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Activism, Not Passivism: Identity, Experience, and Emotion

Victoria Hallie Rose Webb
vwebb3@vols.utk.edu

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Victoria H. R. Webb

University of Tennessee Knoxville

Abstract

Colleges and universities have historically been a hotbed of activism. Student activism takes multiple forms, allows students to form community, and can address causes that are both global and local, including issues that are salient in the lives of students who are members of marginalized communities. This study explored the unique experiences of student activists at a public university in the Southeast during the early Trump era, focusing on (a) how they come to identify as student activists, (b) the experiences as activists, (c) and the affective dimensions of their activist work. In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 undergraduate, graduate, and recent college graduate students who identified as activists. The interviews were transcribed and coded through a modified thematic analysis, in which we developed inductively derived themes and analyzed these themes in terms of Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler's (2015) theory of "identity choreography" among activists. In addition to support for Grzanka et al.'s three-part framework of origins, affect, and efficacy of activism, our analyses revealed support for emergent themes of *social networks and social media, other relevant identities,* and *resistance*. These themes provide support for dynamic, constructionist framework of campus activist identities. While there was no consensus on the state of progress on U.S. campuses, participants did agree that social justice activism is imperative, particularly in the context of the Trump administration's focus on regression, as opposed to social justice. These results are situated in terms of implications for future research on the prevalence of the productive and active components of campus activism, the productivity and understanding of activism outside the academic settings, as well as the importance for self-care and social networks.

Activism, Not Passivism

Tennessee's state legislature and student activists at the University of Tennessee made one major portion of the University of Tennessee's budget quite visible. In the spring of 2016, the Tennessee legislature decided to amend bill HB2248 (SB 1912) to defund the Officer of Diversity and Inclusion completely, diverting funds to scholarships for minority students within the Engineering College. Many different proposals to HB2066 (SB1902) were discussed in sessions over several months, all aiming to cut funding from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Through these actions of the Tennessee legislature,resistance among students formed, specifically through the formation of the UT Diversity Matters Coalition. This study builds upon previous work done to understand how straight allies perform and understand their identity through their experiences, upbringing, political efficacy, and emotions associated with homophobia to make up their "identity choreography" (Grzanka, Blazer, & Adler, 2015). While wanting to not only see if identities are formed and change over time because of the interactions of all the factors described prior, this study is an exploratory project to understand the unique experiences of student activists. Tessema (2016) writes, "Student activists have historically taken crucial initiatives in the struggles against social and political dominations, subjugations, and inequalities in many countries" (p. 43), showing the huge obstacles and battles activists take on.

With activism being so salient in our current campus culture, including coalition forming and marches and rallies every few weeks; all eyes were turned on the activists. Activists turned to social media and social networks to expose the reality of the university, and received little response back from the administration. Despite rallies and marches of large numbers, there was little recognition of the activists and their work. To understand the unique experiences and emotions associated with the experiences of student activists, we used an in-depth interview.

Krause, Miedema, Woofter, and Yount (2017) realize the value of in-depth interviews in this case, "Student perspectives are invaluable because the research questions asked and the manner of data collection would be authentic to the student experience" (p. 213). The interviews would allow us to better understand the experiences of student activists, through the construction and growth of their identities as student activists.

Literature Review

Origins of Activism

The origins of activism differ depending on what systems of oppression activists combat, their background and upbringing, and their experiences with troubling oppressive systems. Hope, Keels, and Durkee (2016) found that for Black and Latino college students, their own identities, microaggressions experienced, and the ability of policy to enact change led to their beginning stages of involvement in activism (p. 211). As far as non-students, feelings of racial centrality and empowerment led to activist behavior among African Americans (Livingston et al., (2017). In other communities, studies have been done that do not lead to central themes for behavior of the community due to their "sporadic" nature (Wong, 2017). Wong (2017) explains that "we know very little about the development of political identities over time, institutional influences on Asian American politics, or conflicting or unique Asian American political ideologies" (p. 14) as different studies ask questions that do not align with one another and are not longitudinal. However, in a study conducted at a community college, researchers challenged the inaccurate and limited models that portray Asian Americans as people in the shadow, who do not usually lead and if they do, not effectively, and decided to focus on the instances where Asian American

were indeed leaders who actively challenged systems of oppression and racism, not only faced

by them, but other minorities as well (Canlas, 2017). In other studies, parents of activists who

have disabilities advocate for their children, display active forms of advocacy, and then this

advocacy transforms into learned skills of self-advocacy for the child themselves. By seeing this

occur regularly, students with disabilities learned that these skills were "essential life skills"

(Kimball, Moore, Vaccaro, Troiano, and Newman, 2016, p. 251). Students with disabilities

continued this activism by telling stories of their own experiences, making themselves familiar,

and ripping away stereotypes, (Kimball et al., 2016). In Swank and Fahs study, (2011) link

involvement in antiwar activism to higher levels of education, working perceptions of what

proper foreign policy entails, as well as how well other similar movements close to them have

done. They also found that being in activist bubble and social networks led to greater

involvement, showing the importance and influence of social networks and their ability to form

whole movements. Tessema's work on student activism under repressive systems found that both

"social origin and life experiences, contribute to activist consciousness that

predisposes students to high sensitivity to practices and propensity to action-taking" (2015, p. *v*).

Through these experiences and background stories, students are able to relate and empathize with

others in similar situations, while fighting to make sure that their reality is not the same for

students in the future. Feelings of oneness and solidarity can lead to a want for change, as

students observe similar experiences happening around the United States, which is how Grad

Students Talk formed. Because of universal feelings and experiences of racial injustice, silence

emanating from professional and educational institutions, and introduction to challenges of

activism and advocacy in modern higher education, a group of graduate students formed a

national group to combat these sociopolitical issues (Lantz et al., 2016). In other instances,

activism originates from ability to create; Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya (2017) speak on a change

of mindset, or activation of a mindset where activists are able to creatively imagine and

"envision a future that does not currently exist and is frequently not even discussed due the

power of hegemonic structuring" (p. 407). The various origins of activism all look and operate

on different contingencies, but all do seem to stem from a want and a dire need for change.

Research participant Patricia insists that "we are all a product of our raising" and that this must

be kept in mind when dealing with people from all sides of the activist community and its

opponents.

Activism now & Importance of Intersectional Approach

Activism and activists movements on college campuses operate in all shapes, forms,

identities, and can work to combat one specific issue or multiple issues at once. An anti-racist

movement occurred at the University of Michigan's campus, specifically through a Speak Out!

