"Framework Experiences": A Key to the Development of Social Responsibility in Young Adults

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I present here a model that documents the role of "framework experiences" in catalyzing a young adult's commitment to service-work. A "framework experience" shapes an individual's view of community and the role that he or she can assume within that community.

I conducted in depth interviews with students at Harvard College who perform 10-20 hours of service-work each week. These interviews turned up an unexpected finding: during the week preceding their entry in college, seven of ten students had participated in an intensive service-orientation program called the First-Year Urban Program (FUP). Participants in this program spend each day working on service projects for Boston-area non-profit organizations and then gather together in the evenings to listen to speakers and participate in discussion groups on various issues of social justice and activism.

Previous research on the origins of social commitment has stressed the importance of moral exemplars and the trait of 'moral giftedness.' The surprisingly strong effect of this single 'framework experience' adds to our understanding of the roots of community service. The students in our sample arrived at college with an 'ethic of care' fostered in early life; but the weeklong immersion experience appears to have been crucial in converting this ethical orientation into a full commitment to service- work.

Introduction

Many valuable insights in the field of moral development have focused on moral exemplars (Colby and Damon, 1994) or the morally gifted (Michaelson, 2001). Colby and Damon (1994) define a moral exemplar as someone who exemplifies "what it means to be a highly moral person," and Michaelson (2001) describes moral giftedness as the performance of service that is both independent and far-reaching (p.27). Other research in this area also focuses on extraordinary moral reach, as captured in the Oliners' (1989) study of Holocaust rescuers, McAdam's (1988) study of Civil Rights activists and Moran and Gardner's (in press) work on extraordinary achievement.

My interest lies in the moral development of more "ordinary" service-workers: that is, young men and women committed to service-work and social justice whose actions might be classified as less heroic or far-reaching than those profiled by the aforementioned scholars. As a means of exploring this interest, I sought out undergraduates at Harvard College currently dedicating 10-20 hours a week to community service. I interviewed these students in order to learn more about the values and prior experiences that have led them to dedicate so much time to

community service. From this work, I have developed a model describing one pathway along which a commitment to service-work and social justice can develop in more "ordinary" young service-workers.

As background to my study, I review the major relevant lines of research, each of which delineates a predictable sphere of influence. Studies by Teske (1997) and Rosenhan (1970) have found that adult activists often come from families in which their parents were also activists. Likewise, a study by Clary, Gil and Miller (1986) noted that adults whose altruism is intrinsically motivated have typically been raised by altruistic parents whereas adults whose altruism is more situational tend to have less altruistic parents. Studies by Fischman (1999) and Fischman et al (1999) have found other adult role models to play an important role in the development of committed service-workers as well. Specifically, several of the young community service-workers studied by Fischman (1999) pointed to adult role models who had inspired their commitment to service. This role-model was often the organizer of the young person's community service activity. Similarly, a number of the Albert Schweitzer Fellows—graduate students in health and human services who participate in year-long community service projects in the United States and Africa—pointed to professors and health workers as mentor figures who had inspired and encouraged their commitment to service work (Fischman et al, 1999).

A major study by the Gallup organization (Hodgkinson et al, 1990) notes that schools have a major impact on the extent to which adolescents engage in service. The study found that 52% of the 301 teenagers included in the survey cited their school as providing them with their initial opportunity to participate in community service. Research by Fitch (1987, 1991) and Johnson et al (1998) on college students who engage in volunteer work has also revealed that

involvement patterns in community service are typically established prior to college. In other words, both research teams found that the majority of college students engaged in community service had participated in service experiences as children or adolescents.

Religious faith has also been found to play a role in children and adolescents' involvement in service. Damon et al (2003) report that adolescents who express commitment to a particular cause typically describe themselves as religious. The aforementioned Gallup Survey (Hodgkinson et al, 1990) found that 62% of the teenagers in the survey who described themselves as religious reported participating in some form of community service. In contrast, only 44% of the teenagers in the survey who described themselves as not religious reported participating in some form of community service. Finally, Fischman et al (1999) observed that nearly all of the Albert Schweitzer Fellows described their faith as the "foundation" of their commitment to service work. This study of the Albert Schweitzer Fellows also revealed that a number of the Fellows described early "transformative experiences" as having impacted their commitment to service-work. For example, one of the Fellows described a trip to Haiti with his parents at the age of eight in which he encountered tremendous poverty for the first time. Another Fellow's commitment to working with AIDS patients grew out of the experience of losing a close friend to the disease. These experiences fueled both of these Fellows' commitment to doing medical work in developing countries.

