lot of causes. She defines activism as "seeing something wrong and doing something about it. I don't think you can consider yourself part of the activist community unless you are doing." Sara has organized protests and walkouts since high school. She started a non-profit for music education for underserved urban schools in high school. She has led fundraisers and serves on the university's student government.

Sara sees faculty and even her college within the university as very supportive of her activism. She is highly critical of the upper administration and activism. She sees them ignoring measures from the student government body, supporting police departments after brutality issues come out, supporting ICE on campus, and ultimately caring about the institution over social justice.

Meet Tom

Tom is White, male, cis, straight, and a junior in his third-year at this university. Tom listed foreign interventions, racial justice, mass incarceration, economic injustice, environmental injustice, and immigration reform among his topic areas. He added to his list "I kinda dip my toes in a little bit of everything." Tom participates by protests, petitions, and sharing of information. He is also starting a new on-campus organization regarding activism.

Tom defines activism as, "Activism I would say is a very active thing . That is kinda self-explanatory... But it is more of a praxis, like a pragmatic, you know active thing instead of passively thinking about something. You can hold views, strong views, about justice and equal opportunity, but activism is doing those things." Tom identified supports from the university for activism as his first-year seminar, Service Days, clubs, and faculty. As hindrances he saw the structure of being a student as conflicting sometimes, such as needing to prioritize studying and other responsibilities.

The table below introduces the participants with demographic information and the causes articulated to summarize the above introductions. As examples articulate later, many of the chosen causes for the student's activism directly relate to the students' identities such as race, ethnicity, LGBTQ status, and religion. All names are pseudonyms. Participants were offered the chance to supply their own pseudonym, and some elected this option. Note that words presented are exactly as answered, which explains inconsistency between terms that have similar meanings such as straight and heterosexual.

Participant pseudonym	*Race/Ethnicity*	*Year at Lakefront University*	*Gender*	*Sexual Orientation*	*Topics of activism*
Anna	Latina/Mexicana	Second Year	Female	Heterosexual	Racial injustice, immigration
Eddie	White, Middle Eastern, Jewish	Second Year	Male	Heterosexual	Gun violence, voting rights, education equity, social justice
Lance	Black	Junior	Male	Straight	Inclusion, education, social justice
Lee	White, Hispanic, Irish	Junior	Non-binary	Gay/Queer	Climate justice, economic and racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, gun violence
Lisa	Hispanic	First-year, freshman	Female	*[Student responded Female]*	Social inequality, racial issues, poverty, workers rights, immigrants rights, gun violence
Parul	Asian, Indian	Junior	Female	Heterosexual	Representation for marginalized, immigration
Rubia	Asian, South Asian	Freshman	Female	Heterosexual	Women's rights, any and all issues
Sara	Caucasian	First-year, freshman	Female	Bisexual	LGBTQ rights, music education, police brutality,

					campaign finance reform
Tom	White, non-Hispanic	Third-year	Male	Straight, cis	Foreign interventions, racial injustice, mass incarceration, environmental justice, immigration reform, economic reform

Table 1. Participants Profile Summary

The ways the students engage in activism was varied while similar patterns emerged. All participants explicitly mentioned attending at least one protest. For some, such as Lance, it was only one protest experience. For others, such as Lee and Sara, protests were a regular part of their activism on a variety of topics. Other activism activities articulated included petitions, starting organizations, voting, starting clubs, contacting representatives, raising money, education, spreading the word, and even running for elected office in the case of Eddie.

Seven of the nine participants completed both interviews. All findings below are the result of the coding and theming in a continuous and iterative way to develop categories and theories, as applicable, and described in chapter three.

Findings and Theories from the Research Findings

As described in chapter three, the researcher utilized pre-coding, coding, re-coding, creating categories, and analyzing to develop major findings from this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through this iterative process, a theory for modern college student activism emerged. The theoretical model developed relates to how students define activism, a self-analysis of that activism identity, higher education support and hindrances, and institutionalism. The model further builds on a common foundation of how students network with other activists, and what

outcomes students have personally experienced from their activism. Each element of this theory and the overall model are described with examples below.

The findings below coalesced into a theoretical model for modern college student activism. This spectrum represents a relationship which emerged from the research between students' definitions, how much they see themselves present in that definition, the level of activity in activism, and how they see that higher education supports or hinders their activism. The model is mapped on Figure 1.

Activism

Communication Oriented -- Action Oriented

Definition:
Education, information-spreading, and Discussions

Self in Definition:
Yes, I am activists based on my definition

Activities:
Communication-focused, some protest participation but not organizer

Activism and Higher Education:
Supportive overall, small complaints, if any

Definition:
Action, change-oriented, listening, and critical of performative only

Self in Definition:
Self-critical, feel not doing enough

Activities:
Organized protests, communication, fund-raisers, and starting non-profits

Activism and Higher Education:
Some local supports, but overall critical especially of upper administration

Foundational and present in all ends of spectrum:
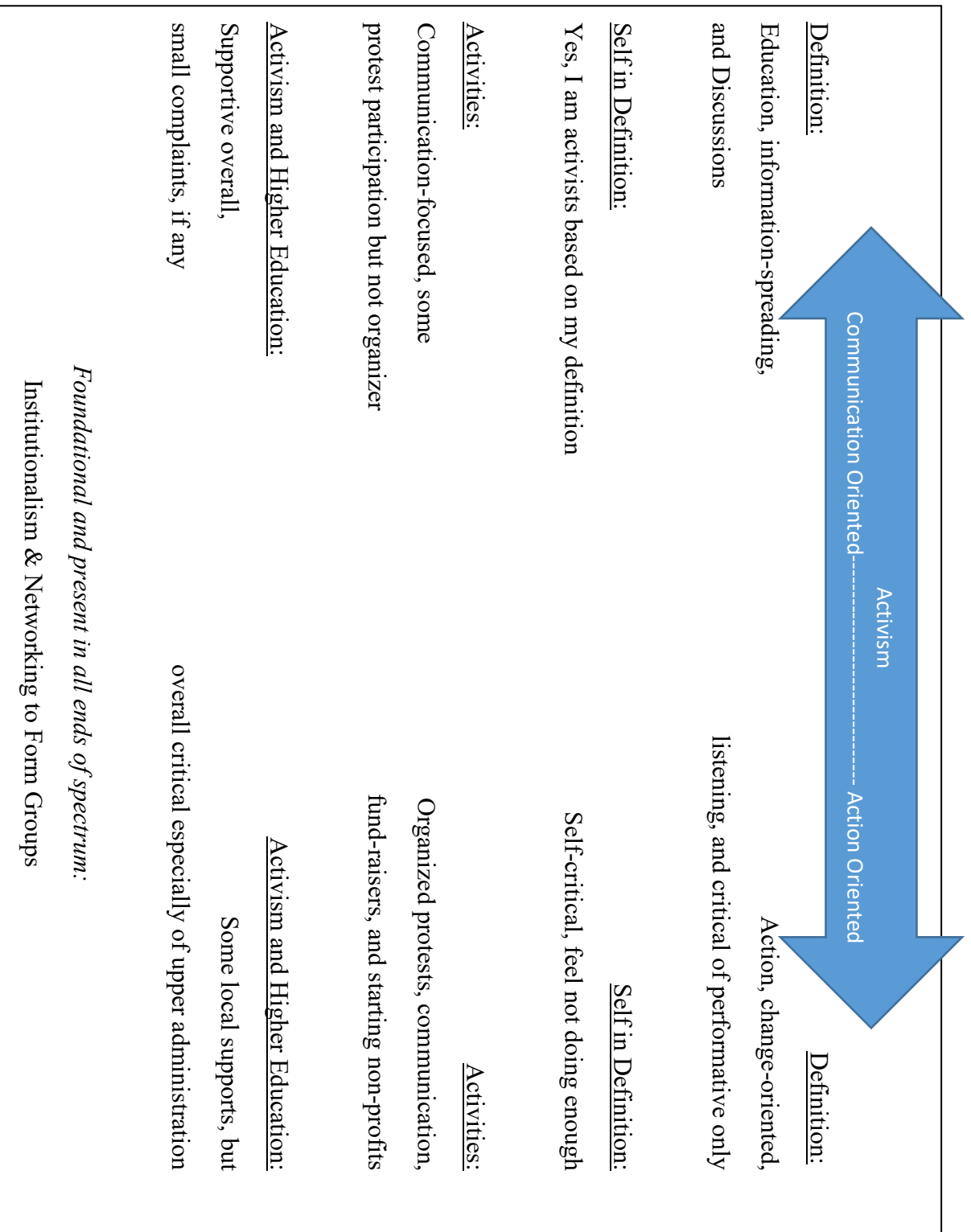Institutionalism & Networking to Form Groups

Figure 1. A Model of Generation Z College Student Activism

The core category for the model is Activism Engagement. The core category was informed by Definition and Self in Definition (causal conditions), Network (intervening condition), and Activism and Higher Education (context). Furthermore, there are various levels of Activities (action strategies) that yield various Outcomes (consequences).

On one end of the spectrum, Communication Oriented, are definitions of activism focused on information sharing, education, and conversation as activism. This end of the spectrum is also marked by participants who most readily reported they were an activist based on their supplied definition. In addition, at this end of the spectrum, while certainly articulating important work, participants listed the least number of discrete activism activities they were engaged in. Finally, participants at this end of the spectrum found higher education most supportive of their activism with some even having difficulty listing hindrances. Each of these areas are elaborated on with examples in the next section.

