Defining, Exploring, and Measuring Metacognitive Social Justice

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ABSRACT

This dissertation explores the concept and development of metacognitive social justice through three manuscripts. The first manuscript defines metacognitive social justice through an extensive literature review from prominent social justice scholars and theorists to find common themes that either explicitly or subtly permeate social justice content. Drawing from theory and empirical data, the first manuscript provides a foundation of this cognitive process that is relatable to all social justice scholarship, defining cognitive common ground. The themes found across the literature can be distilled to four metacognitive attributes found in "social justice thinking": (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning historical origins or intents.

The second manuscript is a qualitative analysis of the perception of self- proclaimed social justice thinkers, exploring how they define 'social justice thinking' and the role it plays in their daily choices and decision-making. Through thoroughly coded and analyzed transcripts of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, this manuscript explores three other emergent themes of action, discomfort and community, as a well as the need for developing social justice thinkers, and highlights significant connections to the attributes in the first manuscript.

The third manuscript is a detailed description of the development of the metacognitive social justice survey for college undergraduates designed to measure the metacognitive social justice attributes in individuals described in the theoretical manuscript. The instrument was found to be increasing in quantitative validity through two exploratory factor analyzes (EFA) with still room for improvement. Drawing on the questions developed thus far, a final version of this psychometric instrument will provide a snapshot of what metacognitive social justice

attributes are found in undergraduate classes and potentially to what extent. This is the first edition of the instrument, with the idea that the instrument should be ever evolving, becoming more accurate and valid, and carefully reworded for different audiences beyond college undergraduates.

Defining, Exploring, and Measuring Metacognitive Social Justice

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSRACT

The thought process of social justice scholarship is something that is often implied, but has yet been explicitly defined. This dissertation explores the concept and development of this thought process through three manuscripts. The first manuscript defines social justice thinking as metacognitive social justice through an extensive literature review to find common themes that permeate social justice content. The themes found across the literature can be distilled to four attributes found in "social justice thinking": (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning historical origins or intents.

The second manuscript explores the perceptions of self- proclaimed social justice thinkers, extracting what they define as "social justice thinking" and the role it plays in their daily choices and decision-making. This manuscript explores three other emergent themes of action, discomfort and community, as a well as the need for developing social justice thinkers. In addition, it highlights significant connections to the attributes in the first manuscript

The third manuscript is the development of an instrument designed to measure the attributes of metacognitive social justice described in the first manuscript. The goal of the instrument is to provide a snapshot of what metacognitive social justice attributes may be found in undergraduate classes. This is the first edition of the instrument, with the idea that the instrument will be ever evolving, becoming more accurate and valid, and carefully reworded for different audiences beyond college undergraduates.

Dedication

The dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Brenda Bryant.

May this be a small example of the impact you've made

in my life and in the lives of others. You are deeply missed.

"Do the best you can until you know better.

Then when you know better, do better."

-Maya Angelou

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Introduction to the Dissertation

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Background on Social Justice Thinking

Higher education is progressively making changes to implement issues of equity, diversity, and culturally relevant pedagogy into its curricular goals, with the mission to transform students into socially conscious citizens exercising their social responsibility to become agents of change (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2016; American Council on Education [ACE], 2016). Universities recognize the need for such action and have been pursuing various ways to drive this initiative, such as classes, majors, minors, centers, and calls-to-action.

An authoritative definition of social justice has proven elusive because the term is suffused with the presumption that everyone understands its meaning and mission (Novak, 2000). Universities and organizations have tried to educate individuals through the aforementioned initiatives, but their focus has typically been on the integration of social justice content and the importance of social justice activism. With such a broad topic, however, how may one implement change on a grand level without establishing the underpinnings that link the varying issues together? What has been lacking is the acknowledgement and purposeful involvement of the *cognitive* component of social justice scholarship, a common thread to connect social justice thinkers. For individuals to bear social justice ideas beyond the context in which they are introduced and implement them in their daily experiences, this cognitive component of social justice needs to be explored. This cognitive process and its constructs together are called *metacognitive social justice*.

This dissertation seeks to set a foundation of research on the topic of metacognitive social

justice by defining it, arguing for its importance, providing evidence of its existence, and creating a tool to facilitate and continue research on the topic.

Metacognitive Social Justice: Social Justice Thinking Explained

The first manuscript provides a detailed explanation of social justice thinking. It delves first into the importance of the cognitive component of scholarship and of explicitly teaching it, exemplified by examples used in science and design. It then explains the three main metacognitive strategies found in social justice literature: (a) empathy, (b) curiosity through questioning, and (c) reflection. By analyzing empirical and theoretical literature on social justice though the lens of these metacognitive strategies, we find four cognitive threads that govern the cognitive processing of this content: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narrative of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces and consequences, and (d) questioning of historical origins and intents.

Perceptions of Self-Proclaimed Social Justice Thinkers

The second manuscript is a qualitative empirical study of the perceptions of self-proclaimed social justice thinkers the goal of the study was to elicit to elicit from these thinkers their definitions of social justice thinking and how it is integrated into their lives. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, guided by the following questions:

1. How do self-proclaimed social justice thinkers identify themselves as such?

2. How do they believe they became social justice thinkers?

3. What role does social justice play in daily decision-making for these social justice thinkers?

Through open-coding, themes were identified in the participants' answers and stories, addressing emergent themes. Then, provisional coding for the attributes of metacognitive social justice was

implemented on the interviews and compared with the previous open-codes to identify similarities. The manuscript concludes with possible directions for further research and exploration.

Measuring Students' Social Justice Thinking: The Development of a Psychometric Instrument

The third manuscript is a detailed account of the process of creating a statistically valid psychometric instrument to measure the attributes of metacognitive social justice. It begins by describing the need for such a tool, then proceeds to a literature review of metacognitive social justice, from which the instrument's constructs are derived. A detailed explanation of the process of statistically validating the instrument follows, with a discussion highlighting potential future uses of this instrument in higher education and stressing the need for continual improvement of the instrument.

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Metacognitive social justice: "Social justice thinking" explained

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is charged with creating social justice agents of change, with an emphasis on exposure to social justice content and engagement in social justice behavior. Little attention is being paid to the cognitive process that mediates the two, however, instead assuming that exposing students to content and behavior will produce "social justice thinkers." This cognitive component is metacognitive social justice, a mindset grounded in the metacognitive activities of empathy, curiosity, and reflection. These activities focus specifically on understanding who has access to resources and who is impacted by society, and they exhibit four attributes: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning the historical origins of ideas and intents. Metacognitive social justice is essential to developing future citizens who view themselves pieces of an interdependent social world.

Introduction

The current call in higher education is to employ issues of equity, diversity, and culturally relevant pedagogy to transform students into socially conscious citizens who exercise social responsibility to become agents of change (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2016; American Council on Education [ACE], 2016). This call to foster ethical, socially-minded citizens is nothing new. Almost all universities in the United States were founded on religious doctrine with the aim of molding young men who were ethically engaged in their church and community welfare (O'Brien, 1998). Although these goals were not explicitly labeled as "social justice," the goal was to develop moral participants in the community. For institutes of higher education, addressing social injustices often involves exposing students to social justice content by adding majors or minors, or classes to student graduation requirements. Many universities also provide opportunities for students to engage in social justice actions such as protests, political movements, and platforms for speaking. By exposing students to social justice content and providing opportunities for these experiences, universities hope to create "social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 1).

However, what is missing is the acknowledgement and purposeful involvement of *social justice thinking* in current teaching. For students to carry social justice ideas beyond the context in which they are introduced and into their daily experiences as agents of change, the cognitive component of creating social justice thinkers needs to be explored. The cognitive processes and constructs required are called *metacognitive social justice*.

The Importance of the Cognitive Component

Any discipline can be divided into three main components: content, cognition, and behavior (Figure 1). Content focuses on the subject-specific facts around which classes, majors, and minors are generally centered. Cognition is the process of analyzing and synthesizing those facts in light of other experiences and perceptions. Behavior is the observable actions involved with the discipline, such as writing an opinion piece, conducting an experiment, or creating a new architectural design. Education has traditionally emphasized memorization of the content matter and evaluation of observable behaviors associated with the discipline. However, it cannot be assumed that learning content and engaging in behaviors results in cognitive growth (Barge, 1997; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Langer, 1978), nor can it be assumed that observable behaviors are a result of conscious thought (Langer, 1978). Therefore, some disciplines have embraced the importance of defining and teaching the cognitive component for better content understanding and effective action.
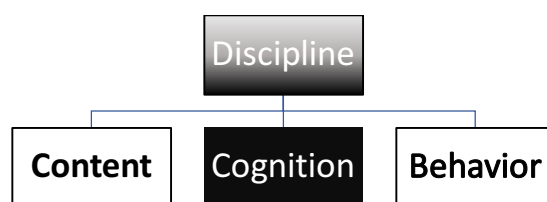
Figure 1. The three components of a discipline: Content, cognition, and behavior

Science has a long history of making a conscious effort to ground its discipline in the cognitive process. The first unit in most science classes focuses on scientific reasoning and scientific inquiry, explaining how to think like a scientist and why thinking this way is essential to learning (Anderson, 2000; Chi, Bassok, Lewis, Reimann, & Glaser, 1989; White, Frederiksen, & Collins, 2009). This unit also involves practice and the development of specific metacognitive

skills students need to effectively process science materials (content) and engage in effective lab and research skills (behavior). Research has shown that students' learning suffers with inadequate metacognitive skills (Capione, 1985; Chi et al., 1989), and specific development of these skills leads to scientific thinking (Anderson, 2002). This cognitive process has made its way into other disciplines that have applied scientific reasoning and its research steps to enhance critical thinking (Zimmerman, 2000).

In the field of design, there is a defined cognitive process called design thinking (Rowe, 1987). This cognitive process looks for a human-centered solution without necessarily first identifying a problem to fix (Plattner, Meinel, & Leifer, 2011; Rowe, 1987). There is still growth and progress (and, of course, disagreement) with the definition of "design thinking" (Buchanan, 1992; Kimbell, 2011), yet there is consensus that designers think in a particular manner and that this cognitive process is essential for designers (Lockwood, 2010; Plattner et al., 2011; Rowe, 1987). Instructional manuals and entire classes have been created to facilitate design thinking, highlighting the importance of specifically addressing the cognitive component to the discipline of design (Lockwood, 2010; Plattner et al., 2011; Rowe, 1987).

Content, cognition, and behavior together form the complete scholarship of a discipline. Yet, it is possible and even necessary to deconstruct each of those parts to develop a deeper understanding of each and of how the components work together and separately to inform other disciplines. Social justice scholarship also consists of these three components; however, the cognitive component has yet to be explicitly investigated. There is an emphasis placed on content and expectations for behavior, but little attention is given to the cognitive process that mediates the two. First, a definition of social justice is needed to understand how the cognitive component is shaped.