In short, the existing scholarship describes factors such as parents, role models and transformative experiences to play a key role in the development of a young person's commitment to service and activism. Likewise, a review of the literature on moral exemplars (Colby and Damon, 1994) and moral giftedness (Michaelson, 2001) confirms that many people who go on to become activists or service workers have had a particularly intensive experience

within one of these aforementioned categories. For example, the children of activists might be said to have had a particularly intensive exposure to social issues and activism through their parents, thereby increasing the likelihood of these children growing up to become activists themselves (McAdam, 1988; Rosenhan, 1970; Teske, 1997). Likewise, as noted above, one of the Schweitzer Fellows described in Fischman et al's study (1999) describes the intensive transformative experience of watching a close friend die of AIDS. For the men and women described by these scholars, it seems accurate to argue that one of these factors—in these cases, parental influence and transformative experience, respectively— played a primary role in shaping the values and work that these people took on as adults.

In contrast to these earlier findings, the middle and upper-middle class college students included in this sample were raised in quiet suburban communities and typically did *not* experience such intensive exposure to any of the factors that have been found by researchers to impact commitment to service. Rather, the messages and values about service work transmitted to these young people by their parents, role-models, service experiences, and so forth are less clear-cut and, as a result, their impact more muted. However, each of the ten students in this sample *has* chosen in college to commit substantial amounts of time to service-work. The existing scholarship seems to offer little insight into what experiences and motivations lead these types of young adults from more "ordinary" backgrounds—by which I mean backgrounds lacking an intensive exposure to any of the aforementioned factors—to develop into committed service workers. I began this study in order to fill in this gap in the literature. More specifically, I offer in this paper a model for understanding the pathway along which these young adults from more "ordinary" backgrounds develop into committed service workers.

Methods

My sample in this study consisted of ten current undergraduates at Harvard College. These students were initially identified through their volunteer work with the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter, a student-run homeless shelter operated in Cambridge just a block away from the Harvard University campus. However, for a number of these students, their involvement with the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter was just one of several community service projects in which they participated. Other projects in which students in this sample were involved included prisoner education, tutoring of urban youth and homeless advocacy work.

All ten of the students in this sample devote between ten to twenty hours a week to community service, and all ten described their families as belonging to the middle or upper-middle class. Nine of these students described the communities in which they had grown up as suburban, and one student described his hometown as rural. Nine of the students were born and raised in the United States, and one was born and raised in a small town in British Columbia, Canada.

An effort was made to develop a diverse sample of students in terms of gender, race, religion and age. Towards this end, five of the students in the sample were male, and five were female. Five of the students were white, three were Asian, one was Middle Eastern, and one was Latina. Five of the students described their religious affiliation as Christian, two as Catholic, one as Jewish, one described herself as currently "questioning" her Christianity, and one claimed no religious affiliation. Seven of the students were seniors, one was a junior, and two were sophomores.

All ten of these students participated in forty-five minute to one hour semi-structured interviews in which they were asked to reflect upon the values, experiences, and influences that

had led to their participation in their current service projects. The development and refinement of my interview protocol (See Appendix A) was aided by feedback from faculty and graduate students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In the protocol that emerged from these discussions, the college-student volunteers were first asked to describe the service projects in which they were currently engaged and to reflect upon their motivation for becoming involved and remaining committed to this work. Students were asked to describe the influence upon their commitment to service-work of parents, role-models, religious faith, prior hardship, early service experiences, and other factors that have been identified by scholars as influencing commitment to service-work. Students were also asked to describe their families, communities and primary and secondary schools and to reflect upon the impact of each in motivating their commitment to service-work. Finally, students were asked to reflect upon the values they held that distinguished them from college students who do *not* participate in any form of service-work.

Each of these ten interviews was tape recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews were then coded in order to seek out commonalities and patterns in these students' varied experiences, beliefs and backgrounds. All ten students are referred to in this paper by pseudonyms.

Results

I demonstrate here that the factors described in the existing scholarship on commitment to service-work—parents, adult role models, religious faith, early service experiences, prior hardship, and transformative experiences—cannot fully explain the commitment to service-work of this sample's middle and upper-middle class, suburban college-student volunteers. My results do, however, reveal the presence of a common experience—a framework experience—shared by

most of the students in this sample that is crucial to understanding these and other young adults'

development of a commitment to service-work.

Influence of Parents

Four of the college-student volunteers in this sample described their parents as fully

supportive of their commitment to service work while six of the students interviewed described

their parents' support as more ambivalent. Of those four students whose parents fully supported

their service-work, two of these students—Sarah and Maria—described one of their parents as

pursuing service-related professions themselves: a director for a major international relief

organization and a caseworker for the homeless mentally ill, respectively. Two other students—

Ty and Eric—described their parents, while not directly participating in service-work

themselves, as actively encouraging their children's commitment to service. For example, Ty

explained, "My parents encourage me…and all the volunteering I do, they are supportive of. I

also volunteer at the prison. And they would never say like, 'Oh, do you feel comfortable there?'

They would just say, 'That's really great that you're doing that.'" In contrast to Ty, six other

students in this study described their parents' support of their children's commitment to service-

work as more ambivalent. For example, Esther explained the following:

> My dad writes a check every month to a charity. He really does believe in helping people.
> But….I think a lot of times my parents have been really disappointed in the time I have
> chosen to do public service. They know where I am 80% of the time and it's not in
> class…I think my parents do believe in service, but they don't believe in it taking
> precedence over your personal life.