Event, letting students express their unjust experiences (González, 2015). Many activist

movements are reviving and challenging old movements, "the connection between queer identity

and smashing rigid gender categories through trans activism, all of which is conducted within a

women's college community, marks a significant departure from older generational divisions

between cisgender lesbians and transgender women" (Weber, 2016, p. 34). Feminist researchers

express the importance of students in activists movements as students understand the unique

positions of their peers, can be agents of active change, come together to change social norms

about consent and rape culture, provide ideas for way in which to support survivors, as well as to

get their fellow students to care about these issues and demand institutions to act accordingly

(Krause, Miedema, Woofter, & Yount, 2017). Milkman (2017) speaks on reasons why the look

of activism has changed, as activists now have to ability to be involved in activism through

social media, have the hardship of entering a job market where a job is hard to find and secure,

and due to the precarious nature of the job market, have a prolonging of adulthood, as students

sometimes have to move back home while waiting to get hired. Activism now calls for an

intersectional approach, as an accurate way to describe and understand unique experiences of

individuals. In an interview with Marcia Chatelain (2017) , she speaks on the need to apply an

intersectional lens when talking about social movements and activists; additionally, Milkman

speaks on intersectionality in protests todays " 'And despite proclamations to the contrary,

millennials confront persistent racial and gender disparities, discrimination against sexual

minorities, and widening class inequality—all of which they understand in the framework of

"intersectionality.'" (Milkman, 2017, p. 1). Pasque and Vargas study academic service learning,

which includes a credit course that urges students to look at the different complexities of

oppression, socio-politically, culturally, and historically, when engaging in community

partnerships that focused on social justice (2014). This course aims to combine both community

and social justice activism with the interaction of education and community interaction. When

analyzing the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the feelings of community associated with the

movement, Schuschke and Tynes express the need for an intersectional movement when

considering and noticing how the effects of police brutality and racial discrimination happen to

all of the African American community. Establishing this feeling of oneness lets activists know

they are on the same page, even if unique experiences might look different due to the

intersections of their identities. When interviewing two students in Ethiopia, Tessema's findings

showcase two students who were persistent in their experiences being understood through both

the student and gender identities (2015), they insisted on their intersectional experiences and said

that the two identities could not be separated. Activism now operates different, with the same

feelings of a need to be better and do better, while also expressing the need for an intersectional

lens to approach and understand the systemic issues and experiences associated with them.

Social Media's Role in Activism

Being a "digital native" (Milkman, 2017) in today's activism world provides

opportunities for growth in community that used to take years to form, in a matter of a viral

hashtag or video. Some researchers see social media as an effective tool, while others deem it as

a more passive way to become involved in activism: otherwise known as "slacktivism". They

expand on this notion of passivity on the internet mentioning only sharing and liking links as

"clicktivism", and deeming funding charities as "politically ineffective" (Cabrera, Matias, &

Montoya, 2017, pp. 400, 403). Other researchers point to the importance and benefits of social

media activism, "activists highlighted social media as a tool for consciousness-raising and calls

to action, an opportunity to connect with other activists, and as a counterspace to reduce power

dynamics present in other spaces" (Linder, Myers, Riggle, & Lacy, 2016, p. 236). In certain

instances, social media activism led to the firing of presidents of schools, the firing of police

officers, the demotion of lawyers on rape cases, and allow things normally swept under the eyes

of students and other activists to be fully exposed (Linder, Myers, Riggle, & Lacy, 2016). Social

media campaigns allow movements to reach people they might not have reached otherwise,

exists as a way to hold institutions accountable for their inaction on sexual violence, provide

communities for survivors of sexual violence, and to provide an outlet to discuss the

intersections of these survivors' identities and experiences in a way that is not as accessible in

other "mainstream media outlets" (Linder, Myers, Riggle, & Lacy, 2016, p. 239). Social media

activism allows for people of color to form communities and feelings of solidarity in times were they have no sense of that on their college campus. These feelings of community and solidarity provide a "healing space away from a hostile racial climate" (George Mwangi, Bettencourt, & Malaney 2016, p. 12) resulting from the I, Too, Am social media campaign to spread awareness of the microaggressions that occur on elite campuses. George Mwangi, Bettencourt, and Malaney (2016) underline the importance of social media activism stating that it "operates beyond individuals and institutions to impact national and international landscapes" (p. 2). The main word associated with the #BlackLivesMatter movement appears to be community, and throughout the movement which started and is maintained through social media, community has kept the movement strong and resistant to the white supremacy that invades our society (Schuschke & Tynes, 2016). Researchers understand the amount of time young activists share on social media, but also enjoy and connect with young activists over their "common internet activist sheroes" (González, 2015, p. 16). Although opinions differ on the effectiveness of social media activism, the benefits seems to be countless, especially for minority students who find community in their counter space, social media, which their own universities and colleges do not provide. Social media provides a community and allows students to work through the risks and negative responses they might receive through their activism, or their sole existence, which helps sustain emotionally taxing movements.

Risks, Responses, and Resilience

Activism exists as a way to oppose and resist social norms and systemic issues that invade our personal lives daily. With this goal to oppose, comes a "degree of risk" (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017, p. 406), but also ways to mitigate and continue activism through these

difficult times. Some risks might range "from threat of life and limb, to emotional and

psychological strain, to the basic costs of neglecting one's studies as a consequence of devoting

time and energy to organizing, students clearly incur serious costs" (Rhoads, 2016, p. 199).

Responses from the institution do a great deal on letting activists know where the institution's

values actually lie. In the case of "Activist University" an University in the Philippines, its role

was to instill activism into the institution's identity, through "(a) promoting iconic personality

from the university's history; (b) implementing programs and policies, and provision of

corresponding resources; (c) emphasizing the belief of the educators in the importance of

activism in student development; and (d) initiating student activities from which students derive

alternative out-of-classroom learning" (Bernardo & Baranovich, 2016, p. 204). This positive

effort on behalf of the university allowed students to see that the university believed in and

supported activism. They aligned their actions with their words, and this provided an

environment where their emotions were supported and taken into consideration. Their campus

served as a safe space, a place to take their feelings of discouragement and frustration and be

recognized, not mocked. On the other side, institutions continue to uphold these systemic issues

or stay silent during pressing times, (Lantz et al., 2016). Directly opposing social norms and

understandings in an institution that enforces those social norms of "gender and sexual dualism,

labelling, and fixed categorization" lead to students who suffered from "hostility from their

peers", little to no support from the administration and their teachers, and frustration knowing

that they would have to operate within the norms to gain any support at all (Elliott, 2016, p. 50).

