Frame-Changing Experiences and the Freshman Year: Catalyzing A Commitment to Service-Work and Social Action

Scott Seider, Harvard Graduate School of Education[1]

Abstract

Interviews with college students committed to volunteer work reveal that a majority of these students can point to a single academic experience that deeply influenced their commitment. These experiences typically occur during the freshman year of college and alter the 'frame' through which these students view their community and/or their role within the community. Here, I offer a model demonstrating the role of these 'frame-changing experiences' in catalyzing a young adult's commitment to service-work and social action.

W̲e live in a world with numerous problems. Across the globe, 15,000 people die each day from illnesses stemming from simple malnutrition (Sachs, 2005). In the United States, approximately 37 million Americans live below the poverty line, a figure that has increased each year for the past four years (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). In my hometown of Boston, Massachusetts, more than 6,000 people go homeless each night (Friends of Boston's Homeless, 2005). These statistics are daunting, yet the problems they represent are not unsolvable. Rather, they require the attention, energy and prioritization of bright, idealistic young people. As activist Marian Wright Edelman once noted, "A lot of people are waiting for Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi to come back—but they are gone. We are it. It is up to us. It is up to you." (McFall, 2004, p. 22). If one agrees with Edelman that progress towards social justice rests upon the shoulders of ordinary men and women, then there is great value in working to understand the characteristics and pathways that lead some young adults to develop a powerful commitment to service-work and social action.

Toward this end, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 college students from a private university in a large northeastern city who currently perform 10-20 hours of service-work each week in local homeless shelters, hospitals, community centers, and inner-city schools. In selecting this sample, I do not intend to suggest that *all* caring behavior comes in the form of organized service-work. In a national study on acts of compassion and caring, Wuthnow (1991) points out that approximately two thirds of people who reported performing charitable acts in the past year such as giving money to a panhandler or stopping to help someone having car trouble had not donated

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[1] *Scott Seider is an Instructor in Education and advanced doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is co-author of* Instructional Practices that Maximize Student Achievement.

any time at all to a community service organization. Wuthnow (1991) cites these statistics to make the point that "a substantial majority" of people show compassion, not through formalized volunteering, but "in small ways as part of their everyday lives" (p. 200). This point is well taken, and yet it also seems reasonable to note that alleviating the inequity and suffering described in this paper's opening paragraph requires not merely small acts of compassion but formalized interventions. For this reason, I focus this study upon the young people who participate in substantial amounts of formal—as opposed to informal— types of service-work and social action.

The depth of these young people's commitment to service-work and social action can perhaps be best appreciated in light of the finding by Astin, Sax and Avalos (1999) that only 5% of college students perform six or more hours of volunteer work each week. The college student-volunteers in this study, of course, are performing two to four times that amount. My goal in conducting this study was to understand better *how* these young people's commitment to service-work and social action has developed. In this paper I propose a conceptual model for this development that holds important implications for university-level educators and administrators interested in the ethical development of the young adults they serve.

Research Design

Students were identified for participation in this study through recommendations made by the professional staff members of the university's undergraduate community service organization (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). With these professionals' assistance, I strove for maximum variation in terms of the gender, religion, age, race/ethnicity, and home state of the participants in the study (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). As a result, the sample consists of ten males and ten females. Nine are college seniors; six are juniors; and five are sophomores. Ten of the students in the sample identify themselves as Christian, one as Catholic, one as Jewish, one as Hindu, one as Buddhist, and one as an atheist. The remaining six students in this sample were reared in families that practiced one of these aforementioned faiths, but these students now classify themselves as non-practicing. Eight of the students in the sample describe themselves as European-American or White, two as African-American or Black, four as Asian-American, one as Cuban-American, two as Indian or Southeast Asian-American, one as Middle Eastern-American, one as Filipina, and one as half-White/half-Asian. The students in this sample come from 13 different states in the United States as well as one Canadian province. All students are referred to in this paper by pseudonyms.

Each student in the sample participated in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately two hours. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using etic and emic codes drawn from the scholarship on service-work, identity development and frame analysis (Maxwell, 1996). These codes were then grouped into categories in order to allow patterns, themes and analytic questions to arise. Additionally, profiles and narrative summaries were constructed for each of the students within the sample (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Findings

Here, I offer two key findings from this study of college student-volunteers. The first finding describes the role that frame-changing experiences can play in the development of a commitment to service-work and social action. The second finding concerns the timing of such experiences. Specifically, this study suggests that the freshman year of college serves as a pregnant moment in a young person's development for a frame-changing experience to occur and a commitment to service-work and social action to take hold.