The other end of the spectrum (Action Oriented) comprised more complex and multifaceted definitions of activism which require action, call for change, and mention listening or being in community with those one is engaged in a fight for change for or with. This end of the spectrum included participants who questioned whether they were activists based on their own definition. At the same time, participants also named a long and diverse list of activism involvement from starting non-profits and organizing protests to school walkouts and fundraisers. This group would articulate a few supports for activism within higher education, if any, but they articulated many hindrances.

Interestingly, the unifying elements across both ends of the spectrum relate to the concept of institutionalism and networking. The word institutionalism, while not used by the researcher in questions, was mentioned by every participant. The level of criticism did intensify across the

spectrum with passive remarks on the Communication Focused end of the spectrum to fixation on elements of institutionalism with activism with the Action Focused end of the spectrum, but it was a present concept among all participants.

In addition, all students discussed how they network and find other students to engage in activism with in very similar ways. Social media usage for networking was mentioned by every participant in some regard. Classes, clubs, service, and offices dedicated to marginalized populations were all frequently listed.

The individual elements of this spectrum: definition and identity, involvement activities, supports from higher education, and hindrances from higher education are discussed and explored with examples below. Following full explanation and unpacking of each area, a chart proposes where the participants land on each given area. An important note that judgement should not be attached or implied by being communication oriented or action oriented, doing only a few activities or doing multiple different activism activities. Certainly, communication is an action, but it is delineated in this model form the action focus end as the only major focus for some whereas others explicitly criticize this being the extent of one's activism. The intent of this model is to look at the alignment of pattern across the categories for individual participants and the meanings that emerge from this pattern. Placement on spectrum is not intended to connect to more positive, less positive, or any expectation of outcomes of their activism on creating change.

Figure 2 proposes where participants land on the spectrum in Figure 1. Placing participants on the model is an attempt to provide further clarity on the model's nature as a spectrum and the relationship between the model's components illustrated in actual participants. Appendix C outlines more detailed supporting quotes and examples for each placement on the spectrum.

Lance		Eddie		Sara
Rubia	Lisa	Tom		Lee
	Parul		Anna	
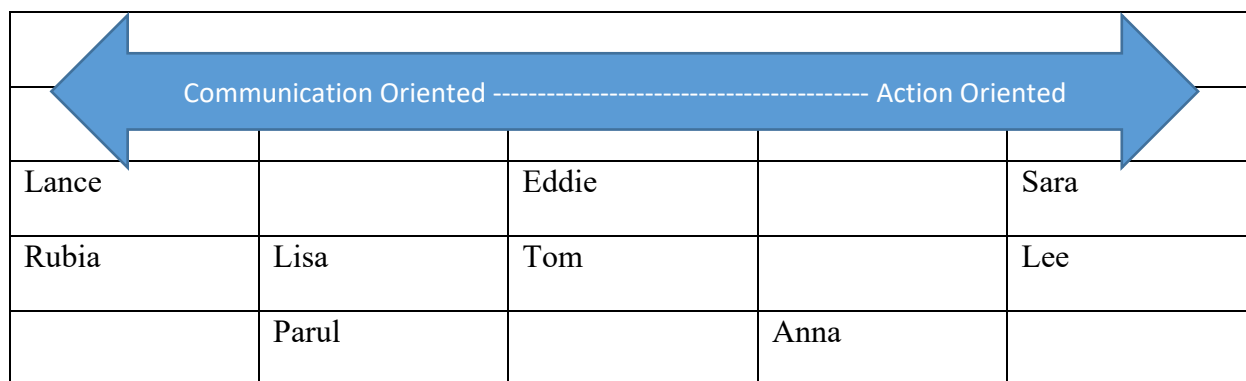
Figure 2. Placement of participants within the theoretical model

Below the components of the model are further elaborated with quotes and additional

information from individual participants.

How Students Define Activism and Their Activist Identity

Research question one and the first section of the model explored how university students

defined activism. Following supplying a definition, participants were asked if they considered

themselves an activist based on their own definition. Some participants, especially on the action

end of the model, struggled with this portion of questions with Lee literally stating, "that is a big

question" and "I wasn't prepared for these questions. There is like so much to answer." The

definitions and descriptions of activism included the following three major categories: Activism

as Communication, Activism as Action, and Activism in the Community.

Activism as Communication

The definition for a group of participants focused most on the education and sharing of

information. Rubia described this as "using your voice to aid someone without [voice]." Eddie

articulated this information sharing also using the term voice, stating "any way you show up and

make your voice heard." Lance focused on the education and information sharing aspect of

activism articulating how he willingly takes up opportunities to share his story and educate

others. He sees classes, friends, and even his supervisor as chances to have a deep conversation

on issues and conduct activism. Lance also articulated that much of activism is self-work on increasing one's knowledge about issues. Anna stated, "one of the main things as well is educating yourself and others." This definition differs from the below because it tends to stop at information sharing or educational aspects, while the next definition included action.

Activism as Action

Many participants' definitions focused on action aspects explicitly stating to be activism there must be action. Sara stated this as "seeing something wrong and doing something about it" adding later "must be doing." Anna described this as "doing the hard work toward social justice." The participants who supplied an action-oriented definition are clear that information sharing is not sufficient to be considered activism. Tom used the term praxis as activism seeing this as when knowledge meets action. Tom further stated, "You can hold views, strong views, about justice and equal opportunity, but activism is doing those things like protesting, spreading information, calling representatives, ..."

Activism and the Community

The definition for some participants also focused on the community aspect of activism. Lee stated it was "community engagement" and "community involvement." Lee set up further parameters that activism is not assuming what a community needs, but it is going in and asking what is needed. Rubia similarly stated a definition focused on community and helping others:

[Activism is]… using your intellectual ability or the resources you have around you to advocate for those who don't have the same thing. You use your voice to advocate for someone that doesn't have that voice. Use that platform to advocate for someone that doesn't have that platform. Using whatever resources you have to in a sense make up for or amplify voices of smaller communities.

Rubia 's definition is still communication or information focused, but it differs in being focused on communication to assist those with fewer resources to amplify their issues.

Below is a table which lists the main portion of the definition from each participant. It contains the classification assigned and where on the spectrum each definition might be positioned.

Anna	"Doing the work, the hard work toward social justice. Activism can be seen in many ways. I think a lot of people mainly think protesting and front lines activism and that is a big of it and that is great. There are so many other things to do. Like I have mentioned one of the main things as well is educating yourself and others."	Lean Action – The definition is focused on education, but does mention words like work and "so many things to do." The lens on education also includes self-work.
Eddie	"Anyway, that you can show up basically. Any way that you can make your voice heard."	Neutral – Voice is interpreted as communication and information sharing, but "showing up" as potentially action-oriented. Due to lack of detail, left neutral.
Lance	"It is conversation at its very basic ground level… like I am going to focus on social media to spread the word…It is about those tough conversations."	Very Communication – Only communication oriented using terms like conversation and "spreading the word."
Lee	"It is community engagement. It is community involvement. Something that doesn't shut other people out. Especially when you are working in like marginalized communities. Activism there is like a direct response and it is also not assuming their needs. It is like going in and asking what do you need and like that is in terms of being like an ally that is how to do it."	Very Action – Uses words like "engagement" and "involvement" which are interpreted to mean action. Involves listening which other communication definitions do not always name.
Lisa	"I would define activism like standing up for injustice issues. Especially, for those vulnerable that are scared to make their voice heard for being afraid of having something bad happen if they speak up."	Neutral – "Standing up" is unclear, but "making voice heard" is interpreted as communication.
Parul	"Activism … is folks representing or voicing our opinions to correct social or political wrongs what we see as wrong. Try to fix those things."	Lean Communication – Mentions "representing" and "voicing" which are communication, but then adds "fix those things."
Rubia	"I think it's using your voice, using whatever platform you have and using your intellectual	Very Communication- Focuses on the word "voice" and even

	ability or the resources you have around you to advocate for those who don't have the same thing. You use your voice to advocate for someone that doesn't have that voice. Use that platform to advocate for someone that doesn't have that platform. Using whatever resources you have to in a sense make up for or amplify voices of smaller communities"	mentions using resources you have to "amplify voices of smaller communities."
Sara	"I would define activism as seeing something wrong and doing something about it. I don't think that you can consider yourself a part of the activism community unless you are doing."	Very Action- Mentions "Doing something about it." Adds critique cannot be activist without "doing."
Tom	"Activism I would say is a very active thing. That is kinda self-explanatory... But it is more of a praxis, like a pragmatic, you know active thing instead of passively thinking about something. You can hold views, strong views, about justice and equal opportunity, but activism is doing those things like protesting, spreading information, calling representatives, spreading information…"	Very Action – Mentions "very active thing." Mentions having the views is not enough, must be doing.

Table 2. Definitions of activism from participants

Activism as Identity

The participants were next asked if based on their definition they consider themselves activists. By and large, the participants who supplied a definition more firmly based on the communication end of the spectrum on the model were more readily apt to express being activists based on their definitions. Parul's entire answer to that question was, "Yes, I do."

The participants who espoused an action-oriented definition were more likely to express some degree of hesitation when asked whether they were an activist. Some hesitation focused on feeling they should care about more issues like environmentalism. For example, Sara answered this in response to the question of does she consider herself an activist based on her provided definition:

Yes and no. Because I think that I have done lots of things that are activists' things but I mean I would be lying if I said I had dedicated my life to activism. I don't think it would

be fair to be like yes I am an activist, that is what I do. I do do things. I am an activist in

some sense of the word. But something that I struggle with, something that I am kinda

embarrassed about is like I am not great about environmentalism.

