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Melissa James Ph.D. Candidate
Graduate Theological Union, james@gtu.edu

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Beyond the Binary: Exploring the Use of Culture in Lutheran Volunteer Corps Members' Understandings of Service and Justice

Melissa James, Ph.D. Candidate
Graduate Theological Union

Abstract

This paper examines the way Lutheran Volunteer Corps participants actively use culture to form understandings of service and justice. Using data from in-depth, qualitative interviews with ten volunteers, this paper argues that though almost all of the types of positions the volunteers hold are fields that are historically "women's work," the way volunteers make sense of their work extends beyond reification of gender norms. Using the theory of cultural repertoires of Ann Swidler, this paper shows how volunteers actively draw on available elements of the cultures that surround them to create understandings of "service" and "justice" that are simultaneously bounded by constructions of gender, race, and class as well fluid and flexible.

Introduction

Historically, work within religious organizations has been divided strongly along gendered lines and given different status and privilege. Undergirding this type of division are assumptions about what is considered "women's work" and what is considered "men's work." Language of service, servant, and servant hood provide a framework for the understanding of many types of work within the church that have historically been considered "women's work." Despite the fact that opportunities to participate in service-based ministry are open to individuals regardless of gender, the participants in such ministries continue to be predominantly women.

I will use cultural theory to explore how individuals in service-based work make meaning of service, work, and themselves. In her book, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, Ann Swidler examines culture in terms of how it is employed in

everyday life through what she calls a "repertoire of meaning" (Swidler, 2003). She notes that people do not necessarily *have* different amounts of cultural knowledge; rather, they *utilize* different levels or amounts of their cultural knowledge to make meaning of their world. In other words, it is not that individuals are more or less familiar with gender norms in a given context but that they actively emphasize, de-emphasize, and ignore elements of these norms to make sense of the work they do. I will employ cultural theory to look at meaning-making processes of contemporary individuals involved in work traditionally considered "women's work" who are currently participating in the Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC), a year-long service commitment through which young adults commit to living in intentional community and work in community-based organizations. LVC is also open to individuals regardless of gender and consists mainly of individuals who are in their first or second year out of college. While LVC is considered a pan-Lutheran organization, volunteers need not be Lutheran and, in fact, come from a wide variety of faith traditions. The LVC experience does not include intensive formation around concepts of service. Through in-depth interviews I will explore the volunteer's cultural repertoires and how they employ culture to make meaning of the work they do.

"This project examined the experiences of women who are involved in work that has been historically feminized and now falls under the umbrella of service."

This project examined the experiences of women who are involved in work that has been historically feminized and now falls under the umbrella of "service" work. I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with individuals who were a quarter of the way through a year-long volunteer commitment. By asking them about both their experiences and the meanings they held for terms they used to describe these experiences I found that these volunteers drew on a number of different concepts from their cultural repertoire that were influenced by multiple cultural loci.

Conceptual Framework

Since Carol Gilligan's seminal work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, there has been discussion about a binary between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan criticized Lawrence Kohlberg for developing a set of moral stages that was not only based solely on studying men but, as a result, resigned women to never reaching the highest stage of morality. Gilligan claimed that women were not, in fact, incapable of being fully morally developed as the test results of Kohlberg's studies suggested, but operate from a different type of moral development. As a result, Gilligan developed her own stages of morality which offered the alternative of an ethic of care to counter the dominant ethic of justice. The Kohlberg/Gilligan debate set up a binary between approaches to ethics labeled as justice ethics based in objectivity and rationality and those labeled as care ethics that focus on relationality and interdependence. As Sara Ruddik (1998) makes clear these two orientations are gendered with men being reason and justice focused and women being relational and caring. Gilligan argues that women are aligned with an ethic of care because of the way the feminine is constructed while men align with an ethic of justice being more concerned with large-scale worldly concerns. Gilligan sparked a sometimes intense dialogue which fostered decades of critique, rebuttal, and debate over whether or not women are innately different from men.

> "Intersectionality explains that individuals' understandings are influenced not only by their gender … but by other important identity elements such as class, race, and nationality."