Social Justice: A Definition

Through the lens of oppression, social justice examines a variety of issues relating to the distribution of wealth, services, opportunities, and privileges in society (Adams et al., 2007; Michelli & Keiser, 2006; Novak, 2000;). In general, social justice is about the oppressors and the oppressed; it interrogates past and present tactics calculated to keep the oppressors in power and the oppressed subservient (Freire, 1970). According to Adams et al. (2007), *"Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure"* (p. 1). Social justice theorists, researchers, educators, and activists have tried to define the term "social justice," but as Novak (2000) pointed out, the term is used by many "to float in the air as if everyone will recognize an instance of it when it appears" (p.1). It could be argued that the term's fluid nature is a result of the fluidity of social justice topics themselves, topics that change as history, policy, and social trends create new inequities. While an agreed-upon definition can be elusive, at the core of social justice lie two manageable, digestible categories that can allow the learner to process new social justice information: *access* and *impact*.

The question of *access* evaluates who has opportunities to obtain and use resources of knowledge, experiences, or assets (Adams et al., 2007; Laughter, 2013). Access to these resources is directly related to control and power in society. Those individuals in power construct systems to retain their power, often at the expense of others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Freire, 1970). By examining who has access and who is controlling the access, questions begin to arise: What purpose does access serve? What implications does access control have?

The question of *impact* evaluates who is benefitting and who is being harmed under particular circumstances (Adams et al., 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Omi & Winant, 1986),

as well as how access or its absence can directly or indirectly *impact* a particular population. In many cases, the impact of a certain plan, policy, or decision is not proactively thought out, nor is it immediately felt by those making the decision (Adams et al., 2007; Novak 2000). Instead, decisions and policies often produce winners and losers. Use of the terms "access" and "impact" to define social justice allows for a malleable interpretation related to the context of a person's daily experience. It allows flexibility in analyzing unique circumstances, yet provides a streamlined way of analyzing social justice issues regardless of context.

Metacognitive Social Justice: The Missing Piece

Social justice scholarship has exposed historical and current injustices against the stigmatized, the marginalized, and the oppressed. As mentioned before, campus and community organizations have created opportunities for activism and engagement to enhance students' experiences with social change. The assumption is that by introducing the content and providing opportunities for engagement, students will exit college as more socially conscious citizens exercising social responsibility (Adams et al., 2007; Aston, 1993; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009).

Social justice issues are complex: they permeate every aspect of society and demand purposeful, conscious thought and effort towards progressive change. For a person's actions to benefit society, a decision to think in a social justice manner must precede the action or behavior; however, the cognitive constructs underpinning a social justice thinker have not yet been explicitly defined. *Metacognitive social justice* is the cognitive component of social justice, separate from social justice content and social justice behavior and critical to develop an individual embodied with social justice responsibility.

Metacognitive social justice is the awareness and control of one's thoughts, examining new knowledge and experiences by consciously questioning who has equitable opportunities to

obtain and use resources, and who is positively and negatively impacted because of his or her social identity. Social justice thinkers embody this perspective in their everyday lives. When social justice is embodied, then social justice issues can be addressed proactively rather than reactively, anticipating potential injustices and seeking to address them before they have a chance to take root and propagate. This can be achieved not only in social justice content or in social justice behavior but also in the context of a person's daily experiences. To achieve this, a purposeful development of *metacognitive skills* to process new information and experiences as they pertain to *social justice* is needed.

Metacognition

Metacognition, the backbone of metacognitive social justice, is the deeper cognitive process that allows a person to embody a way of learning and thinking through daily experiences. Flavell (1979) first described metacognition as cognition about cognitive phenomena. Specifically, metacognition focuses on (a) cognitive *awareness* of one's thoughts and (b) cognitive *control* over the direction of the thought process (Brown, Bransford, Ferrera, & Campoine, 1983; Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 2009; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Pintrich, 2002). Those who are actively involved in the learning process exhibit a higher frequency of metacognitive actions (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Weinstein & Van Mater Stone, 1993), being "agents of their own thinking" (Kluwe, 1982, p. 222). This awareness allows individuals to be more intentional about their learning process (Paris & Winogard, 1990; Pintrich, 2002), constructing thoughts and behaviors and monitoring consequences of these constructs (Hacker et al., 2009). If learners have conscious control, they can self-guide the constructs of their thoughts to better understand and process new information (Paris & Winogard, 1990; Pintrich, 2002; Waters & Schneider, 2010). In pursuit of better understanding,

persons exercising metacognition apply different learning strategies to process the information they are aware of receiving. Individuals can then either continue the learning strategy, reinforced by affirming consequences, or shift their strategy to seek positive consequences (King, 2009; Waters & Schneider, 2010). This awareness and control help the learner categorize information in ways that make learning more meaningful, thus reinforcing the metacognitive actions that lead to and maintain this awareness and control. Metacognition is vital for individuals to process daily experiences in a conscious manner.

Grounded in the aforementioned foundations of awareness and control, specific activities are needed to embody social justice in daily experience: empathy, curiosity through questioning, and reflection.

Empathy, more specifically, cognitive empathy, is a conscious drive to understand someone's emotional state, feelings, or thoughts in an effort to fully embrace an experience of another (Hodges & Myers, 2007; Rogers, 1959). In order to exercise empathy in a situation, individuals must have a concrete grasp of what they are cognitively processing so they can seek ways to experience the emotions of others (Raskin, 1974). This awareness of one's current mindset and controlled empathy with another is grounded in metacognition. Empathy is the cornerstone of making altruistic social justice decisions (Andorno & Baffone, 2014; Batson & Law, 1991) and is, therefore, a critical metacognitive activity for someone who exercises metacognitive social justice.

Curiosity through questioning is also grounded in metacognition, for the individual actively seeks answers to self-generated inquiry (Berlyne, 1953). Questioning is not a new concept linked to metacognition. As Gavelek and Raphael (1985) stated, questioning "represents one of the primary means by which individuals are able to foster their own comprehension and as

such represents a powerful metacognitive activity" (p. 114). Curiosity through questioning is a critical component of metacognitive social justice, particularly when questioning the norms of a presented reality with regard to those who are underprivileged, stigmatized, or silenced.

Reflection is also an important metacognitive action of genuine learning: it requires the individual to examine oneself (self-reflection) and then re-examine acquired knowledge for better understanding (Brown, 1987; Giroux, 1988, Schön, 1983; Shraw & Moshman, 1995). Reflection provides individuals a chance to re-examine what they believe or understand or how they interpret an experience, developing a baseline before taking the next cognitive step (Sarachild, 1970). Important to metacognitive social justice, reflection motivates individuals to be aware of where their thoughts originated and understand how their thoughts should evolve with regard to the best outcome for social justice. Reflection also provides a gateway for an individual to engage in empathy and curiosity through questioning.

Empathy, curiosity through questioning, and reflection are all examples of metacognitive activities that require the mind to first be aware of an experience and then process the information received during that experience (Hacker et al., 2009; King, 2009). This control makes it possible for individuals to develop a personal embodiment of how they view humanity, the people they interact with, and their interpretation of daily experiences. Metacognition molds a person's interactions with the world such that the person actually controls their understanding of experiences rather than just accepting them and consciously decides to interpret their experience in a specific way to make an informed decision about the best course of action. Embodying social justice requires individuals to be *aware* that they are thinking and then to *control* the direction of their thought processes with an understanding of how and why they are thinking in a social justice manner.

Attributes

The psychological constructs that define metacognitive social justice are called "attributes," for they are characteristics a person has developed to some degree to embody social justice thought in their everyday experiences. Someone exercising metacognitive social justice would exhibit the following four attributes to some degree: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning the historical origins of ideas and intents. Each attribute is guided by the aforementioned metacognitive activities of empathy, curiosity, and reflection but with a clear focus on social justice.

Attribute 1: Self-awareness through consciousness-raising. In order to fully engage in meaningful conversation and the thought processes of social justice, individuals must be aware of their own privileges and oppressions (Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994), for it is "impossible to separate our individual identities from the various social group memberships we hold" (Bell, 1997, p. 9). Highly important to feminist scholars who examine the marginalization of women, consciousness-raising pedagogy emphasizes the importance of self-storytelling as a way to become critically aware of one's past and connections to build identity (Boyd, 2008; Sarachild, 1970; Sykes, 2014). Understanding identity development is important to understanding where ideology and belief systems originate, including social injustices that may have been pivotal in the construction of such thoughts and beliefs. Self-awareness through consciousness-raising subscribes to the notion that *learning* and *being* are inseparable, so it is important to examine oneself and one's fit in the world through reflection (Giroux, 1988).

Reflection has long been an essential part of learning and monitoring cognitive growth (Schön, 1983), particularly when used to transform one's adult identity (Mezirow, 1991). It has

been shown that people who participate in self-reflective growth through consciousness-raising view their roles in a collective society differently and build a sense of autonomy (Ledwith, 2005), which has been recognized as a basic human need (Doyle & Gough, 1991). In children as young as five, self-awareness skills have been taught in an effort to create stronger future leaders who understand the impact they may have on society (Sheer & Sarift, 2004). In most community outreach, extension, and experiential learning programs, participants are first asked to reflect to become more self-aware of their current viewpoints and roles before engaging in societal change (Bauermeister et al., 2016; Caprino, 2005). In order to control one's thought processes in metacognition, one must be aware of where a particular thought process originated or at least question its origin if unknown. Acknowledging a bias and making a conscious effort to either change it or recognize its tendency to be reinforced is imperative in metacognition for learning and critical for metacognitive social justice. Reflection is the assessment and reassessment of one's metacognitive growth towards self-awareness.

Attribute 2: Value in the narratives of others. Metacognitive social justice is grounded in the themes of *access* and *impact*, which elicit thoughts of privilege and oppression. Many critical theorists whose work is based in examining specific social justice issues place significant value on the stories of those who have been oppressed (Delgado, 1989; Lorde, 1992; Solózano & Yosso, 2001; Solózano & Yosso, 2002). These stories, called *counter narratives*, are stories that are in opposition to the master narrative and are explained through the voices of the marginalized and silenced. Often in society, the perspective of the hegemonic norm is what is absorbed and taught (Delgado, 1989). Silencing these marginalized voices gives the illusion of a "supposedly unitary majority culture" (Omi & Winant, 1986; Said, 1993). Michel Foucault (1980), a French philosopher and social theorist, called master narratives "regimes of truth" that permeate society.

Counter narratives reject regimes of truth and allow readers/listeners to expand their view beyond what is expected (Delgado, 1989). They seek to disrupt the tradition of ignoring the voices of the outliers, the silenced, and the othered and instead privileges these marginalized voices (Matsuda, 1987). The introduction of these stories is important because they need to be presented as legitimate experiences to be considered and appreciated. By valuing the stories of others, respect is shown for what others have endured, which provides a sense of agency to the marginalized voices that are otherwise oppressed through silencing and exclusion.

Valuing the narratives of others allows the learner to be open to others' experiences while integrating them into the master narrative they have learned. One study showed that by using the personal narratives of health care-related dilemmas of stigmatized groups (immigrants, prisoners, or the elderly), participants had more empathy and curiosity towards the plights of these silenced individuals than those participants who were exposed to the non-narrative story (Oliver, Dillard, Bae, & Tamul, 2012). This empathy experience was evident through the participants identifying with the narrative, which contributed to a shift in attitudes and behaviors (Murphy, Frank, Chatterjee, & Baezconde-Garbanati, 2013). By introducing video-information delivered through a narrative format, another study showed a change in participants' perceptions of societal health-related norms (Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011). This awareness of differences and control of integration allows some who exercise metacognitive social justice to develop their own perspectives on an event or issue, all while understanding it may be different than someone else's. Thus, the use of narratives not only supports empathy among those engaged, but the fostering of empathy has been shown to contribute to a change in behaviors and views of what participants considered "normal."