When a university responds to an activist movement by "invoking diversity language, the

administrative responses to student activists recenter majority culture, place systemic problems

back on minoritized students, and create a discursive context wherein action to address activist

concerns is stifled" (Hoffman and Mitchell, 2016, p. 277) students become discouraged and even more frustrated. Using this language means that the blame is put on the diverse "others", that this is not a normal issue, but only an issue to "some" of the campus population. To live through these experiences and then receive blame for your experience can be both exhausting and depressing, and even more so when the university is silent. Modeling "Activist University's" approach to embedding activism in the goals and mission of the university, would allow students to feel safe, recognized, validated, and supported. Hoffman and Mitchell suggest each administration to think about what their actions are telling potential and current students about what they value, especially students who are struggling to find a place to fit in on campus (2016). For some students these negative responses were expected, and so they mentally prepared themselves for that outcome, celebrating the "vibrancy" in their struggles, knowing that at least they were actively fighting against these "oppressive processes" (Tessema, 2015, p. 203) and had the numbers to mobilize and face their grievances head on. Despite the state trying to repress activists, the students' actions did not slow down. These students continued to resist, not only in "everyday micro resistance", but also by mobilizing and using "student organizations and clandestine means to challenge policies and practices" (Tessema, 2015, p. 95). Rhoads (2016) found that an increase in costs does not always lead to a decrease in activism, in contrast activists "develop a greater willingness to ignore person costs" in order to pursue their goal, collectively (p. 199). With activism, risks are possible, and responses to student activism can differ depending on if the environment is supportive of an active and challenging student body. While these risks and apathetic or negative responses are expected to and do lead to an emotional toll, students seem to be motivated more to do more work. The sight of resistance validates their grievances, and transforms into a push to keep going.

Self-Care

All activists do not stay resilient for long periods of time by only paying attention to the

cause. In order to better others, it is best to make sure that their own needs are being met as well.

Elliott (2016) speaks on the toll activism can lead to, especially in the school setting, the

"complexity" of activism in school, the "challenges" of being student-lead, and the "forces"

pushing against this change (p. 49). Being a forerunner on a movement that is so close to home,

and affecting your actual existence, which a lot of student activism is comprised of requires and

necessitates self-care. González (2015), suggests "community-centered self-care" such as

connecting with other activists on social media to talk and work through shared experiences, to

be part of groups and coalitions that include people who look like you and can provide a sense of

solidarity. Community-centered self care can even mean having a professor who has trigger

warning policies to provide an "emotionally accessible classroom" (p. 16) for survivors of

trauma. The sense of community and self-care uses feelings of solidarity and oneness to combat

the "university system driven by job scarcity and individualistic careerism" (p. 15). This

community-centered self-care shows the power of numbers and solidarity, bettering everyone as

a whole, instead of letting each other break down individuals in the job search and beyond.

Identifying as an Activist

Across definitions of activism, the element of wanting change and working towards that

change remain the common theme. Activists usually self-identify or are identified as activists

because of this awareness to create change and oppose systemic institutions they do not agree

with. For some activists, they use queer theory to work through and understand their and other's

identities, in order to understand their experiences and their efforts towards activism (Elliott, 2015). Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya (2017) write about premises to be a student activist positing that "to be a student activist is a description of behavior as opposed to an identity" (p. 406). Pasque and Vargas (2014) push against this definition through their findings of how student activists constructed their identities "as it pushed against dominant ways of knowing and being in society. This led to performances of activism and resistance within the community service site itself " (p. 65). Pasque and Vargas's findings show that not only does activism and the identity as activism work together with each other, but also that that the way in which students operate by themselves by rejecting the norms of society, serve as a form of activism itself. Student activists are the ones who hold these identities, so having them explain and understand their experiences might be able to show how these identities are utilized, while also allowing for a better understanding of the motivations and resilience many activists form. Our team wanted to explore the construction and meaning of these identities, as well as the experiences and emotions associated with these experiences.

Statement of Research Questions

Throughout the literature, many origins of activism are explored, researchers underline the importance of applying an intersectional lens when being an activist and analyzing social movements. They visit how social media provides other channels for activism, while providing safe spaces for some activists and allowing movements to become more widespread. Risks of activism and responses to the activism from audiences such as college campuses and administration vary, with some colleges being accepting and supportive and the benefits associated with that support, as well as the harm caused by colleges who do not stand with their

students lived experiences. Due to the positive responses and sometimes even negative

responses, activists form a resilience, and receive validation for their activism; however this

resilience is not maintained by itself. Through various forms of self-care both personally and

through the community, activists know their work is valid, they are important, and there are

others who feel the same way as they do. The identity of activist is touched on, showing that for

some activists, activism was more of a behavior than an identity, and for others rejecting cultural

norms daily proved to be activism. This project seeks to develop a better understanding of

student activists, building on previous research to understand the development of their activist

identity, the affective components of activism work, and their perceptions of efficacy of their

work.

Method

Recruitment

Student activists were recruited through Facebook, by recommendation of other well-

known and active student activists on campus. Potential interviewees were sent the recruitment

materials, which included a short introduction to the study, as well as the flyer for recruitment as

well. Throughout the recruitment process emails were sent to check in on activists who

expressed interest in being interviewed, and to get interviews scheduled for activists who agreed

to the study. After a number of interviews, interviewees suggested other names of activists that

might be interested, and these students were emailed on Facebook as well throughout the

interview process. The messages were sent out to 24 undergraduate students and graduate

students, we received 19 responses, and solidified 11 interviews over a span over 3 months, as

many potential interviewees were out of town, or did not have access to reliable internet connection. This process of recruitment led to a response rate of almost 46%. This higher response could be attributed the means of messaging through Facebook, which alert the messenger if the recipient has received or read the message. This transparency Facebook messenger offers could led to the potential interviewee feeling more inclined to respond. There were also a few potential participants who did not feel comfortable participating in the study, as they did not feel like they had contributed enough to campus to be considered an activist, introducing the idea that some people felt that direct action had to be a part of the identity as an activist. While the idea of the study originated from the increased visibility of student activism on campus due to the defunding of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the previous work of Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler (2015), activists interviewed were parts of my channels of activism happening on campus. Throughout the recruitment, the networks on campus for activists were apparent, but included many branches of activism, and varying stories of the origins of their activism.

