

College Students' Negotiation of Privilege in a Community-Based Violence Prevention Project

Beth S. Catlett¹ and Amira Proweller

DePaul University

Recent scholarship on service-learning has departed from examination of more traditional models and outcomes to explore how service-learning shapes students' understanding of social change. This study builds on existing research to further interrogate the ways in which service-learning relates to power and privilege, specifically exploring how college students in a service-learning experience reflect on notions of privilege and how this informs their work with urban youth. Data was collected from 15 undergraduate student participants in a violence prevention program. Findings point to the potential that lies within change models of service-learning for students to reflect on the complex relationship among service-learning, power, and privilege, and to see themselves engaged in impactful, transformative, and sustainable service work.

Over the past two and a half decades, there has been an enhanced national interest and a growing scholarly attention to the theory, practice, and value of service-learning experiences across the educational spectrum. While no consensus has been reached around a single, overarching definition of service-learning, it has instead been widely conceptualized as both a pedagogy and philosophy (Butin, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). Prevailing scholarly analysis of service-learning has tended to link theory and practice by integrating key elements of reflection and social action into academic curricula designed to enhance student learning and meet community needs through service (Peterson, 2009). Conventionally, service-learning scholarship has focused through the prism of students' experiences, and the attendant educational benefits of participation. For instance, a variety of studies have explored the relationship between service-learning and student outcomes along personal, social, and cognitive dimensions (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1996). Studies also have noted gains in student learning and civic engagement (Litke, 2002; Mercer & Ilustre, 2002; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002). Students participating in service-learning experiences have been shown to be more tolerant and culturally aware, and have benefited from opportunities to develop leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills more so than their non-service-learning peers (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Peterson, 2009).

An emerging scholarly trend, however, has viewed service-learning not exclusively from the students' experiences but also has acknowledged the potential social change aspects of the enterprise. As Brown (2001) aptly noted, "service-learning traditionally

works toward a "mutual" or "shared" benefit outcome—benefits for enhancing the student's educational activities as well as her/his civic engagement, and benefits to the community in which the student serves" (p. 10). While recognizing the benefits to students of community participation, this school of thought has advocated for applying a more critical lens that situates students' community engagement within systems of social inequality. Kiely (2005), for example, has argued that scholarship has tended to emphasize the content and outcomes of student learning in service-learning experiences to the relative neglect of studies examining processes and contextual factors that impact such outcomes and are fundamental to understanding critical and transformational learning in such programs.

Thus, two distinct models of service-learning have developed—the charity model and change model—each with different sets of moral, political, and intellectual traditions as well as different goals and objectives (Morton, 1995; Westheimer & Kahne, 1994). Implicit in a traditional conception of service as charity is what has been described as a "false understanding of need" (Eby, 1998, p. 3), suggesting that communities have deficits that others can fill through service. But this charity model comes with significant, if subtle, risks that privilege those doing the service relative to those having their needs served. In particular, some service-learning programs tend to be oriented toward an apolitical volunteerism and charity where students are engaged with a community to provide a service and then relate that service experience to their classroom learning (Brown, 2001). While attention to individuals and communities at the core of volunteerism tends to be driven by altruistic

goals, critics have pointed out that this service orientation does not go deep enough, stopping short of a fundamental exploration of more complex socio-political dynamics that underlie larger social problems. As Brown noted, "what the focus on volunteerism tends to do, then, is to place the focus on individuals and communities rather than on complex dominant socio-political systems that either create or could possibly alleviate the problems that create the need for volunteers" (p. 15). Students engaged in service-learning under the auspices of a charity model are driven to ask, for example, how can we help these people, this community that we are serving? Thus, despite altruistic intentions, charity-oriented service-learning models have the potential to create service-learning experiences that reproduce power imbalances and social injustice (Green, 2001). This suggests that there is a need to move toward a service-learning model that goes beyond discourses of volunteerism, charity, and philanthropy (King, 2004).

A change model of service-learning facilitates students' critical reflection on social problems and considers the role they can play in engaging with communities to transform and shape a different social landscape. Service-learners working within a change model seek answers to different kinds of questions—for example, why are the conditions of this community the way they are, and how can we partner in ways that challenge and ultimately help to change existing conditions? Strategically reorienting service-learning toward social justice, service-learners have the opportunity to become more aware of structural inequalities that organize society and strategic action steps that can yield different outcomes for individuals and communities (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004).

Moreover, this reorientation, with its centering of the relationship among service-learning, power, privilege, and critical theoretical frameworks, has the potential to shape more equitable relationships and a more just society. Meeting this goal depends on students having destabilizing experiences (King, 2004) that force interrogation of taken-for-granted and deeply embedded assumptions about power and privilege. This opportunity for interrogation is particularly important given that service-learning students often are from more educationally and socio-economically privileged positions than the communities with which they are partnering. Specifically, a majority of students commonly taking service-learning classes are White and middle-class, and they typically are placed in service activities in lower income communities of color (Green, 2001). In that context, the service-learning experience risks being seen as privileged Whites acting benevolently to teach and serve those perceived as lacking the skills to achieve

on their own (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, & Davi, 2007). Thus, similar to what Westheimer and Kahne (1994) observed almost two decades ago, there is a significant concern that service-learning could potentially reinforce one's privilege if opportunities are not built in for students to critically reflect on their service responsibilities, the basis for their service, and the relationship between their service and the unearned advantage of being relatively privileged to begin with. Accordingly, these scholars noted that service-learning students need to be given opportunities to examine assumptions, discourses, and practices about power and privilege, which increases the likelihood that they will become more aware of their own relative privilege, allowing full development of the possibilities that service-learning holds for building more collaborative, equitable, and invested relationships across difference.