What is important to highlight about her work is not the methodological or even theoretical merits, or lack thereof, of her work but the cultural narrative it captured which struck a chord with academics and non-academics alike and makes her a much-cited figure even today. In this narrative justice and care are set up as dichotomous. In other words, one operates either from an orientation based in reason and autonomy (a justice approach to ethics) *or* from an orientation based in relationships (care).

Much scholarship has engaged this and even challenged the binary of justice and care work. Some studies such as that of Karniol, Grosz, and Schorr

(Kamiol, Grosz, and Schorr, 2003) criticize the essentializing nature of Gilligan's theory by asserting that the connection to either "ethic" is connected not to one's assigned gender but one's gender role orientation.[1] Others suggest that there is overlap between justice and care such as argued by Orme (2002) who describes a more complicated, nuanced relationship between care and ethics in Social Work, itself an historically gendered field of work. The binary between these two unfortunately named ethics are insufficient when one takes cultural theory into account. Ann Swidler provides a much more agential understanding of one's use of culture which helps explain how women doing service are constructing their understandings. Intersectionality explains that individuals' understandings are influenced not only by their gender (though this is one important element) but by other important identity elements such as class, race, and nationality (Crenshaw, 2004).

To address the question of how women in service-based work make meaning of service, work, and themselves, I turn to Ann Swidler's concept of culture consisting of a "repertoire of meaning." Swidler takes on the task of examining culture in terms of how it is employed in everyday life. Contemporary views of culture, on which she draws and builds, share Clifford Geertz's understanding culture as "the set of symbolic vehicles through which such sharing and learning take place" yet differs from classic theory in that they recognize that we traverse many different sets of symbols (Swidler, 2003). Culture is varied in content; it is not one set of symbols from which people operate according to how much of the culture they have learned. Swidler demonstrates that we use culture for more things than simply explaining or communicating our thoughts and actions. Culture, she claims, also shapes who we are and how we act. In her study, Swidler found that understandings of "self" and the integration of culture were connected. When one's understanding of who one is was static (for

[1] See also the work of Virginia Held.

instance, she interviewed one woman who stated repeatedly that she was "happy" and had no need to reexamine a sense of self or sets of beliefs) culture tends to be less integrated. That is, the person will draw on cultural symbols less to form an understanding of the "self" as compared to others who are actively drawing in cultural symbols to help them become a certain kind of person that is in line with those symbols.

While foundational theorists of culture claim culture influences actions through shaping their *telos* through ideas (such as Weber), or shaping moods or ethos (ala Geertz), Swidler claims that culture, instead, shapes "strategies of actions." Strategies of action, defined as "ways actors routinely go about attaining their goals" (Swidler, 2003, p. 82) are more influential than goals. She characterizes strategies of actions as dependent upon culture, inherently social, and a part of a pattern of actions. Culture works on the level of "means" and not "ends" shaping our sense of selves, our routines, our understanding of the world, our habits, etc. These in turn shape what strategies are available to us to deal with the world around us.

"Culture, she claims, also shapes who we are and how we act."

There are two particular insights, however, that make Swidler's works particularly useful. First, Swidler's use of culture as a "repertoire" opens up the space to understand the role of culture in today's society when individuals are traversing multiple cultures. Understanding culture as something we employ as needed explains the ability of individuals to traverse the cultural overlap that is so characteristic of today's world such as the need of someone who is a minority with the knowledge of how to engage majority culture, or someone who is mulit-racial living at the nexus of multiple cultures. By recognizing multiple cultures present in any given society and within any given individual, Swidler also points us to the pervasiveness of the dominant culture and the ability individuals develop to navigate and employ elements of this culture even if by rejecting it. Finally, Swidler provides a helpful understanding of the role culture plays in actions. This is more compelling than understanding culture as shaping action by forming the

goals toward which we strive. While culture has an impact on those goals, merely having a goal does not necessarily result in action. Having elements of culture to draw upon as we navigate our daily lives, however, such as explained in Swidler's strategies of action explains the fluidity which people demonstrate in acting every day.