Some participants hesitated because they felt they were not doing enough. Tom stated, "Well, I

am one, but I have a lot of room to grow. I think we all have a lot of room to grow in our

activism." Others similarly hesitated, and they expressed they could do more to be comfortable

with the term. Rubia stated, "Yes (pause), but I think I could be doing a lot more. I think I am in

an introductory stage." Rubia is an exception being a communication-focused definition with a

degree of hesitation.

Many participants supplied other words they felt more comfortable using to describe how

they express their views on the topics that are important to them. For example, Lee stated, "Yes,

slash, I would like to use another word… just because of that performative aspect that… I like to

say I am a political advocate." Some of these other words included organizer, ally, and advocate.

Some participants discussed how activism had been overused and lost meaning leading them to

feel comfortable with these new terms.

A number of participants on the action-oriented end of the model articulated a judgment

on what they viewed as a performative aspect of activism seemingly critiquing the other end of

the spectrum. Sara said, "I think that is the big issue and misconception, especially in America.

That you can get away with being an activist by being on the right side as long as you said you

are." She went on with her definition requirement that "you can't be an activist by

acknowledging a problem. Acknowledge your part in the problem and say what can I do to make

this not a problem." Lee stated this concept as, "youth activism kinda can anger me sometimes. I

think it is fantastic, but I think it can be problematic." She continued, "I think a lot of these

protests, a lot of the young people use them as a way to seem trendy." She referred to this as a "performative aspect" of activism. Parul stated, "more action than speaking." Sara expressed similar sentiments stating, "can't be an activist just by acknowledging a problem. Acknowledge you are part of the problem and what can I do to fix it." These critiques seem to judge just acknowledgment or speaking on topics as not enough to be activism in their opinion.

Some participants certainly take their activism involvement as an important part of their life. Three of the nine participants shared they had started actual 501c3 organizations. One of those is even starting a second non-profit. They all articulated a rationale for this legal step that aided them in raising money. One organization focused on music education for inner-city children. Another was focused on the history of marginalized people that get ignored typically in school. Finally, one had started a non-profit to assist LGBTQ young people in running for political office. It was apparent that those with this level of involvement in activism had many more examples and nuanced thinking on activism because it consumes a great deal of time and energy for the students.

Activism Activities

Research question two addressed how the students engage in activism. The students answered this by responding how they act on the issues they care about related to their activism. As the model articulates, those on a communication-oriented end focus their actions on communication. The majority of actions includes social media, paper writing, and discussions with friends or peers. Lance articulated real value in creating change in one's own circle of influence. He discussed conversations with a supervisor about race relations sparked by both watching the 2020 film: *Judas and the Black Messiah.*

The participants on the action-oriented end of the model have more diverse engagement in activism. This included started non-profits, organizing protests, leading boycotts, and organizing community efforts. As articulated in their self-view on activism, many on this end of the spectrum still felt they were not doing enough activities. Appendix C contains a full listing of activities by participant.

Higher Education and Activism

Research question three investigated the relationship between participants' activism and the university. Participants were asked a series of questions about how they see activism relating to higher education in general, their specific university, ways the university supports activism, and ways the university hinders it. Responses from participants related to their view on the university weaved among many question responses, but consistent themes were present. More generically all participants except one saw these factors related. Lee expressed that college had been a "catalyst" to jumpstart their activism. Others expressed how the diversity of the university enabled learning about the variety of issues in society. Eddie was the one person who did not see a specific relationship. Eddie articulated more how college tended to radicalize and further polarize viewpoints. Eddie relegates much of his activism involvement to outside the university.

All students listed similar supporting elements. However, those with action-based definition and involvement listed more elements of hindrances whereas those focused more solely on communication could sometimes not even name hindrances at all. The ways participants noted the University supports activism and hinders activism are described below.

Ways the University Supports Activism

All participants attended Lakefront University, a private, not-for-profit university located in a mid-west urban city. Because of its religious nature, it has a strong mission statement that centers on education and elements of social justice. Every single participant expressed that one way the university might support activism is through the mission and/or values of the school. For example, Lisa said, "Well, I would say activism relates to the university with the mission of the university." She further stated the founding figure of the university was "willing to help anyone without judging" and that example informs activism in students. Some participants, like Parul, articulated this as even a reason the university was attractive to attend since it united the entire university community on creating a better world. She said, "that was the main thing that drew me to the university itself was the value we have for the mission and all align with basically being activists like being an ally." Tom stated:

> [Lakefront University] specifically have [sic] mission values and whether a religious thing or secular thing there is a big draw to be in the community and do what you can do. And don't just sit in your ivory tower and write papers and think but to interact with your thoughts and community.

Participants then shared very specific ways that the university supports activism.   The representative student government in the shared governance system of this university came up for several participants. Lee stated it, "I think like with student government. Since they set that up, they want to hear from students. I would say compared to other universities that I have heard of, [Lakefront University] does want to hear a lot more from their students." Lance and Sara also talked about the student government as a way to support activism with Sara even serving as a representative for her college.

Elements of the curricular experience often came up in ways that the university supported activism. In particular, a few students mentioned first-year seminar courses. Tom stated, "my [first-year seminar] was a good first step. It got us out in the community. It actually gave me relationships with faculty and students to do activism stuff together." Connected to curricular support, Tom, Parul, and Lee generally named faculty as supportive of their activism.

Finally, students named tangible events or programs as ways the university supported activism. Lakefront University hosts an annual Service Day which Tom named as a way to support activism behavior. Outside of Service Day, Rubai and Anna named service projects as a way that it is supported. Anna also named how you can see support in particular offices such as religious services or offices for multicultural students.

Ways the University Hinders Activism

The participants on the action end of the spectrum had much more to say in the ways the university intentionally or unintentionally hinders their activism. Only one student was very short in this area with Tom simply stating that grades, homework, and assignments might get in the way of being involved as one would like. All others had varying levels of issues and ways the university interferes with their activism.

The most widely shared interference was a perceived lack of action from the highest administration. Despite the supports articulated above, the participants see support at levels close to them, from professors or departments, as wholly disconnected from the actions they perceive from the highest administration, especially the President of the university. Participants expressed dismay at what they see as releasing statements or sending emails about issues, such as Black Lives Matter, but not matching their words with actions.

Further, many participants often felt student complaints went unanswered. Specific examples were given from varying participants including incidents of cultural appropriation by the Athletics department, stances on the relationship with the local police department, and accommodations of pass/fail policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some participants felt they were not even listened to. For some, if the administration did hear them on these issues, their requests were simply ignored. Sara stated, "I will say that we in Student Government have had quite a few issues with the institution where we presented them with issues… and they have not listened to us." She went on to share:

> We passed a bill on this. We pass an idea. What happens when you do this, you send it up to the higher people, send it to the president, then [they] will just say no. Even though it was passed by the Student Government, they will just say no. Even though we have had multiple ideas brought to their attention, here is the issue, here is what you can do… then just all sort of stuff, and they won't do it.

Several participants were aware of activism conducted by one of the black student organizations on campus to advocate for accommodations on academic policies during the pandemic and period with ongoing social unrest in society. Such requested accommodations included pass-fail options or optional finals. Although recounted by many as an example of the administration not listening, Parul stated it well:

> Recently, [Black Student Club] tried to pass something for Pass/D/Fail options and bring those back and things… they were basically like rejected it but didn't provide like an alternative. They didn't prove any good reason, just like no. It is just not going to happen. It is what it is. So, at the very least, they could have provided like some sort of support along with the rejection. That is what the institution is supposed to be doing.

Several students articulated this lack of listening in specific examples of this university
not listening to students based on cutting ties with the local police department after nationwide
attention on police brutality in 2020. Rubia said:

I think when they are not listening to students and not like, *we want to hear your voice*
and then don't act like that. Maybe that can cause student to like feel, in a sense,
hopeless or that it doesn't really matter. They are going to do what they are going to do.
Like I remember, in regards to defunding or like breaking ties with the [local police
department]. Even though there was like an entire student government meeting on it, and
a lot of students expressed concern about that, they were like *we are really open to this
and want to hear what you have to say.* So maybe in a sense when they ask to hear one's
voice and then don't act on it, that can cause discouragement or just like this it is what it
is and that is how the institution is going to work, and it doesn't really matter what we do.
So maybe, like a sense, there is no point.

One other area where activism was hindered, and in this case, caused the student to take
their involvement off campus occurred with Eddie. Eddie is Jewish and was born in Israel.
Eddie expressed specific examples of ways the university was unwelcoming to the Jewish
student body. He shared ways that his Jewish identity puts him at odds with others whom he
would normally agree with politically on most issues.   In addition, he shared examples of faculty
scheduling tests during fasting periods. He articulated instances of hate on campus directed at
Jewish peers. Eddie is quite active in activist activities but, because of these hindrances, almost
exclusively keeps his involvement outside the university. Eddie stated:

 [Lakefront University] hasn't really been too welcoming for me and Jewish students.
Umm, and especially, it is difficult for me because I am not only am I Jewish, but I was

born in Israel. And, I am a dual citizen of the United States and Israel. It doesn't matter

what my pigment is on the… it is impossible for me to be in the room of a progressive

circle and have that washed away is what I have noticed. So I think fundamentally the

university hasn't been a welcoming environment for me, I have been more active off-

campus. That is why I don't think the university has done much in terms of changing my

mind or molding my opinion on anything because I haven't spent much time on campus

in those circles.

Anti-Institutionalism as Foundational

The conversations about hindrances and upper administration, in particular, brought up a

particular word in every interview: institutionalism. For the most part, the participants had

strong views on how the university is an institution and failings of that fact. The word was said

with such disdain and a focal point of further unpacking with participants in the second-round

interviews that occurred. Lee put it overall in the conversation about activism and the university

that, "I feel like in a lot of ways that you are fighting back against an institution."