Thus, several scholars have suggested moving entirely away from a charity model toward a change model of service-learning. Mitchell (2008), for example, has argued that the linkages between service-learning and social justice need to be made explicit to avoid the unintended consequence of doing more harm than good when service falls short of cultivating student awareness of systemic inequality and the need to change existing power imbalances. Moreover, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that service-learning can diminish negative stereotypes and increase tolerance for diversity among service-learning students, prompting service-learning educators to purposefully integrate opportunities for critical reflection about the root causes of social inequities into service-learning experiences.

Although scholars have identified the positive potential of such a critically-oriented, change model of service-learning, even this model of service-learning experience itself can leave students "stall(ed) in personal consciousness raising" (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004, p. 64) without a critical consciousness of the structural reasons for community problems and action steps that can be taken in their service role. Scholars also have discussed the potential to "mis-educate students if they walk away from the experience with essentialized notions of the communities with whom they worked" (Hui, 2009, p. 23). Endres and Gould (2009) studied this potential for mis-education in their research exploring the relationship between whiteness theory and service-learning in an intercultural communication course. These authors found that although students were exposed to critical theories of whiteness before engaging in service-learning projects, and should have been equipped to at least recognize and potentially challenge the roles of White privilege in their service-learning experiences, most did not. Rather, the service-learning experience

for these students provided a context to rehearse and reaffirm their White privilege.

Other research, however, has produced very different results. Green (2001, 2003), for example, insisted on the potential of intentionally incorporating discussion about privilege, particularly around positions of race and class, into service-learning experiences. In her 2001 empirical study exploring this potential, she examined the experiences of students who worked on a weekly basis tutoring middle school students in an inner-city community close to the university campus. Although she emphasized the challenges that talk about race and class present for those students in positions of relative privilege, she also reported students' progress in speaking about historically unnamed categories of unearned advantage and conferred dominance (McIntosh, 1988). She further concluded that, while student development can be varied and uneven, the service-learning educational experience can prompt key insights about the roots of systemic inequality and holding oneself accountable for working to interrupt relations of exploitation and domination.

As evidenced by these somewhat inconsistent research findings, conclusions remain elusive about the benefit of implementing a change model of service-learning within which interrogations of power and privilege are emphasized. Our study builds on this existing research, further interrogating the ways in which service-learning relates to power and privilege. We utilize McIntosh's (1988) conceptualization of privilege as unearned entitlements that confer dominance in ways that advantage some and disadvantage others along interlocking dimensions of class, race, gender, and sexuality, among others. In particular, our research addresses two specific research questions: (a) How do college students enrolled in a service-learning course reflect on notions of privilege and assumptions about the "other" in their work with urban youth in a violence prevention program?, and (b) In what ways do students' reflections give rise to a consideration of both the risks and possibilities that emerge from their work with these urban youth?

Program Overview

Take Back the Halls: Ending Violence in Relationships and Schools (TBTH) is a teen dating violence prevention and community activism program designed to prevent relationship violence among teens. TBTH gives teens the opportunity to examine issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse as well as the variety of social structures that support violence in our culture. It creates a space for high school students to talk about issues affecting their lives, gen-

erate ways to raise public awareness, speak out against violence, and advocate for change in their schools and communities. In short, TBTH aims to empower teens to become community leaders and active participants in the movement to end violence.

This local university-community collaboration was created to address an epidemic of youth relationship violence. Extant research has suggested that although rates of dating aggression vary according to how this variable is defined and what age group is studied, dating violence is common and widespread among adolescents, ranging anywhere from 9% to 46% (Johnson et al., 2005). Taken together, the results of several studies have suggested that physical aggression occurs in one of every three teens' dating relationships. Moreover, a study by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (2001) found that 81% of high school youth reported sexual harassment from peers. And studies on sexual victimization among high school students have indicated that 15-20% of high school females reported experiencing forced sexual activity.

Developed in 2004, TBTH is based on best practices for dating violence prevention programs. With this model, high school student participants meet weekly throughout the school year to examine a range of issues related to relationship violence and advocacy efforts toward ending such violence. Weekly group meetings—from October through May—are facilitated by specially trained staff and university students taking a service-learning class that includes their participation in facilitating the discussions throughout the academic year. The students participating in this program attend a large, private university in the Midwest whose mission is primarily geared toward serving first-generation and underserved student populations while instilling a lifelong commitment to service and social justice.