Key Finding: Frame-Changing Experiences

The first key finding from this study concerns an experience described by 15 of the 20 students in the sample that is relatively unexplored in the literature on commitment to service-work and social action. Specifically, 15 of the study's college student-volunteers attribute their commitment to service-work and social action in large part to a single academic experience which altered 1) the "frame" through which they view their community and/or 2) their conception of the role they can play as service-workers within this community. I refer to these experiences as "frame-changing experiences."

Before providing examples of such frame-changing experiences, let me clarify two aspects of this definition. First, in defining frame-changing experiences, I deliberately use the phrase "academic experience" to differentiate the frame-changing experiences described by students in this study from the "triggering events" and "transformative experiences" described by Haste (1983); Hart, Yates, Fegley & Wilson (1995); and Fischman (1999). According to these scholars, triggering or transformative events are "sudden, unexpected occurrences that create powerful emotional responses that may 'trigger' a reexamination of one's life-choices" (Haste, 1983, p. 102). A frame-changing experience, in contrast, is not a transient "occurrence" that lasts just moments or hours, but rather a protracted experience that unfolds over days or weeks. As described by Haste (1983) and Hart et al. (1995), a triggering or transformative event seems to impact one's emotions initially and afterwards, one's worldview. A frame-changing experience works in the reverse; the experience first leads to a shift in one's worldview and/or self-concept, followed perhaps by an emotional response to this shift. Thus, a single individual could certainly encounter both transformative and frame-changing experiences over the course of his or her life, but, as defined here, an individual could not experience a single event as both.

The second phrase I use deliberately to define frame-changing experiences is "and/or." I do so because 11 of the students in the sample describe their frame-changing experiences as having altered their view of *both* their community and their role within this community while four students in the sample describe their frame-changing experience as having altered their conception of the role they can play within their community but *not* their view of the community itself. Drawing upon terminology from the framing literature, I refer to the first type of frame-changing experience as a "global-interpretive" frame-changing experience and the second as a "domain-specific" frame-

changing experience (Goffman, 1974; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Bensen, 1986). Let me offer now examples of both types of experiences.

Eric is a White college senior from Minnesota who volunteers 10 hours a week at a local homeless shelter. He attributes his commitment to service-work and social action in large part to his participation during his freshman year of college in a Bible study sponsored by the International Justice Mission. As Eric explains:

> So my freshman year, I was involved in that particular Bible study, which really was. . . about the things that go on in the world, just really bad stories—that sort of like opened my eyes to things I didn't know were going on, and it gave me sort of a different perspective of what the purpose of the church and Christianity was. So, it was sort of a shift in my thinking about faith, going from a very personal-salvation sort of viewpoint to more of a Christian-worldview type of viewpoint, which sort of included a lot of working for social change, as part of the real basic identity of Christianity.

Here, Eric describes the way in which a social justice-oriented Bible study opened his eyes to problems in the world he "didn't know were going on" and also led him to adopt a self-concept that included "working for social change" as a part of his basic identity. Certainly, participation in a Bible study could be described as an emotional, spiritual or transformative experience. Yet, Eric's description of how he was impacted by his freshman year Bible study focuses primarily on what one might call the "academic content" to which the Bible study alerted him: the injustices and inequities occurring in different parts of the world and the interpretation of the New Testament as a "call to action" to Christians to combat these injustices. In this way, Eric's freshman year Bible study served as a global-interpretive frame-changing experience—an academic experience that altered *both* his view of his community as well as his role within this community.

Was such a frame-change an explicit goal of the Bible study in which Eric participated? The International Justice Mission's website describes its youth curriculum as "reflecting the heart of God for the poor of the world" (International Justice Mission, 2007). Moreover, the website offers the following description of the organization's mission:

> When the poor are hungry, homeless or alienated, the Church has come to their aid by providing food, shelter and missionaries to meet the pressing needs. But when the poor have been oppressed, treated unjustly and suffered under the hand of someone more powerful, little was done on their behalf. Accordingly, IJM was established to fill this void (International Justice Mission, 2007, para 2).