Interviews

For our study we used a 36 question interview, to better understand and explore the experiences of student activists and how those experiences operate and are processed to form unique identities. This work builds upon Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler's previous work (2015), on straight LGBT allies, which introduced the idea of "identity choreography", as a way to explain how these allies used their experiences, upbringing, and beliefs about why homophobia exists to create and shift their identity as a straight ally. These in-depth questions aimed to get student activists to reflect and explain their identity as a student activist, while also actively recalling their experiences of activism on campus. The exploratory interview allowed the participants to

be able to develop and construct their own understandings of their experiences, as opposed to

taking a survey, which might limit their ability to navigate through their identities and

experiences. All interviews were conducted in a laboratory setting, in person as well as via

Skype and Google Hangout. Interviews lasted anywhere from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 40

minutes, and were audio recorded for transcription purposes. The interviewees were instructed to

skip questions if they did not feel comfortable answering them, and also were allowed to stop the

interview at any time.

Participants

The 11 interviewees ranged from 19 to 23, and they were all from different areas of the

United States, including Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, Illinois, Louisiana, and Colorado. The

participants' gender identities are fluid, male, female, queer, non-binary trans-fem, and non-

binary (Table 1). Eight of the 11 participants were currently undergraduate students, the others

being recent college graduates or a graduate student. Although the recent college graduates are

not technically students anymore, they are still both involved in activism on and around campus,

so they still maintain and hold the label of student activist. Nine of the 11 participants identified

as White, and the other two identified as Black. The participants' sexual orientations exists all

across the spectrum, and seven out of the 11 were single. Participants were asked to choose a

pseudonym in order to keep their answers confidential, as some of the questions were personal in

their nature.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe Transcription Software. I did a thematic analysis of the data, looking for repeated and reiterated themes during the activists' recollection and reflection of their experiences as activists as well as the emotions they associated with those experiences. Multiple themes were recorded, including themes of frustration, emotional toll, social networks, resistance, doing what is right, and social justice warriors. These themes were then consolidated into 3 recurring themes of social networks, other identities, and resilience. These themes provided support for the "identity choreography" (Grzanka, Blazer, & Adler, 2015) model, which posits that identities are constructed and understood through the experiences of allies and their background, their emotions they associate with supporting the LGBT community, and progress of the current state of the United States in terms of LGBTQIA issues. These themes built upon the identity choreography model as well, as they illustrate the identity of being a student activist as inextricably linked to productivity and performance. While the experience of each activist led to them understanding and reflecting on their identities in a unique way, feelings of doing activism because it "was the right thing to do" proved to be an underlying reason for many activists. Through the themes of social networks, other identities, and resistance, being productive in their activism and even while facing backlash went hand in hand with their definitions and self-identification as student activists.

Results

The qualitative responses from the participants of our study support and extend findings of Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler (2015) explaining the active process of creating and shifting identities through "identity choreography". While Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler find both active

and passive forms of LGBT allyship among their participants, our participants describe activist identities as an exclusively proactive and performative identity. Both social networks and social media allow activists to create, shape, and form their identities, in contrast to the notion of "slacktivism" (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017, p. 400) in online activism. Refuting premise #4 (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017), my findings show that these actions and behaviors led to students identifying as an activist, making action and identity exist together, as opposed to activist and activism only existing as a behavior. The experiences of participants with multiple, intersecting oppressed identities supports the active component of the identity, as activists understand their sole existence and day-to-day activities as a form of activism in itself. Resistance resulting from or in activism might seem to be a way for activists to fall into the more passive state, but many activists explains these instances as ways to become resilient and more proactive in the causes they are advocating for or against.

The Personal Meaning

Certain distinct moments served as student activists' realization that they did not want to stay stagnant in the injustices that occur daily. For Bobbi, with the murder of Michael Brown, she noticed apathy amongst the students at her previous college, and knew that this wasn't okay, especially when she couldn't even continue her day normally. She noticed that her want to change set her apart from many other students, which can display first ideas of being a student activist, serving as a "turning point" (Tessema, 2015, p. 84). For Meredith it is just something she feels she should be doing, and to be a student activist means taking an active advantage of the opportunity to attend college. John says it stems from the "desire to right inequities". For Elijah, being a good activist means "having action in your activism". Rachel values the active

components of activism, "something about the physical, active, like continuing to persist, and be there, and hold signs, and chant". Poppy states that activism is a personal responsibility for her, and that she wants to stay educated on the things around her. For Kyle, having activist as a label seems odds to him as he sees his activism and existence exist as one in the same, "I think it's weird to try and like separate, to take an activist and make it a label to me, just because I think it falls underneath the term of being a good person, it's just something you should be doing". Activists also noted the importance to look at their privilege and actively reflect and make sure they are using their privilege in the right way, John states, "I just think it's important to use for me, to use, my voice and sometimes not, just my presence, or support, or whatever form that takes, for people who haven't been as lucky as I have been in my life". Rachel also notes her privilege, "so as a white person, I need to know when it's not my time to talk, and that's a lot of the time". Emily repeats the importance of giving people space and a voice, "I just want to like make room for minorities, and give them for what they need in whatever moment that they need it". When Grace was asked about her work on campus she mentions that she would consider herself an ally, as she does not feel she has been as active in organizing and planning, showing that her understanding of student activism is a rather interactive and productive one. Activists' personal meaning for the work they do sometimes speaks to the origins of their activism, or to the way in which they identify as activists. The different meanings show the active component of activism, as change and progress are mentioned in multiple instances. Our interviews aimed to see where these personal identifications stemmed from, while also trying to better understand activists' experiences.

Social networks and Social Media

Respondents explain the idea of activist being a productive identity by stating the importance of social networks to not only influence them to become an activist, but also to challenge and validate their beliefs and thought processes. Through social media networks, they are also able to continue to educate others and themselves, as well as decompress and practice self-care, in order to maintain their combatting of systemic and oppressive structures. Social networks have been linked to empowerment, by bringing together social capital (Putnam, 2000). The bonding and bridging then allows for a feeling of solidarity to form, which fulfills the "relational dimension of psychological empowerment" (Christens, 2012, p. 117). Through this empowerment, activists and allies are able to achieve a similar goal, and feel united while doing so. The origin of social justice activism for many was their group of friends, or program of study they were in, which was the case for Kyle, "I was in this group of like 20 people who were all very active on campus, very recognizable people, and I was immediately thrown in there, and to me it feels like thrown in with the best". Patricia also talks how she got into a student-led organization which does activist work, giving credit to "that community feeling" in the organization, to urge her to become involved. Social networks help them maintain and alter their activism and identities encompassed in this identity. For Bobbi, social media helped her meet her best friend and through that friendship she continues to grow and be inspired by her,

> I found my best friend through the Netflix show *The Hunting Ground,* and we connected
> on Facebook. I flew out and met her in California, and we are literally best friends now,
> and she is an incredible writer, and she is an incredible speaker, and I idolize her which is
> weird because she's my friend. She is 9 years older than me, so when I grow up I want to
> be like her.