Women's and Gender Studies [WGS] 387: Teen Violence Prevention is an interdisciplinary service-learning seminar in which students critically reflect upon their service in the TBTH program. All students in the course participate in TBTH and have the opportunity to explore youth perspectives on violence and consider the ways in which economic, social, political, and cultural contexts influence violence in adolescents' lives. As such, the course is guided by the following objectives: (a) examining major theoretical and methodological approaches used in studying teen relationships, particularly violence and aggression; (b) developing a contextualized understanding of teen violence with regard to gender, race, class, sexual identities, and other social identities; (c) considering activism and other approaches to prevent teen violence; and (d) raising awareness about the personal and social complexities

Methods

related to teen violence. As part of the course requirements, students are asked to maintain a journal of written reflections that speak to their engagement with course readings and their experiences in the service context, as well as other written assignments that invite students to explore how their positionality has informed their work with the youth in the program.

Importantly, course content is situated within critical framings of service-learning in conjunction with feminist pedagogy. Feminist scholars engaged in service-learning have recognized the synergy between feminist pedagogy and critical service-learning goals (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Novek, 1999; Webb, Cole, & Skeen, 2007; Williams & Ferber, 2008). Service-learning experiences refracted through a feminist theoretical lens help students appreciate the relationship between theory learned in the classroom and day-to-day practices, specifically providing students with opportunities to reflect on socially structured inequalities that play out in people's lives across intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. As such, students involved in critical service-learning activities as part of a women's and gender studies course are given the space to explore difference and inequality, enabling them to see how the social contexts that people inhabit are shaped at the nexus of systems of power and privilege. As differences between themselves and those with whom they are working through the course become more apparent, students are faced with examining their own privilege and confronting personal assumptions and biases about the communities they are entering. As Butin (2010) observed, this can be a reflective process that is "existentially disturbing" as it calls on service-learners to be "active, reflective, and resistant agents in their education" (p. 10), and creates possibilities for changing how student learners understand themselves in relationship to others. As one college student intern put it retrospectively after completing her service-learning experience, "the greatest discovery I have made through my experience this quarter is that the only way to really understand and internalize all of this information is to adopt its complexities," and added that "the ability to first understand the complexities of the 'self' is the most important element to envisioning what change might look like." The integral connection that she articulated between self-understanding and social transformation illustrates how a critical service-learning experience informed by feminist pedagogy such as TBTH can go beyond simply educating students about social problems to encouraging service-learners to, as Walker (2000) states, "solve those problems through politics" (cited in Keller, Nelson, & Wick, 2003, p. 35) oriented toward individual and collective transformation.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of the 15 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 22 participating in the TBTH program for a period of six months during the 2009-10 academic year, and who also were enrolled in the WGS 387 course in the 10-week winter quarter. All participating students identified as female, and most identified as White, middle class, and heterosexual. Specifically, ten students identified as White, one student identified as African American, one student identified as East Indian, one student identified as Latina, and two students identified as bi-racial. The two bi-racial students talked at length about their experience of identifying as White in a variety of social and educational contexts, including TBTH. In terms of class background, with the exception of one student who described her background as working class, all participants described themselves as middle- and upper-middle class.

Procedures

In advance of data collection, the study was presented to and reviewed by the University Institutional Review Board. Following approval, data collection commenced, drawing on qualitative data from two sources: (a) in-depth interviews with the 15 undergraduate students at two points in time—at the beginning of the program in November/December 2009 and near the end of the program in May 2010, and (b) the students' written course assignments.

In-depth interview questions (see Appendix A) focused on college students' expectations of the program, challenges they faced as facilitators delivering the TBTH curriculum, their assumptions about urban youth, and lessons learned about themselves, urban youth, and violence prevention as a result of their work in the program. Only some of the questions presented in the initial round of interviews were revisited with the interns near the end of the program, such as those exploring how their interview responses early on may have changed as a result of having participated in the program. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, we drew data from two assigned "Who Am I" papers (see Appendix B), one written at the beginning of the quarter, and the second—a revision of the first paper—written at the end of the quarter. This paper assignment asked students to examine their multiple identities drawn from the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as from uniquely individual attributes and life experiences. It further prompted students to begin to

explore their positionality and that of the teens in TBTH within interlocking structures of oppression and privilege. A qualitative content analysis process was applied to the research data. Specifically, the interview transcripts and course papers were analyzed using the NVivo program for analysis of qualitative data. Anonymity of all collected data was ensured by removing any identifying names and assigning numerical indicators in their place. Coding was undertaken by two individuals: a graduate student of color who worked directly with the Take Back the Halls program, and a Caucasian post-graduate student, both of whom were trained to discern salient topics emerging from the data, as well as regularities and patterns both within and across cases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To represent these topics and patterns, initial coding categories were developed and subsequently re-coded into more specific and theoretically-focused analytic themes to enable different relationships across data to emerge, ensuring depth and breadth of analysis. The findings that follow coalesce around salient themes emerging from the data.

Findings and Discussion

Participants' interview and written narratives were designed to address the following research questions stated earlier: (a) How do college students enrolled in a service-learning course reflect on notions of privilege and assumptions about the "other" in their work with urban youth in a violence prevention program? and (b) In what ways do students' reflections give rise to a consideration of both the risks and possibilities that emerge from their work with urban youth? All the research participants' interview and written narratives contained detailed accounts of their emergent and heightened awareness of race and class privilege. All—both White students and Students of Color—experienced and explored a sense of privilege in relation to the urban youth with whom they worked. We saw a certain intermingling of race and class privilege within the written assignments and interview narratives. While a full exploration of the nuanced differences among students with different racial identifications is beyond the scope of this research, the college students' interpretations demonstrate a set of common dimensions with shades of variation.