This element of the model did not differ as highly from one end of the spectrum to the

other, but certainly those most action-focused, such as Sara, Lee, and Anna were more specific

and critical in the institutional elements. Overall, the participants would articulate a capitalistic

orientation that the institutions work towards for their own survival. Eddie stated that

"institutions will be imperfect because people are imperfect." Sara said:

> The reality of the situation is that most institutions aren't setting out to make it harder for
>
> us. They are setting out to make it easier for them. Which is honestly what most people
>
> do. So you have to keep in mind that you know that how do we fight a system that isn't
>
> intentionally, you know, burying us, but they are doing so in order to protect themselves.

Some went further to state this was about money and appeasing donors. Lee stated, "they need to appease, you know, donors, cause I am familiar with how non-profits work and [Lakefront University] is a non-profit." Lee further compared higher education to a business:

> So I think institutions have rules and they have ways of doing things that are very old and what I think of are archaic, but they its [sic] because they worked for certain people. It has benefited certain people, so they keep it that way. But then when it is challenged, people try to change it, they become upset. They don't want it to change. They are profiting off students. It is a business basically. You pay them, and then they give you a degree.

Others articulated that as an institution, the university cares first and foremost about its reputation.   The participants shared that this worry about reputation paralyzes some organizations from taking stronger stances on issues.   Anna was referring to support for Black Lives Matter activism and the university when she said:

> I don't really see [Lakefront University] as an institution supporting students. I think they may be worried about that. Institutions as a whole are worried to think about these things. They are touchy subjects. They worry about backlash and stuff.

In another location, Anna summed it up stating, "So it is frustrating to see when institutions promote certain values and don't actually show it to their students because they are afraid of what the backlash might be."

Some critiqued that even elements of student-involved governance are attempts to assimilate students into becoming also part of the institution. Sara describes seeing students involved in the student government start behaving as part of the institution:

What we are seeing is that a lot of that is being reflected off the institution itself. It is almost like the institution by modeling these ideas of you know self-protection, and you know, imperialism, honestly and just being above everyone else that Student Government is most reflecting that because they have to in order to preserve themselves…. I think the scary thing is watching students become a part of that institutions. I think that over time that is something that happens.

Similar to what Sara warned about, Parul saw this as a benefit of college. She said, "It [being in college] gives me more of an inside look at institutions." Ironically in support of the point above, Parul, who is very involved in student government organizations, articulated a journey along the lines of what Sara warned about.

Sara also articulated a more nuanced view of the institutions. She stated how in high school she was anti-anything produced by her school: "I hated doing anything for my school." However, since being in college, she has seen the power in sometimes using the institution. She shared examples of moving activism items actually through the student government processes. In addition, she shared how her music education non-profit used her university to get rights to conduct a musical that would have been impossible to obtain without that help. She articulated a struggle with how to still think these institutions are bad but utilize them sometimes for the greater good. Sara said:

And now that I am at [Lakefront University], I have realized there is value in utilizing an institution. That it doesn't make the institutionalism right, but I have learned there are ways to use their resources through like Student Government.

Of note, the three students who were the harshest on the institutionalism of higher education are also the three who started non-profits for their causes. All of them when presented

with this element of starting an institution while decrying institutionalism in society defended it in ways similar to the nuances of Sara above. This was a necessary step because this is the way the government has outlined it is legal to accept donations.

Ultimately, the aspect of students seeing the university as an institution and that viewpoint as a most mentioned element of how their activism is hindered is important. It also seems to cause the students to pause on the worthiness of their efforts even. Rubia ended the discussion on this topic stating, "it is what it is, and that is how the institution is going to work, and it doesn't really matter what we do. So maybe in a sense, there is no point."

Activist Networking

The fourth research question explored how students develop their network. This included finding others interested in their causes and the impact of social media. The importance of social media to modern college student activism was present for all participants along the spectrum in the theoretical model. Every single participant articulated the use of social media. It was critical to almost all aspects of their activism. Several participants still mentioned clubs and organizations connected to activism. Finally, a few participants also had preexisting networks, from high school, which were still their core group they conduct activism activities with.

Social Media

First, participants articulated very specific ways they used social media. For example, explaining the sharing of information, Rubia said, "I am always on Twitter retweeting stuff I see. On Instagram, I will share like posts from you know creators and other small organizations that are dedicated to these causes." Importantly, it is not just national content creators and organizations on social media. Lisa shared how she shares information on social media in detail. She stated:

I usually like to post on my social media. Like right now I am using more Snapchat, and I have been having a lot of new friends. Especially people from [Lakefront University] and I like posting about the events that have been happening or like in my community, I post about the things that we are doing and encourage people to join. I usually write a small paragraph of the benefits that will happen if they join and actually try to help us.

In another similar example, Anna articulates the different ways to use different platforms of social media in exact detail and how to beat the infamous algorithm, in her opinion:

Sometimes it is hard to get it out on social media, the algorithm and everything, so we as a team to try to it out more you have to like the post, share the post, save the post, comment, doing all those things to help boost a post.

She further articulated differences in demographics and targeted messaging for different groups:

We [her non-profit organization she co-founded] have an Instagram and a Facebook page as well, and oh a website. So we share all our things out there. I think Facebook is where we get the most support because Instagram are more like our demographic like kids still in high school, and they may not be involved in these type of things… It is more like with Facebook groups, it is more with older, like older generations are more active on Facebook and more about [sic][able] to help with like monetary donations.

Her non-profit dedicated to education activism spread its message and events on Instagram, but utilized Facebook, with an older demographic in her assessment, to fundraise.

Many participants described how they learn things on social media. Tom shared how he found out about what activists' groups on campus are doing via Instagram: "social media is a big one. Instagram, I find, is a great place to find what groups at [Lakefront University] are doing." Rubia, Lance, Anna, Lee, and Sara all shared they found protests over the summer for Black

Lives Matter primarily through social media. Anna stated it simply, "I learn a lot from my peers on social media."

Lance explained a more nuanced view of social media and his activism activities. He did share that he found out about a protest he participated in during the Fourth of July on social media. However, he articulated he intentionally didn't share his actual participation on social media nor did his friends. He stated:

> I didn't feel the need to like post on social media. Oh, I am here. Look at all these people. Like I intentionally didn't. First off, I didn't want to. But also, I didn't want to even put it out there. It is just like I can do this on my own. And see the people there and interact with the people in real life. It doesn't have to go on social media.

The students seem to see their activism completely fused to social media. This was clearly a tool mentioned not only in response to questions about how they find out about events and network, but social media would appear in answers to all nature of questions. Lee perhaps describes this in summary well stating, "first and most immediate is using social media as a tool to conduct outreach and to work with other people to spread awareness."

Clubs and Organizations

As mentioned earlier, clubs and organizations also came up as a mechanism for how the university supports activism. This clearly shows that students see these organizations and their link to activism. Clubs and organizations also came up as ways students found others to conduct activism with. Most often the types of organizations mentioned were political student groups, service organizations, and groups around identity such as Latinx organizations or those for Black students. Many of the references were to the organizations being behind specific activism on campus. Several students mentioned actions by a black student club advocating for academic

policy leniency due to the pandemic and uproar in society around police brutality that was mentioned earlier in the section about administration ignoring student requests.

Student government was mentioned in several interviews, and one interviewee, Sara, is a member of the student government at this university. For the most part, the context was positive and seeing student government as activists and advocating for students. She stated, "through [Student Government], I have learned a lot about activism." The only negative about student government came from Eddie concerning what he perceives as hostile toward Jewish students and by Sara who believed it served as a gateway for students into institutionalism, as articulated earlier.

Classes and Majors

In the interviews, participants were asked how they found others interested in their causes. Another frequent answer was variations of their college, classes, and major. Lee, Parul, and Eddie were both political science majors and shared that activism and that major are completely linked. Sara was a student in theatre, and she similarly talked about activism being a motivation for many actors. Sara said, "activism and acting and theatre are very intertwined. Just by being with those kind of people. You know a lot of theatre is inspired by activism and injustices in the world."

Pre-existing Relationships

Many of the activists conducted their activism with individuals from their prior high school, church, or other community involvement. Anna is a great example of this. She started the Black Lives Matter protest in her local community after seeing it was not having a protest, unlike other suburbs. She did so with high school friends and acquaintances. Out of that involvement, she formed her non-profit on education left out of traditional curriculum about

minorities in the United States. She still sees a connection to the university. She described how she takes articles from her non-profit work to her campus groups for feedback. She recruits for her causes on campus as well, but her network started off-campus. Lee also articulated reconnecting with others in the past because of social unrest happening in society. She said, "I reconnected with a lot of people because we were like this is really like a terrible thing that happened to George Floyd and Black people across the country, and we want to do something about it."

A common theme across these participants, all a similar generation, was activism that began in high school and mostly with gun violence issues. The nation experienced large youth movements related to activism after especially the Parkland shootings in Florida in 2018. This was specifically referenced in many participants' stories of their activism and activities. Eddie stated, "I first got started with local organizing in high school primarily due to gun violence in schools. So, the Parkland shooting was a key moment." While only a few still articulate this as a cause they are actively working towards, the impact that event had on starting activism activities in their lives was apparent.