Social networks can aid in self-care, especially for Elijah, "Yeah, I have a good group of friends, friends who are in the same activist sphere that I'm in, so I'm always able to relax and recharge with them, uhm so yeah. Eating, friends, my mom, TV". For Meredith, her social network of activists fulfills her, "having a community that's for you, and for what you believe in, like it doesn't get better than that". Social networks help maintain Elijah's activism during difficult times, and he realizes that without a social network he might not be able to stay grounded,

> So it is frustrating you know to receive uh I guess like negative responses, especially you know as a multiply marginalized person myself, it's one thing to have to you know fight against these things, but I'm also still a victim of them too, and I'm also still overcoming them myself and there are things that I am still trying to work through as a queer person of color that I have to like unpack and unravel and overcome, and so to have to deal with some random jackass, I'm sorry, it is frustrating, but I think for the most part, because I have such a very good support network it's not too bad, it's definitely manageable.

Many activists were first introduced to social justice through the regularly used and sometimes joked about term "social justice warrior", which they later connected to the work they themselves were doing on campus, as well as being proud of the word. Social media exists as a medium through which activists are able to become introduced to social justice as well as grow in their own activism. For Elijah, he became informally introduced informally to key ideas and beliefs regularly discussed in social justice activism.

> When I was in high school and I was as a queer person, uh especially as a queer identifying male, I guess there has traditionally been this sort of, uh, glorification of like strong powerful women, and I definitely was down with that when I was younger, well in

high school, and so throughout that I started learning about "what does it mean to be a strong woman?" which led to me learning about like feminism and "what is feminism?" and so on and so forth. So I learned a lot online, especially through Tumblr, Tumblr, was very key to that, I learned so much, not only in terms of having language for things that I had never thought about before, but also just like hearing people's experiences was very very cool and I thought that was really a pro to having that access to that information and through learning more about feminism I also started learning about other systems of oppression like racism and heterosexism and things like that not in the formal academic sense, but in a sort of informal experiential sense, venting about – they actively process their experiences together and strategize.

Social media not only allows potential and current activists to have instant access to key social movements as well as social media tactics, but also serves as locations for social media movements to start up, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement. When asked about an activist or activist movement that inspired him to do activist work, John recalls,

Yeah. I mean I just remember, I remember for a long time feeling lost, and like uhm knowing that I didn't like things, but not knowing what to do about or how to express it. Like my Freshman year when like the Ferguson protests were happening and we were all watching it on the TV in Fred Brown and everybody was like "pshh blah blah blah thugs, etc. it's terrible, ridiculous, rioting" I remember feeling, not knowing why I felt like they were wrong, but wanting to argue with them, not knowing how to express my disagreement, or like what it was, uhm so I guess I'd say that was like important, like that was like was a defining event, not just Ferguson but like #BlackLivesMatter as a whole,

and for activism, for our generation, like this generation of activism, so I think that was a

big part of it.

Cornerstone movements including #BlackLivesMatter as well as Stonewall have and

continue to inspire and inform activists. For Patricia she reminds herself and stays motivated

when thinking of "our black trans-queer mothers are kind of the ones who led the fight",

regarding both Stonewall and the Gay Liberation movement as a whole. Social networks and

social media help maintain, sustain, and improve individual's activism in an active manner,

refuting claims that these social mediums decrease productivity or let an activist become passive

in their activism (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017). Social networks and media exists not

only as some activists' introduction to activism, but also as a continuance, and even a major

motivator, actively contributing to activists' lives during times of discouragement and burnout.

The rise of social media provides an additional outlet for activism, and is seen as more helpful

than harmful to the cause to the activists interviewed.

Existence Equals Activism

Respondents who hold multi-oppressed identities display and support an active

conceptualization of activism and being an activist, as their day to day interactions and activities

are processed as forms of activism. When we asked Ryan when he started engaging in activism

he responded, "Uhm, I don't know it really just, that's really weird to me, I mean I guess it just

depends on how you define activism, I mean I came out of the closet when I was 16, and that's

kind of when I started like speaking up and doing stuff." He understands his identity as gay and

coming out as a form of activism in itself, as he came out and them immediately started telling

others what he believed was right. As for Kyle, he believes his existence not only is activism but also calls for activism,

> Like I guess like I said earlier, I think it's weird to try and lie separate, to like take an activist and make it a label to me, just because I think it falls underneath like the term of being a good person, like it's just something you should be doing, uhm so I guess, I guess for me it just kinds of means like existing and kind of being.

Activism appears to be so intertwined with his daily actions, as he does not even see it as a label, but as something that he does and other people should do simply because it is an essential part of existing and being a decent human being. Bobbi states that her identity and her organization's identity "is in the fact that we offer something different than the university" she continues on stating that the push back from the university is expected, and with progress there will be push back. Bobbi roots her identity into her organization's, which exists to support sexual assault survivors and to change policy on campus to offer more support. Although not explicitly stated, offering something the university does not, going outside the campus norm and social norm by advocating for sexual assault victims,a form of activism, is ingrained into her identity. For Elijah, he outwardly states his identity as being a form of activism when asked how long he has been involved in activism,

> But also, uhm not to get like, all worldly and philosophical and stuff but I guess when you're living in a world that doesn't advantage you, or see you as human, or see you as valuable, then simply existing and thriving and surviving and flourishing is a form of activism in its own way, I guess, so, kind of since birth, I guess…And she [his mom] always tried to give me the opportunities and the means to mitigate and combat those obstacles, and to me, you know, I mean it's sort of like the whole concept of like black

excellence I guess, that's sort of what she was, the thought process that she had, and

having that mentality throughout elementary school, middle school, high school, to me

and like flourishing in those areas, like that's kind of sort of like activism in the sense of

combating these systems of oppression that are excellent.

For Patricia, her identities exists as forms of activism in themselves, which can be seen

through her responses when asked if she feels like her activism offends anyone, she answered

immediately that "trans-people offend people every day" showing that her identity as non-binary

trans-fem was a form of activism in itself. When asked about potential backlash or being worried

about it in day-to-day interactions Patricia answered that she was,

> Worried about proving my existence, proving why I should be in this bathroom instead
>
> of the other one… always this negotiation of do I do what feels good or do kind of I
>
> succumb to social pressures that are always operating…I don't think there's an instance
>
> or a day do I correct them on a name, or please don't use these pronouns, and if that is
>
> going to affect me in a negative way.