Swidler describes peoples' relationship to culture as different in settled versus unsettled periods. During unsettled times people tend to more actively analyze their use of culture. Because of this, participants in year-long volunteer programs are fantastic candidates to talk to about the use of culture to understand service and justice. Participants tend to be young adults in their first or second year out college (all of my respondents fit this description) which is a time of great transition. In addition, committing to one or two years (some re-up for a second year) they enter a time-bound commitment necessitating re-evaluation of next steps in their lives.

"…the meanings of symbols, particularly language, are not monolithic."

Swidler's concept of strategies of actions captures this process by explaining that "[p]eople do not build lines of actions from scratch, choosing actions one at a time as efficient means to given ends. Instead, they construct chains of action beginning with at least some prefabricated links. Culture influences action through the shape and organization of those links, not by determining the ends to which they are put" (Swidler, 1986, pp. 273-286). Swidler suggests people employ different elements of culture in patterns that are developed over time. Neither the elements individuals utilize nor the way they employ them are static and individuals often shift which parts of culture are being drawn on, sometimes mid-stream, in order to make sense of their world. The very symbols which capture the cultural meanings are created and afforded that meaning through an active and collective process. However, the meanings of symbols, particularly language, are not monolithic. Cognitive linguistics has shown us that one linguistic symbol can have many meanings and be employed in

multiple ways (Fauconnier, 1997). Respondents are actively constructing their understandings but they are not whole-cloth original ideas.

Methods

This research examined how individuals involved in different types of service work within the church make meaning of that work and their notions of service. Since the primary purpose of this research was to explore the way events and concepts are interpreted, that is to explore meaning-making processes, in-depth interviews best fit this study (Weiss, 1994). In addition, as a researcher I operate from a Feminist Ethical perspective that includes a commitment to making space for the stories and voices of traditionally marginalized groups. Though I am not strictly taking a narrative approach, interviews provide a venue for learning from the narratives of the women in the study.

"Respondents were not provided with terms such as service and justice or identity labels."

I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with ten of the sixteen volunteers participating in a year-long service program in the San Francisco Bay Area and two informants including a city coordinator for the program and a past member of a local support committee for a volunteer. In the following spring I conducted follow-up group interviews with seven of the volunteers. Of the ten respondents, nine identified as women, nine identified as "white" or "Caucasian," all were US citizens, and, per the requirements of the program, all had a Bachelor's degree. While not asked in either the interviews nor in a brief follow-up survey, three self-identified sexual orientation during the fall interviews (one as straight, one as queer, and one as gay) and three additional volunteers did so in the spring (one as bisexual, one as gay, and one as exploring).Volunteers commit to a year of living in intentional community with four to six other volunteers, working full-time at a community-based organization. Contact information for the volunteers and permission to contact the volunteers directly were given by the city director. Respondents were recruited through e-mail invitations to participate in interviewing. Respondents were then asked to "talk up" the interviews with their

housemates to encourage them to reply and schedule an interview. Interviews took place in various coffee shops close to either a volunteer's work placement or house and were arranged around their work schedule. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Respondents were asked questions about their childhood, family, involvement in school, church, and other community organizations through high school and college, career aspirations, and past involvement in service, volunteer or justice work. Respondents were not provided with terms such as "service" and "justice" or identity labels (i.e. liberal, conservative, feminist). Many of the respondents offered terms such as these and toward the end of the interviews, respondents were asked directly about the meaning or definition of key terms they used (i.e. service, justice, and empowerment) as well as the significance of their gender on their experiences. Interviews were transcribed and coded with an eye to metaphors, cultural symbols, and places of intentional formation.

"Volunteers commit to a year of living in intentional community with four to six other volunteers, working full-time at a community-based organization."

Interviews were conducted in public spaces which may have influenced the level of disclosure of the respondents; however, respondents seemed to speak freely and willingly shared stories of their past and present experiences. While response rate was high (75% agreed to interviews and 62.5% of the volunteers participated in interviews by the time of this paper), many of the volunteers who did not respond or complete interviews are from demographics that tend to be under-represented in the organization (namely people of color and men). Because of this, my sample is fairly representative of the majority demographic of the volunteers across the organization but leaves exploration of minority demographics for further research.