In these words, one can see how Esther's parents have both encouraged and discouraged her

desire to invest time in performing service. Another student, Craig, explained, "My parents

actually said, when I first told them that I wanted to start doing these sorts of things, their

immediate reaction was, 'No, you need to study [sic] on your schoolwork.'" However, Craig also credits his parents with instilling in him the belief that, "You have certain obligations to the rest of society." Like Esther, Craig has received both positive and negative messages from his parents about his commitment to service-work.

It is interesting to note that, of the four students in this sample whose parents fully supported their children's volunteer work, two of these students had parents who could be classified as service workers themselves. It would seem, then, that this study supports the findings of earlier researchers that activists are likely to have children who grow up to be activists themselves. At the same time, however, the responses of the other students in this sample suggest that there is also a reluctance on the part of non-activist parents to see their college-age children commit themselves whole-heartedly to service-work. It seems possible that this finding has been overlooked in previous studies by virtue of focusing on activists and service-workers many years removed from their college experience. What one can see in the responses of these students, however, is that the majority of the students in this sample received *both* supportive and unsupportive messages from their parents about their commitment to service work.

Influence of Adult Role Models

The students included in this sample also diverged from the findings of other researchers (Fischman, 1999; Fischman et al, 1999) in their description of the *limited* impact of non-parental adult role models upon their development of a commitment to service-work. Specifically, only one of the students in this sample, Maria, could point to a non-parental adult who had played an

important role in encouraging or modeling a commitment to service. In describing the director of a soup kitchen at which she works during the summer, Maria explained,

> My boss, there, Lucy, is the program director.…And Lucy is also a person who used to do consulting and switched jobs after September 11th. So, [I admire her as] somebody, who could take that much control of her life and really externalize what she was thinking in terms of actual action.

For Maria, this mentor figure has unquestionably played an important role in strengthening her commitment to service. The other nine students in the sample, however, were unable to describe a non-parental adult whom they saw as having played a role in their desire to perform community service. This result is somewhat surprising given the numerous references to role models and mentors offered by the young community service workers and medical students in the studies by Fischman (1999) and Fischman et al (1999). However, it should be noted that five of the students in this sample *were* able to point to an older college student whose commitment to service-work they regarded as impressive and inspirational. For example, Kelly explained that,

> There's people [here at college] who took a year off and spent it in Africa…teaching sex ed and different things, like amazing things people have done because they have so much love for—I don't know—compassion for other people. It definitely is an inspiration to meet certain people like that.

Four of the five students who could point to upperclassmen role models had first encountered these older students through a program called the "First-Year Urban Program" (See Results Section below). For the majority of students in this sample, then, it was older college students, rather than adults, who served as role models.

Influence of Religious Faith

While religious faith, too, has been cited by researchers (Damon, 2003; Fischman, 1999; Hodgkinson et al, 1990) as a major factor influencing the development of a commitment to

service-work, the majority of students in this sample described in more ambiguous terms the impact of their faith upon their commitment to service. Of the eight students in this sample who described themselves as belonging to a particular faith, only two, Eric and Bonnie, described their faith as the primary factor influencing their commitment to service. Eric offers the following explanation:

> My motivation to get involved in service has a lot to do with my faith, too. There's a passage—I think it's in Luke—where it says that to whom much is given, much is expected or something like that. And also all the places where Jesus says, you know, you saw me hungry and thirsty and gave me things to eat and drink.

Bonnie, likewise, notes that service is "almost like the central part of Christianity….You can't understand who God is without understanding His heart for the poor and stuff." For both Eric and Bonnie, their faith has played a central role in their commitment to service.

Other students, such as Jeff, however, see the impact of their faith as more subtle. Jeff explains, "Consciously, I don't think I've ever gone out and said, you know I'm doing my Christian duty here, but I do feel that my upbringing with, you know, sort of steeped in Christian values, definitely played a role [in my commitment to service]." Several of the other students in this sample described the impact of their faith upon their desire to do service as even more complex. For example, Esther explained the following:

> It is kind of interesting actually because I am pretty religious but I rarely ever directly connect religion and service…I am Christian. And so inherent in Christian philosophy is a belief in charity, in that you have a responsibility to love your neighbors, yourself, do to others, as you want them to do to you….It is a really great philosophy and I like it a lot, but there is also inherently in it a certain form of condescension in that I don't see the church as viewing service in the way that I view it…I don't like the word charity because it predisposes differences in status and differences in intelligence. I don't like that.

Another student, Louis, explained the following:

> I feel like there are very clear models in scripture of what justice means and what it means to reach out and serve. But I do feel that those pictures are limited in some ways

which is why I feel like activism is important; not that there aren't pictures of activists in scripture, but…I sort of feel like it (the Bible's depiction of service) is necessary but not sufficient.