Outcomes of Their Activism

Throughout the interviews, participants reflected on the impact of their activism on themselves. A variety of outcomes were shared. A popular one was confidence and leadership skills. Tom stated it, "I am not afraid to do things that are out of my comfort zone." He shared the nature of activism activities required "doing things you aren't always comfortable with." He saw how that had translated to other aspects of his life and stepping out of the comfort zone, as he put it. Anna stated, "it has helped me just grow as a leader and that helps me with my [non-profit organization]. That helps me, and I am a leader in [Catholic Club], a mentor for first-year

students, and on a career team." She further summed it up by saying, "transferable skills that have definitely helped."

Another aspect of activism can be the community and the almost therapeutic aspect of being with others who share similar views, backgrounds, and values. Rubia simply put it as "it allows me to make a lot of connections." Lee articulated an aspect of this during President Trump's time in office. They said, "I think a common cause for a lot of young people was sadly Donald Trump. You could like *ugh Donald Trump* and get a conversation going around that." Lance gave a different reflection on community and talked with joy about a Fourth of July Black Lives Matter protest which he termed as "the perfect protest." He further said:

> It was at my school that I went to high school. It was run by students that I knew, and I had given money to get supplies for it. I had also joined, and I got a few of my friends to join. And afterwards, there was as socially distant community event, like a bar b que… this is what it is supposed to be like. All the changing is great, but like stuff like that is great, but we also have to walk for a reason, we have to have a reason for us to protest. Ending with us all in community. That was something I wanted to be part of.

Participants were asked a question in the first interview of what they would do differently regarding activism if they were starting college over again. Without exception, every participant stated they would start earlier and get even more involved. This indicates a level of satisfaction with their work and their experience with it which they only wish to have increased and started earlier.

Conclusion

The participants engaged in a wide variety of involvement in activism. From protests to starting non-profits and organizing, these students were working hard on issues important to

them. Ultimately the participants directly addressed a wide variety of issues in these interviews.

Well beyond the scope of this study was the fascinating commentary on the state of political

systems in the world, racial injustice, and reflections on higher education.

The developed theoretical model ties directly to the distinct research questions. The first

research question addressed how university students define activism. The study presented

different definitions with different emphasis, specifically between focus on communication

versus more action orientation. Interesting observations were noted about who aligned with

which definitions, and the reluctance for those on the action side to consider themselves fully an

activist even with their own definitions.

The second research question asked how students engaged in activism. This was

embedded information in the theory above and related to what definition they articulated. As

stated, students generally doing the most distinct activities tended to give action-oriented

definitions and be more reluctant to call themselves activists. Those focused more solely on

conversations or education who articulated less distinct activities accepted the definitions they

gave without hesitation as true for themselves.

The third research question addressed the relationship between the university and

activism. For supports, participants saw a direct relationship to this particular university's

mission. Also, they stated classes, faculty, departments, clubs, and Student Government as all

supporting elements to their activism. The participants were also clear on hindrances. The most

universal complaint was a lack of listening and/or action on the part of the highest

administration, especially from those more action-oriented on the spectrum. In addition, the

concept of the university as an institution, and all the negative connotations to that, was

mentioned by almost all participants.

Finally, the fourth research question addressed how the participants developed their network. For many students, their activism was occurring with individuals they knew before college. Some had met their network of activists in classes, clubs, and through service projects. The largest contributor in this area was social media. Social media was a tool utilized in all the above relationships. For example, social media enabled high school friends to reunite about causes or how clubs on campus used social media to spread the word. Social media is completely connected to the network of activism for these participants.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine college student activism in a modern setting, specifically looking at how the university relates to this activism and how the students network. This topic is important because activism has long been a staple of higher education in the United States (Lucas, 1994), and has reemerged in increasing numbers in recent years. As the second decade of the twenty-first-century begins, the nation is undergoing a pandemic while also having some of the largest social movements in decades. It was an opportune time to situate this researcher's interest in activism and learn from self-described activists.

Through nine unique participants and across sixteen interviews, the researcher developed the Model of Generation Z Activism. The model's categories are unpacked further in the discussion below with reflection back to the existing literature to contextualize the findings. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research, limitations, and implications for all constituents involved: student activists and college administrators.

Generation Z Theoretical Model of Activism

The development of a theoretical model for today's generation of students' activism occurred because of the pattern apparent between participant's definitions, activities, views on higher education, and self-view as an activist. A model can be useful in explaining complex and seemingly distantly related items. Existing literature on definitions of activism, networking of the activists, and the relationship to the university exist as presented in Chapter 2, but no other known model combines these distinct elements and their relationship.

In the case of this model, a broad spectrum of activism emerged. Communication-oriented activism is important. These participants on that end articulated valuable change, often in a circle of friends, supervisors, or classmates. They see aiding others in their education on

issues as valuable. The action-oriented side is also important. They are challenging society in multifaceted ways from organizing to non-profit work. This is undoubtedly impactful.

The real value is available in seeing both ends of the model as activism. The action-oriented end of the spectrum had some participants articulate directly that communication only is not activism. Communication-oriented individuals were often articulating a recruitment to the cause strategy. Those participants were educating and growing their causes. This is a necessary part of activism, and in this researcher's view, activism as a big tent, most accepting of whatever one can do for their cause, is a path towards more change and success.

The articulation of the model is also useful for its context within higher education. This is discussed more in implications for administrators and students later in this chapter, but the relationship between ends of the spectrum and impressions of support and hindrance from participants was strong. That one end of the spectrum feels mostly support while the other feels mostly hindrance deserves attention. The remaining portions of this chapter unpack the sections of the model in more detail for discussion.

Activism's Definition, Identity, and Activities

Activism is hard to define. That was apparent in participants' struggles to come up with definitions for it, and this researcher would argue a lack of unifying definition in literature. As noted earlier in chapters one and two, Kezar said, "refers to students' efforts to create change on or off-campus related to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues using technical outside institutional channels such as protests, demonstrations, and rallies" (Kezar, 2010, p. 461). Similarly, Hundscheid (2010) emphasized that activists had exhausted institutional or normal channels for change. A commonality across these definitions and many others is an outside-of-institutional method approach to advocate for the change desired. The review of the literature in

Chapter 2 also articulated the complications and unsettled nature of a definition in the scholarship of this area.

Many participants engaged in activism that could mirror Kezar and Hundscheid definitions, but the students' definitions that focused more solely on education, conversation, and information sharing would not match these definitions from the literature. The one exception in this literature review is Broadhurst (2014) who stipulated a desire to change the world and collective aspect of activism. This definition is encompassing enough to fit all participant definitions within it.

The definitions the participants provided more clearly mirror existing scholarship definitions of civic engagement. Civic engagement is a broader term of which activism is a component. As previously mentioned, Keeter et al. (2002) list nineteen specific activities which can be considered civic engagement. The participants involved in this study are literally doing all nineteen of them, and, of note, named these as activism behaviors. Even in research, these terms are often used interchangeably, so it is of no fault to participants or this researcher that the delineation is not clear. The difficulty with the definition was apparent in many participants volunteering words they preferred such as organizer, ally, and advocate.

As described in the literature review chapter, activism is most often successful when it closely aligns with one's identity (Klandermans, 2002). This aspect was present in the topic of activism for many of the participants. Eddie is passionate about Jewish issues. Lisa and Anna are passionate about immigrant topics as children of immigrants and Hispanic-identifying students. Lee and Sara articulated passion about LGBTQ causes.

Importantly, the study also had participants engaged in activism beyond one's own identity. This is most clearly shown in the involvement of every single participant in the topic of

Black Lives Matter and police brutality. This could be a condition of the time period of this study and the large amount of public support across identities for this cause. However, this form of ally activism manifesting so universally would be unusual to this researcher's knowledge of existing scholarship. Certainly, there are examples of white people helping in the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s or men advocating for women's rights, but these are exceptions rather than the norm.

The participants reflected on outcomes from their activism. For the most part, they articulated items well placed in the literature: e.g., leadership skills, confidence, and organization were also found in the studies by Baird (1970) and Trent (1970). In addition, Kezar (2010) found via faculty and staff surveys perceived growth among activists on many of these same attributes.

In the end, the definitions of the students did not quite match literature on activism but did more closely match definitions of civic engagement. Beyond that, the outcomes from activism aligned well with what the literature states individuals achieve out of being an activist.

Higher Education and Student Activism

The participants see their activism as linked to the university, and they were very clear on ways their activism is supported and hindered. Fundamentally, as one participant put it, college was a "catalyst" to their activism.

Many of the examples supplied by students as supportive to their activism have research backing evidence to also indicate this. For example, course content, student government, service projects, and multicultural clubs (Bowman et al., 2015), were all shown to have supported links to civic engagement and/or activism. That students perceived these diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences as supporting and contributing to their activism is a compliment to the

execution at this university and evidence of the accomplishment of what is ideally a goal of each activity.

Students were most articulate in ways they felt the university was hindering their activism, especially on the action-oriented end of the spectrum. One does not have to look far to see activists and universities at odds, but the specific relationship is under-studied in scholarship. The contribution in this study of students specifically articulating disappointment in a lack of action from upper administration, a disconnect between statements and action, and not listening to students provides concrete complaints to this often-strained relationship. Ultimately, the participants on the Action-oriented end of the spectrum believe their activism interacts in negative ways with the school. At some level, this is not surprising. If one were to conduct an exercise of putting a university on this spectrum, most activism by universities is communication-oriented. This, therefore, fits the pattern of action-oriented participants critiquing communication only as activism.

The communication-oriented end of the spectrum had more difficulty listing hinderances if they had many at all. Conceptually this makes sense. Universities and higher education often start and end their activism with statements and communication efforts. Certainly, bold stances are sometimes taken with policy or funding decisions, but activism activities from universities themselves would certainly be more often in a communication realm. Therefore, students whose own activism starts and ends with communication might see more alignment in their view of what is activism with the university.