From this description, it seems reasonable to conclude that the type of frame-change experienced by Eric *was* an explicit goal of the Bible study's curriculum. In other words, the International Justice Mission sought to bring about in its participants a global-interpretive frame-change: a shift in participants' worldview as well as their

conception of their own role within the world. Sample readings and testimonials about the Justice Mission curriculum can be found on the organization's website.

An example of the second type of frame-changing experience—a domain-specific frame-change—can be seen in the experiences of Deborah, an Asian American college sophomore from Texas, who volunteers 10 hours a week for an after-school tutoring program. Deborah describes her worldview as having been greatly shaped by the experience of growing up a person of color in an affluent, predominantly white Dallas suburb. She explains, "It's kind of like I've been able to see things on two different sides. I've been able to see things from like the mainstream perspective but also from the perspective of people who may be overlooked in mainstream society." Deborah attributes her commitment to service-work to this "dual" worldview as well as to her participation in the Freshman Week Service Program.[2] The Freshman Week Service Program is a "service orientation program," conducted by her university during freshman week that offers incoming first-year students the chance to do readings and participate in discussion groups about social justice issues, listen to guest speakers and carry out a small service project. As Deborah explains,

> The first essay that they had us read was about being aware of like the community outside of the campus. . . about how some members of the community would refuse to go through the campus and things like that. I realized I was part of this institution now. I saw myself as part of like the dominant culture that was imposing themselves on the ones that were being overlooked. . . .[The article] really opened me up to seeing. . . the fact that I am here for four years does affect other people besides other students. I guess knowing that I don't study just in a vacuum and have the ability to make an impact, it's just logical that I should be out there [doing service] and not just devoting my time doing academics.

Here, Deborah explains how a particular reading about town/gown relations served as a domain-specific frame-changing experience. Reading this article impacted, *not* her larger worldview about "dominant" and "overlooked" cultures, but rather her conception of the role she could play within her new community. Specifically, the article convinced Deborah of the need to perform community service in the community surrounding her college campus so as to be a positive contributor—and not merely a part of the "dominant culture"—in this new community.

As is the case with Bible studies, a service-orientation program that includes readings, speakers, and a small-scale service project could be described by participants not only as an academic experience but as an emotional, spiritual, or transformative experience as well. However, Deborah's description of the impact of the Freshman Week Service Program focuses not upon the service project or her relationships with fellow participants, but upon the ideas conveyed to her through a particular reading. The same can be said for several other students in this sample. Esther, a Middle-Eastern

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[2] A pseudonym.

American college senior, focuses on the Freshman Week Service Program's reading packet as well. She explains:

> There are readings about gender oppression; there are things about racism; about prisons; about homelessness…It was amazing because I hadn't even thought about some of this stuff. I hadn't thought about how oppression permeates our lives in ways that we don't think about.

Like Deborah, Esther's explanation of the program's impact focuses upon the way in which particular readings influenced her thinking about the world. A third participant in the Freshman Week Service Program, Nancy, a White college senior, describes yet another article in this same reading packet:

> There were some [topics in the reading packet] that I had no idea about. One was about quality in schools and like looking at the property taxes that went into those schools versus schools in other districts and how many dollars you have to spend per child and then looking at that versus like the achievement of the children. It was horrifying. I mean just how can such blatant inequality exist? Another one was a chapter out of *Nickel and Dimed*, and that was eye opening because I didn't realize that you really couldn't earn a living on minimum wage.

In this explanation, Nancy references articles in the program's reading packet that opened her eyes to social justice issues pertaining to education and the minimum wage. Here as well, Nancy describes the primary impact of the service-orientation program as an academic one; she does describe an emotional reaction to these articles, but only because she finds troubling the information and statistics put forth in these pieces. For this reason, I argue that the experiences of Deborah, Esther, and Nancy in their university's service-orientation program are most accurately characterized as academic experiences rather than emotional or transformational experiences.

Were such frame-changing experiences the explicit goal of the Freshman Week Service Program? The program's website describes its purpose as "to introduce first-year students to the service and activist community in and around the university" (Freshman Week Service Program, 2007). The website also offers to the following note about the program's reading packet— which includes articles by Jonathan Kozol, Robert Coles, Eric Schlosser, Angela Davis, Andrea Dworkin and Barbara Ehrenreich:

> The reading packet is designed to present a variety of issues and perspectives to start you thinking about issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, social justice, and what it means to participate in community service. There is no one official view of the Freshman Week Service Program. Please do all of the reading carefully. We will be holding organized discussions throughout FSP week. Happy reading, and we'll see you at the beginning of September! (Freshman Week Service Program, 2007, para 2).