Attribute 3: Awareness of unseen forces. What our dominant culture has perpetuated as correct and normal is what we are typically taught and what is written in the textbooks (Freire, 1970; 1974). But behind every major discovery and every story of progress, as well as the small daily actions and interactions we experience, there are potentially unseen forces, structures, and consequences. This awareness of hidden winners and losers is very closely tied to critical enlightenment, which seeks to uncover how "power plays operate" to keep certain individuals in power and others subservient (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 437). It is imperative in developing metacognitive social justice that individuals learn to question these hidden power plays and be aware that there are potential consequences as a result. Fostering an *awareness* of silent players and victims is an important filter to apply to any situation in which new content and knowledge are introduced. This is accomplished through internal questioning of who or what is not being acknowledged.

It has been noted that in classes in which a teacher promotes critical questioning, students are "curious, (and) challenge authority" (Pedrosa-de-Jesus, Moreira, Lopes, & Watts, 2014), a curiosity that is sparked by an internal awareness of unseen forces and possible unseen consequences. Questioning and curiosity have been shown to promote the active acquisition of information, to "create, maintain, and/or resolve meaningful perceptual conflicts or gaps in knowledge" (Kashdan & Fincham, 2002, p. 373). This curiosity brings to the table novel perspectives, ones that generate the exploration of possible hidden or unseen players in the experiences one encounters (Day, 1986; Loewenstein, 1994).

This metacognitive attribute allows the learner to wonder who or what is behind the scenes of an event or narrative. The more information people have about an experience or data point, the more in control of their calculations and opinions they can be. If they only receive one

point of view, someone who exercises metacognitive social justice realizes that the view they have is subjective, and there are other unseen forces at play.

  Attribute 4: Questioning the historical origins and intents. Individuals exercising metacognitive social justice not only has an awareness of the unseen but also consciously interprets what they do see, actively questioning the historical component and context of ideas and institutions. Hegemony explains how power is maintained through coercion and through consent of those being dominated through history (Freire, 1970; Morrow & Torres, 1995; Tong, 1989). Hegemonic views are considered normal and are accepted as common sense in our world's social reality (Tong, 1989). Through questioning of origins and intents behind ideas and institutions, hegemonic constructs with the intention to oppress may come into view. This questioning allows someone exercising metacognitive social justice to explore possible hidden intents behind the construction of such ideas and institutions, for many of them were built without regard to those without power (Bell, 1992; Morrow & Torres, 1995). Questioning origins and intents also allows the individual to contemplate hypothetical counter histories, asking critical questions about how things could have turned out differently (Bell, 1992). This critical questioning, as well as critically analyzing systemic oppression and the social construction of institutions, particularly in education, is emphasized in critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2008; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). An individual exercising metacognitive social justice would be able to take critical pedagogy a step further and question the content's historical component and original intentions, question the purpose was behind a certain discovery, theory, or process, and question the master narrative being presented. Studies have also shown that allowing students to openly question what they have been taught gives students more autonomy in understanding events and what they have read (Frost, 2001; Wong, 1985). In addition, when students have been

taught to openly question ideas and procedures to solve problems and seek information, this skill has been shown to transfer to other contexts (Blank & Covington, 1965).

This attribute brings forth the idea that history plays a particularly important component to social justice. Metacognitive social justice guides learners' awareness towards understanding the history *behind* what they are learning and experiencing while developing an opinion with regard to historical origins and intents. Metacognitive individuals question more than other individuals. They are always seeking to find a clearer explanation and understand how something came to be. This attribute addresses the past causes of social injustices that may be glossed over or ignored in current systems and structures.

Connecting the Attributes

Although each attribute in and of itself is not unique to metacognitive social justice, it is the combination of the four that allows for the embodiment of social justice. Individuals exercising metacognitive social justice have a strong sense of self through reflective practice and believe that they have autonomy over their learning and understanding of experiences. They value the experiences of others and see them as more than just a story: they are valid data points to be considered in making a decision or interpreting an event. They question the narrative, either asking what unseen forces and structures are in play or what the historical, possibly socially unjust intentions behind current systems and structures might be. Metacognitive social justice attributes are what embody a social justice thinker: someone who actively and consciously interprets the world through the lens of access and impact.

Why Does This Matter?

Addressing the cognitive component in addition to the content and behavior of a discipline has had far reaching effects. As mentioned previously, in the science and design

disciplines, the direct teaching of how to think and why to think in a particular way provides a guideline for problem-solving and daily interactions. The cognitive component of these disciplines is recognized and valued as an important part of learning the content and effectively implementing and engaging in the behaviors of that content. Now that social justice thinking can be defined as *metacognitive social justice* with corresponding attributes, there is a cognitive objective for the type of social-minded agent of change that universities seek to foster through social justice scholarship.

It cannot be assumed that metacognition will be transferred beyond the context in which it is taught (Barnett & Ceci, 2002), so a conscious effort is needed to implement metacognitive social justice beyond its initial context. By working with pedagogical experts for implementation, instructors can integrate the fostering of metacognitive social justice attributes into their non-social justice classes and throughout the college experience.

Most importantly, for widespread societal change, citizens need to engage actively through purposeful, effective behaviors made possible by a thorough cognitive examination of social justice outcomes in their daily experiences. This is accomplished through the conscious, critical examination of potential access barriers and social impact concerns through the use of the four attributes of metacognitive social justice: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) recognizing the value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning the origins of ideas and intents. Metacognitive social justice is more than just a way of thinking: it is a goal for developing future scholars, leaders, and citizens who view themselves and what they learn as a piece of a larger, interdependent social world.

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Perceptions of Self-Proclaimed Social Justice Thinkers

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ABSTRACT

Social justice scholarship has traditionally focused on educating individuals on specific issues and encouraging engagement in social justice actions. While these activities are extremely important in the social justice discipline, there has been little attention paid to the cognitive process of social justice thinking. A greater exploration of this cognitive process is necessary to understand how this may govern individuals' ways of examining and acting within their daily lives. Seven self-proclaimed social justice thinkers were interviewed to gain insight into how social justice thinking manifests in their everyday decision-making. Through open-coding and thematic analysis, emergent themes of actions, discomfort and community support, and the need for available training in social justice thinking were evident in the participants' interviews. In addition, provisional codes for the four attributes of metacognitive social justice were compared to the open-codes, showing strong evidence these self-proclaimed social justice thinkers exercise the attributes of metacognitive social justice.

Perceptions of Self-Proclaimed Social Justice Thinkers

Higher education is calling for equity, diversity, and culturally relevant pedagogy to be major components in content and curriculum to help students become agents of change towards social justice (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2016; American Council on Education [ACE], 2016). Many institutions have increased opportunities for students to learn about social justice content such as classes, majors, and minors, as well as opportunities for social justice behaviors such as activism, interest groups, and community engagement. Looking at past initiatives, social justice teaching and implementation have been packaged as a combination of three components: social justice content, social justice thought, and social justice action (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; van Montfrans, 2017). While content and action have been thoroughly described and implemented (Adams et al., 2007; Aston, 1993; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009), the cognitive component has just recently been addressed and examined as *metacognitive social justice* (van Montfrans, 2017). By examining how metacognitive social justice may influence the cognitive processes of people who say they make daily decisions based on social justice, we can better understand the role of metacognitive social justice when used outside the discipline of social justice, in the interactions and experiences of someone's everyday life.

Literature Review

Social justice issues are ones in which resources are inequitably distributed to keep a particular demographic in power and another subservient (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). These injustices are performed with regard to race, gender, cultural distinctions, social class, socioeconomic differences, and ownership of resources such as water, food, and power sources (Adams et al., 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Freire, 1970). Social justice issues are created

when decisions are made without regard to who has "equitable opportunities to obtain and use past resources" and who is benefitting or being harmed by those decisions and actions (Adams et al., 2007; Freire, 1970; Michelli & Keiser, 2006; van Montfrans, 2017). The ultimate goal of social justice and its scholarship is to create a society in which "the distribution of resources is equitable and all members feel physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Adams et al., 2007, p.1). This requires all individuals living in a just society to think constantly in terms of access and impact. These individuals can be called *social justice thinkers*.

Traditional efforts to create social justice thinkers have sought to educate people through either social justice content or social justice action (Adams et al., 2007; Kincheloe, 2008). Opportunities to have a degree with an emphasis in social justice, take required diversity classes, and learn from faculty who specialize in social justice are available at most institutions (Smith, 2012). Activist opportunities such as service organizations or political movements are abundant on most college campuses, with many participating students reporting that they now view the world with a greater sense of social responsibility (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Simmons & Cleary, 2006; Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). However, most student activists are from marginalized groups who already had an affinity towards social justice before engaging in social justice activism and scholarship (Cole & Stewart, 1996; Egan et al., 2015). While these current efforts provide a space for existing social justice scholars and activists, full integration of social justice in institutions of higher education has yet to occur, leaving those individuals who choose to ignore these opportunities a chance to do so. While exposure to content and action may result in cognitive growth toward social justice thinking for many, it cannot be assumed that this is true for all individuals (Barge, 1997; Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001; Langer, 1978). It also cannot be assumed that this cognitive process is transferred and utilized out of the social justice context in

which it was taught (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). Full participation and transferability requires an *embodiment* of social justice, which necessitates a change in beliefs and attitudes of individuals. Deep beliefs and attitudes are very difficult to alter, particularly through the aforementioned traditional efforts towards social justice (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). There is still another route that could potentially be explored to truly tap into people's core values and attitudes, especially if the goal is to develop social justice thinkers (possibly from scratch) who exercise this cognitive component well beyond the context in which they were first exposed. This type of social justice thinking requires an awareness of one's thoughts and control of the thought processes necessary to interpret daily experiences. This awareness and control in which social justice thinking is grounded is called metacognition.

Metacognition has been recognized as a way for people to transcend into learners, to leave behind automatic thinking and habits and embrace awareness and control of one's thought processes and decisions (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Flavell, 1976; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Weinstein & Van Mater Stone, 1993). Teachers of all grades and faculty of all departments are encouraged to promote metacognitive skills in their students to help them process and retain information (Borkowski, Carr, & Pressley, 1987, Halpern, 1996; Serra & Metcalf, 2009). Metacognitive skills are considered the key to understanding one's own behavior and learning methods, making learning personalized and specialized for students and giving them agency over the processing of that information (Kluwe, 1982; Paris & Winogard, 1990; Pintrich, 2002). Metacognitive skills also contribute to students' ability to recognize a problem accurately and deduce a rational reaction or resolution (Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 2009). Without exercising metacognition, a person would be unable to deduce a socially just response or make a

socially just decision. Those who are social justice thinkers must be metacognitively aware of the decisions they make.