In a study conducted using conversational journals, Susan Cotts Watkins and Ann Swidler suggest one possible weakness of using more sociological and ethnographic methods such as surveys and interviews to explore meaning-making is that these tools miss the dynamic, everyday use of culture found in the interactions that make up people's lives as they actually create and negotiate

culture (Watkins and Swidler, 2009). Aware of this, however, in-depth interviews in which the respondents are asked to share many parts of their personal narrative and decision making processes allows for insight into part of the processes through which they make meaning.

Findings

Among the symbols respondents used to talk about their experiences and work were those of justice and service. Through appropriation as well as contestation, respondents were able to use these widely used linguistic symbols to make sense of their experiences, values, and choices. The meanings behind these words were not only publicly created and shared as a semiotic cultural analysis would suggest but were sites of cultural work. For the respondents, the symbols of "justice" and "service" became containers for their own understandings. The concepts they used to fill in the container of "service" and "justice" came from the cultural repertoires around them. I now turn to look at the cultural pieces respondents utilize to fill these containers and the varied and sometimes competing influences on those repertoires.

"For the respondents, the symbols of justice and service became containers for their own understandings."

Understandings of Social Justice

Respondents drew on a number of metaphors and concepts to talk about their work in and relation to social justice. One resounding theme in understanding social justice was that of equality. For instance, Julie, who grew up going to community organizing meetings with her mother, thought very carefully about what she meant by "social justice" before she offered "I guess, just social equality is what it means, and just, equal access and equal opportunities."

Included in the volunteers' understandings was the language predominant in the Kohlberg-Gilligan dichotomy of right and wrong which suggests they operate with at least a partially deontological understanding of justice. For instance, Emma, a volunteer from the Midwest working in fundraising, explains

that justice is based in "the very basic sense of right and wrong." However, she continues by explaining that her sense of right and wrong is founded on a belief "that things shouldn't be so unfair for people." Like other volunteers, her understanding of justice was layered and included more than one frame of analysis. Mixed in with the language of right and wrong, she drew on the metaphor of being a part of a "human family living together." The metaphor of family and other metaphors which connoted connectedness were a common theme in the respondent' understandings of justice. For instance, Annie, a 23-year-old volunteer in her second year of the program, talks about an immersion trip to Mexico in terms of having the opportunity to learn about the people there because she didn't "know how that branch of the family lives." Annie is particularly fond of using metaphors to inform her commitment to social justice. What is fascinating about Annie's engagement with metaphors, and thus merits an extended quote, is the way she draws on multiple metaphors to formulate her understanding:

"I call it 'Tightening the Web' and is how I sort of started to explain why I actually got involved in social justice work."

> I call it "Tightening the Web" and is how I sort of started to explain why I actually got involved in social justice work. And especially international . . . because I was working to help organize Episcopal churches to be involved in anti-poverty, like, the ONE campaign, this was after my Junior year of college. And, I think of tightening the web, like, when you're a kid in grade school and you're playing with the parachute, and like, if everyone just, like, has a parachute and like the balls are just going everywhere; but, like if people just hold on to the parachute and lean back you can actually feel, like when the ball lands on the other end of the parachute. And, like, I think, that was really helpful to talk about what we were doing, like, why churches should care about international poverty issues is like, you're part of the same parachute, but, like, if you don't pull back, if you don't tighten the web, you don't realize that. You don't see how your actions are affecting people in other parts of the world. And, so, that's kind of where I am now, again, like, tightening the web, and figuring out, like, who's holding the parachute with me, like, who's around that parachute? Um, and what does tightening the web mean for me right now.

By drawing on these multiple metaphors, Annie is utilizing cultural symbols and experiences to capture this notion of connectedness. By utilizing both of these metaphors she is able to draw on similar but nuanced understandings from her repertoire to make sense of her current approach to justice. Utilization of culture is not always as consistent as this, however, especially when we compare the language individuals use while describing particular experiences or decisions with the definitions they develop when asked for their specific meaning. For instance, Kate, a volunteer who grew up in the Northwest, described a moment when she was given language that captured what was to become an important view of social justice. In her initial interview she described her reaction to the way the executive director of the agency framed the work:

> She said, "You know, if you think you want to be helping people, then you probably shouldn't work here because that's not what we do. We're about being a community and standing with people." And I was like, "*YES*" I didn't even know that was important to me until she said it and the second she said it I was like, "Yes, I understand, it's not about being there and doing the right thing and being savior for the world and helping everyone"

"Respondents spoke of these experiences as influencing their understandings of the world and of justice and service."