In this description, the Freshman Week Service Program explicitly notes that "no one official view" exists and that the reading packet seeks to offer a "variety of issues and perspectives." From these points, one might reasonably conclude that organizers of the Freshman Week Service Program do not intend the program to guide participants towards a *particular* frame-change—or at least to a far lesser extent than the coordinators of the International Justice Mission.

Eric, Deborah, Esther, and Nancy's experiences represent just a few examples of frame-changing experiences described by students in this study. Other students described participation in university courses covering topics from religion to international health. Still other students described as frame-changing experiences their own independent reading of philosophers such as Peter Singer and texts such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. While the specific experiences varied, each of these students could point to a single academic experience that they believe deepened their commitment to service-work and social action by altering the "frame" through which they view their community and/or their conception of the role they can play as service-workers within this community.

Key Finding: The Freshman Year

The study's second key finding concerns the timing of frame-changing experiences. Recall that this study's sample is made up of a mix of college sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However, of the 15 students who describe frame-changing experiences, 11 describe this experience as occurring during their freshman year of college. The four other students in the sample describe frame-changing experiences that occurred in either high school or the later years of college.

The work of several developmental researchers—particularly Erik Erikson (1965, 1968)—may explain why the freshman year of college represents such a pregnant period for the occurrence of frame-changing experiences. According to Erikson (1968), it is primarily in late adolescence and the college years that individuals develop their ego identity, the identity derived from their relationships with other persons, institutions, and the social-historical context in which they live. To accomplish this ego identity development, Erikson (1968, 1965) explains that young adults "seek to identify with values and ideologies" that can counteract their "newly won individual identity with some communal solidarity"(p. 31, p. 24). In other words, as young adults begin to establish their independence from parents, caregivers, and other childhood mentors, they are simultaneously seeking out new values, beliefs, and causes with which they can identify. Erikson (1965) refers to this period of flux as an "identity crisis." Belief systems that young adults may turn to during this crisis include religious, political, ethical, philosophical, social, and literary systems.

Consider, then, through the lens of Erikson's identity development model, the frame-changing experiences of the fifteen students in this sample. Four of the students in this sample—Eric, Bonnie, Louis and Bill—describe experiences in Bible studies in which they came to see service and activism as, in Bonnie's words, "a central part of Christianity." These students can be regarded as having turned to a religious system for an ideology that gives their world a "semblance of continuity and coherence" (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 250). Five other students in this sample—Esohe, Martin, Ashwin, Dara

and Lester—describe frame-changing experiences that occurred in university classes. For Esohe, Martin, and Ashwin, these courses concerned the subject of public health while, for Lester and Dara, the subject matter concerned personal and societal choices in the modern world. Each of these classes, however, exposed these students to ethical and political systems and provided them with the opportunity to adopt new ideologies or make alterations to existing ones. The same can be said for the five students—Deborah, Esther, Ann, Nancy, and Jeff—who describe their university's Freshman Week Service Program as an experience critical to their development of a commitment to service-work and social action. This orientation program—through its readings, speakers, and discussions—exposed students to ethical and political ideologies that could be adopted wholesale or used to adjust an existing framework. Finally, one student, Ty, describes a frame-changing experience based on his own independent study of philosophy. Citing philosopher Peter Singer to justify his desire to spend his extracurricular time "doing things that have some kind of meaning," Ty explains that he has taken on the "egalitarian" ideology that Singer (2000) espouses.

In all of these students' experiences, one can see the ego identity development process play out as described by Erikson (1968). As these youth move towards adulthood, they are breaking away from a strict adherence to their parents' ideologies and values while simultaneously seeking out alternative ideological systems through which they can organize their understanding of the world and their role in it. Such a process is likely going on every day of the year on college campuses across the United States, but for the 15 students in this sample, the various ideological systems they sought out and adopted share the common characteristic of framing service-work and social action as worthy and necessary endeavors.