A preliminary definition of social justice thinking is called *metacognitive social justice*. Metacognitive social justice entails purposefully guiding one's thoughts to examine new knowledge and experiences through constant questioning, by asking who has equitable opportunities to obtain and use resources and who is impacted because of their social identities. It combines the importance of metacognition (awareness and control of one's thoughts) with the cognitive element of social justice (thinking about who has access and whom may be impacted). A person who employs metacognitive social justice has four attributes:

1. *self-awareness through consciousness-raising:* subscribes to the notion that *learning* and *being* are inseparable, so it is important to examine oneself and how one fits in the world,

2. *value in the narratives of others:* value is given for the stories of others, providing a sense of agency to the marginalized voices that are otherwise oppressed through silencing and exclusion,

3. *awareness of unseen forces:* a focus on hidden power plays (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003) and an awareness of silent players and victims, and

4. *questioning the historical origins of ideas and intents:* exploring possible hidden intents behind the construction of ideas and institutions, bringing to light potential counter histories (van Montfrans, 2017).

It should be noted that each attribute on its own does not define metacognitive social justice; a combination of the four identifies a social justice thinker. However, deeper exploration is needed to understand to what degree self-proclaimed social justice thinkers value and use these attributes

and how they affect the processes of social justice content and engagement in social justice actions.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to help identify key elements of social justice thinkers' daily cognitive processes and to what degree metacognitive social justice's attributes are evident in their daily decision-making. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do the participants identify themselves as social justice thinkers?

2. How do they believe they became social justice thinkers?

3. What role does social justice play in their daily decision-making?

Methods

The research was based on data collected through semi-structured interviews with both faculty and graduate-level students at a large, research-intensive university. IRB approval was confirmed through the researcher's university (Appendix A), and recruitment emails were sent to specific faculty members who are affiliated with inclusion, diversity, and equity initiatives at the university, identifiable through public university records (Appendix B). This email asked each faculty member first whether they identified as a social justice thinker, and if they did, to please consider participating in the researcher's qualitative study. In addition, an advertisement in the university's graduate student listserv was distributed, asking "self-proclaimed social justice thinkers" to participate by contacting the researcher (Appendix C). Undergraduate students were not asked to participate for two reasons: (a) the possibility of a student being under the age of 18 could complicate the IRB approval process, and (b) students beyond late adolescence are more likely to have already developed metacognitive skills (Weil et al., 2013). In total, seven participants' interviews were used. These participants comprised both faculty and students, with

a wide variety of race/ethnicities and sexual orientations. All demographics were self-identified by the participants and offered freely to the researcher. Table 1 provides a list of the participants with their self-identified demographics.

Table 1

Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Student or Faculty	Race and/or Ethnicity	Area of Study/ Research/ Employment	Sexual Orientation*
Robert	Student	Black, African-American	Critical Race	Heterosexual
Diana	Faculty	Hispanic, Latina	Identity Development	n/a
Bethany	Student	Mixed-race	Student Services	Lesbian
Aaron	Student	White	Engineering	n/a
Marisol	Faculty	Hispanic, Latina	Women and Gender Studies	n/a
Sandra	Student	White	Human Development	Queer
Tina	Faculty	White	Student Services	Heterosexual

* Responses were not elicited but were freely given at some point during the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were used, allowing for tangents and exploration of other topics that the participants wished to explore (Seidman, 2013). Following basic demographic information, the interview questions were constructed to be extremely broad in nature, allowing the participant to interpret and deduce answers in any way they deemed relevant (Appendix D). The goal of the interview was three-fold: (a) identify the participant's definition of social justice thinking, (b) have the participant describe how they believe they became a social justice thinker, and (c) identify how social justice thinking may be linked to their decision-making processes. After each interview was transcribed, a member check was conducted by emailing each

participant his or her transcribed interview to verify that the transcript accurately portrayed his or her intended answers. All changes and omissions the participants requested were honored per ethical guidelines (Seidman, 2013).

Data Analysis

Following the member checks on all transcripts, the researcher systematically open-coded for tentative labels among the transcripts (Creswell, 2013). This coding allowed the text to define ideas, constructing data into first-level concepts. Using the open-codes, axial coding was used to group the labels for a thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). Comparing the open-codes between the interviewees allowed for (a) confirmation of whether concepts and categories accurately represent responses, and (b) exploration of the interrelatedness of the concepts and categories. Separately, the transcripts, void of the previous codes, were then coded using provisional coding (Saldana, 2016) based on the attributes of metacognitive social justice (van Montfrans, 2017). The provisional codes were juxtaposed to the thematic codes, identifying similarities and other themes for further research.

Findings

The findings suggest that the participants are highly aware of their thinking processes and make conscious decisions to channel how they think about the world and how they make decisions (metacognition). Through the exploratory open-coding, themes of activism, discomfort and the need for community support, and the necessity for social justice training were strongly evident. The defining attributes of metacognitive social justice emerged when the participants discussed their experiences, values, and thinking processes and were evident in their body language and unsolicited narratives as the interviews unfolded.

Metacognition

"I have an organized process for making decisions."

- Marisol

Metacognition is the awareness and control of one's thought process (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Flavell, 1976; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Weinstein & Van Mater Stone, 1993). Throughout the interview, the participants were asked to recall and think about how they processed the world and its surroundings. The participants were very deliberate when answering, slowly processing and carefully answering every question. They were very purposeful in making "conscious decisions and actions that lead to social justice" (Sandra). Describing what goes through her mind when deciding on the next course of action, Tina articulated clearly how she is in control of her thought process; she slows down to purposefully guide her thoughts:

My brakes pump a little bit. Like, I hear you, and I want to know more, but I don't

know enough about what that means and what that looks like and what is needed.

Participants in this study were highly aware of what they were thinking and were constantly analyzing, questioning, and reassessing themselves as they continued their thought processes, "always think[ing] back and weigh[ing] the different options and see[ing] what's there" (Tina).

Strategy. Individuals knew exactly how they made both big and small daily decisions, with more than one participant stating, "I try to be strategic" (Marisol). Another participant, Robert, echoed that sentiment: "When I do decide to make a decision, it's definitely very intentional and strategic." Many reported having a list of their pros and cons, ordered thoughts, or action analysis to sort through their cognitive load. When faced with a life decision, Marisol described in detail her file folders with goals at varying chronological distances: "I talked to people. I try to be very rational…to [have] a rational basis for my decision…I have an organized process for making decisions."

Questioning. All participants emphasized the need to constantly question and be curious about information they receive. They also questioned whether they are processing information in the best way possible. Participants restated throughout the interview that constant questioning and curiosity is important for their cognitive growth, which they claimed is essential to always keeping their mind energized. In fact, when asked about their thinking processes, most participants did not describe their processes but instead gave examples of questions that constantly swirled in their heads, such as "What are the impacts of whatever is happening?" When tasked with educating a group of individuals, Tina described how she approached each lesson. She stated that she mentally guides herself with persistent questioning: "Who are you speaking to today? Those kind of questions, like why are you telling them this? What is it that you want them to hear?"

Another participant described her need to "constantly examine who is at the table, who is not at the table, how are decisions being made, and how do they affect particular people in that society, again to empower or disempower" (Sandra]. But this constant questioning extended beyond the scope of direct conversations. Two participants, Aaron and Marisol, brought forth the issue of environmental justice and how they consistently question what the most socially just outcome would be. When asked about her definition of social justice, Marisol described her previous work in environmental regulations, articulating that she felt it was always a social justice issue to her: "[It has to do with] some sort of equal distribution of rights and welfare. You could say that environmental justice is not social justice, but for me, it's all under the umbrella of justice."

Aaron echoed her sentiments, noting that his work in environmental engineering had a strong ethical component that guided his education and decision-making. Even though most of

his engineering classes rarely (if ever) mentioned the well-being of society, for Aaron, "It was still all about the people." In every class and research project he worked on, the people he served and how they could be affected were "things that [he] consciously worked on incorporating."

Empathy. A recurring theme for all participants was how their emotions contributed to their thinking: that there was an affective component to their thought process and decision-making, guided by a strong sense of empathy. Although they may have previously described their thought process as systematic and rational, they also acknowledged that their decisions are not devoid of emotions. One participant explained the reason for this as, "we're human, so we have that human connection" (Sandra). When participants discussed their definitions of social justice and social justice thinking, there was often a component of *caring* and *inspiration* which lead to them describing that their thinking process involved humility and altruism. As one participant explained, "I think if I care about you, I have a duty to question, because I care about you" (Sandra). These participants made conscious decisions to do good and a conscious effort to analyze the best way to approach those decisions. During his interview, Robert recalled an important lesson his mother taught him on using his emotions:

> My mother always taught me, and it still guides a lot of my decisions, is think
> about what's the best thing, what's the worst thing that could happen in whatever
> decision you make. If you're not willing to accept the worst thing, then you
> probably shouldn't do that action.

Tina, when asked about her decision-making process, could not separate the emotive component from her thought process:

> Even when I'm thinking and acting, I'm feeling the whole time. And I mean, it's
> just my natural way of being in the world…I think…Is this the right thing to do?

And if it doesn't feel right, then I probably either don't do it, or I work to change

why it doesn't feel right.

Supporting that theme, Diana likened social justice thinking to servant leadership (Greenleaf,

1977), which she stated promotes leaders to "lead by selflessness and love."

Reflection. To recognize the components of their decision-making, participants stated the

need to constantly reflect as a key component of their metacognitive awareness. One participant

described it as "a way to make sense of what goes on and a way to make meaning of my

experiences and way to…survive in certain environments as well" (Robert). Participants

described always revisiting and re-examining their previous decisions to determine whether they

were the right ones. It was evident that the participants did not rely on a default mode but were

always seeking ways to improve their reactions and decisions. They also modeled social justice

thinking throughout the interview process, such as how Bethany reflected on her thoughts when

arriving to the interview: "When I came … I walked downstairs. I'm able-bodied, that's

something that could be social justice issue." It was that immediate reflection that caused her to

re-evaluate such a simple act as arriving for the interview.

Although the participants' cognitive processes may seem automatic to the outside

observer, the participants acknowledged that they were always in control of where their thinking

was headed, looping it back around to social justice, and "always remind[ing] [themselves] and

never forget[ting] that this is important and people are neglected in the system" (Sandra). They

identified their curiosity, questioning, and reflecting as an embodiment of who they were. They

admitted it was a more mentally taxing way to think about the world, but that's how their minds

worked, and "there was no changing that" (Bethany).

Emergent Themes

Through exploratory open-coding, three themes strongly emerged during the interview process in addition to high metacognitive awareness: (a) the need for activism, (b) discomfort and community support, and (c) the need to develop new social justice thinkers. Although not specifically linked to the cognitive process of awareness and control, the strong emergence of these themes signifies that individuals felt these themes were important for a social justice thinker, extending beyond the cognitive component and into action, community, and development.

The need for activism.

"(We need to) take action and support action to achieve social justice."