For both Esther and Louis, their faith has clearly played a role in influencing their desire to do service-work, but both express reservations about the depictions of service in their respective faiths. Previous studies examining the relationship between service and faith have tended to note merely that a high percentage of service-workers describe their faith as central to their commitment to this work. It is unclear whether the complexity with which several of the student-volunteers in this sample regard the impact of their faith on their commitment to service-work was also present—but not described—in these other studies, or whether perhaps college students are at a particularly sensitive age for reflecting upon and questioning the tenets of their respective faiths.

It seems important to note here that while eight of the students in this sample describe themselves as belonging to a particular faith which has influenced their commitment to service to varying degrees, only two, Eric and Bonnie, put forth their religious faith as the primary factor motivating their commitment to service. Interestingly, these two students share similar explanations for how their faith has impacted their commitment to service. Eric explains the following:

> Another big thing that has changed my perspective [on service] was a Bible study I did freshman year through the International Justice Mission…that sort of examined some of the horrible things that are happening in the world, and God's heart for justice, and how we sort of reconcile those two, and what our role as Christians were in sort of helping to reconcile that. So, that was a big perspective changer….I knew that my faith was personally important to me when I was in high school, but coming to college—it was sort of [a shift from] this 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.

Bonnie, too, cites a Bible study she participated in during her freshman year of college that influenced her commitment to service and activism. She explains,

> I was a Christian all through high school, but I think we didn't, like, just—in the church, we didn't talk very much about issues of social justice, and I think, like being at Harvard, a lot of the churches in the area, and also I'm in Lacieve (a Bible Study)—we talk a lot more about those issues and like looking at – like our heart for the poor and the oppressed, and just like doing Bible studies on that—like it wasn't something I had heard before…It's almost like a central part of Christianity that I don't think was emphasized to me before.

While for both Eric and Bonnie, faith was clearly an important part of their lives prior to college, it was their participation in social justice-oriented Bible studies that leads them now to cite faith as the primary influence behind their commitment to service work.

Influence of Early Service Experiences

This study confirmed the findings of previous scholars (Fitch, 1987, 1991; Hodgkinson et al, 1987; Johnson et al, 1998) that young adults engaged in community service had already participated in service opportunities through their primary and secondary schools. All ten of the students in this sample had participated in some form of community service during high school, and nine described established programs in their high schools such as Key Clubs, National Honor Society, or Environmental Clubs that provided opportunities to participate in service. These community service opportunities included the following: soup kitchen volunteer, Meals on Wheels, walks for hunger, visiting the elderly in nursing homes, canned food drives, the Special Olympics, Amnesty International, tutoring, peer court, beach cleaning, and so on. Two students, Sarah and Craig, founded their own community service programs in high school—a local chapter of Amnesty International and a Student Hunger Initiative, respectively. For only one student, Kelly, was participation in community service a graduation requirement.

All ten of the students in this sample considered opportunities for community service in high school to be a good idea. Echoing the comments of several other students, Sarah suggested that service has tremendous potential to impact high school students:

> A lot of kids come into high school straight from middle school and elementary school sort of being like, "Who the hell am I?" And, then, they fall into something like band, and, then, they become a band geek and always hanging out in the band room. And that's how their personality develops while they're there. But if there are more service opportunities, they'd be that group of kids that worked at the homeless shelter, and that would totally affect who they are at least while they're at high school and probably for the rest of their lives.

Despite this unanimous support for service opportunities in high school, eight of the students in this sample also offered criticisms of their school's attempts to engage students in community service. Esther expressed a concern echoed by several other students in the sample when she explained the following:

> I did my three hours every month [to remain in Key Club] and I had a good time…but I think part of it is I never really thought about why I was doing it. It was kind of like going through the motions… Nobody really challenged me to confront why I did public service, or what I could be doing better.

Similarly, Louis described his participation in a program called "Youth Engaging in Service" with the observation that, "You had to have 100 hours before graduation and you could get a certificate. But it was very much, kind of, results oriented. Tell me the number of hours you did. What did you do? Kind of looking at service in terms of some kind of mechanism." Craig suggested that his school's community service coordinator "didn't have a feel for what kinds of activities students would enjoy doing. So she had us every week going to this nursing home, which most students just are not interested in. So people would join the group, and then they would leave after a week." Finally, Bonnie explained,

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> I was in a volunteer program. We did like service days, and like they were good, but they weren't—I didn't necessarily change. I think I did them—not necessarily just to put on my transcript or resume or whatever you call it, getting into college but like…I don't think I really understood the reasons why.

In short, then, while virtually all of the students in this sample took advantage of community service opportunities offered by their high schools, they also criticized the meaningfulness of these opportunities. In fact, the only student in this sample who described his early service experiences as important and meaningful was Craig, the student who, frustrated by the lack of opportunities offered by his high school, took the initiative to form and lead his own student service organization.