Erikson's (1965, 1968) work on identity development is supported by the findings of many other researchers as well. Piaget (1932) noted in his work on moral judgment that adolescents seek out philosophical, political, and moral ideologies to make sense of their lives. Likewise, Youniss, McClellan, and Yates (1999) report that adolescents and young adults require an ideology that can help to "provide guidelines out of the fluctuating morass [of adolescence]," and Blasi (1984) writes of the development of a young adult's moral identity (p. 250). Damon (1984) theorizes that, in children, "self and morality operate as two distinct conceptual systems," and that it is only during adolescence that these two separate systems achieve relative integration. (p. 111). In other words, Damon (1984) contends that during adolescence, individuals seek to more strongly incorporate moral principles into their core identity. He observes that such moral principles can come to "reflect the main organizing principles of the adolescent's self-conception" and "guide the choices and interpretations of adolescents in every sphere of life" (p. 119).

In light of these happenings during adolescence, both Kotre and Hall (1997) and Parks (2000) argue that the period of "young adulthood" should be recognized as its own developmental stage. Likewise, Sanford (1962) suggests that the freshman year of college should be considered its own "distinctive stage of development" because it contains its own unique identity crisis. Finally, Waterman, Geary, and Waterman (1974) have found that 75% of college freshmen change identity status in their ideological commitments over the course of their freshman year of college, and Pascarella and

Terenzini (1991) report that college students demonstrate an increase in identity achievement that begins during the freshman year.

It would seem, then, that the 11 students in this sample who describe frame-changing experiences during their freshman year of college are by no means unusual in having encountered an experience during this first year of college that led to either the adoption of a new ideology or the adaptation of an existing one. Factors influencing these ideological shifts during the freshman year include exposure to a diverse environment, new points of view offered by classmates and professors, and the opportunity and distance to think critically about the value system in which the student has been raised (Keniston, 1970; Sanford, 1962; Waterman and Waterman, 1999). In short, then, the freshman year of college seems to represent a developmental moment when young adults are uniquely positioned to take on new worldviews, ideologies, or belief systems or to make adjustments to existing ones.

Proposed Model

In this study, I have sought to understand better the development pathway that led this sample's college student volunteers to develop a commitment to service-work and social action. My two key findings are that three fourths of the students in the study can point to a single academic experience that they believe played a key role in this development, and that the majority of these experiences occurred during the freshman year of college. Of course, there are clearly many other college students who participate in these *same* Bible studies, university courses, and service orientation programs without experiencing any shift in their worldview or deepened commitment to social action. An important question, then, is what differentiates the students in this sample from their peers.

The existing scholarship on commitment to service-work and social action offers a number of factors that have been found to influence such a commitment. These factors include service-oriented parents and role-models (Rosenhan, 1970; Tierney and Branch, 1992); a strong religious faith (Damon, 2003; Wuthnow, 1991); early service opportunities through school, religious and community organizations (Fitch, 1987; Johnson et al., 1998; Sax and Astin,1997; Serow, 1991); the influence of one's peer group (Clary and Miller, 1986; McAdam, 1989); experiences of early hardship (Fischman, Schute, Solomon, & Lam, 2001; Hart et al., 1995); transformative experiences (Haste, 1983); and direct requests or invitations to participate in service opportunities (Hodgkinson, 1995; Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 1998). In this study of young service-workers, all of these factors were found to have played at least some role in the participating college students' development of a commitment to service-work. For example, eight of the students in the sample have parents who work professionally as activists or in service-oriented fields, and 13 of the students can name other adults who have inspired their commitment to service-work. Twelve students in the sample describe their religious faith as having influenced their commitment to service-work, and 17 students participated in some type of community service opportunity prior to college. Thirteen students describe their peers as having influenced either their initial involvement or sustained commitment to service-work, and five