- Robert

Participants felt activism was a two-fold process: (a) the first is knowing (cognitive component), and (b) the second is doing (the behavior component). Self-proclaimed social justice thinkers often intertwine their thoughts and their actions, holding value to their thought and describing their action as the purpose behind their thought. The metacognitive awareness and control guide the participants into questions regarding how they can act. When asked about encouraging social justice thinking, Robert expressed his answer in a series of questions about how to act: "How do we improve society, how do we make things more equitable, how do we move things forward?" This indicated that the metacognitive component of questioning is needed, but the questions need to also be guided towards observable actions. Participants saw social justice thinking as something that can proactively "mitigate potential social injustices" (Aaron), but most often, reactive action is the course that must be taken.

Participants unanimously agreed that social justice action is very personal and can have varying levels of involvement. As Bethany said, "you need to take a stand…you need to see

where you can act." Tina spoke of the conversations she had with the neighbor's child as a way to make an impact, while Marisol relived her experience as a political dissident against a foreign dictatorship. According to the participants, actions are personal in nature and are reinforced and enhanced by each individual's social justice thinking.

However, action is not without consequences, and participants acknowledged the "activism fatigue" (Robert] that many of them felt. As Sandra expressed, "It's the most thankless job I can think of, and thankless jobs are tiring." This raises a need to explore methods of self-preservation for social justice thinkers.

Discomfort and community support.

"Just understand you're not always going to have the right answer."

- Sandra

The participants agreed that discomfort is inevitable as you discover systemic oppression of marginalized populations and an individual's possible role in that oppression. But participants described discomfort as necessary to really grow as a social justice thinker. Comfort with current situations, they indicated, was a sign of complacency: "I think you need to get engaged, and not just be comfortable with all the criticism that you have of people being engaged" (Sandra). Participants explained the natural fear of thinking and engaging in social justice activism but also emphasized that "it's a natural part, and we don't want people to feel scared and they hide back and just retreat to themselves" (Tina). Through that agitation is where the most growth happens, especially on a cognitive level "because it's what propels you to keep asking questions" (Tina). But the need for self-preservation was there because, as noted before, social justice thinkers often felt "worn out" (Sandra).

Participants unanimously brought up that they healed from the discomfort and avoided burn-out by surrounding themselves with a supportive community or group. This support echoes the value that social justice thinkers place on the struggles of others and helps them draw strength by interacting with others' identities. As Sandra said, "when you're social-justicely [*sic*] minded, I think it's very easy to be one of the few or one of the only in your geographic location." They see community and the collective members of that community as key to change and support each other through the discomfort.

This support extended beyond burn-out and also provided a think-tank for the participants to grow as social justice thinkers. As Robert explained, "Finding other people who had similar ideas and interests as me… allowed me to…become committed to these issues and learn even more." The presence of a supportive community was a vital key that allowed the participants "to stay fresh, to stay reflective, (and) to stay committed" (Tina). Through this interaction, according to the participants, burn-out was not only stifled but reversed, facilitating environments "…where every single person has a chance to thrive" (Sandra).

Developing social justice thinking.

"Both a process and goal." - Tina

Participants unanimously asserted that social justice thinking is not a finite goal. It was identified as a *growth process* or *continuous journey* with the goal to "create actual good" (Diana). By constantly questioning and seeking solutions for social justice issues, participants found this cognitive growth as "the way to gain an understanding of what's right" (Robert). It was something that they consistently did and "cultivated throughout [their] interactions with people and the different systems … whether it's school or shopping" (Tina). This development and growth never stops for the participants.

All participants expressed the need to train individuals who have the privileged choice of easily ignoring social justice issues and thinking. They emphasized that training people to think about the world in a social justice way is crucial. As Diana asked, "How do you make someone a little less self-interested and little more socially inclined?" Many said it starts with the individual by "trying to find out what it is they are passionate about as a way to get into it" (Robert). Not all participants agreed on how it should be approached and organized and could only really speak from their individual experiences. One common thread among the participants is that this training must start with questioning and self-discovery. As one participant explained, "Encourage people to understand why they're making decisions, about who they are and what they do" (Sandra).

There were many suggestions from participants on how to develop new social justice thinkers. Most wanted people to understand they are not devoid of societal and systemic influences on "what's informing those decisions and why" (Tina). Many participants said that it would take discomfort in the form of small actions, as mentioned before. Tina, Sandra, and Diana explained the power of mentorship, of having someone who they could learn from. Robert, Bethany, and Marisol said this way of thinking was ingrained in every aspect of their lives, which made this training unavoidable and created an embodiment of social justice thinking. However different the journey to social justice thinking, they all agreed that this process can be accessible to everyone through personalized paths. In fact, many participants felt they had a duty to try and teach people to develop a mindset more oriented toward social justice, as Tina described her interactions with young college students:

They're only here for this long [holds up hand], this teeny little bit, then they're

going to be the people who are running for offices in twenty years. They're going

to be the people who are teaching my kids in five years. I just, I can't, I wouldn't

be able to sleep well at night if I knew I had the opportunity to create that

invitation for them to chew on these really difficult subjects, and know that… it's

just … it's worth the risk.

Metacognitive Social Justice

Following the first round of open-coding, which provided evidence for high

metacognitive skills and emergent themes of activism, discomfort and support, and development

of social justice thinking, a second round of provisional coding linked the metacognitive themes

to the four attributes of metacognitive social justice. Even through constant bracketing, re-

reading, and re-evaluation of coding categorization by the researcher (Appendix E), the

participants' interviews demonstrated high awareness and control of their thinking, which

specifically guided them towards the attributes the literature has ascribed to metacognitive social

justice.

  Attribute 1: Self-awareness through consciousness-raising.

   "(It's) an identity I've developed over time but I've always owned."

         - Diana

Participants in this study were extremely self-aware, valuing the importance of having an

"enlightened sense of self" (Sandra). They understood the impact their family values and

childhood experiences had on who they currently are and who they were in the process of

becoming. Participants explained in detail how the way they were raised played a significant role

in who they became and credited their parents for "instill[ing] a sense of identity " (Robert).

Marisol recalled how life with her brothers stirred her desire to wonder and question the fairness

of her gender role:

…having grown up with two brothers, I always thought it was unjust that they had

all the privileges and none of the restrictions in contrast to what I had … it was

really basic stuff like that I had to cook and iron and sweep, and they got to do

things in the yard and stuff … helped my dad build things. So, I thought that was

unjust, just at a very personal gender level.

The participants asserted that it was impossible to be able to think about social justice without knowing themselves. They felt that they need to know where they are currently placed in a situation before they can make an informed decision, recalling how they came to be. This echoes their value of reflection, which helped individuals identify their shortcomings and seek out others' experiences. As one participant said, having grown up in a white, Midwestern, working-class family, "I have blind spots. Someone could maybe guide me in certain areas (Tina). Participants credited these prior experiences on the construction of their current identity as a social justice thinker. This included experiences as a self-identified mixed-race lesbian living in a large metropolis or the influence of an all-male Jesuit education. These influences were acknowledged throughout the interviews as participants reflected on both good and bad experiences and reanalyzed how current experiences and past identity development intersected. They valued the relevance in every event in their lives as a transformative component of who they were and would always recount personal stories and experiences to answer questions.

Participants also recognized that they are constantly changing and growing as individuals. This required them to (again) constantly reflect on those influential people who shaped them. As Robert recalled thinking of his African-American/Louisiana family roots,

…the older I get, the more I talk to my grandparents, the more I listen to

them, I become really inspired by what they did.

This influence has motivated him to work on becoming a better person throughout his life. He also recognized that what he previously aspired to be has evolved over time. As Sandra explained, "Who we aspire [*sic*] to be changes over time based on who we are over time."

These participants had strong senses of self built by reflecting on who they are, where they came from and who influenced the construction of their past and current identities. This self-awareness has led to the desire to grow as an individual, but also to analyze where they need to grow the most through recognizing who they are and who they are not.

Attribute 2: Value in the narrative of others

"Start with the lived experience of others."

- Sandra

Knowing themselves was just the first step for these participants. A crucial coinciding skill was the recognition that multiple narratives can exist. Different groups – the majority and the marginalized – can see the same situation with competing points of view.

After recognizing the existence of these narratives, these self-proclaimed social justice thinkers also placed *value* in these narratives as well. These were not just stories but valued data points that needed to be equally considered when making decisions. As Diana noted, listening to the viewpoints of others helped her have a better understanding for herself: "It was really all about seeing how different people see things and trying to figure out for myself what that means." Because of this value, participants expressed a desire to seek out these marginalized narratives, even if these points of view were not freely offered them. As one participant explained, "I regularly go to where the narrative is all about…the counter narrative" (Marisol).

After seeking these narratives, the importance of listening for the sake of listening – not to interject or provide feedback – was considered extremely important in the participants'

opinions. Listening to the narrative of others is vital for identifying "how are those identities either honored or dishonored in this society" (Sandra). Honoring by listening provided the first step in valuing others' experiences.

These self-proclaimed social justice thinkers used others' narratives as ways to question and guide themselves towards action, as Sandra explained:

When you talk to someone, you find out so much about their path and their journey, and that's what it's like mainly about. Through people's paths, you can see…how they've interacted with different systems.

After learning how others' narratives contribute to the participants' understanding of the system, participants then used the narratives to question what they know about the system and question why the counter narratives are silenced or stifled. As Tina described, "It is necessary to question in order to make sure that the voices that need to be heard are heard." These narratives are important to the participants because the counter narratives — the individual piece of history — are critical for social justice thinkers to decide how to contribute to their shared community work.

Attribute 3: Awareness of unseen forces.

"Recognize the existence of multiple truths...that they can

all exist in the same arena." - Tina

Through their constant questioning and curiosity, participants explained their understanding of how society is constructed to benefit some individuals through normalizing. Participants have "the consciousness to be aware of these issues" (Marisol). They understood that there were unseen forces and consequences at play in what they learned about the world. This led them to "really think about systems and structures and about how things operate beyond

the individual" (Sandra). They constantly wondered who is the most vulnerable and whether the most vulnerable are being recognized and considered. Tina explained what runs through her head during a seemingly mundane activity:

> [I am] consistently viewing things through that lens of, "Well, what does this mean for the most vulnerable groups? What are the implications of this thing I'm watching on TV, who is impacted by this? What is the implication of this book that I'm reading about?"… you know?

Tina was not the only participant to constantly question what was behind the scenes. Aaron clarified that the sources matter, which links this attribute back to the importance of multiple narratives to discover multiple truths: "Where's the sources of these things? Where did they come from? Which, you know, there may not be one source and most of the time, there's not." He made a very compelling case that information we learn is riddled with *blind spots*, and it requires a constant effort to question and chip away at those spots. As Sandra bluntly commented, "A social justice thinker is someone who questions the system they are working within."

Participants provided examples of this systemic questioning, such as how the language you use can be an unseen powerful force. Tina explained, "[it is] a white construct to say, 'business as usual.' Or even when people are like, 'get shit done.' Like, for who and how?" Aaron delved into how the seemingly objective field of environmental engineering is riddled with decisions that are actually social justice decisions as well, even though they are not explicitly described as such on the surface. He noted that you must always question, but first, "you have to understand that it exists."