Finally, the portion of this theme relating to institutionalism is most fascinating. As a reminder that Kezar's (2010) definition said, "students' efforts to create change on or off campus related to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues using technical outside

institutional channels such as protests, demonstrations and rallies" (p. 461). Importantly, her definition literally stated, "outside institutional channels." As that particular word appeared in every single interview, one must reflect on a potential aspect of this generation's activism which is striving to be anti-institutions. Anti-institutionalism is a sentiment that has a history with activism. Rogers (1959) talked about anti-institutionalism in education, and he defined institutions quoting Walter Hamilton as "they may be rigid or flexible in their structures, exacting or lenient in their demands, but alike they constitute standards of conformity from which an individual may depart at his peril" (p.169). McCool (2018) discusses how the principle of anti-institutionalism has been co-opted by the right side of the political spectrum recently in the United States, especially since Donald Trump's presidency.

The most salient point about the anti-institutionalism aspect of the study and connection to literature is that this relationship of activists to anti-institutionalism is not new. While the aspect might be newly visible on the right, this study would give credence that it still exists on the left. As higher education in the United States is an institution by definition above, and continues to operate in business and corporate type ways, educators must think about how and why this trait of education collides with activist perceptions.

How Students Network

Activism is a group activity. This aspect is often referred to as collective action. Hunt and Benford (1994) and Klandermans (2004) discussed important aspects of how groups find each other and network, building cultures, subcultures, and steps to transition into activism in this journey.

Many of these participants shared they are involved with their activism with others from prior to college. Perhaps the community aspects, parents, and external connection that Pritzker,

Springer, and McBride (2012) talk about in the literature as reinforcing and maintain activism communities causes this connection between peers to be strong enough to maintain changes in their life such as going to different colleges. Keeter et al. (2002) discussed how volunteerism in high school is a precursor for many to activism in college. Certainly, this aspect is also affected by the urban location and commuter aspect of this particular university. Many commuter students maintain friendships and connections from prior to college (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

Several participants are engaged in activism related to an identity they already hold. As articulated in the literature (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Oliver, 1993; Platt, 1998), this alignment to the existing subculture traits, such as LGBT status or immigrant status, give pre-existing commonalities to build upon for activism. For example, two of the three study participants who started non-profits did so directly related to one of their identities. Certainly, this amount of activism work, both organizationally and legally, shows a strong alignment to the cause.

The participants also discussed clubs and organizations. Bowman et al. (2015), Baird (1970), Benford & Hunt (1992), and Swank (2012) all discuss some aspects of this in the existing literature. There is also a historical connection between activism on campuses and clubs such as Students for Democratic Society (SDS), Black Student Unions, and others (de Graff, 1970; Foster, 1970). In a world dominated by social media to connect students, it is encouraging to see this aspect of these important organizations continuing to be important and seen by students.

As discussed, social media's role in each participant's activism was ever-present in many aspects from networking to the execution of activities. In the literature, hashtag activism, slacktivism, and online political participation all discuss aspects of online tools for activism.

Importantly, the students see their activism as exclusively helped by social media. No participants shared a negative impression of specifically social media as a tool. A few participants discussed performative aspects of activism on social media which could be similar to hashtag activism or slacktivism (Cabera, Matias, and Montoya, 2017; Dewey, 2014; Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017), but that critique focused on the individuals not social media as the medium. These same participants shared a multitude of ways they use social media for their own activism. These positive aspects would more closely align to magnification effects and increase in capital gained by social media contributing to activism as articulated in literature by Earl and Kimport (2011) and Valenzuela et al. (2014).

This study contributes to the literature in this area by highlighting the full integration of social media into activism activities by these participants. To this generation, for whom social media has existed for most of their lives, it is an integral tool for communicating, assembling, marketing, and networking. The participants did not highlight social media, but instead, its usage was embedded in responses across the questions.

Importantly, this overarching usage of social media did not diminish other methods of networking that also existed in the literature. Students built on their previous relationships. Students engaged through clubs and organizations sponsored by the universities. In total, social media has added to the ways students network not replaced other methods.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the utilization of a small sample and from only one university limited discovery of and consideration of the model as applicable to other environments. This university with a strong religious-based mission and urban location situate it as a unique setting. The strength of the mission at this university was evident in it

coming up as a way activism is supported in every single interview. This is important for this university, but not all universities have such strong unifying missions.

In addition, the recruiting method of students connected to an office or club, which engages in education and activism, may have corrupted one of the main items under investigation: the influence of the university on their activism. Students who voluntarily engage with such an office connected to these topics may see the university as more beneficial than those that do not engage with such an office. To the level this study relied on students self-selecting they were activists to participate, the study could have left out individuals doing activism work who do not identify with that term. In addition, the criteria for inclusion left out non-traditional or adult students. While intentional to not complicate findings, this is an important and growing portion of students in higher education who also engage in activism.

Finally, the constant changing landscape of social movements and politics occurring during the research period may have influenced the concreteness of information now. In the period of this study's main data collection, the protests occurring in large numbers around Black Lives Matter, police brutality, and systematic racism caused this to be a distinct moment different from most. In addition, the turbulent 2020 presidential election and the long period of ensuing protest and doubt placed on results contributed to an uneasy and unstable time. Finally, the attempted insurrection at the Capitol in the new year seem to call into question the very norms of society in the United States. A study during this time was interesting but might make the findings unique to this period of time. There was a figurative sense of despair, fatigue, and lack of 'dust settling' that may have hampered discovery. In addition, this study had a limitation of focusing only on the students' perspectives. Valuable information could also be gained from involving faculty, outside activists, staff who engage with these topics, and more within this

study, but the small sample and limited time frame in this study did not allow that larger analysis.

In spite of the limitations, it is always important to hear from students on their real, lived perspectives. Activism worldwide often stems from colleges and universities. It is important as new waves of protest and activism were occurring, to see how students with today's technology and networking capabilities sees their work for change. It is the hope of this researcher that the prescribed methods allowed their story to show and provide tangible learning to improve the climate of activism among college students in the future.

Application of Findings

The themes from this study have applicability to students and college administrators. Each theme has a different aspect to consider for each audience which will be explored in this section including higher education administrators and student activists.

Application for Administrators

Administrators should consider how activism is defined for today's students. It is apparent that no single definition exists. Higher education in a democracy has a duty and opportunity to define what responsibilities of citizenship look like. Activism's place in that should be thoughtfully considered.

Because of the positive outcomes of activism articulated in research and from participants, administrators should consider how it tangibly supports activism identity in students. Programs underway at this university, such as first-year seminars, service days, community service, and faculty should intentionally promote this aspect of involvement. It also speaks volumes that students perceive these things as connected and informing their activism.

Student activists articulated the ways activism is supported, so this is a known trait of this involvement to students themselves. Students named a diverse group of activities but also named individual departments and faculty as supporters of their activism. Students see this as completely disconnected from upper administration, yet not reflecting on the ways upper administration setup and maintains these departments and individuals who do the encouragement. While higher education bureaucracy is complex and not necessary for students to understand, in what ways can students better see upper administration also connected to items like service projects, first-year seminars, or clubs that support activism? There are tangible ways of showing up which could convey the upper administration's continued support for these efforts.

Upper administration faced intense criticism especially from the action-oriented end of the model. Some of this is expected and perhaps unavoidable. This does not prevent reflection and work to try to mitigate the perception by students that the administration prioritizes statements over action or protecting the institution over making change. Recently in the United States, one sees a period of corporations conducting advocacy. Coca-Cola and Delta forcefully came out against voting laws in Georgia (Taylor, 2021). If private, for-profit corporations can take brave stances, why can't higher education?

The aspect of institutionalism, more specifically anti-institutionalism, is important to consider. Every participant used that term. That students perceive their interests not aligned to an administration focused on the institution is a problem. Students should see their interests in the success of the university. That they see administrators putting the institution's interests over student interest and these interests as in conflict is a philosophical problem. While simplistic, the

efforts to take action when possible on social issues, transparency in decisions and issues, and accessibility to students could aid in bridging this rift.

Applications for Students

Students who are engaged in activism have some opportunities to apply information from this study. First, activists themselves should shape the definition. The most genuine way to settle what activism is, especially in contrast to civic engagement, will best come from activists themselves. A broad term and acceptance of the many ways one can engage in activism is best for gaining participation towards change. While, slacktivism or hashtag activism (Cabera et al., 2017; Dewey, 2014; Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017) is often criticized for its focus simply on social media awareness, awareness of issues is important. Activists would be well served to also see this as a group within which to grow their involvement. One already knows they care about this cause, so now it is an audience to further involvement on issues one knows to be important to them.

Every single participant responded to a question about what they would do differently in regard to their activism. Unanimously, they stated that if they could start over, they would start their activism even earlier. Students should take this to heart to encourage and share this message of early involvement with new students. Given the tangible benefits articulated in research and from the students, from leadership skills to organizing, it benefits all to have an active student body engaged in activism.

On the issues where participants perceive the university to hinder their activism, the students should actively work to be involved in the institution they devote time and money towards and attempt to understand the administrator's perspective. The students are clear in criticisms of upper administration putting the needs of the institution above students and society,

but students also must accept the transparency and involvement in governance that comes with running a complex organization like a university. Ultimately, someone must be the shepherd of the institution's reputation, resources, and future. This does not have to be diametrically in opposition to what the activists want, but where priorities and ability to take action differ, the students must also make an effort to understand the other side.