students cite transformative experiences or experiences of early hardship as factors that have led to their current level of commitment.
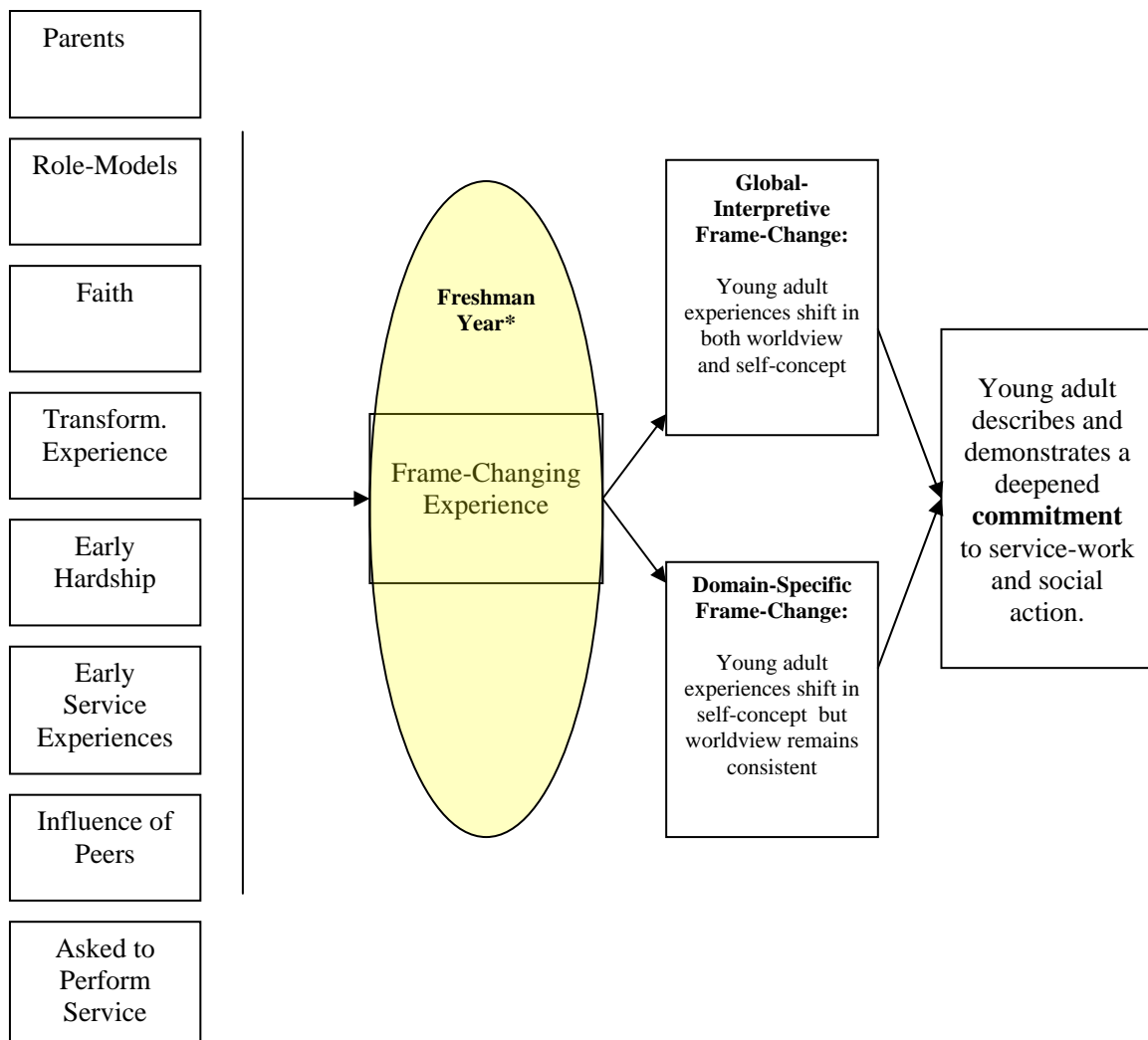
Clearly, then, neither the frame-changing experiences nor the timing of these experiences *alone* can be credited with these students' dedication to service-work and social action. Rather, I propose here that the factors described in the preceding paragraph—service-oriented parents, deep religious faith, etc.—served to instill in these college student-volunteers a *predisposition* for the development of a commitment to service-work and social action. The transformation of this predisposition into a full commitment to service-work and social action, however, required an academic experience that altered the students' worldview and/or self-concept. In short, I propose here that such an academic experience—a frame-changing experience—can catalyze a predisposition into a full commitment to service-work and social action.

Of course, this study's second key finding suggests that the *timing* of the academic experience is as important as the experience itself. I make this point because, as noted above, there are many students who participate in Bible studies, international health courses, and service-orientation programs for whom the experience in no way results in either a change in frame or a deepened commitment to social action. However, for 15 of the students in this study, these same experiences *did* act as frame-changing experiences, in large part I believe, as a result of their timing. For the majority of these students, these academic experiences occurred during the freshman year of college, a period that Erikson (1965, 1968) and other developmental psychologists recognize to be a typical period of crisis in which young adults cast off their childhood ideologies and actively seek out new ideologies, worldviews, and conceptions of self (Blasi, 1984; Damon, 1984; Keniston, 1970; Sanford, 1962; Waterman et al., 1974). It is the occurrence of one of these academic experiences during such a period of "crisis" that seems to instill in these experiences their catalytic, frame-changing power.