Convincing other people that there are unseen forces was a challenge for many participants. But, as Sandra expounded, we have to "start to talk on a human level, and what people's experiences are day-to-day, and other people might not think about," because ultimately, to encourage people to question and recognize unseen forces at work through systems, people need to recognize their own roles. By being self-aware (Attribute 1) and consciously seeking the experiences of others (Attribute 2), then unseen forces tend to come to light. As Sandra passionately continued, "We are the stories that we create, and we are influenced by rules that are outside of us."

Attribute 4: Questioning of origins and intents.

"To see the way forward, you probably need to see the way back to

understand the continuum." - Aaron

Through this constant questioning, social justice thinkers highly value the role history has had (and continues to have) on shaping policies and procedures. As Robert said, "They (social justice issues) didn't evolve in a bubble. There's long histories of these things that require extensive amount of work." Participants expressed belief that people throughout history has not only put oppressive structures and power plays in place, but they have also been intimately involved in defining *social justice*. As Aaron explained,

A space-time continuum… created these circumstances, they didn't just arise out

of nothing, and it's malleable in that it conforms to some sort of narrative

…because of that interpretation, we then come to different conclusions about

whether or not some sort of social injustice exists.

Because of this, history cannot be ignored and must be continuously examined because "people are malleable, so that can lead to this dissembling effect of people not really seeing what to

others seems right in front of them" (Aaron). Questioning the origin of history and the intents of

those who wrote it is critical for someone to understand the multiple layers involved with the

current situation and "figure out how the system is structured to empower or disempower those

groups" (Marisol). This can inform the way a historical narrative is presented to the world,

omitting the experiences of individuals, thus devaluing their experiences and their roles in the

future. As Tina said,

> I don't hear a ton of conversation about where histories align or diverge. And so,
>
> for example as a woman, I hear myself and other women referencing women
>
> leaders. But very few times, I'm hearing us talk about women of color, or queer
>
> women of color.

Ignoring history also means ignoring the pain of the past for the underrepresented and

marginalized. Sandra explained within her area of study, "We have a lot of history of

purposefully and knowingly hurting people of different races." By ignoring it, systems are

dishonoring the sacrifices a particular community has endured in the advancement of society.

Through educating about social justice progress, social justice thinkers can examine historical

events "in particular for marginalized communities, that history plays a really important piece in

seeing, in finding hope" (Sandra). Participants could not seem to agree, however, *how* to educate

the world on how policies have evolved. They acknowledged that "sometimes that makes it

worse because it depends on who is informing the people and what they think education is"

(Tina).

It is a metacognitive decision for a "social justice thinker …to actually slow down and

say wait a minute, who wrote these rules?" (Tina). Because of this high metacognitive awareness

and control, social justice thinkers do not just read and learn history but use it as a tool to question the origins of what they see and what intentions are behind what they see.

Discussion

The emergent themes and provisional coding for metacognitive social justice had a very clear focus that social justice thinkers "should constantly be thinking about who [they] are and … what affordances [they] have and others don't" (Diana). This shows that there are clear cognitive components to social justice that may transcend individual thinkers and contexts. Aaron explained, attributing this thinking to engineers:

> I tend to think that engineers make a lot of decisions, or least can be put in positions where they make a lot of decisions that can affect a lot of people. So like, the Flint water stuff is a really good example of this. But you can look at automotive engineers and half dozen different instances in the last couple years, like the GM ignition switch cases to Takata airbags with Honda vehicles to Volkswagen emissions scandal. The point is, is that engineers end up making a lot of decisions that can affect a lot of people. And that can, through no intentional fault of their own, can lead to what I would consider circumstances of social injustice.

Aaron summed up how the cognitive component of social justice could really affect individual decision-making by making social justice thought proactive in the development of engineers instead of reactive to the results. This type of thinking is guided by the idea that all members of a society feel "psychologically safe and secure" (Adams et al., 2007).

Participants have demonstrated that they interpret the world through social justice thinking. It informs how they approach decisions and consider how to solve problems, even

mundane ones. If social justice thinking were part of everyone's thought processes, it could potentially make mitigating social justice issues into a proactive decision rather than reactive response. As Aaron continued to explain, social justice thinking would "reduce the instances of these decisions that [could create], I would consider, social injustices."

While the participants in this study are recognized as self-proclaimed social justice thinkers, it is to be noted they feel there is a need to expand this type of thinking. However, as indicated before, traditional efforts of examining content and activism tend to attract and retain those individuals who already have an affinity towards social justice. Changing the hearts and minds of individuals (a goal stated by the participants of this study) requires a deeper understanding of the cognitive process by which social justice individuals think, something that is often alluded to but has not been specifically defined and dissected in past research. Assumptions are made that the cognitive component is being changed and developed, but deep beliefs are extremely difficult to alter based on what is currently being done (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). The participants in this study not only indicated that they think with a social justice lens, but they applied and modeled this lens throughout the interview. This indicates that social justice thinking not only exists with these participants but is worthy of investing further research in understanding.

Limitations

Although the participants were diversely represented with respect to gender, age, education, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, they all were still affiliated with the same university. This lack of perspectives could lead to a concentration of experiences and educational perspective with regards to social justice.

Faculty interviews were conducted in the privacy and security of their offices. Student interviews, however, had to be conducted in rooms that could be reserved at various places at the university. This environmental influence may have led to different answers for those who were comfortable in their surroundings and those who potentially were not.

Implications

Certain themes emerged consistently among all the study participants. Metacognition, activism, discomfort and support, and the need to develop social justice thinkers were important themes that all participants addressed to some degree. When the open-codes were compared to the provisional codes of metacognitive social justice, it was evident that all participants exercised these attributes, providing a common, foundational thread of social justice thinking regardless of content or context. This could provide a cognitive goal for individuals to develop as they participate in and learn more about social justice and their roles in creating or dismantling oppressive structure. If educators, both formal and informal, could foster this type of thinking regardless of the content, then social justice thinking could be a foundational component of the content rather than an afterthought or additional component. Curriculum, activities, and objectives could be centered around the development of this thinking, making the processing of social justice content and deep, meaningful engagement in social justice actions much more grounded and purposeful.

Future Research

The landscape for exploring metacognitive social justice is rife with opportunity. More interviews and a greater database of answers could, for example, provide researchers with a firmer grasp of how individuals express their desire to seek out counter narratives or become

more self-aware. More interviews to expand the data base from different universities could allow for contrasting languages and interpretations of metacognitive social justice.

Based on the interviews with the participants of this study, there are three main avenues that should be explored in depth. First, participants indicated that activism is a critical component of social justice scholarship. This collaboration and connectedness of metacognitive social justice and social justice actions is an area to be further explored: Does one precede the other? Is one critical for the other to exist? Is there a point where cognition and action become so intertwined that there is no distinguishing between them?

The second avenue is the need to explore the discomfort component further in order to understand the role that community support provides in alleviating that discomfort for cognitive growth. To what degree is *emotional* discomfort needed for that growth, particularly since metacognitive social justice is heavily reliant on empathy?

And finally, the participants indicated the need to develop social justice thinkers, which lends itself to the implications of a metacognitive social justice research agenda. Deeper understanding of how metacognitive social justice is present (or absent) in certain populations could lead to better professional and personal development opportunities designed to elicit cognitive growth where it may be needed most. This is an important next step in the accessibility of social justice thinking for everyone. Overall, the deeper exploration of social justice thinking is an important area of research towards social change.

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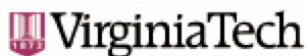
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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Virginia Tech

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	February 18, 2016
TO:	David John Kniola, Veronica Lynn Van Montfrans
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	Personal Reflections of Self-Proclaimed Social Justice Thinkers
IRB NUMBER:	16-144

Effective February 18, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**
Protocol Approval Date:	**February 18, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**February 17, 2017**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**February 3, 2017**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix B

Recruitment email to potential faculty participants:

Dear _____,

Good day and I hope this email finds you well. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education, writing you an email to ask for your participation in a qualitative study. The purpose of this study is to identify attributes that self-proclaimed social justice thinkers may have, and how this shapes their view of the world. You have been identified through public university records as working for InclusiveVT, and, if you perceive yourself as a "social justice thinker," I would greatly appreciate your input.

The study will consist of a 1-hour interview in a location of your choice. The questions will consist of how you proclaim to be a "social justice thinker." Your confidentiality is important to me, so all efforts will be put forth to remove any identifying information post interview. You may request a transcript of the interview and a summary of our findings once it is completed.

If you are willing to provide your input for this important study, please reply to this email so I can set up a time and location for the interview. Attached to the email is the consent form that we will collect at the interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am happy to answer them.

Thank you for your time. We sincerely hope you will consider providing your point of view to this important research opportunity.

Have a wonderful day, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Appendix C

Recruitment graduate student listserv advertisement

PARTICIPANTS SOUGHT FOR RESEARCH STUDY
ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE THINKING - 1st postings
Graduate students who are self-proclaimed social justice thinkers are invited to share their insights for an important study. Participation consists of a one-hour, confidential interview at the location of your choice. To participate in this study, please contact Veronica van Montfrans at vanmonv@vt.edu. Participants must be 18 years or older.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1) Interviewee's demographics
   a. Male or female
   b. Student or Faculty
   c. Race and/or Ethnicity
   d. Area of study (student) or Area of Research (faculty) or Area of Employment (staff)

2) What does social justice mean to you?

3) By agreeing to this interview, you are saying that you are a "social justice thinker." What is a "social justice thinker?"

4) Are there any specific events or moments in your life that you believe led you to be a social justice thinker?

5) Do you have any role models that inspire you or you aspire to be like? Why are they a role model?

6) What role does history play in how you view social justice?

7) When you are making a critical decision (you decide if it is critical or not), how would you describe your thought process?

8) When you are making a simple decision (you decide if it is simple or not), how would you describe your thought process? Any difference?

9) What would you do to encourage others to be social justice thinkers?

10) Are there any other questions you wished I would have asked? Are there any other topics you wish we would have explored?

Appendix E

Researchers Thoughts While Coding.

This paper was written for my advanced Qualitative Studies Course. It describes the inner thoughts, feelings, and difficulties I have had with my scholarship, in particular, the coding of the second manuscript. It is included in this dissertation because it is an honest insight to my thoughts and feelings as I undertook this research.

Metacognitive Social Justice Research and Scholarship: A Reflection

When I decided to define the cognitive component of social justice scholarship, I did not anticipate such a daunting, difficult task. Although I did not anticipate this challenge, once I began undertaking this avenue for scholarship, the importance of and need for this definition became apparent and was validated by those with whom I've spoken about it, both personally and professionally on a local and national stage. There is a lot of history in social justice scholarship — its purpose, its process, and its goals — and trying to identify a singular, previously undefined component presents multiple challenges. These challenges have caused me to grow exponentially as a researcher, a scholar, and a person.

Identifying what components are present in social justice thinking was the first and most difficult task. Embedded in the goals of scholars and courses, there was always an underlying cognitive expectation of thinking a certain way, yet that cognitive expectation was never defined. It was treated as if everyone could identify and understand it, but a definition supported by literature and empirical studies had yet to be solidified. Critical theories have dipped into this realm with their definition of critical consciousness (Kincheloe, 2008); however, whereas critical consciousness seeks to dissect institutional practices to produce change for the most vulnerable (Freire, 1974; Kincheloe, 2008), "social justice thinking" is the encompassing cognitive umbrella of how a person processes their everyday interactions with the world. Although social justice thinking is purposeful, it is not dedicated to one specific action, agenda, or goal that critical

consciousness specifies. It is the metacognitive awareness and control of one's thoughts with regards to access and impact based on individuals' social identities, which I have termed *metacognitive social justice*. This type of thinking is used in everyday decisions and interactions and is then focused into more purposeful actions and goals as described in critical consciousness, theories, and pedagogies.