Here she encountered an alternative frame through which to look at the work that was in competition with an understanding based in "saving" and "helping" people. Like Annie, she returned multiple times to the concept of community to understand her current work. However, she also spoke of her competing desire to give the youth with whom she worked anything she could and reacting from her "bleeding heart." Respondents whose notions filled the container of "justice" also utilized notions of "helping" or to explain parts of their work.

Understandings of Service

Only two of the volunteers used the language of service to describe what they were doing this year without having some qualifier (i.e. direct service,

indirect service, service-learning). When I asked Molly to think of an example of something she would consider "good" that she would not consider service she captured her understanding of what service actually is by saying "I think I would be really hard pressed to come up with an example of something that I thought was good for other people that I wouldn't, personally at least, wouldn't conceptualize as service. I'm sure that other people could do that, but, I feel like just the way that I have incorporated that word into my life that I could come with something." Service was described as "an orientation toward others." Yet, this self-less giving in a pure altruistic sense of the word did not resonate with the volunteers (even her) and was instead met with a great deal of cynicism.

While respondents who used terms of justice would often use qualified service terms in their interviews, neither of the volunteers who offered service as a symbol to understand their work used language of justice. Many of the respondents described being involved in service projects or service-learning experiences in high school and college. While they often spoke of these trips as awakening them to different issues of poverty, race, and urban life (since most of these types of trips are to urban settings), they described the involvement in terms of getting to go to a new place and meet their classmates. Respondents spoke of these experiences as influencing their understandings of the world and of justice and service. For instance, Heidi, a Midwestern Lutheran, became very active in her campus service organization at the end of her freshman year of college. Through this organization she was introduced to service-learning theory and understanding service as being separated into charity and justice. She spoke of learning about this distinction at the first retreat she went on with the campus organization:

> I think that was a very "Aha" concept to me because I had never heard of trying to think of why things happened instead of just trying . . . trying to prevent things from happening in the first place by thinking about their causes, their root causes of them rather than just doing what you can for people who are in bad situations.

This distinction between helping "people who are in bad situations" and "trying to prevent things from happening in the first place" was a common theme among the respondents. While Heidi drew on concepts from the social work classes and community organizing she was exposed to in college as part of her understandings of this distinction with relation to justice and service, others used language they drew from anti-racism training and academic discourses such as Irene who struggled with the relationship between the work she was doing in a group home for youth who were predominantly African American and Latino and the anti-racism training she received with LVC. She explained:

> I had a really hard time with [it] at first because I very much felt like I was kind of supporting the system that these kids were stuck in and kind of supporting the cycle that they're stuck in and, and as I became more just conversational about racism and going through all of the training, like I just felt like I was supporting institutional racism. Like, a lot of our kids are there because they are stuck in these horrible situations that just aren't really their fault. And, it took me a long time to realize that people stuck in the system need support as well as . . . like, there are different roles.

"Others used language they drew from anti-racism training and academic discourses."

Through utilizing cultural elements she was gaining through anti-racism training as well as those from her college experience she made sense of her work by explaining that she was "much more equipped to support people stuck in the system than to change the system." Like Molly, Irene did not use language of justice. However, her notion of service was much more in line with those who did use justice language in that service was something people did because they got something out of it in return. She claims "I think that's an aspect of doing service work in itself is that the person doing the service work benefits from that as well. . . I don't think people would do service if they didn't get something out of it themselves. And, whether it's just the simple feeling appreciated or feeling like you're making a difference".