In the figure below, I propose a conceptual model that demonstrates the relationship between these various forces. Let me state clearly here that I do not intend to suggest that the proposed model represents the developmental pathway of *every* dedicated service-worker or activist. Rather, I propose here *one pathway* toward a commitment to service-work and social action that seems to capture the experience of a majority of the college student-volunteers in this study.

Figure 1: "Frame-Changing Experiences and the Freshman Year"

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| Parents |
| Role-Models |
| Faith |
| Transform. Experience |
| Early Hardship |
| Early Service Experiences |
| Influence of Peers |
| Asked to Perform Service |

Freshman Year*

Frame-Changing Experience

Global-Interpretive Frame-Change: Young adult experiences shift in both worldview and self-concept

Domain-Specific Frame-Change: Young adult experiences shift in self-concept but worldview remains consistent

Young adult describes and demonstrates a deepened **commitment** to service-work and social action.

*Or any other period during which an individual experiences an identity crisis

In *Figure 1* the factors on the far left represent the various factors that have been found by scholars to influence the development of a commitment to service-work and social action. I propose here that these factors, while not always sufficient in and of themselves to result in such a commitment, can also serve the purpose of instilling in individuals a *predisposition* for the development of a commitment to service-work and social action. For the majority of young service-workers in this study, the transformation of this predisposition into a full commitment to service-work occurred during the freshman year of college. Students during this period seemed to experience what Erikson (1965) refers to as an identity crisis—a period in which young adults cease to adhere blindly to their parents' beliefs and values and, instead, seek out alternative ideological systems through which to view the world and their role in it. During this "pregnant period" of crisis, the young adults in this study encountered various types of academic experiences—Bible studies, post-secondary or university courses, etc.—that served as frame-changing experiences. In other words, these young

men and women encountered particular academic experiences that they describe as altering the frame through which they view the world and/or their role in the world. It was the combination of the academic experience and the timing of this experience that resulted in a frame-changing experience powerful enough to catalyze an adolescent's existing ethic of care into a full commitment to service-work and social action.

Let me utilize another student from this study, Lester, to illustrate concretely this proposed pathway. Lester is a White college junior who volunteers weekly at an urban public high school. In his description of his childhood, Lester explains that his father "just influenced me so much. Like I never felt like he was telling me what to do, but just [about] how lucky we are, and how Americans in some ways are given too much and how little we do with it." He also described the influence of his high school headmaster who each week would give a "30-40 minute kind of secular sermon. . . about to whom much is given, much is expected. And like, that is how I try to live my life." Despite these influences, Lester observes that in high school, despite numerous opportunities, he did "zero meaningful service."

Upon arriving at college, however, Lester enrolled during his freshman year in a Religion course entitled "Personal Choice and Global Transformation." The course consisted of weekly lectures by speakers who were playing some role in changing the world. Lester attributes his commitment to service-work, in large part, to the readings and lecture of educator Jonathan Kozol, one of the course's guest lecturers:

> He just spoke, and just blew me like out of my seat. Just like everything about him. . . . He just kind of just wham bam in a three-punch just knocked down, to me, just two things: he just showed how ridiculous the idea of a level playing field is in this country for educational access. So he does that on one hand. And then two, just with this absolute love of kids, just shows what lives are at stake, these unbelievably wonderful lives.

Here, Lester describes how Kozol's depiction of the American educational system led him to adopt a worldview in which educational opportunities are inequitably distributed. He goes on to explain that "One of the reasons I got so into teaching was reading books like Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. . .and realizing how bright, wonderful, amazing kids don't get that opportunity [to succeed]." The combination of Kozol's speaking and writing led Lester to experience a global-interpretive frame-change: he shifted his view of the world as well as the role he could play within this world. Following this experience, Lester began volunteering to teach civics 15-hours a week at a local public high school and sought out the coursework necessary to obtain his professional teaching certification. He plans to pursue a teaching career upon graduation. Here, one can see how a predisposition for a commitment to service-work and social action instilled in Lester by his father and headmaster required a frame-changing experience—in this case, the writing and lecturing of Jonathan Kozol—to catalyze his predisposition into an actual 15-hour a week commitment (and possible career commitment) to public education. Like the majority of students in this sample, this frame-changing experience occurred during Lester's freshman year of college.