In particular, these shades of variation center around the students' ability to move beyond basic descriptions of the unearned advantages attendant to their racial identification to a deepened understanding of their position in systems of domination, as well as the ways in which their community-based work has the potential to disrupt such systems. We first discuss the ways in which students engaged in a

process of introspection, interrogating their own privileges as well as their service work with urban teens, which heightened their awareness that their underlying assumptions about the teens were a byproduct of embedded systems of privilege and oppression. We then turn to an examination of student reflections on the processes within their service work that both risk reproducing and creating opportunities for disrupting relations of domination. Finally, we consider the implications of these emergent themes for developing new theoretical models that can begin to explain the mechanisms of change for service-learners.

Interrogating Privilege

In the seminar, we recognized that integrating critical reflective practices was an important way to assist students in linking theory to practice and connecting the university to the surrounding community. We asked our service-learners to consider the multiple identities they embody, and the relationship between these identities and systemic privilege and oppression. As Katz (2003) has suggested, many Whites fail to recognize their privilege. Thus, an important beginning step toward challenging systems of racial inequality lies in first recognizing one's privilege. To aid our students in their efforts to begin to do so, we had them read from select seminal scholarship on race and class privilege. The assigned readings included Peggy McIntosh's well known piece, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence through Work in Women's Studies* (1988), in which she took account of and directly named some of the effects of White privilege in her life. Therein, McIntosh made the important point that it is possible to challenge and change existing power structures, but that steps in this direction require a fundamental recognition of what has been historically hidden and unnamed.

Through this critical reflective work, all students seemed to develop an ability to acknowledge and describe their privileges. The written narrative of one student was typical of many:

Looking at my identity, I was born with many unearned advantages. First, I identify myself as White. Due to this identification, I receive quite a bit of White privilege. Some things are easier for me than they are for those of other races. For instance, I can walk down the street without worrying that someone will harass me based on the color of my skin. I can get accepted into good colleges without someone thinking that I got accepted solely on affirmative action. I can turn on the television and see an overwhelmingly large representation of my race. I did not ask for these privileges, yet they were handed to me nonetheless. I wish that they were widely avail-

able to those of other races as well. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Other privileges are also granted to me in this society based on my middle class status and my heterosexuality. I am not looked down upon or scrutinized by society because I identify these ways. I have never come to understand why our society views these identities as favorable and dominant over other identities in the first place.

Similarly, another student came to identify and critically question her unearned advantages as a White woman:

I am a White, middle-class woman. I understand that from those facts alone, I am immediately undeservedly awarded advantages compared to a woman of color who is otherwise the same. This is just one example of how our society has illogically created inequality between equals.

A majority of our students were able to move beyond merely chronicling a list of their privileges and unearned advantages, and began to develop a recognition of their situatedness within interlocking systems of privilege and oppression. For many participants, this recognition was accompanied by a strong sense of guilt, as illustrated in one student's paper:

I am privileged, I am White. I am female, I am disadvantaged. I am White, I am female, I am oppressed, yet an oppressor. How can that be? Peggy McIntosh stated it so perfectly...I believe there are reasons to my obliviousness to my privilege. The guilt that accompanies the realization of my privilege is at times very overwhelming. There are many people that most likely wish to remain oblivious about their White privilege because then they would face guilt and other negative feelings that revolve around their positions of privilege. I had only skimmed the surface of the concepts of gender roles, masculinity, and sexual violence before this [service-learning] internship, but never dug beneath the surface. There were all of these "isms" that I knew, and could think of, but I had never once connected them together. I had looked at them all separately and hoped I had never been an oppressor and an "ist," and realized without knowing I was guilty of being an oppressor, I was part of this system of oppression. My whiteness oppresses others, and I had never thought of it that way until now.

Along similar lines, another student had this to say:

The path to navigating through and grappling with my own intersectionality of identity and privilege has allowed me to acknowledge the ways in which individuals, including myself, work as part of the oppressive system, while

continuing to question and understand the ways in which the system oppressed its people, even if they are actively contributing to the oppression and are somehow oblivious to their actual realities. This recognition is necessary if one is to ever work toward social change...my privilege had allowed me to ignore many of the injustices surrounding me.

In comments such as these, we heard students deepen their understanding of the unearned advantages that operate at powerful intersections in their lives. For one of the service-learners, in particular, the recognition of what it means to benefit from relative privilege elicited profound "embarrassment, guilt, and anger" that made her want to "hide from myself" and "not want to identify as a Caucasian." This type of powerful, visceral discomfort with facing privilege reverberated in the comments of all of our service-learning students, for example, as one pointedly observed in an interview:

But it still doesn't help with that guilt when we're working with these teens and you realize some of these things that you have the privilege to do and they don't. Like I can walk down the street and not be concerned that someone is going to make a racial slur. Like that's just not something that I have to be concerned with. And like many of these students, you know, are concerned with that. I had friends back home of color, and they'd be walking in the mall, and they'd see, they'd pass a woman and she'll like grab her purse, and she'll tighten up and stuff like that. And that's just not something that I have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. And it does make me feel guilty.