Shaping the Repertoires

Some parts of the volunteers' repertoires are based on intentional conversations which took the form of service-learning requirements and programs in high school and college, faith and call, anti-racism training, and academic study. Respondents were not asked directly about their political affiliation, yet, many labeled themselves or those things which they drew from their parents as "liberal." Because LVC claims an identity to be a progressive Lutheran organization it is not surprising that most of the volunteers it attracts fall on the liberal end of the political spectrum. Abigail described her family as the one family in her town that could be labeled as "the liberal family" because of their involvement in various protests and political events. She describes herself as having been "a NPR baby" and goes on to say that she has become "even more liberal" than her parents. Rather than in the relatively few times respondents labeled themselves as "liberal," the influence of liberal discourse is even more evident in the use of language of "rights" and "equality." Respondents also turned to language of "privilege" and "oppression." While some traced this language back to college courses, these concepts are among the few things that LVC turns volunteers' attention to through their retreats and trainings. While there are few expectations about how the volunteers continue reflection in between the retreats, this formation appears to be enough to add to the volunteers' cultural repertoires.

"Many attended Lutheran colleges and had varying involvement with religion throughout their college experiences."

Respondents had a variety of connections to religion and faith. Some grew up being involved in a Christian church but are currently exploring what they would like spirituality to look like for them now like Kate who grew up Lutheran but lists her current religious affiliation as "unsure." Many attended Lutheran colleges and had varying involvement with religion throughout their college experiences. Some drew specifically on religious understandings to make sense of the work they are doing. These religious understandings most often were in line with "liberal" or "progressive" Christian traditions. Respondents who

grew up in liberal protestant or Catholic traditions also tended to cite a feeling of guilt and a desire to "help" people as motivating factors, particularly when they were younger, for being involved in service work. Annie, our metaphor loving volunteer, spoke of her understanding of her high school community service requirement stemming from a "liberal-Protestant, we help people kind of thing." As she went on to college she had an "aha" moment when she was introduced to the concept of social justice based in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Unlike many of the other respondents, she was able to point to a particular biblical concept that had captured the concepts that became so meaningful to her. For her being able to draw on elements of her faith was central in being able to describe her motivations for the work she was doing. When she spoke of participating in a secular immersion trip she described how difficult it was for her to not be able to explain why she was doing so using her "native tongue" of faith. However, like other respondents for whom faith or religion were important parts of their repertoire, she decided against other year-long volunteer programs because they were "too Jesus-y." One other concept that came up specifically with respondents who were connected to Protestant traditions was that of "call." Molly, who attended a Midwestern Lutheran college, captures the common understanding of call not being related to a specific career but more to a sense of self:

> I think lately it's become more of almost a sense of a calling and not necessarily a big "this is what you're supposed to do" but, like, this is the way you can serve where you're at right now and that'll lead to the next step and that'll lead to the next step.

"Negotiating and utilizing culture isn't simply about using elements from one's repertoire that work at a given moment."

Interestingly, Molly goes on to talk about how language of "call" would not, in fact be among her every-day language because she considers it too "flouncy" and implying things she didn't "necessarily mean to imply."

Contesting Notions

Negotiating and utilizing culture isn't simply about using elements from one's repertoire that work at a given moment. As Swidler points out, we also use culture to react against concepts and dominant understandings to make meaning. Part of the journey for many of the volunteers was a matter of questioning and contesting elements of the culture they knew or were learning. I met Abigail at a coffee shop in downtown San Francisco after she finished work at her placement about three months into being there. Unlike many of the other placements and volunteers I spoke with, Abigail worked at the local branch of a national non-profit organization that provides housing to qualified individuals in need. She described her struggle with working with a multi-million dollar non-profit. One of her responsibilities was to go to congregations in the Bay Area and recruit volunteers to work with the organization. Having to sell the organization and the volunteer opportunities to different constituents, she offered thoughtful reflections on the meanings people attached to the work they did with the organization. In pitching the organization to the churches, she described having to stress the fact that people aren't simply given houses because people were uncomfortable with "quote-un-quote charity work." She received much better reactions when she stressed that those that received the houses had to contribute by working on their houses and paying a mortgage. When I followed up with her about her use of "charity work" she told me that it "doesn't sit well with people from what I've noticed . . . with some people it does there's a sort of a weird dichotomy between "yes, I'm just gonna give to you, you don't have to do anything in return" to a "that family is in need but, it's the American way to make them work for it." And that's not considered charity to a lot of people that's considered, you know, a program to help people." Many of the other volunteers' understanding of justice would also include this "empowerment" notion of helping people help themselves. When Abigail attaches this to "the American way" she is highlighting a link between empowerment and the boot-strap myth which is a narrative with a lot of clout in the U.S.