Influence of Prior Hardship

Previous studies have found a high percentage of service-workers to have experienced some type of hardship in childhood or adolescence that then played a role in motivating their commitment to improving the lives of others (Fischman et al, 1999). However, none of the students in the sample described prior hardship as a motivation for their desire to perform service. Perhaps closest to this 'hardship' factor is that two students in this sample, Kelly and Ty, described the economic diversity of their high school student bodies as having played a role in their recognition of societal inequity and the need for service-work. As Kelly explained, "There's [sic] people in my high school that were pregnant when they were sixteen. Like they could have been in the same situation as the people I'm helping [at the Shelter]; whereas some people have never seen anything like it and don't understand what it is to come from that." Likewise, Ty noted the following:

> I have always gone to public schools that have had a lot of economic diversity. A lot of my friends who went to private schools, at the high school level, are really, really

insensitive to the fact that there are poor people in the world. Sometimes they forget that
there are poor people in the world, or they tend to just think if you're poor, you deserve to
be poor. And if you didn't go to school with kids who are poor, it's easy to forget that
being poor has a lot to do with your parents being poor which has maybe, a lot to do with
their parents being poor. So just being surrounded by that kind of diversity helps.

For both Kelly and Ty, witnessing the hardships experienced by high school peers seems to have

played a role in influencing their commitment to service. However, for neither of these students

was this factor a particularly intensive one. Neither student was describing personal experience

with hardship, but merely the experiences of other students with whom they had attended high

school.

Influence of Transformative Experiences

Also absent from the responses of the majority of the students in this sample were

descriptions of transformative experiences. Fischman et al (1999) define a transformative

experience as a single, life-changing event occurring early in life that "expands perceptions and

later influences [one's] philosophy of work" (p.4). Fischman et al (1999) cite as examples of

such experiences an adult service-worker influenced by the loss of his best friend to AIDS as

well as another service-worker's witnessing at a young age the abject poverty in Haiti. While

none of the college student-volunteers in this sample described such intensive experiences, two

of these students did describe experiences that might be called somewhat transformative. Craig,

the student who in high school founded and led his own student service organization, described

himself in high school coming across a brochure for a Walk for Hunger:

> [Finding that brochure] started getting the wheels turning…I guess I thought it would be
> worthwhile, so I organized a group to go. And I found that very rewarding, so then I did
> it again the next year. Then after that what I did was I, well I found it rewarding to bring
> groups to the Walk for Hunger, and I really wanted to do something a little bit bigger, a
> little bit more, something that I would feel like I was more personally in control. So I

started a group of students. We called ourselves the Student Hunger Initiative, and through that we applied for grants, we made presentations at other schools, and ultimately we organized our own walk.

Craig credits spotting that brochure with starting him down the path towards becoming involved in homeless issues. In addition to his fundraising work in high school and volunteer work at the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter, he has spent a summer working with the Coalition for Homelessness in San Francisco. Another student in the sample, Jeff, described as transformative the "year off" he spent in between high school and college working for a social service agency near his hometown that served adults with disabilities. In his words,

> That was sort of my eye-opening experience and sort of you know, the contrast between the way I was living in high school and the way these people were living.…And it wasn't just their disabilities that sort of affected me. It was really Fall River and a lot of the poor neighborhoods and sort of, the way that society had sort of shelved these people in a lot of ways that was sort of disturbing.

For both of these students, these experiences seem to have played a role in influencing their commitment to service. And, yet, it also seems fair to classify these "transformative experiences" as not in the same category of intensity or impact as those described by the Schweitzer Fellows in Fischman et al's (1999) study.

Influence of The First-Year Urban Program (FUP)

Perhaps related to—but, I argue, distinct from— the subject of transformative experiences was an unexpected commonality that seven of the ten students in this sample shared: namely, their participation in Harvard's First-Year Urban Program (referred to as FUP hereafter). It seems important to note here that I made no attempt in creating this sample of college-student volunteers to choose students who had participated in this program, nor were there any specific

questions in the interview protocol that asked students whether or not they had participated in this program or what they had gotten out of it. However, seven of the students in this sample had, in fact, participated in FUP, and each of these students raised the topic themselves in describing experiences that have impacted their commitment to service-work.

As explained by one of the students in the sample, FUP is a four day "service orientation program" that takes place along with camping, arts and international student orientation programs in the week prior to Harvard's regular first-year orientation week. All four programs are organized and run entirely by Harvard College upperclassmen. Incoming first-year students apply to participate in all four programs, and a student in this sample who had gone on to play a leadership role in FUP explained that the program's steering committee seeks to accept a group of ninety incoming first-year students who have varying amounts of community service experience. According to the program's website, participants spend each day working in teams on projects for Boston-area non-profit organizations and then gather together in the evenings to listen to speakers and participate in discussion groups based on a reading packet that is mailed to participants prior to their arrival on campus. Included in the 2004 reading packet were excerpts from writers such as Barbara Ehrenreich, Robert Coles, Jonathon Kozol and Peter Singer (www.hcs.harvard.edu/~fup, 2004).