Attempting to broaden and generalize such a topic is extremely polarizing within the scholarship of social justice. The way to think about social justice has been so intertwined with learning the content and the importance in engaging in the action that I have been met with some considerable backlash, questioning whether this overarching cognitive component can exist on its own. "How can we separate the topic of racism, sexism, voting rights, water rights, etc… from the thinking process?" "How are we ever going to produce change if we don't force action and engagement?" "How are we going to have people think of social justice without explicitly addressing and naming the issues?" This is where I am seeing a disconnect, and I wish to explain: I am not seeking to say that the thinking process is mutually exclusive of the other two components (content and action), and I am also not yet deep enough within my scholarship to begin a Grounded Theory approach to understand the development of metacognitive social justice within individuals or societies. However, if we can define social justice thinking, then we can identify, teach, and foster this type of cognitive activity in any context. We need to start somewhere, and I am attempting to start by defining and exploring metacognitive social justice.

I have accepted that I will have an uphill battle with social justice scholars and critical theorists. I have been told that metacognitive social justice is "watered down" social justice, "social justice light" or "white-washed social justice." Part of being a scholar is understanding that you will always have critics, however, and the best way to handle critics is to listen to them

and then defend yourself with research. A good study is not without its critics, for it pushes you to recognize gaps and inconsistencies and richly expand the scholarship. However, even with all my critics, I have received just as much (if not more) praise on the importance of this idea and great interest in where this research is headed.

The driving force behind this research is simply the fact that I want social justice thinking to be something *anyone* believes they have the capability to do. While I agree that those who are marginalized should be the leaders spearheading social justice actions and policy, we still need everyone to feel that they have the capability of thinking in a social justice way – particularly if we want widespread change. Yes, there are experts in this field, and there should always be experts giving us reasons to question, think, and act. But failure to invest fully in the cognitive component to foster widespread understanding is counteractive to societal change.

Since I began this scholarship in November of 2015, the aforementioned thoughts and critiques have been swirling in my head. And as I transcribed and coded my interviews, I knew that I had to bracket these thoughts to the best of my ability. I felt my questions were good questions because they put the definition of social justice thinking and social justice on the interviewee. I felt the questions empowered the interviewee to expand and share as much as they felt comfortable, allowing them to unwrap and unwind how they viewed the world. I did not feel as though they were too "baiting" but allowed for guidance as the interviews progressed. But when it came time to code, it was *extremely* difficult. I had to keep stepping away from my transcripts, clearing my mind with a walk or other task, and try revisiting in order to catch my own biases. There was a constant need to clear up brain space as I felt my thoughts being directed to metacognitive social justice. I would love to have a cohort committed to helping me

decipher and code what we find, seeing if others saw what I saw, but that is a limitation of being a graduate student with narrow resources and time at my disposal.

Overall, this very difficult process has made me a better researcher – *hands down*. Trying to decipher and explain something so new to the academic sphere has forced me to slow down and question myself every step of the way – does this make sense? Is there a place in society for my work? Am I forcing myself to see something that isn't there? Everything must be purposeful, well thought-out, and as objectively written as possible — including my coding. Good research is extremely thorough and thoughtful. While we are taught this in classes, it didn't really affect me until I had scholars tell me to slow down and not force the process. My coding took a while and was mentally exhausting, but that was because I heeded the advice of experts, flying in the face of the exhausted truism, "A good dissertation is a done dissertation."

Measuring Students' Social Justice Thinking: The Development of a Psychometric Instrument

Veronica van Montfrans

Third Doctoral Manuscript submitted to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In Curriculum and Instruction

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November 3, 2017

Measuring Students' Social Justice Thinking: The Development of a Psychometric Instrument

Veronica van Montfrans

ABSTRACT

Metacognitive social justice, the cognitive component of social justice thinking, is comprised of four attributes: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning of historical origins and intents. Measuring whether metacognitive social justice is evident is the first step in the integration of social justice thinking into any context that is not a social justice class. Through two exploratory factor analyses, a survey consisting of 17 questions on the 6-point Likert scale was designed specifically for undergraduate students in an attempt to measure the attributes of metacognitive social justice. The goal of this manuscript is to provide adequate reliability and validity evidence towards the development of this instrument. This is the first version of this instrument, with the idea of wide implementation and constant evolution into a more valid survey, as well as different versions for different audiences.

Measuring Students' Social Justice Thinking:

The Development of a Psychometric Survey Tool

Institutions of higher education increased opportunities for students to learn and engage in social justice activities, such as classes, majors, minors, student activism, interest groups, and community engagement. These opportunities have contributed to a more inclusive, tolerant, and social-justice-oriented agenda in the higher education environment (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2016; American Council on Education [ACE], 2016). Traditionally, social justice teaching and implementation have been packaged as a combination of three components: social justice content, social justice thought, and social justice action (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; van Montfrans, in review). These three interconnected components can also be deconstructed for a more in-depth understanding of each with the agenda to enhance each component. While content and action have been thoroughly described and implemented (Adams et al., 2007; Kincheloe, 2008), the thinking (cognitive) component has just recently been examined, described, and defined as *metacognitive social justice*. If faculty have a way to identify whether the components of metacognitive social justice are evident in their classroom, then they are better equipped to alter their objectives and outcomes to foster social justice thinking within the realm of their subject matter. A quantitatively valid psychometric instrument would provide faculty a means to identify this cognitive component.

Literature Review

Social injustices are actions that keep those with certain identities in power and are oriented with regard to race, cultural differences, gender identification, socioeconomic class, and ownership of widely needed resources such as energy sources, food, and water (Adams et al.,

2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). The objective of

social justice scholarship and education is to create a society in which "the distribution of

resources is equitable and all members feel physically and psychologically safe and secure"

(Adams et al., 2007, p. 1). Traditional efforts to introduce people otherwise unfamiliar or not

immersed in social justice issues include exposing them to social justice content or involving

them in social justice action (Adams et al., 2007; Kincheloe, 2008). There are current and

emerging opportunities to obtain a higher education degree with an emphasis in social justice,

participate in a variety of diversity and social justice classes, and receive an education from

social justice activists and scholars (Smith, 2012). In addition to the classroom experience,

opportunities for activism are available and encouraged on many university campuses with many

students reporting an increased sense of social responsibility after participating (Cole & Stewart,

1996; Simmons & Cleary, 2006; Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998).

But full participation and transferability of content and activism outside the labeled social

justice opportunities requires a deeper embodiment of social justice, necessitating that an

individual's subconscious beliefs and attitudes be centered around the empowerment of others.

This metacognitive skill is a deep awareness of one's thinking and control over the thought

process to interpret daily experiences. It forms the foundation for social justice thinking, or

metacognitive social justice.

Metacognition is the awareness and control of one's thought processes and decisions

(Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Flavell, 1976; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Weinstein & Van Mater Stone,

1993). It is an important skill to develop and practice to retain information (Borkowski, Carr, &

Pressley, 1987; Halpern, 1996; Serra & Metcalf, 2009). Metacognitive skills are key to

understanding one's own interpretation of the world and personal reasoning behind opinions and

decisions, which gives the individual agency over the processing of that information (Kluwe, 1982; Paris & Winogard, 1990; Pintrich, 2002). Students have been strongly encouraged to acquire metacognitive skills, for they have been attributed to reasoning and critical decision-making: they help students recognize a problem and deduce a creative or plausible solution (Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 2009). To even think about social justice requires the cognitive awareness and control in metacognition to be able to think critically about creative solutions to social justice issues.

These social justice thinkers exercise *metacognitive social justice*. Metacognitive social justice is "the awareness and control of one's thoughts, purposefully examining new knowledge and experiences by consciously questioning who has equitable opportunities to obtain and use resources, and who is positively and negatively impacted because of their social identities" (van Montfrans, 2017, p. 12). It describes the combination of metacognition (awareness and control of one's thoughts) with the cognitive component of recognizing who has access to resources and whom may be impacted by decisions made by those in power, regardless of the person's context. Metacognitive social justice is identified through four attributes:

1. self-awareness through consciousness-raising: subscribes to the notion that *learning* and *being* are inseparable, so it is important to examine oneself and how one fits in the world,

2. value in the narratives of others: value is given for the stories of others, providing a sense of agency to the marginalized voices that are otherwise oppressed through silencing and exclusion,

3. awareness of unseen forces: a focus on hidden power plays (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003) and an awareness of silent players and victims, and

4. questioning the origins of ideas and intents: exploring possible hidden intents behind the construction of ideas and institutions, bringing to light potential counter histories (van Montfrans, 2017).

It is the combination of the four attributes that make up the cognitive component of a social justice thinker. Some individuals may have a deeper development in one of those attributes, so it is essential to clearly state the importance of developing all four attributes in metacognitive social justice to foster social justice thinking. To know which attributes to focus on fostering, particularly in a different context than a social justice class, an individual should to know where they are with regard to the development of these attributes. Therefore, producing a reliable tool to measure metacognitive social justice could have various uses for individuals or for faculty who seek to integrate this type of thinking into their classrooms, regardless of content.

Developing a tool to gain understanding of a social problem is the original purpose behind conducting surveys (Groves et al., 2004). First, a psychometrically valid survey could be used to provide a snapshot of which attributes are already present and which need to be fostered in the classroom. This could help inform a faculty member's course objectives, requirements, assignments, and assessments. In addition, a valid survey could be used for pre-post data collection to see if changing particular classroom variables could make a difference in students' overall social justice thinking.

The purpose of the survey is to provide a quantitative instrument to effectively measure metacognitive social justice in undergraduates by addressing several questions: (a) Do students recognize that their background experiences and knowledge shape their current decisions and experiences?, (b) Are students putting genuine value in the narrative and experiences of others?,

(c) Do students have an awareness of unseen forces and unseen consequences for others?, and (d) Do students wonder about and question the origins of ideas and intents?

Survey Design and Analysis

Study 1

Based on the four attributes of metacognitive social justice, a survey consisting of 28 questions was constructed (See Table 1 for questions). Essential principles of those attributes were extracted through an extensive literature review. Using those essential principles, 28 statements were crafted using specific language to minimize the impact of social desirability bias, which might lead a person to over- or underestimate their likelihood to perform an undesirable (or desirable) action or have an undesirable thought (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). First, faculty were consulted for readability and content. Then, two undergraduate student groups were asked to analyze and identify any confusing statements for readability. The first group consisted of 23 communication students, and the second group consisted of 6 agriculture leadership students. Changes were made based on class discussions, with two statements being completely removed based on student feedback, which resulted in 28 comprehensible statements.