Finally, social media's place as a chief tool in activism is undisputed. This Generation Z of activists seems to so clearly see its connection that it is shifting from a novel item of technology to an item as accepted as paper. Activists would not stop to think of paper as a technology aiding activism, yet hundreds of years ago the printing press and paper did change communication. In much the same way, social media seems to have implanted itself across activism.

Importantly to this researcher's investigation, it does not seem to have replaced other, more traditional methods of networking. Items important to networking in activism of the past, such as clubs based on identity, still come up as important for finding out about activism and conducting activism. The tool analogy is again important as social media is not replacing community and networking but a tool utilized in it.

Opportunities for Future Research

Several opportunities exist to expand this research for further study. First, it is difficult to study around a term with so many differing definitions. Definitive research which could focus on arriving at a definition of activism in the modern setting would benefit the scholarship. This study included how students define this term, but the study's limitations of being one university with one group of students is not inclusive enough to arrive at a scholarship-wide definition.

Another opportunity for further research might be to investigate the shift to thinking of the student's college as an institution. Have neoliberal aspects of society caused such a shift in higher education to become a business that students now perceive it that way? What other aspects of society do students see as an institution and, and importantly, has this term always been used derogatorily?

This study contained many elements of criticism for upper administration in regards to activism. A fascinating opportunity for future study could involve the administration's perspective on activism. Students critique that they see statements on topics such as Black Lives Matter, but they see no action. What perspective and thinking is occurring in upper administration on activism? Universities, like many entities in society, are facing calls to action in regards to equity, but what considerations are informing decisions? As research continues on this wave of activism occurring in the country and on college campuses, it is important to include an investigation into all perspectives.

Conclusion

College student activism is a staple of higher education in the United States. As it occurs in a new decade and at a time that people are increasingly involved in activism, this study was useful to investigate how students define it, perceive supports and hindrances, engage in it, and network.

In a democracy, education plays a vital role in passing democratic values from generation to generation. That aspect of education exists in higher education as well. Students and scholarship align on aspects that encourage activism, and those activities should continue to get investment and encouragement. Opportunities exist for more exploration of institutionalism and

disconnects with upper administration to attempt to mitigate that perceived or real hindrance to activism.

 The most important aspect to this researcher from this study is a hopefulness about the future.   These participants are engaged in making the world better. They are passionate about their causes and making change. This researcher left every interview inspired by the good work on a diverse array of topics that are occurring from these students.   If these students continue their enthusiasm and work for change, the future of the country and world is indeed bright.

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Appendix A: Participants

Participant pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Year at Lakefront University	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Topics of activism
Anna	Latina/Mexicana	Second Year	Female	Heterosexual	Racial injustice, immigration
Eddie	White, Middle Eastern, Jewish	Second Year	Male	Heterosexual	Gun violence, voting rights, education equity, social justice
Lance	Black	Junior	Male	Straight	Inclusion, education, social justice
Lee	White, Hispanic, Irish	Junior	Non-binary	Gay/Queer	Climate justice, economic and racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, gun violence
Lisa	Hispanic	First-year, freshman	Female		Social inequality, racial issues, poverty, workers rights, immigrants rights, gun violence
Parul	Asian, Indian	Junior	Female	Heterosexual	Representation for marginalized, immigration
Rubia	Asian, South Asian	Freshman	Female	Heterosexual	Women's rights, any and all issues
Sara	Caucasian	First-year, freshman	Female	Bisexual	LGBTQ rights, music education, police brutality, campaign finance reform
Tom	White, non-Hispanic	Third-year	Male	Straight, cis	Foreign interventions, racial injustice, mass incarceration, environmental justice, immigration reform, economic reform

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview 1 Questions
Demographic questions:
1. By what race and ethnicity do you identify?
2. By what gender do you identify?
3. By what sexual orientation do you identify?
4. What year are you in at this university (First-year, sophomore, junior, etc.)?

Background Questions:
1. What issues do you care about the most?
2. How, if at all, have you expressed your concern about these topics?
     a. *If applicable*: How has being a college student informed your views?

Definitions/History
3. How do you define activism?
4. Do you consider yourself an activist and why?
5. *If not provided in 3 or 4:* In what ways, if at all, have you engaged in activism as a college student?

Network/Relationship to the University
6. How did you find out about activism activities?
7. How did you get involved in these activism activities?
8. How does student activism and the activism by other students relate to the university?
9. In what ways does the university encourages activism?
10. In what ways does the university hinder activism?
11. What impact, if any, has your activism had on your experience as a college student?
12. How, if at all, did you find others interested in your cause(s)?

Closing
13. Is there anything else you want to share about college student activism?
14. What questions do you have for me?

Interview 2:
Opening
1. Before beginning anything they want to bring up they thought about since last interview?

Definitions Recap
1. In previous session, I heard you define activism as ____(Summary)___ and that definition centers (share coding such as issues, people, change, etc.). Is that accurate?
2. Does the university and your peers share this definition or in what ways would it be different?

Networks
Summarize how student networked for activism and themes of that technique or story.
1. What would you change about my account of how you engaged in activism and found others?

2. Would you have done anything differently in regards to your activism involvement if you were starting new at this university?

University and activism

Summarize students points on the university and activism. Share major themes from support and hindrances.

1. What would you change about my account of how you view the university and student activism?

Summary

1. What about activism and this school should I have asked that I have not asked?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix C: Model Placement for Participants Examples

Communication Oriented -------------------------------------- Action Oriented				
Lance		Eddie		Sara
Rubia	Lisa	Tom		Lee
	Parul		Anna	

Rationale (Organized Left to Right)

Lance

Definition	"Umm. I would just to me it is conversation at its very basic ground level. People see how goodness now… like I am going to focus on social media to spread the word. That is fine. It is about those tough conversations. Like you might be ignorant, but you want to figure out what you want to ask to figure out. Like I have never felt any type of way about someone that doesn't know. You know like hey I am not sure about this, but can you shed some light on this for me? Like I have never felt like why are you asking me. Like a representative I am not a representative. I have never felt that way. I would rather you ask me and then learn the information rather than giving misinformation to other people. So, for me activism at its very root is just conversation."
Self-view on activist identity	"Yes, I would say so."
Activities engaged in	Writing, discussing, spreading knowledge, "get information out"
Higher Education relationship view	Only supports: Election and voting encouragement, classes, discussions, clubs and organizations.
Placement Rationale	Lance's definition is completely communication oriented. He readily sees himself as an activist based on his definition and only listed supports from the university

	without any hindrances. He is placed leftmost on the spectrum end of communication based.

Rubia

Definition	"I think it's using your voice, using whatever platform you have and using your intellectual ability or the resources you have around you to advocate for those who don't have the same thing. You use your voice to advocate for someone that doesn't have that voice. Use that platform to advocate for someone that doesn't have that platform. Using whatever resources you have to in a sense make up for or amplify voices of smaller communities or people who aren't as, I don't know, say like there not, not well known."
Self-view on activist identity	"Yes, (pause), but I think I could be doing a lot more. I think I am at the introductory stage right now. I am starting to learn. I am starting to use my platform and resources and amplify those voices."
Activities engaged in	Social media sharing, student journalism, political commentary online
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports*: University mission statement, knowledge through classes, community service *Hindrances*: Not listening to students, disregarding votes and policy from Student Government
Placement Rationale	Rubia 's definition uses "voice" repeatedly which is communication oriented. She added a slight qualifier in her self-view, but ultimately did say she was an activist based on her definition. Her activities engaged in are also solely communication based. She did list some hindrances.

Lisa

Definition	"I would define activism like standing up for injustice issues. Especially, for those vulnerable that are scared to make their voice

	heard for being afraid of having something bad happen if they speak up."
Self-view on activist identity	"Yes since like I always have liked to stand up for injustice sine when I stand up for injustice it has given me more strength to stand for what I believe is right even in the most difficult situations. I can just like try my best and keep standing up for my community."
Activities engaged in	Fundraisers, food banks, protest attendance, community/church meetings
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports*: "I do think that [Lakefront University] is encouraging students to be involved in activism since there is a club that is presently being launched activist student who is a senior and it's called Changemakers club and there like, she is an activist and she wants to encourage like new students to take place in their community and stand up for the things. Also, like [Lakefront University] is always offering talks to talk about social inequality. *Hindrances*: "I don't... well maybe like umm, I think that it maybe there will promote it more. Not a lot of students are aware. I knew since one of my teachers told me but I wasn't aware they had all of these classes and programs every week. Maybe bigger promotion and let students know more of the resources there will be more students involved."
Placement Rationale	Lisa's definition is very communication oriented, but she does use the term "stand up." But her activities are more diverse than just communication. She sees only lack of marketing as a hinderance. In total, this places her lean communication based on the spectrum.

Parul

Definition	"Activism I would say is, it is folks representing or voicing our opinions to correct social or political wrongs."

Self-view on activist identity	"Yes, I do."
Activities engaged in	Participated in protests, petitions, sending letters to Politicians and representatives, involvement in college student political organization
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports*: "The values we have for the mission and all align with basically being activists like being an ally and speaking up against injustice so for me that was the main thing that drew me here." Listed faculty as supporting involvement and efforts. *Hindrances*: Administration not listening. Listed example: "A lot of times the situation last year with the cultural appropriate. That was very clearly aligned with our mission [the university's mission] to be like hey you can't do that but I feel the administration doesn't connect the mission with the work that we actually do on campus."
Placement Rationale	Parul's definition is communication oriented with words like "representing" and "voicing." She readily accepts the title based on her definition. She is engaged in a state-wide college student political organization, so her activities are more diverse than communication. She also does well-articulate some hinderances. She is placed lean communication.