In explaining the impact of her participation in FUP, Esther offered the following explanation:

> The most important part of FUP is the discussions, and the issues that are brought to light….I was so angry when I read about stories about prisons and about how people are treated, and how in many ways the system is wrong and no one is doing anything about it….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 we don't even think about. And FUP made me really, really angry. I left FUP saying oh my gosh, I really have to do something.

Several other students in this sample echoed Esther's sentiments in describing the way in which

FUP served to open their eyes to previously unnoticed societal inequity. Bonnie, for example,

admitted that, "Growing up in suburbia, like I didn't really have that much exposure to issues of

social justice, and it wasn't until I did FUP my freshman year that I actually like thought

about…how hard it is to break out of the cycle of poverty." Likewise, Eric described FUP as a

"mind-expanding experience" that was "revelatory… about the extent to which things that I

didn't even know were problems are problems, or how deeply rooted some of the problems are."

Other students in this sample described FUP's impact upon them in related but distinct

ways. For example, Louis explained the following:

> Before FUP…I'd say that I was taught to think about community service as an extracurricular activity, as something that would just enrich your high school experience, something that clubs did when they weren't doing their primary activity. It was not presented as a framework of thinking. And, I think, that's what FUP really did for me. I saw people that were integrating their studies and their service, their activism, and how they engage with this community….And it was just really powerful for me.

For Louis, FUP helped him to see how service could be not simply one isolated aspect of his life

but rather a value system that influences his activities, coursework and career choices. Another

student in the sample, Sarah, who had founded and led a chapter of Amnesty International during

high school, explained that FUP "gave me a new perspective on why it's important to think

about why I do service because I guess I just hadn't thought that people do service for different

reasons. And, then, after hearing why other people did service, it was, sort of, like, I should

analyze why I do service." Sarah acknowledged that she could now articulate *why* she valued

service in a way that she would not have been able to prior to participating in FUP. For each of

these students, then, their participation in FUP played an important role in strengthening their

commitment to service and activism. Later, I explain my belief that experiences such as FUP

serve as "framework experiences" that can play a crucial role in the development of a commitment to service-work in young adults, and I offer a model proposing how such development occurs.

Discussion

The scholarship on moral development has found factors such as one's parents, religious faith, early service experiences, exposure to adult role models, experiences of prior hardship and transformative experiences to play a role in the development of young adults' commitment to service-work and social justice. However, this scholarship has tended to focus on activists and service-workers who have had particularly intensive experiences in one or more of these areas: for example, a child who grew up with activist parents (McAdams, 1988; Rosenhan, 1970; Teske, 1997) or a teenager motivated to become a doctor after watching a close friend die of AIDS (Fischman et al, 1999). By contrast, in my research, virtually none of these students could point to one of these categories as having played a *primary* role in the development of their commitment to service. Rather, one might say that these students' respective families, faiths, and early service experiences instilled in them what Noddings (2002) refers to as an "ethic of care" for the well-being of others and perhaps even *predisposed* them to develop a commitment to service and social justice. However, for seven of the ten students in this sample, I suggest that transforming this predisposition into a firm commitment to service-work was a framework experience such as FUP.

A framework experience is an experience that shapes an individual's view of community and the role that he or she can assume within that community. Unlike a transformative experience, a framework experience is typically an event that occurs not in moments or hours,

but rather over weeks or months. Also, while a transformative experience as described by Fischman et al (1999) seems to first impact one's emotions and then, later, one's worldview, a framework experience works in the reverse—first causing a shift in one's worldview, followed potentially by an emotional response to this shift. My argument, then, is that for a majority of the students in this sample, their development of a genuine "ethic of care" (Noddings, 2002) first sprouted through the influence of parents, religious doctrine, early service experiences, and so on—thereby implanting in these students a *predisposition* for commitment to service-work. However, it was these students' unanticipated participation in a framework experience that led to the development of a worldview in which service-work came to be seen as important, meaningful, and, for many of these students, a moral obligation. In short, a framework experience transformed these students' generalized care for others and a predisposition for performing service-work into a firm *commitment* to service and social responsibility. My claim, then, is that a framework experience can serve as an important step in the development of a commitment to service-work and social justice for people who have not had particularly intensive experiences within any of the categories cited by researchers as catalytic to moral development. This developmental model (See Figure 1), then, represents a pathway towards commitment to service-work for what might be called people from more "ordinary" backgrounds than those typically studied by moral development scholars.

Let us look more closely at the framework experiences of students within this sample. For six of the students in this sample—Eric, Jeff, Bonnie, Louis, Sarah, and Esther—their participation in FUP seemed to serve as a powerful framework experience. These students described their participation in FUP as "mind-expanding," "revelatory," "powerful" and "amazing" in providing them with a new framework for looking at the world and their role in it.