Role of Gender and Class

Two groups of individuals spoke clearly about gender. The first were those who took gender studies, women's studies, or feminism classes in college. These students drew on language from these classes to reflect a systemic analysis of sexism, socialization, and power. Three of the respondents drew on gender analysis they traced back to classes in college in gender studies or feminist philosophy. Julie, who attended a college that she described as attracting "idealists" like herself, spoke at length about the changes in understandings about women and service and how she wishes more men worked in human services because they have been detrimentally gendered as feminine. However, when asked how that affects her personally she explained:

"These students drew on language from these classes to reflect a systemic analysis of sexism, socialization, and power."

> I guess I don't really think about it that much, because I would rather see it in terms of that it's something I want to do, and not something that I do because I'm a woman. . . .I think that my identity as a woman has definitely shaped a lot of. . .maybe even, I mean it's definitely had a lot to do with a lot of the experiences I've just kind of found myself falling into in my life. And I'd like to think that I'm doing all of this because I want to, because I as a person want to rather than me as a woman want to. But, I mean, I'm not sure how true that is. You know, I think . . . gender works in mysterious ways.

Here she captures her negotiating two important influences on her cultural repertoire. On the one hand she has a whole set of notions and frames from a gendered, power-based analysis of social systems and socialization so prevalent in today's gender studies. On the other hand, she, like many of the volunteers, utilized understandings of autonomy and agency which allows individuals to be in charge of their choices.[2]

[2] Her cultural negotiations here fit nicely with Bourdieu's theory of habitus in which we learn to desire those things that are available to us and believe that we have actually chosen those things (Bourdieu, 1987).

The other group that spoke explicitly about the role of gender in concrete ways was those volunteers involved in institutional church organizations. Typical of these responses is Annie who claimed that her whole world was women in terms of work and living, but where she saw gender being an issue was in the institutional church.

Not all respondents, however, spoke as succinctly about gender. In fact, when I asked most of the respondents about what it was like to be a woman doing the work they were doing or what being a woman meant for them in their context most were unable to articulate their thoughts and resorted to "I don't know" or something along the lines of "I'm sure it has some impact" without being able to go further. Not speaking about or having formulated analysis does not mean we are not influenced by certain parts of cultures, in this case the role of gender in culture. Much to the contrary, many volunteers turned to one of two things which they did not directly link to gender but had elements of teaching gender (Butler, 1999). First, volunteers resorted back to role models who were women. For instance, Molly spoke at length about the example her mother set for her as someone who gave selflessly to others whereas Emma, spoke of women ministers who set an example and spoke with her about being in nontraditional roles. Second, volunteers spoke occasionally of those behaviors and goals for which they were rewarded or toward which they were groomed such as quietly paying attention in school.

"The central concept for the program she taught was that of 'servant leadership'."

Respondents were much more fluent with issues of class and race privilege than with issues of gender. As a high school student, Kate participated in a summer leadership program put on by the regional office of her denomination. During summers between her college years she worked at a Christian summer camp as a counselor. One of the programs offered at this camp is a two-week leadership camp for high school students. When she interviewed for a second summer at the camp she told the director that she really wanted to work with the leadership program. She was hired on and went off to camp training with no

formal commitment that she would in fact be working with the high school group. At staff training the director pulled her aside and told her that she was not only working with that camp but was in charge of figuring out what the program looked like. She described the following days as sitting alone designing everything from curriculum to scheduling. The central concept for the program she taught was that of "servant leadership." When asked what this meant she described:

> My big phrase for them was "Eyes that see do." So, like, if you see something that needs to be done you should just do it. And then we talked about like, being a leader isn't telling people what to do, it's leading by example. Like I never ask you to do something that I'm not willing to do myself.

"Service was seen much more in terms of a Bourdieun capital sense in terms of participants increasing their chances at college admission or future jobs."