Our students' experiences in this regard find reflection in existing scholarship that theorizes that for members of dominant groups, recognition of the systematic nature of their privilege often will be inclined to generate powerful emotional responses, ranging from guilt and shame to anger and despair (Tatum, 1992). Scholars have recognized that emotional engagement such as this articulated guilt can be useful as an initial phase in developing a critical consciousness about the ways in which privilege relates to processes of domination (Leonardo, 2004; Nagda & Gurin, 2007); it helps an intellectual awareness of privilege and oppression evolve into an emotional connection. Guilt alone, however, does nothing to change the system that grants privilege to some and oppresses others (Edwards, 2006). We thus turn to reviewing our students' experiences at moving toward an effective and focused awareness of the concrete ramifications of privilege on the populations that they encountered in their community work.

Challenging Assumptions about Urban Youth

As many of the college students began to bear witness to their own privileges and complicity in replicating power and oppression, they saw opportunities, as articulated in the written observations of one, to “disturb the social order.”

As a White person, I know how easy it would be for me to accept that way of existence and ignore my own privilege. If I, a person who has family members, disadvantaged by this inequality, can see how much easier my life would be to enjoy these privileges at the expense of others, I imagine most whites recognize this and are unwilling to disturb the social order. Because I am White, I will have to actively fight these systems of oppression or inactively become the oppressor. Complacency and comfort are things I can only enjoy at the expense of nonwhites.

During their work in the TBTH program, the majority of students came to understand the “luxury of obliviousness” (Johnson, 2001). They were presented with concrete opportunities for a form of activism that would take steps to eradicate that obliviousness by deploying their newly-deepened awareness of systems of privilege to a specific impacted population—urban youth. A majority of the students engaged in a meaningful interrogation of how their underlying assumptions about urban teens were a byproduct of embedded systems of privilege and oppression operating through the discursive construction of the racialized “other.” In the context of the service-learning experience, this represented a shift for students from simply acknowledging the benefits that privilege affords toward recognizing what privilege means in relationship to the communities with which one is working.

We saw this shift emerge, in part, out of our students’ interactions with urban youth over their time in the program. Through this engagement, they had the opportunity to unlearn conventionally White, middle class assumptions that have long framed dominant narratives of urban youth as violent, disengaged, and ultimately disposable (Books, 2007). As one student put it, there is a general “fear by society of all youth, that they’re disruptive, or they’re violent...when you look at urban youth and poverty, then there’s even more fear.” The vast majority of students going through the TBTH program admitted that their pre-existing assumptions were challenged and their latent biases changed as they discovered thoughtful, socially aware, and hopeful urban youth on the other side of demonizing and damaging representations that populate the social imagination. For example, this process of illumination can be seen in the following observations by two study participants:

...I expected students to be too angry and stubborn to listen to the messages we were trying to get across. I expected girls to have attitudes towards the interns² in that I thought they would not appreciate outsiders who know very little about their lives to come in and try to facilitate discussions about relevant yet difficult topics. I also expected the boys to be on the defensive and have set ideas about how to have relationships with girls. Most of my assumptions proved to be false. All the students were very respectful and open to hearing what we had to say, which, in turn, made me feel a lot more comfortable listening to their ideas. So it was as though they were facilitating the discussion and keeping me open-minded.

They’re actually concerned and not apathetic. And I think that would really challenge a lot of people’s assumptions that aren’t in Chicago and aren’t in those areas of Chicago as well...but what people don’t realize is usually they’re pretty..... they know their surroundings. They know what they’re growing up with and things like that. They know that their neighborhood isn’t the best neighborhood, and they know that needs to change. So I think people just don’t realize how aware these students actually are about what’s going on.

Reflecting on privilege in these ways gave rise to other questions about the linkages between privilege and authority. That is to say, the college students questioned their credibility to teach anti-violence, given the relatively privileged lives they lead in contrast to the overwhelming challenges faced by the high school students, in particular, challenges with the violence that is so often part of the fabric of the urban landscape. In the service-learning context, these linkages manifested themselves in potentially unwarranted assumptions about what is deemed best for those being served. This emerging dilemma is evident in this student’s comments:

During this quarter, I began to think deeper about the ways in which my White privilege can at times interfere with the work that I am doing in TBTH...There have been times when I have had to step back from the work that I have been doing in the classroom and assess whether I am coming into the classroom with a dichotomy of “us” and “them.” And then I think to myself whether I am somehow idealizing my life and my opinions over theirs, and hoping that the work that I accomplish in the classroom will somehow allow the teens to see things my way or the “right” way.

Indeed, as they engaged the urban youth over the course of the program, at least some of the service-learners discovered the promising space that opened

up for them to shape service-learning relationships based on the mutual power that is emblematic of a critical, change model of service-learning (Pompa, 2002).