Activists whose identities exist as forms of activism are unable to hide their activism,

even in situations where they feel fearful or overwhelmed. Patricia speaks on this when asking

about negative responses to her activism, "I fear existing publicly a lot because violence against

me is more accepted than me existing." Having identities which are forms of activism in

themselves can be particularly exhausting, resulting in continuous self-reflection, self-care, and

anxiety. Elijah uses a metaphor to explain what having identities that exist as activism is like,

"It's not like a superhero where you get a secret identity, a super identity and a secret identity,

you're still that person, and you're still in the heat, in the frying pan." His metaphor shows that

the activism never stops, that he can't just turn off his identities and escape his activism

whenever he wants. Citing an earlier paper Linder (2015) explains how these students who hold these identities are viewed,

> Students engaged in activism related to sweatshop labor and other international and
> national issues that have less of a direct impact on college and university daily practices
> are frequently heralded as student leaders and activists while students engaged in
> activism related to their own identities on college campuses (e.g., racial discrimination,
> sexual assault, and immigration status) are frequently seen as troublemakers or rabble-
> rousers by administrators (as cited in Linder, Myers, Riggle, & Lacy, 2016, p. 232).

These stories describe the identity as activism itself comes from a place of active advocacy, which seems to take the term "ally" to the next level. This helps understanding how the identity of activism forms and continues to be understood, as a dynamic and progressive identity, stemming from the existence of these activists.

Resistance and Resilience

Respondents spoke about the many factors they understood to be the cause of oppression in the U.S. and what they were fighting against: capitalism, power, and miseducation. Through these lived experiences of resistance, activists remain proactive in tackling these oppressive factors, and undermine the importance and need of activism, especially in light of the recent election of Donald Trump. Ryan explains how he feels when dealing with backlash "Frustrated, but I mean if you have that backlash and it's more of a dialogue backlash then that's a great opportunity to talk to that person, sometimes you end up having a good genuine conversation…" he continues on, "it's a large crisis of conscious… you have to figure out what you can do, while

also staying safe… what is it in this situation that can be the most productive". Ryan continues

mention a quote that keeps him motivated during difficult times by Martin Luther King Jr. "the

arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice". Some activists have seen and

experienced so much that the resistance and criticism received starts to become internalized.

When talking about the ways in which Patricia dealt with her feelings of internalized guilt as a

result of people going to great lengths to erase hers and others identities, she states,

> I try to take those internalized demons [internalized guilt] and try to turn them around and
>
> realize that I need to do more for other people who are more marginalized than myself, in
>
> a lot of those ways, so yeah it was like this internalized war that also became a motivating
>
> factor to keep pushing on "It is important" "I mean it can be just helping people.

> Helping people be reminded of the individual people that will benefit from activism

proves to be a key to resilience in activism for student activists. Meredith speaks on her

admiration for the people she advocates for,

> So I go back to the people I'm doing it for, and oh my gosh I just love them so much. The
>
> people in Campbell County, who really inspire me in everything that I do, like I get like
>
> kind of emotional just thinking about them. I do. Because I mean they are the best people
>
> in the world, in the whole entire world. And they don't have the ability to be on the
>
> ground, like boots on the ground, like fighting the man… so I just go back to them, and
>
> take a little bit of time, and just reground myself, and think of why I do what I do, and
>
> why it's so important, but it doesn't really take me that long to get back to it, because
>
> that's just who I am.

John also speaks on what he does when his activism gets discouraging,

But yeah, I think it's easy to get discouraged. What I try to do is like center, refocus on

people…when you see somebody who's in a bad place and they're in a good place now

because they got involved in activism or started working at the Pride center, or joined a

club that makes them feel valued, you know like that matters… but like when somebody

says "oh you know I'm a part of this and this" with so much pride in their voice, my heart

melts. People deserve to feel like they belong somewhere, like they're included

somewhere and like I think activism averse organizations do that, and it certainly did that

for me.

For John, all he does is refocus on people and his desire to have people feel included on

the campus they are a part of daily, and these reminders sustain his activism. Rachel speaks on

the resistance she encounters while working at the Pride Center,

We are always worried about backlash from the legislature, or just UT administration,

from people who hold power over us so like I'm not, worried that my friends will be

annoyed about me talking about the Pride Center too much… I'm way past that with the

Pride Center it's more like who could physically come in and take this space from us,

that's always something that is always kind of looming, and then the authority figure fear

is always there in like all of the work, cause you know that no matter how much work

you put in, someone who has more power and experience and more money could come in

and take it all away.

Rachel mentions the never ending fear of having all of her and others' hard work stripped

away, but knows that the sheer existence of that possibility means they have to keep fighting. In

some instances activism can result in a loss of friendships or partnerships; Kyle recalls what this

process looks like for him,

It makes you question yourself and everything that you're standing for, like really rapid

fire kind of things, but then like, you just have to move on, I guess, again it's just life,

people come and go, and sometimes more abruptly then I guess we'd like, but I try to

hope and cling to the idea that yeah this is the right thing, so bad things happen to good

people… I guess afterwards like use it as like a strong-point like "Hey, the self-checking

was fine, turns out just need to move on from this and grow.

Losing friendships as a form of resistance is tough for Kyle at first, but it allows for a

time of self-reflection and growth, to make sure his actions match his intentions. Like Kyle,

resistance for John allows for time to grow, become more informed, and to reflect,

You do it [activism] because it's something that you think is right or wrong. There is

something right or wrong that you think you can change that you think you can work on.

So if like a hundred people tell you that you're wrong, in my opinion it shouldn't

change… if someone is like "yeah I think that's great and I think this is messed up…"

you can talk to them and bond over that. And you can learn from people who criticize

you, because you can figure out where that criticism is coming from, like self-examined

be like, "is that a valued criticism" and I think it's important to do it that way, especially

if somebody with my background, because it's like if somebody is like "you're being a

bad ally" it's easy and a lot of people react like "I'm not a bad ally, I did this and this and

two of my friends are gay" you know. And it's like, well like, if that's how somebody

feels their feelings are valid, it doesn't mean it's the fact, it's how they feel, so I think it's

something like "okay, well where is that coming from? Is that true?

For some activists, resistance is not only expected but also validating, and lets them know

that their work is pushing against a force that actually exists. For Bobbi, with the creation of her

sexual assault survivor group she expected the pushback and says that backlash is sort of the

point for her speaking out,

> The negative makes me feel validated, especially when I say… 'talking about racism with
> white people is difficult, but it is especially difficult if they view themselves as not racist
> and not part of the problem'…your defense, your immediate kickback reaction to me
> saying 'we need to be more tolerant, we need to be more open to ideas from people of
> color' and they immediately have something negative to say, it proves my point exactly.