They talked about never having realized prior to FUP how "oppression permeates our lives," the existence of a "cycle of poverty," and "how deeply rooted some of the problems are." For these students, the impact of the First-Year Urban Program extended far beyond its week-long duration. As Bonnie explains, "I feel like during that week, I didn't necessarily—it wasn't like a life-changing experience—it's like over the process of the past two years, like processing it, I feel like has been what's been really powerful."

As might be expected, FUP isn't the only example of a framework experience that can be found within this study. Recall that both Eric and Bonnie described their participation in social justice-oriented Bible Studies that served a similar function—providing a framework for examining "some of the horrible things that are happening in the world…and what our role as Christians were in sort of helping to reconcile that." Moreover, it seems reasonable to conclude that an academic course could serve as a framework experience as well, though only one student in this sample, Eric, described an academic course as influencing his commitment to service. Eric described a course he took in the fall of his freshman year offered by Harvard's Religion Department entitled "Personal Choice and Global Transformation." Enrolling more than 300 students and nicknamed "Idealism 101," the course featured a series of interviews with "people who had done interesting or significant things with their lives." As Eric explained, "It wasn't all that thematic or academic in a sense, but it was inspirational and sort of allowed people to think broadly about what they wanted to see happen in the world, which I think there should probably be a place for that in the University." Similar to FUP and social justice-oriented Bible studies, such a course seems to hold the potential to serve as a framework experience for its participants.

Let me turn now to the three students— Ty, Craig, and Kelly—who did not participate in FUP, a justice-oriented Bible Study or Idealism 101 in order to understand how these students'

experiences fit into the proposed developmental model. Ty is an interesting case in that he revealed through his interview that he had effectively developed his own framework experience. A philosophy major who plans to pursue a doctorate upon graduating from college, Ty explained that, following high school, "I just started thinking about my life in a more philosophical way." And, in fact, Ty stood out from the other students in the sample in his use of philosophy to explain his commitment to service. In his words, "I mean, I'm an egalitarian…someone who believes that income and wealth should be distributed equally. Or, maybe, that differences in income and wealth just aren't justified." As one can see here, Ty, too, has undergone a framework experience, though in a somewhat different form than the other students in the sample. For Ty, this framework experience seems to have been a more solitary one than is typical, based more on his own personal reading and thinking than through group reflection or activities.

Craig and Kelly, on the other hand, seem to be students who have not yet experienced any type of framework experience. How then does one explain their commitment to service and social responsibility? One explanation for Craig is that he may be one of the few students in this sample who had a particularly intensive experience in one of the categories that scholars have found to influence a later commitment to service and social justice; namely, in high school, Craig founded and led a student organization called the Student Hunger Initiative that organized several successful fundraisers for Boston-area homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Perhaps, then, Craig's early service experiences were sufficiently intense that he did not need to participate in a framework experience in order to solidify his commitment to service-work. It also seems noteworthy that, of the ten students in the sample, Craig is the only one whose actions might be deemed sufficiently "independent" and "far-reaching" to meet Michaelson's (2001)

criteria for moral giftedness. Perhaps Craig's pathway towards commitment to service work simply follows a different developmental model than that of the other students in this sample. That said, Craig was unique among the students in this sample for his difficulty in articulating *why* he felt committed to doing service-work. He vacillated during the interview in responding to questions on this topic, raised the subject again after the interview had concluded and then contacted me later that evening via email to amend his response once again. It seems possible that Craig's difficulty in articulating his commitment to service-work may be the result of having not participated in a framework experience similar to that of his peers.

Like Craig, Kelly seems not to have participated in a framework experience, and Kelly was notable among the students in this sample as the only student who spoke of planning to lessen her commitment to service-work. Like several of the students in this sample, Kelly spoke of her parents' concerns that she was spending too much time performing community service and that it was unsafe for her to spend the night in a homeless shelter. Despite Kelly's explanation that, "I feel completely comfortable at the shelter," she later noted that she had agreed to stop working the overnight shift at the shelter due to her parents' concerns. While this claim cannot be made with any certainty, it does seem reasonable to speculate that Kelly's participation in a framework experience might have left her less willing to compromise her commitment to service-work in the face of her parents' (in her opinion, unfounded) concerns for her safety.

If one accepts the "Framework Experience" model as a potentially valid developmental model for the majority of college student-volunteers included in this sample, then this model seems capable of making sense of several other aspects of this study's findings. Recall that eight of the students in this sample criticized the meaningfulness of their high school service opportunities in comparison to those they have taken advantage of in college. While many of

these students' criticisms are likely valid, it also seems possible that it is these students as much as their service opportunities that have changed since entering college. More specifically, it seems plausible that these students' framework experiences and resulting commitment to service-work have led them to regard their current service experiences through a different lens than the one through which they viewed their high school service experiences. For example, Jeff says of his work at the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter, "I've been blessed in a lot of ways, and I feel like it's sort of an obligation to give back in whatever small sense that is, [even] if it's washing dishes for a couple hours on a Friday evening and hanging out and talking." It seems possible that, prior to his framework experience, Jeff may not have regarded washing dishes as meaningful work; however, his participation in FUP (i.e. his framework experience) provided him with a perspective on how his small act of washing dishes contributed to a greater struggle against what he referred to as "systemic injustice." In other words, had Jeff been asked to wash dishes at a homeless shelter during high school—prior to his framework experience—he may well have criticized this opportunity as unengaging and unmeaningful.