The Risks of Community-Based Service

Moving from the more personal to the more programmatic, we next consider students' application of their expanded insight into systems of privilege to a critical consideration of the risks and opportunities posed by engaging in service-learning within such a dynamic context of privilege and power imbalances. Turning first to risks, a culture in which urban teens are so often constructed and written into inferiority (Said, 1994) plainly poses challenges to attempts to achieve a power-sharing ideal of service-learning. Many of our students demonstrated a critical consciousness about these risks, recognizing that histories of White supremacy and racial domination (Leonardo, 2004) have tended to obscure White, middle class complicity in perpetuating systemic power and oppression. For instance, one student examined the potential for service-learning experiences to reinforce rather than dismantle relationships of power, fearing her complicity in this process:

I often fear that I am not giving enough weight and importance to the ideas and opinions expressed by the teens. Unfortunately, our society has taught me that I do not need to. I understand that this is wrong, and I hate how I have to continually re-evaluate the mindset that I am entering the classroom with. I realize that I am not there to exert my privilege and somehow fix all of the teens' problems. I am there to share my knowledge with them, let them grapple over the problems they feel are important, and ultimately let them be the ones to change their school and community.

This student's heightened consciousness embodied what feminist ethicist Welch (2000) described as an intentional shift away from an "ethic of control" toward an "ethic of risk" that unfolds through mutually affirmative relationships based on working *with* rather than *for* others (p. 17). Service-learners from relatively privileged backgrounds might bring the best of intentions to the work they do in service to others, but good intentions can slip inadvertently into exploitive relationships that succeed in reinforcing traditional assumptions vested in power and difference (Illich, 1990).

These risks deepened as students encountered emergent challenges to their perceived authority. Our TBTH work called for students to promote anti-violence through a violence prevention program directed at youth who—notably unlike the service-learners—often experienced violence as a routine part of

their daily lives and in some instances, as a resource for their survival. Facing this reality led to deep struggles and concerns that thread through students' observations:

I feel like I went into the program thinking I would be okay with teaching people things as far as the curriculum and stuff. But now that we've started, I feel more uncertain because I don't know if—like, do I have the authority to tell these kids—I say "kids", but they're not "kids"—these young adults [who deal with] things that I am not really sure of.

Another student demonstrated an implicit understanding that college students' work with teens is not neutral, but, in fact, carries real risks:

And I feel like because the topic is just too tough on them, like they grew up in an environment where domestic violence is probably the norm to them. And to just continue on, telling them, like this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong, don't do it, this is wrong. And honestly, if I was one of them, I'd be like, you don't even know....you're telling me something that you don't even know about and probably don't care about just sitting in your home and relaxing in your very quiet neighborhood.

Opportunities for Community-Based Service Work

Embedded within these risks, however, are significant potential opportunities, as identified by the service-learners. Through interrogating their authority to facilitate an anti-violence program with urban youth, and recognizing the risks inherent in service relationships oriented around service *for* rather than service *with* others, the student interns began to hold themselves accountable for their privilege by repositioning themselves as allies collaborating with high school teens to end violence and strengthen communities. As Green (2003) noted, service-learners cannot eliminate power imbalances between themselves and community members with which they work, but they can make power relationships visible and work to develop relationships that are more mutual and egalitarian.

Thus, as the college students gained a more complex understanding of how privilege has operated in their lives and has affected those who are relatively marginalized, they also came to appreciate the weight of responsibility that follows when those in positions of privilege work with urban teens of color living in communities characterized by high rates of violence. In particular, in the context of the relationship with the youth, they have learned that service sometimes trickles down to its most fundamental level of providing a space for urban teens to be heard.

Moreover, in their interactions with the high school students, many of the college interns learned how to listen to youth talk about their struggles, and gained a deepened understanding of how the teens navigate their challenges through difficult urban terrain on a daily basis. As a result, they often demonstrated an awareness of the possibilities that service-learning creates for developing a collaborative, youth-led movement aimed at social justice:

We need to work in solidarity with the students, know that they have just as much to teach us as we do to teach them, take off our “savior capes” or get over our false generosity....Resisting the idea that we are there to bestow students with knowledge, and replicating existing social structures, even when it is uncomfortable or more challenging to us as interns, is ultimately not only better for the students but also better for us. We learn more as interns if we are open to learning.

Indeed, through such increased awareness, several service-learners began to give shape to activist agendas, mirroring the shift away from a charity to a change model of service-learning, and affirmatively positioning themselves as allies in the movement to end violence. In other words, many of the students began to translate learning about change in a service-learning context into a commitment to making or doing change. As one student aptly noted:

Social service is needed but cannot be the end of the work. Social service on its own is merely a band-aid on the problem, but does not end it. Acknowledging that social service on its own maintains systems of power was revolutionary in my mind....As I was reading [Paul Kivel, 2006], I realize that to me, it is more important to change the cause of the problem instead of relieving the effect. We can provide social service for hundreds of years, but our end goal should be to not have to provide service anymore. I would like to contribute more of my time to social change....Reading Kivel made me further my want to be involved with the law and remain connected to communities I am trying to help change. I feel it is important for those in power to keep community organizing as a priority. The people who the change is affecting must be involved in the process because otherwise the disconnect will prevent real change.