Going back to a desire to better other people's lives, Bobbi's feelings of responsibility

towards her group and other students who have not spoken out push her to keep going through

the difficult times, "I get resistance from UT but when you love something you don't let up on it,

and my members of sexual assault group, I have to do it for them… My organization exists

because it is something UT is not doing". While present day and future students are what

motivates many activists, past activists and activists movements also influence activists to this

day. For Kyle he thinks of not only other activists in his group, but also activists who were part

of Stonewall,

> Like I guess it's just, I think about other people… Well one, people have been through a
> lot worse I guess, so I'm like 'Yeah, I can get through this' … I guess it's kind of like a
> pact mentality…like if part of us are feeling good, then the other part can be like 'they
> can do it!' and I think about like, I know I mentioned Stonewall, so like I can pull I guess
> just like pull inspiration just like off of seeing people really step it up and really win.

Forenza & Germak (2015) found that "activism contextualizes a long-term empowering

process", and the ability to use strong social networks and social media to mitigate and combat

the resistance they come across, and then using that process to motivate one another displays this empowerment process clearly (p. 229). Tessema's findings show how activists want and need to "be alive and impactful" in their actions, and they did so through finding active ways to fight the resistance on campus (2015). These students wanted the resistance in order to know that they were fighting against a concrete and visible issue, though this resistance they were able to create a new message on campus, spread the message, and shape the content of the message (Tessema, 2015). Resilience in the face of resistance proves to be a common occurrence for the student activists interviewed. For them, the resistance in the beginning at times was discouraging and exhausting, but also served as a motivating factor and validator for the causes they are fighting for.

Progress

With the recent election of Trump, many activists have said that there is progress on a local level, although things on a larger scale do not seem to be as we continue to watch the administration reverse all the progress that has been made. On the University of Tennessee's campus, Kyle says he will stay "cautiously optimistic" in the wake of a new, first-ever woman Chancellor for the university. Bobbi states that before the election she thought progress was being made, but now she does not think so, as she does not think with this current administration progress can be made on a large scale, as America's systemic issues are not taken seriously or validated. Activists notice the lack of response or regard of grievances from the campus administration. They also believe that the lack of involvement and apathy could be due to how slow change moves on campus as well as experiencing constant disappointment from the state

legislature. John seems indecisive when it comes to ideas of progress, but shows the need for activism,

> I think it works, it doesn't feel like it's ever enough, it's too slow, and moves too slowly, and I think everyone is tired. They're tired of having to worry about my friends getting home safe, and their tired of not being safe. I mean that's why it's hard, but that's why you have to keep doing it.

For Patricia, she is not sure where progress lies, but knows that currently we have more access to current events by living in a "global village", which makes injustices across the world readily available. For Poppy, she thinks that progress is being made, but that it is more complicated when analyzing all of the institutions and players involved,

> I think there is a new wave of leftists politics, and just activism, that's really honestly in the past year, since the recent election, and I'm excited to see where that goes, I think that people are feeling really energized right now, I just hope that energy is very thoughtful and intentional.

Emily says that in regards to campus progress, "part of me feels hopeful with the new Chancellor, but I don't feel too hopeful because there are a lot of other people in the administration", and in regards to the world, she believes progress is happening "slowly, but not fast enough". Activists assert that activism is important and needed, especially now due to the events that take place day to day with the current political climate. They realize that even though progress moves slowly, activism's contributions do not go unseen and with resistance and persistence change does happen, and this is what they tell themselves to keep going in times of discouragement.

Discussion

We found that when it comes to the identity as student activist, the more proactive and

productive meaning given to the identity of activist appears to be a common definition and

 understanding. Identity formation and sustainment among activists show the active component

of the identity, and support the existing literature that shows origins of activism are not

homogenous, but do play a huge role in the activism they are involved with currently. This builds

on the findings of Grzanka, Blazer, and Adler's (2015) framework of origins, affect, and

efficacy, all contributing to the process of "identity choreography". This underlying idea of

productivity can be seen through the way in which social media and social networks are utilized

by student activists. Social networks serve as a way to not only destress and sustain activism, but

also as ways to stay informed and continue to grow in their own activist identity. Social media

also allows student activists to have more access to information that aids in growth, allows for

better ways to reach audiences that might not have been reached otherwise, and also serves as

motivation for student activists who might be discouraged where they are at, physically and

mentally. These findings do not support the literature deeming activism on social media as

"slacktivism" (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017), but show the benefits and opportunities the

new form of activism has to offer. This encourages activists who might not be able to make it to

physical events, to use their voice to advocate online, while also building networks and support

groups to help maintain their activism. By allowing activists to connect to other activists with

similar passions, movements are able to be sustained throughout hard times, and allow activists

to be able to express their problems or successes with like-minded people who might not be

accessible without social media. Existing identities operate as a form of activism for multiple

student activists, leading to a higher emotional toll and an inability to ever shed their "super

identity" of being an activist; however their existing identities also provide support for the highly

active component and understanding of activism being an active process. This emphasizes the

need to have movements analyzed with an intersectional lens, making sure all causes and actions

are intentional and thoughtful, while utilizing privilege when it is needed, but also taking a step

back if it is not their place to speak. Holding identities which operate as forms as activism can

provide insight on how to lead movements, as these people have lived their life actively rejecting

social and cultural norms. Resilience in the face of resistance proved to be more common than

not, as student activists were able to take the resistance and allow themselves to feel frustrated of

sad, but then become motivated through this frustration. Through the mere existence and

occurrence of resistance, they were validated and through reflection, reassured that they were

doing the activism for the right reasons. Being able to see resilience especially in the most trying

times can provide the extra motivation and validation to keep going, despite the negative

environment surrounding the movement. Resilience shows the strong nature of activists, but also

the need to slow down and realize that activists might need to take a break in order to fully and

thoughtfully continue to fight the system. Progress or lack of, varied depending on which scale

progress was measured, but regardless of the scale of progress, activists believe that social justice

activism is needed, especially now.