It also seems reasonable to speculate that the dearth of students in this sample able to name adult role models may be linked to framework experiences. More specifically, it seems notable that, while only one student in this sample could name an adult role model, four of the students in this sample cited as role models the upperclassmen they met during their framework experience. And, in fact, the one student who did name an adult role model had encountered this role model in the summer *following* her participation in FUP. One might speculate, then, that young adults have a propensity to identify as role models the people who have played a role in bringing about their framework experience and that, moreover, young adults are less likely to encounter such a role model prior to the framework experience. Such a possibility is quite

intuitive in that a young person seems unlikely to regard as a role model an adult whose commitment is to a field for which that young person him or herself is not similarly committed or in the process of becoming similarly committed. For example, a young person might admire the brilliance of, say, an architect such as Frank Lloyd Wright, but, if that young person is not interested in pursuing a career in the field of architecture, he or she seems unlikely to regard Wright as a plausible role model.
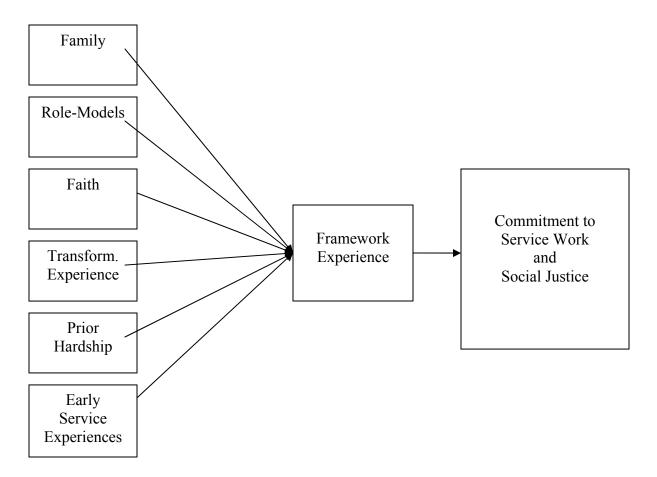
Conclusion

In this paper I have developed a preliminary model that suggests how a framework experience can fit into the process of a young adult's development of a commitment to service and social justice. I do not mean to suggest that this model describes the pathway along which *all* adults and young adults committed to service-work and social justice have traveled. However, I do suggest that the framework experience may be an important developmental opportunity for students similar to those in this sample—students in whom an "ethic of care" (Noddings, 2002) has been fostered through the influence of parents, role-models, faith, early service experiences, and so forth. For such students, a meaningful framework experience may dramatically impact the pathway along which these students choose to travel in the near future.

Figure 1

"Framework Experience" Model for Development of Social Responsibility

**Early non-intensive experiences
in one or more of these areas results
in a general "ethic of care" and a
predisposition for commitment to
service-work.**

Family

Role-Models

Faith

| Transform.
Experience |
| --- |

| Prior
Hardship |
| --- |

| Early
Service
Experiences |
| --- |

| Framework
Experience |
| --- |

| Commitment to
Service Work
and
Social Justice |
| --- |

Appendix A

Interview Protocol:

1. Could you describe your weekly responsibilities at the Shelter?

2. About how many hours a week would you say you commit to the Shelter?

3. How does the amount of time you spend doing work for your program impact other aspects of your life?

4. How do you feel about this impact?

5. How would you say that volunteering at the Shelter has affected you?

> -outlook on the world?
> -values?

6. What would you say you've learned through your work at the shelter?

7. What first motivated you to begin volunteering at the Shelter?

8. What particular values motivated you to start volunteering?

9. Where do you think you acquired these values?

10. What particular experiences that have occurred in your life do you believe may have played a role in your development of these values?

> -Support of family?
> -Mentors?
> -Peers?
> -Organizations/activities?
> -Curriculum/coursework/books/readings?

11. What percentage of undergraduates would you guess participate in community service to the extent that you do?

12. Do you think that other undergraduates participating in service are motivated by similar values as yourself?

13. Why do you think some students choose not to participate in community service?

14. Where did you grow up? What was it like there?

15. How would you describe your school?

16. What opportunities were there for participating in community service?

17. Did you participate in these opportunities? Why or why not?

18. How does your family feel about your involvement in the Shelter?

19. How does your faith play a role in your commitment to service work?

20. How has your desire to participate in community service been influenced by your time at Harvard?

21. Is there anything else you feel I should know about your volunteer work at the shelter?

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