Her campers sometimes needed prompting to do the "dirty work" she included in servant leadership but were generally receptive to the training which included challenge courses, team building, and training around communications. When Kate joined LVC she interviewed and eventually worked at a placement that provided services for homeless youth. During the summer of her first year at that placement she and another staff member were given the responsibility to work with a number of the youth who had been selected to be a part of a leadership board. Since her experiences in school and camp had ignited a passion for leadership development and community building, she was very excited about this opportunity. She approached the board meeting with team-building exercises ready to go. She described her experience:

> I was really excited about doing team building stuff with them and they were having none of it. Like all the stuff I did with my campers I was, like, it will be great and we'll learn so much. And they were like, "absolutely not. Trust falls? What is this crap?" and I was like, "Okay." . . . I know not to take it personally, but, it was just like, wow, these people are in a very different place than the white middle class privileged kids that I worked with at camp.

Service was seen much more in terms of a Bourdieun capital sense in terms of participants increasing their chances at college admission or future jobs (Bourdieu, 1986; Swartz, 1998). The concepts respondents drew on to explain why they served and what it meant for them was connected to the class from which the respondents came.[3] Volunteers that described their background as middle-class or upper-class, such as Annie and Irene, talk about their year of service as a chance to figure out how to live simply or as a chance to discover how to live out their values. While most volunteers spoke of a practical desire to explore careers and gain experience, these respondents framed that in terms of self-discovery.

On the other hand, respondents who described an upbringing that was less financially secure tended to talk about self-discovery only as secondary if at all. To varying degrees, these respondents saw their volunteer year as a concrete way to have a secure income and place to live for a year while doing something they thought was valuable. Ruth, a volunteer working for an environmental organization, captures this in her story. She grew up on a small hobby farm in the Northwest. Both of her parents worked through much of her childhood, her mom working out of the house sewing clothes. When she was in middle school her mom went back to school to be trained as a teacher. This brought somewhat of an economic boost to the family. She described her childhood as being significantly different for her than her sister who was four years younger. In talking about this difference she explained "the childhood I remember was like you get one winter coat and then if you lose it you're like gonna wear two sweatshirts. My sister remembers like if you lose your winter coat we'll buy you a new one." Ruth didn't talk about the choice to participate in a year of service in terms of spending

"…it wasn't that I wanted to do a voluntary year of simplicity."

[3] The respondents' class is self-reported. They were not asked to provide income levels to verify their class position growing up. However, all respondents were asked about the types of work their parents did and the impact that work had on them. From this I was able to cross check their self-reported class when this was offered.

a year discovering herself and finding out ways to live simply. She explains that "it wasn't that I wanted to do a voluntary year of simplicity, it was like, for me I am actually economically much better off in the LVC because it's a year of guaranteed, yeah I might only be making this much money a month but I know I'm going to make that much money every month until my year is up. Whereas with where I was working part-time, I might get laid off next week."

For Ruth, the progressive middle class narrative was in competition with the class narrative with which she grew up. While this type of tension sometimes leads to an integration or redefinition, for Ruth, this resulted in critiquing the program for the class bias which she sees inherent in the organization.

Conclusion

How do we make sense of all of this? For women working in fields that have been feminized, their understanding of what they do is not a simple matter of aligning their work with their gender or specific gender roles. Nor are the processes by which they end up in these fields based in the simple logic of "they are women, therefore they do service work." Respondents are not drawing on gendered terms of service and justice to explain their work and understand themselves in relationship to that work. That is, they do not draw on the concept of service because it captures feminine virtues of caring and nurturing and avoid justice because it captures more masculine traits of right and wrong. Instead, the very linguistic symbols of "service" and "justice" are the sites for negotiating culture. The terms themselves serve as containers in which the individuals must put understandings from their cultural repertoire in order to make sense of the concepts which then help shape their strategies of action. The cultural repertoires from which they draw are indeed influenced by their gender. However, other significant influences on both their available culture and their utilization of culture include race, class, and religion. Establishing the complexity and nuance of the cultural work done by women in these fields opens the doors for important

"Instead, the very linguistic symbols of service and justice are the sites for negotiating culture."

research to be done which critically examines the role of race and class as intersecting with gender on shaping the cultural repertoires. In particular, more work needs to be done around the role of race and class privilege in forming the repertoires from which the organization and individuals build their understandings.

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