When looking at the original research questions regarding student activists: (a) how they

come to identify as student activists, (b) the experiences as activists, (c) and the affective

dimensions of their activist work, we found that no story was the same. Origins differed but

played huge roles in the identity formation and still work to shape and change their identities

today. By looking into the stories of identity origin, we found that in some activists, their

existence was a form of activism in itself, and that while this can be emotionally taxing, allows

for great insight and forms resilience. Throughout the study, definitions of activism of

themselves and activism collectively all pointed towards an active and dynamic process, not one

that is passive or stagnant. Throughout the experiences of activists they saw the importance of

intersectional approaches, self-care, self-checking, thoughtfulness, and resilience in the face of

both negative and positive responses to their activism. Their experiences proved to be

exhausting, but validating knowing that they were fighting and advocating for real and important

issues in the current sociopolitical climate on campus and in the world. Social networks and

social media themes arose in many interviews, as these networks and channels not only provided

support, but information and access which might have otherwise been hard to find.When

activists spoke about their own work and progress both locally and on a larger scale, they said

that while activism was hard work and might not feel like much is changing day to day,

activism's work is needed, and the changes are apparent. Being able to see changes happen,

networking with other activists and movements to learn about ways to better organize, as well as

having social networks to practice self-care and "community-centered self-care" (Gonzalez,

2015) allow activists to form resilience and sustain themselves and movements that otherwise

might have fallen apart.

Limitations and Implications

The study has a few limitations, a lot of which are based on the nature of the study and

when it was conducted. While the response rate of 79% is great, it is also worth noting that only

24 students were initially reached out to. Only 11 participants were interviewed; however, each

interview was extensive, and allowed us to help and facilitate a better understanding of activists'

experiences and the way in which they "choreograph" their identities. While it is easy to reach

out to all members of some organizations, an organization as huge and mobile such as the #UTDiversityMattersCoalition proves to be harder to reach out to and recruit members. The time these interviews were conducted is also important to mention, as all of the interviews were conducted during the months of May, June, July, and August. Many potential interviewees were out of the country, or unable to do a Skype or Google Hangout interview, or maybe just taking a mental break from all of their activism work, since it does bear such an emotional toll on activists. Also, since a lot of activism work slows down during the summer as people are traveling and working, the idea or action of activism might not be as salient in their day-to-day experiences, which could make recollection of their experiences harder and not as accurate. It is also important to note that this study is not generalizable to all activists, or all activists at UT, but rather an exploratory study to see how all types of activists use their unique experiences to come into and grow in their identities as student activists. It is also important to realize the campus climate that led to a huge uprising of campus activism; a bill passed that essentially defunded and diverted all funding from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, taking away programs for already silenced and marginalized on campus. Patricia, one of the interviewees speaks on the emotional toll the defunding had on her, "One of the offices on campus for my specific identity, like somebody went and made an entire law to make it disappear. I mean it was really baffling in a lot of ways, to kind of have to process and deal with; to realize that someone would go to that great of lengths to erase a group." With such a direct effect felt by multiple communities on campus, the climate called and still calls for efforts to help reverse and mitigate the consequences of the defunding. The sense of urgency and need for action resulted in multiple rallies, stand-ins, and protests to let administration know that their inaction was not going to go unnoticed. As far as the nature of the interview, some of the questions included multiple questions within one, and

made the interviewees a bit confused, and sometimes not answering the whole question as a

whole. The specific question "What do you think is the primary cause or factor spurring or

influencing ongoing oppression of marginalized groups (e.g., People of Color, Women, LGBT

people, religious minorities) in the U.S. today?" led to a lot of confusion, requests to repeat the

question, and answers that did not address all of the elements of the question. While many of the

questions in the study were loaded questions, it might have been better to split some of them up

and not overload the interviewee with multi-faceted questions after they are already answering

questions that had the possibility of being anxiety-inducing. We are not assuming that the

experiences of UT students are better or worse than students on other campuses, but we do

recognize that these are feelings and experiences they hold, and validate those feelings that come

with those experiences. We also understand that experiences usually have to be processed as

concerning and "not right" for action to happen, and so while activists might feel like at the

current moment that their campus [UT] might be worse off than others, these feelings are

necessary to ignite the want for change. The findings in this study provide ideas for future

research questions regarding the prevalence of the active and productive component in the

construction and understanding of the term activism amongst other student activists outside the

ones interviewed. Another question for future research is if activism is understood and displayed

as productive and active outside of the academic setting, which would allow for the exploration

of more forms of activism outside of student activism, as well as if there are unique themes at

play when specifically engaging in student activism.

     Our findings show and underline the importance and relevance of social networks and

social media as ways to sustain, shift, and develop social movements, as opposed to just ways to

passively exist in the identity of activist (Cabrera, Matias, & Montoya, 2017). These social

networks can help challenge existing beliefs and constructively criticize problematic behavior or words, creating a more informed and aware movement. Social media proved to be a frequent starting point for activists, but it is not solely just used for beginners. Social media allows movements to reach broader audiences, to inspire others to act, and to show the harsh realities of the world around us. These experiences also point to the taxing and exhausting nature of activism, supporting the importance of self-care although many interviewees were so in tune with their work that they admit that self-care was something that they are currently working on. A lot of activists said they felt guilty when taking a break, but that it was needed in order to sustain the movement. The student activists not only deal with the multiple oppressions they face day to day, but also work to help others navigate and combat these oppressions as well. Throughout their social networks, existence, and motivation due to resistance, they are able to fight against these systems of oppression, find community even in places where it feels like their community is trying to be erased, and generally improve the lives of not only themselves but others to come as well.

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Table 1 Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Location(s) raised; current location	Relationship status; sexual orientation	Race	Educati
Elijah	Fluid	20	Clarksdale, MS; Memphis, TN; Knoxville, TN	Single; pansexual	Black	Current
John	Male	21	Atlanta, GA; Nashville, TN; Knoxville, TN	In relationship; heterosexual	White	Current
Kyle	Queer	19	Telford, TN; Knoxville, TN	Single; gay	White	Current
Ryan	Male	20	Murfreesboro, TN; Knoxville, TN	Single; gay	White	Current
Patricia	Non-binary trans-fem	21	Corrytown, TN; Knoxville, TN; Jordan	Single; attracted to other queer men	White	Current
Bobbi	Female	22	Memphis, TN; Knoxville, TN	Single; sexually fluid/queer	Black	Current
Meredith Grey	Female	23	Nashville, TN; Knoxville, TN	In relationship; heterosexual	White	Current
Emily	Female	20	Chicago, IL; Nashville, TN	In relationship; heterosexual	White	Current
Rachel	Non-binary	21	New Orleans, LA; Nashville, TN; Knoxville, TN	In relationship; pansexual	White	Current
Poppy	Female	22	Fort Collins, CO; Maryville, TN	Single; bisexual	White	College
Grace	Female	21	Knoxville, TN	Single; heterosexual	White	College