The above discussion is reflective of how the majority of our research participants, through their service-learning experience, were able to acknowledge their privilege and articulate an emergent understanding of their place in interlocking systems of power and privilege, and from there, interrogate and actively challenge preconceived assumptions about

urban teens that have been historically constructed to de-value youth (Said, 1994). For our students, their service-learning experience was productive in other ways, evidenced in their critical analyses of the real risks that service-learning programs can foster—however unintentionally—by reproducing long-standing legacies of White supremacy and racial domination (Leonardo, 2004) that undeniably obscure White, middle class complicity in perpetuating systemic power and oppression. At the same time, many of our students came to appreciate the opportunities inherent in service-learning experiences that allow for exploring and exposing dynamics of power and privilege, out of which genuine community alliances with urban teens are possible.

Nonetheless, our study also points out that despite strategic efforts deployed through course readings, assignments, and the opportunity to translate theory into practice in their work with the urban teens, the sense-making process that takes place in service-learning is uneven and incremental. We saw direct evidence of this in the fact that all of the college student participants were able to recognize how multiple and intersecting privileges operated in their lives, and from there, most were able to articulate challenges to prevalent assumptions about youth and families of color facing poverty and violence. Fewer, though, were able to demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the limitations of more traditional service-learning approaches that seek social change through charity and fall short of deep, foundational critique and, thus, were unable to fully tease out how service-learning activities can inadvertently reproduce and reinforce systemic forms of privilege and domination.

Implications for Future Research and Teaching

There are several limitations to bear in mind when interpreting the results of this research. First, while the themes deriving from the data gathered from the 15 college students in our sample *may* be generalizable, the small sample requires that we do so with caution. Second, as a full exploration of the nuanced differences among students with different racial identifications was beyond the scope of this study, generalizing from our sample to students across racial and other social identity groups cannot be made. Third, while references to other forms of privilege, among them gender and sexual orientation, peppered our data as well, they were not teased out within the parameters of this study; therefore themes generated in this investigation may not be transferable to other forms of student privilege. And fourth, the findings described in this study may not be generalizable to

students undertaking other kinds of community service experiences other than teen violence prevention. Notwithstanding these limitations, moving service-learning research in critical directions holds the promise of furthering service for social change that is ultimately transformative and sustainable for all involved.

The findings discussed here suggest some future research and theorizing directions. The thematic categories that emerged from our qualitative data analysis suggest a certain staging of consciousness that finds parallels in theories of White identity development (e.g., Helms, 1995), as well as research that points to the utility of an educational model that guides students to first develop a critical consciousness and understanding of individual differences as contextualized in structural systems of inequalities, and ultimately to use that deepened consciousness to strengthen individual and collective capacities to promote social justice and social change (Nagda & Gurin, 2007). Future scholarship should continue to build on these and similar models—as well as on our research findings—to develop a fuller empirical and theoretical understanding of the mechanisms of developmental change for service-learning students.

Our findings also have implications for teaching service-learning courses. Perhaps in the future, courses would be well advised to develop a chronology in a syllabus that mirrors the thematic categories emerging from our research—i.e., acknowledgement of privilege; experience of guilt; challenge of previously held assumptions; and consideration of risks and benefits of service work and community engagement. Moreover, we agree with Butin's (2010) argument that impactful service-learning experiences should be "existentially disturbing" (p. 19). The challenging work of interrogating foundational beliefs and assumptions, and the possibilities for social change inherent in new relationships may depend, in part, on extended service-learning experiences that are, unfortunately, more the exception than the norm. While students in the TBTH program are enrolled in a ten-week service-learning course, they are engaged in delivering the program for a full academic year. Over the period of their extended involvement in this program, our data suggests the emergence of complex sense-making processes about service that strongly argue for stretching service-learning experiences over the course of a year or longer. In fact, several of the college student interns have continued to work with the TBTH program for a few consecutive years, and our observations of their work in the program and their learning speak to the impact that long-term engagement can have for transformative social justice education and community impact. Finally, we heard echoes of class privilege in student narratives,

reminding us of the importance of working with students to make this subject position visible and integral to service-learning, and, more broadly, to impactful community work. In light of the predominance of White and middle-class students involved in service-learning experiences that locate them in service with communities of color often facing the challenges of poverty and violence, it is vitally important to couple explicit talk about whiteness and social class in the context of service-learning experiences (Green, 2003; Heller, 2010). If service is to result in more collaborative and equitable relationships, then it is incumbent on those involved in the teaching of service-learning to complicate this experience.

Our study provides further evidence of the potential that lies within change models of service-learning to contribute to college students' enhanced understanding of the issues involved in shaping more just and equitable social conditions, so long as the students are given the space to critically reflect on sociopolitical dynamics that are more often than not the basis for the need for service in the first place. As such, service-learning experiences that highlight the relationship among service-learning, power, privilege, and critical theoretical frameworks can greatly assist relatively privileged students in seeing themselves as allies engaged in the work of social change *with* rather than *for* others.

Notes

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¹ The authors' names are listed in alphabetical order. Both authors contributed equally to this paper.

² Students working in Take Back the Halls were referred to as interns by the program staff. In this article, however, the authors refer to these interns as students and/or service-learners

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Authors

BETH S. CATLETT (bcattlett@depaul.edu) is an associate professor of Women's and Gender Studies at DePaul University in Chicago. She is director of the Beck Research Initiative for Women, Gender, and Community that specializes in community-based research involving gendered violence and social movements to create community change. Her recent work has appeared in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *Violence Against Women*, and *Men and Masculinities*.