Limitations

Having focused this paper primarily on the 11 students in the sample who describe frame-changing experiences during the freshman year of college, let me take a moment here to describe the nine students who do not fit the proposed model. Four students in the sample— Dara, Ashwin, Martin and Ty—describe frame-changing experiences that occurred either prior to or following the freshman year of college. Specifically, Dara and Ty describe classes they took and readings they encountered during high school while both Martin and Ashwin describe as frame-changing experiences a class they took during their later years of college. For example, during his junior year of college, Martin enrolled in a seminar on Malaria, Tuberculosis and AIDS that he describes as altering his conception of the role he could play with the world. He explains:

> That class really interested me in international health. . . [Now] I kind of want to see what I can do in terms of a more global scale. Like I'm very interested in health inequalities in third world countries. And the AIDS epidemic and the malaria epidemic.

In these words, one can see that Martin's participation in an academic course on global health served as a frame-changing experience by altering his conception of the type of service-worker he aspired to become. Thus, while the work of Erikson (1965, 1968) and other identity theorists offer compelling explanations for why frame-changing experience may be most likely to occur during the freshman year of college, it is clear that such experiences are not *limited* to the freshman year.

It must also be noted that five students in the sample— Rishi, Sara, Craig, Kelly and Maria— offer explanations for their development of a commitment to service-work that do not include frame-changing experiences at all. I argue that none of these students encountered frame-changing experiences because none describe a particular academic experience that *altered* either their conception of the community in which they lived or their conception of themselves as service-workers within this community. Several of these students describe experiences that *strengthened* or *deepened* their commitment to service-work and social action; however, none describe these experiences as leading to an actual shift in perspective. For example, Sarah attributes her commitment to service-work in large part to her father's role as a director for Amnesty International. In her description of her childhood, she explains:

> And, so, my dad would tell me from time to time about like what he did with Amnesty, and, then, one day when I was 12, I was talking to him about it, and I was, like, can I start something like that because I kept wanting to be involved with what he was doing. . . . And, so, that's how I, sort of, got started.

In her interview, Sarah describes how her commitment to human rights deepened over the course of her high school career and has continued in college with her volunteer work at a local homeless shelter. In her account, then, Sarah offers no description of a particular academic experience that resulted in an alteration of either her worldview or self-concept— the criteria by which a frame-changing experience is defined. For this reason, Sarah's commitment to service-work, along with that of four other students in this sample, cannot be attributed to a frame-changing experience.

Clearly, then, one cannot reasonably argue—nor do I attempt in this paper to suggest—that frame-changing experiences account for the commitment of *all* young service-workers. Rather, I propose in this paper a frame-changing experience model that seems useful for understanding a particular pathway towards a commitment to service-work.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to demonstrate the significance of frame-changing experiences—and the timing of these experiences—on the development of a young adult's commitment to service-work and social action. Though no single model can capture the developmental pathway of *every* committed activist and service-worker, this study suggests that the development of a majority of students in this study was deeply impacted by the confluence of three factors. First, these students' parents, religious faith, early service experiences, etc., instilled in them a predisposition for a commitment to service-work and social action. Second, these young adults then encountered a particular academic experience that offered a new frame through which to view the world and/or their role within the world. Third, these young adults encountered this academic experience during a period of identity crisis—in the majority of cases, during the freshman year of college— which awarded the particular academic experience its catalytic power. I suggest here, then, that it was the confluence of these three factors that allowed many of the college student-volunteers in this study to experience a university course, Bible study, independent reading book or service orientation program as a frame-changing experience when many other participants in these same experiences did not.

Certainly, this study's sample size of 20 students from a single, northeastern university limits the generalizability of the findings. More research with a greater number of college students across multiple universities and geographic regions will be necessary for drawing substantial conclusions about the role of frame-changing experiences in the development of a commitment to service-work and social action in young adults. Nonetheless, I believe that this study's findings offer important implications for university-level educators and administrators. Namely, while the model outlined in this paper cannot account for the commitment of *all* young service-workers, it seems that university educators would do well to think deeply about the opportunities available to students during the freshman year of college for reflection and learning about the state of the world as well as the role that they as individuals can play within this world. Recall Marian Wright Edelman's observation that society cannot afford to wait for the next Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. to come along. On the contrary,

educators at all levels must take an active role in fostering in young people the commitment to social action exemplified by these historical figures. Understanding the role that frame-changing experiences can play in catalyzing such a commitment may be an important step in this endeavor.

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