Eddie

Definition	"Anyway that you can show up basically. Any way that you can make your voice heard . I don't know. Obviously within legal means, so you cannot be violent, you cannot be threatening or inciting violence. So yea, so yea. In a way, I would consider certain votes to be activists in many ways or activists without having to do all that heavy lifting you are still making your voice heard. But certainly, there is obviously like organizing town halls, organizing rallies, showing up with your peers and going to the offices of your elected representatives with a group of

	people and demanding that your voice be heard and stuff like that. I think would fall into that, fit a very general view of activism."
Self-view on activist identity	"I mean technically yes, it was more so in just high school than it was just more organizing and now it is more running but certainly, I do think that what I am doing falls in line with activism in many ways."
Activities engaged in	Organizing, contacting elected representatives, volunteering, fundraising
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports:* Faculty: "I have been in many classes in which professors say if you don't like what is going on, run. Run for office. I have been taking a public policy course, and I am really enjoying it and umm, yeah, I very frequently my professor says if there is something you believe is not right then run. Do something about it." *Hindrances*: Not welcoming environment for Jewish students: "it is difficult for me because I am not only am I Jewish, but I was born in Israel and I am a dual citizen of the United States and Israel. It doesn't matter what my pigment is on the... it is impossible for me to be in the room of a progressive circle and have that washed away is what I have noticed. So I think fundamentally because the university hasn't been a welcoming environment for me, I have been more active off-campus."
Placement Rationale	Eddie's definition talks about voice, but he also mentions "showing up" and voting as aspects. He accepts the definition he supplied while adding that the activities have changed since high school. He is involved in diverse activities including running for political office. He has hindrances to his activism on campus which were very strong and relegated his involvement off-campus entirely. This totaled to equal neutral position.

Tom

Definition	"Activism I would say is a very active thing. That is kinda self-explanatory... But it is more

	of a praxis, like a pragmatic, you know active thing instead of passively thinking about something. You can hold views, strong views, about justice and equal opportunity, but activism is doing those things."
Self-view on activist identity	"Well, I am one but I have a lot of room to grow. I think we all have a lot of room to grow in our activism. But definitely, since college has started, I have done a lot better at expressing it and being active instead of just thinking."
Activities engaged in	Protests, petitions, spreading information, and starting on-campus organization
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports*: First-year seminar, clubs and organizations, Service Day, faculty *Hindrances*: Studying and responsibilities for being a student
Placement Rationale	His definition is action-oriented. He accepts the definition with a slight qualifier which inches him towards the middle on spectrum. He also does not have major hindrances compared to others on the action end of the spectrum. In total this placed him neutral.

Anna

Definition	"Doing the work, the hard work toward social justice. Activism can be seen in many ways. I think a lot of people mainly think protesting and front lines activism and that is a big of it and that is great. There are so many other things to do. Like I have mentioned one of the main things as well is educating yourself and others. Organizing and everything. So yea, it is not always just protesting or just volunteering. There are so many things you can do toward activism, but the main goal is to work toward social justice."
Self-view on activist identity	"It is funny because I used to not. I think before I started with [Her non-profit organization], I would have considered myself I guess just an advocate and never much of an activist. But I think now the more in the work I have been doing, I think, I am certainly more into a role of being an activist,

	but I am still learning about what that looks like and what I can do, but I think with [her non-profit], I have grown a lot in that. I am beginning to step more into a role of being an activist."
Activities engaged in	Organize protest, create website and social media content on social justice issues, create and run non-profit on education for minority groups
Higher Education relationship view	Supports: Faculty, first-year seminar, departments such as religious area and community service department, Hispanic/LatinX club Hindrances: "But yea I don't really see much of [Lakefront University] as an institution supporting students. I think they may be worried about that. Institutions as a whole are worried to think about these things. They are touchy subjects. They are worried about backlash and stuff.
Placement Rationale	Anna's definition includes communication elements but adds organizing, volunteering, and educating others. She accepts the definition, but she adds a story on the growth to that point. She has a long list of involvements, including starting a non-profit. She did list hindrances, but she was ultimately not as consumed and blocked by these hindrances as those on the complete action-end end of the spectrum. This smaller grievance of hindrances and acceptance of definition earns her a lean action-oriented position rather those solely at the action end.

Sara

Definition	"I would define activism as seeing something wrong and doing something about it. I don't think that you can consider yourself a part of the activism community unless you are doing. And I think that is the big issue and misconception, especially in America. That you can get away with being an activist or being on the right side as long as you said you are, but in my opinion, you know, you can't

	be an activist if all you are doing is acknowledging there is a problem. You have to acknowledge that there is a problem. Acknowledge your part in the problem and say what can I do to make this not a problem."
Self-view on activist identity	"Umm. Yes and no. Because I think that I have done lots of things that are activists things but I mean I would be lying if I said I had dedicated my life to activism. I don't think it would be fair to be like yes I am an activist, that is what I do. I do do things. I am an activist in some sense of the word. But something that I struggle with, something that I am kinda embarrassed about is like I am not great about environmentalism. Really not my strong suit. Really like I just don't really understand how to recycle correctly which is really bad."
Activities engaged in	Organize protests, create and run non-profit on music education in urban schools, marches, support and join clubs engaged in activism, serve on Student Government
Higher Education relationship view	Supports: Faculty, her college within the university, Student Government, other students, clubs Hindrances: "I will say that we in, Student Government, have had quite a few issues with the institution where we presented them with issues and they of activism and they have not listened to us particularly when it comes to ICE. We have had a lot of issues on that front. And then the campus police. Because it is Chicago that is a huge hotspot for police brutality. So I will say that you know, really from what is an outside perspective, it doesn't look too good at [Lakefront University]…. [Lakefront University] that is a product of institutionalism which is America, pretty much. So I see the issue being really being that and this is the issue that I have with institutionalism as a whole. Institutions aren't trying to making things harder for their students. They are trying to make money so they can stay open. They are not thinking so much about what do students need. What can

	we do to make the world a better place. They are thinking about what can we do to keep this institution running and keep students coming here. I think that is really the relationship with activism."
Placement Rationale	Sara's definition is completely action oriented and adds that you cannot be an activist without doing. She is hesitant to use the title seeing it as something she does rather than dedicating her life to. She has a long list of hindrances from the university and a strong critique on institutionalism. She is solidly on the action-end of the spectrum.

Lee

Definition	"I would say... (pause). I don't know. I think about this in a lot of different ways. I feel it can be very performative. And a lot of people don't necessarily do it for the right reasons, but I would say to me it is whatever has the best impact on your community. It is community engagement. It is community involvement. Something that doesn't shut other people out. Especially when you are working in like marginalized communities. Activism there is like a direct response and it is also not assuming their needs. It is like going in and asking what do you need and like that is in terms of being like an ally that is how to do it. Oh my gosh. Ughhh. I wasn't prepared for these questions. There is like so much to answer. I would say it is just... it's trying to create change like directly in your community."
Self-view on activist identity	"Umm,… (pause)…. yes, slash, I would like to use another word. (Pause) Umm, I know that there has been some like people don't like the word as much just because of that performative aspect of that. I like to say yes I am a political advocate of activists but I like to say more so like I mean you earn this title but like an organizer. I have been called that by other people. Because I have been organizing around issues especially like

	where I grew up, but also in the area. Umm, but I think an activists its a powerful word if used correctly, but like it can also be assigned like willy nilly to whoever does have that performative aspect to it. Umm, so yea, so I would say I am somebody that cares about my community and wants to help, so I like the word activists . I don't really use that before, but I want to find a new word for it."
Activities engaged in	Organize protests, create and run non-profit on LGBTQ political activities, organizing students, clubs
Higher Education relationship view	*Supports*: Student government, "I would say if they do encourage it. They... since there is such a strong emphasis on community service. They even talk about social justice in their just in their messaging as a school. A lot of the classes have that too. You know the whole thing with the mission values and giving back to community that I think kinda sparks that like volunteering is like one of the first steps to get like into community issues and taking it like one step further." *Hindrances*: "I feel like in a lot of ways that if you are fighting back against an institution. That is activism and a lot of ways it is fighting against a system. A university is a system. it is an institution . That is like a direct correlation that people have. I would say also too. If we are looking like at more at the positive, that is not the right word, but something that is like a little big more accepted by the university and I put that in quotes." "There were a lot of calls this year especially with the [Food Service] workers to get them pay and also like I think also time off and just like protections from Covid. And the university wasn't really didn't that since it is a private company, I am not sure how all that all works. I am not fully educated on like labor and labor unions. I do know they weren't listening to student protests necessarily with that and also with Professor Rivers they refused to condemn him or really

	do anything about it. Then they like turned it to be like oh we can't fire him. We were like we aren't asking for that. We are just asking for you to condemn him. Then the President released something saying oh this is his free speech. But it's hate speech and hate speech isn't protected in the Constitution and just in general. So that was, that was definitely a way they did not respond in the best way and sometimes... sometimes schools don't respond in the best way. But I think they don't intentionally try to hurt their students or intentionally try to do anything wrong because they do want to serve us. We are paying to go here and try to make it the best deal they possibly can. I know it sounds very capitalists, but they want to protect their students and they want to make sure it is a safe and good environment to learn in because they want people to keep coming back here and have a good experience and learning.
Placement Rationale	Lee's definition used words, such as work, "direct response," and "community change" which are all action-oriented. Lee gave alternative words for self-view preferring those over the term activist. Lee was specific and detailed about hindrances listing many more in this category than supporting elements. Lee was strongest in the concept of institutionalism. All of this combines to place Lee on the far action-oriented end of the spectrum.