AMIRA PROWELLER (apowell@depaul.edu) is an associate professor of Educational Policy Studies and Research at DePaul University in Chicago. She is the author of *Constructing Female Identities: Meaning Making in an Upper-Middle Class Youth Culture* and has written several articles on youth culture and gender issues in school context. Her

research interests have focused on the cultural politics of schooling, youth culture and identity construction, qualitative research methods, and service-learning and social justice in education.

Appendix A

Initial Interview Questions (Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the program, which was prior to the start of the course)

1. Why did you choose to work with TBTH?
2. How would you define/describe the focus and the goals of this program?
3. When you began your involvement with the program, what expectations did you have about the work? (Provide examples).
 - a. Curricular content?
 - b. Responsibilities?
 - c. Time commitments?
 - d. Would the work be difficult?
4. What assumptions did you have about urban youth? (Provide examples).
 - a. Youth of color?
 - b. Youth from communities of poverty?
 - c. Representations in the media or popular culture?
5. (How) have your experiences delivering the program thus far challenged these assumptions you have about urban youth? (Provide examples).
 - a. Youth of color?
 - b. Youth from communities of poverty?
 - c. Representations in the media or popular culture?
6. Can you describe any instances in the program where your thinking has been challenged, and how have you responded? (Some domains of thinking may include relationship violence, communicating across differences of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, etc.)
7. What has been your experience working with your fellow interns?
 - a. Any challenges making decisions around curricular content?
 - b. Any challenges working with your peers?
 - c. What are you learning from each other?
8. What are some of the issues you have encountered with delivering the TBTH curriculum to the high school students?
 - a. Issues you've encountered with specific content of the TBTH curriculum?
 - b. Issues you've encountered engaging the high school students?
9. What does it mean to you to create a safe and open space for discussion with the high school students?
 - a. How do you facilitate this?
 - b. How do you create safe space, in particular, for exploring the impact of violence in high school students' lives?
 - c. What challenges, if any, have you experienced?
 - d. How have you chosen to address these challenges?
10. As you begin your work with TBTH, what are you learning about yourself?
 - a. As a learner/student?
 - b. As a facilitator working with youth?
 - c. Working with your peers?
 - d. Your own background and identities?
11. As you begin your work with TBTH, what are you learning about what it takes to deliver an effective violence prevention and community activism program with youth?
 - a. Engaging high school students?
 - b. Discussing sensitive and/or controversial topics?
 - c. Challenging high school students' behaviors and beliefs?
12. At this point of your involvement in the program, what are your hopes and what are your concerns as you move forward with your work?

Post-Interview Questions (Interviews were conducted at the end of the program, two months after the course ended.)

Now that we have come to the end of the year, we wanted to revisit some of the issues we've talked about in the first interview we did with you in December/January.

1. What have you learned this year about urban youth?
 - a. Youth of color?
 - b. Youth from communities of poverty?
 - c. Have stereotypical images been challenged? In what ways?
2. As a facilitator, how has your experience been enhanced by the high school students in the program?
3. How are you feeling about your understanding of the topics in the TBTH curriculum (e.g., sexual violence, domestic violence, healthy relationships, media literacy, etc.)?
4. How are you feeling about your ability to present the topics in the TBTH curriculum (e.g., sexual violence, domestic violence, healthy relationships, media literacy, etc.)?
5. How have you navigated the challenges of your role as a facilitator in the high school classroom?
 - a. Communicating across differences of race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, class, etc.)
 - b. Authority/mentor/friend?
 - c. Challenging high school students' thinking?
 - d. Coordinating with your fellow interns?
6. What have you learned about yourself through working collaboratively with your fellow interns? More generally, what have you learned about yourself this year?
7. What would you change about TBTH?
8. What have you learned from this entire experience that you will carry forward with you?
 - a. In what ways will you carry it forward?

Appendix B

“Who Am I” Paper (Assigned at the beginning of the course, and then rewritten at the end of the course.)

One of the main challenges of our work this quarter will be to locate ourselves within the violence prevention work that we are doing. Each of us embodies multiple identities drawn from the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, as well as from uniquely individual attributes and life experiences. This approximately 5-7 page paper will give you the opportunity to begin to explore your positionality and the positionality of the teens in TBTH within these structures of oppression/privilege. It will also allow you to explore how these social positions shape and influence your work with the teens in this program. In addition, you may want to look very specifically at experiences with, and attitudes about, relationship violence that you have developed during your life. It may be helpful to think about the following questions as you think about who you are in relation to those teenagers with whom we will work during the year:

- What themes emerged from this week’s readings? How do the ideas explored in these readings inform your thinking about your own positionality and your work with TBTH teens?
- What experiences with, and attitudes about, relationship violence have you developed during your life? How does this shape your approach to TBTH?
- What assumptions might you make about a teenager of color from a low-income family who attends a Chicago public high school? Are these proving to be true? False?
- How are you different from the teens in TBTH? In what ways are you similar? How do you intend to negotiate these issues?
- What strengths and skills do you bring to TBTH?
- What strengths and skills do the teens bring to TBTH?
- What might this violence prevention and community activism work evoke in you, emotionally and intellectually?