After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A), emails were sent out to undergraduate students enrolled in a single, large undergraduate geography course at a research-1, land grant institute (Appendix B). The email requested voluntary participation in an anonymous online survey for which the student would not receive class credit but stated that their participation would be valued and desired. The goal was to have a minimum of 280 participants complete the survey to run the statistical tests, based on the suggestion of 10 participants per item on the survey (Groves et al., 2004). With the potential of 1,921 enrolled students, 608 responded to the survey with 515 responses scored.

Procedure. Numerous statistical tests were used to analyze the results of the pilot test. A first analysis determined whether the internal consistency of the subgroups (Cronbach's alpha) was sufficiently consistent across the items. Internal consistency measures ensure that individual items of the subscale are measuring the same construct. For example, the instrument is designed to measure the four constructs of metacognitive social justice (self-awareness through consciousness-raising, value in the narratives of others, awareness of unseen forces, and questioning the origins of ideas and intents), and each construct was measured with multiple individual items. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was run to examine clusters, which could be the result of "manifestations of the same underlying variable" (Rietveld & Van Hout 1993, p. 255), with a result of $\alpha = .786$. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted to test the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix (Bartlett, 1950; Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett's Test determined the factorability of the items ($x^2 = .785$, df $= 378$, Sig. $= .000$) and allowed us to reject the null hypothesis. Because all validating criteria were satisfied—adequate sampling size, KMO, and Bartlett's—an exploratory factor analysis was conducted with Maximum Likelihood extraction method with the Promax with Kaiser Normalization rotation method (k=4) on the 28 items to determine whether they comprised the four areas of metacognitive social justice identified through the literature. This is an oblique rotation method which correlates all factors on multiple dimensions. Instead of providing a simple two-dimensional correlation of the values, this analysis will rotate the values on a third plane, showing possible correlations through a third dimension. This may show values and correlations of numbers that previously have appeared unrelated. This is to statistically test that the instrument is driven by theory and is not atheoretical or left to chance.

Results and discussion. The survey yielded unsatisfactory results for it to be

implemented for pilot testing. While many questions did load high enough on one factor, they

were found to load high on other factors as well (Table 1). This indicates that the language used

in the questions leads to an integration of results with various sub-factors. In other words,

questions from the first study do not allow for results to provide accurate distinction between the

attributes they are designed to measure. A reanalysis of the questions is required, particularly

those that are loading high on two, while disregarding those who do not load high on any factor.

Table 1.

Study 1 - Correlation matrix with factors loading higher than 0.4

Questions	Factors loading higher than 0.4			
1. I often feel as though my options are limited when making a choice about my life.				
2. I often wonder about who wrote the historical information I read.	.658			
3. I believe that current policies are strongly influenced by history.	.446			
4. When making a decision, I rely heavily on my religious/spiritual beliefs.				
5. I often feel there is only one true way to interpret a situation.		.548		
6. When I read my textbooks, I question if the information is accurate.	.561			
7. I often wonder if I am receiving accurate information from the local news.	.569			
8. When I hear about a law or policy, I often wonder why it was created.	.648			
9. When I walk into a room, I am aware of how my gender is perceived.				-.521
10. I listen to others' opinions but feel my decision is best made by my opinion.				
11. When I hear "facts," I question the reason they are considered a "fact."	.636		-.462	
12. I often wonder who decides when something is considered a "fact."	. 652		-.410	
13. I often find the experiences of others interesting.	. 501			
14. When considering a decision, I am conscious of the race/ethnicity of the people who may be affected.	.471			-.408

15. I often consider history as an important factor when making a decision.	.557			
16. My opinions are often shaped by my upbringing.			.464	
17. When making a decision, I feel the opinion of the majority is probably the correct decision.		.636		
18. I believe that when people are unsuccessful, it is usually because they did not try hard enough.		.547		.451
19. I feel that history accurately depicts what happened in the past.			.401	
20. I often believe we should listen to everyone's point of view before making an important decision.	.452			
21. I believe my opinions have changed because of my education.	.446			
22. Even when I disagree with an opinion, I think it is best to go along with the majority.		.571		
23. I believe that when something goes wrong for someone, it is because of something they did.		.625		
24. I often expect to be treated differently because of my race.				
25. I believe that current events are strongly influenced by history.	.551			
26. I feel my culture plays a significant role in how I carry out daily tasks.	.449			
27. When I listen to other people's stories, I trust they are telling me the truth.			.529	
28. I often find myself wondering if society is responsible for the failure of individuals.	.536			

Study 2

Based on unsatisfactory results on the first survey attempt, a second study was performed. When constructing the second survey, items with a score < 0.3 were removed from the database. Items that scored high on multiple factors were reanalyzed and written for greater slant to the higher factor. For example, certain words were found to elicit grouping from the participants, so certain questions were changed to remove or add words such as "history" or "fact" to slant towards an already clustering factor. In addition, the instrument questions were then grouped into the four attributes they were designed to measure, instead of randomly mixed-up as they were in the previous survey. The procedural steps from the first study were repeated,

utilizing the same recruitment email with an updated link, and sent to a different population of

undergraduates. The results yielded 269 responses with the Cronbach's and KMO significant at

α=.706. The Bartlett's Test allowed the researcher to reject the null hypothesis (x^2 = 929.271, df

= 136, Sig. =.000).

Results and discussion. Questions loaded much higher on the second study than the first

but still do not indicate a clear enough distinction among the four factors (Table 2). While the

questions are statistically a vast improvement from the first study, it still does not indicate a

complete survey to be pilot-tested on multiple populations. There were only a few questions that

were not loading the number desired, indicating that an additional third round of tests would be

needed (at a minimum) to create a cluster of four questions for the first attribute. Due to time

restrictions, the survey has been completed with the intention of being revisited, reworked, and

continually improved in the very near future. The goal of the completed version of this survey is

to end up with sixteen statistically valid questions that researchers can use to measure

metacognitive social justice in an undergraduate classroom.

Table 2.

Study 2 - Correlation matrix with factors loading higher than 0.4

Questions	Factors loading higher than 0.4			
1. When considering a decision, I am conscious of my race/ethnicity.	.429			.597
2. When I walk into a room, I am aware of how my gender is perceived.	.405			.657
3. I believe my upbringing has shaped my decision-making.				
4. I believe that when I am unsuccessful, it is usually because I did not try hard enough.				
5. I often feel there is only one true way to interpret a situation.		.639		
6. When making a decision, I feel the opinion of the majority is probably the correct decision.		.668		

7. I believe that when something goes wrong for someone, it is because of something they did.		.484	
8. Even when I disagree with an opinion, I think it is best to go along with the majority.		.730	
9. When I learn about "facts," I question the reason they are considered "facts."	.701		
10. I often wonder who decides when something is considered a "fact."	.642		
11. When I read my textbooks, I question if the "facts" are accurate.	.696	-.471	
12. I feel that history accurately depicts what happened in the past.			
13. When I listen to others' stories, I trust they are telling me the truth.		.434	
14. I often wonder who wrote the historical information I read.	.713		-.408
15. When I hear about a law or policy, I often wonder why it was created.	.648		
16. I often consider history an important factor when making a decision.	.622		
17. I believe that current events are strongly influenced by history.	.518		

Discussion

The original purpose behind conducting surveys is to gain a better understanding of a social problem (Groves et al., 2004). Current literature shows that social justice thinking is not being identified or investigated, and in order to change the hearts and minds of individuals to think in a more socially just manner, a clear definition of social justice thinking is needed. We cannot attempt to develop and alter something if we do not first have a clearly defined understanding of it. Metacognitive social justice is a first attempt at establishing a definition of this thought process, drawing from past social justice literature, both theoretical and empirical (van Montfrans, 2017).

Institutes of higher education currently have measures in place to encourage social justice activity and learning, with the indication that cognitive growth and change will occur. To

understand whether this growth is occurring, a psychometrically valid survey is needed to provide educators a snapshot of which attributes are currently present with their students. When completed, this survey may reveal (a) a cognitive component is or is not present, and (b) how we can try to foster this cognitive growth. With this survey, research into this topic has the potential to flourish.

Limitations

Metacognitive social justice is a new area of research; therefore, there are no content experts to default to in an attempt to see if the survey questions consistently fit with the cognitive theory. Therefore, the questions are simply based from the literature and an initial qualitative study conducted. The students were all from one university, which limited the population input. Finally, the time to finish a valid survey was limited, thus prohibiting a multi-year survey development.

Implication for Survey Use

If a psychometrically valid instrument can be constructed, it could provide a snapshot of a university's or course's undergraduate student population. This can influence curriculum changes and ways to approach topics and subjects. In addition, various pedagogical strategies can be tested and retested to see if there is any growth in metacognitive social justice within the students. Finally, this survey allows a shift in focus on the cognitive component of social justice thinking in the classroom, which is a new way to approach integration into non-social justice content classes.

Future Development

It is understood that this survey is the first integration of a continual evolution of a psychometric tool to measure metacognitive social justice. As participants take the survey, the

added data will provide a greater sample base with which to work. New questions will be considered and experimented with for fit, and the input of experts will be addressed as those who choose to explore this realm emerge. Various psychometrically sound surveys can be altered to suit various populations of different demographics, examining how far-reaching metacognitive social justice may or may not be.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter
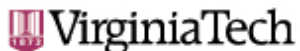
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 22, 2016

TO: Peter Doolittle, Veronica Lynn Van Montfrans

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Creating a Survey Tool to Measure Metacognitive Social Justice

IRB NUMBER: **16-1049**

Effective November 21, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**
Protocol Approval Date:	**November 21, 2016**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**N/A**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**N/A**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

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Appendix B

Recruitment email to potential participants

Hi,

My name is Veronica van Montfrans, a PhD Candidate in Educational Psychology here at Virginia Tech, and I need your assistance towards completing my dissertation. The following link will direct you to a survey of which you will be asked 28 questions on a 6-pt scale. Your identity will be completely anonymous at all times and it should take less than 15 minutes. To participate, please click on this link for more information and the survey: https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8IdJcnCVOZ8x1Up

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and will not be counted towards your grade in the class. Your insight will be useful in creating an accurate and valid survey for my research. Thank you very much in advance for your help.

Conclusion to the Dissertation

Veronica van Montfrans

Helping to produce agents of change has been the precedent of U.S. institutions of higher education. The integration of social justice scholarship and opportunities for activism for students, as well as the commitment of scholars, academics, and globally engaged citizens, are credited for keeping social justice a prominent goal for those engaged in the education of college students. While social justice content and behavior have been the main focus, a shift towards examining the cognitive component is another avenue that should be explored. Metacognitive social justice defines what cognitive constructs are found in someone who could be proclaimed a "social justice thinker." With this definition, the cognitive component of social justice scholarship can now be explicitly taught, which makes measuring the cognitive component and transferring this thinking to different disciplines a new possibility in social justice teaching and learning.

Manuscript 1 provided an in-depth literature analysis of how metacognitive social justice exists across the gamut of social justice platforms, grounded in the metacognitive strategies of empathy, curiosity though questioning, and reflection. It provides an argument for the deconstruction of social justice scholarship into content, cognition, and behavior. Paralleling the practice of the disciplines of science and design, this manuscript makes the argument that social justice scholarship should be deconstructed the same way, with an emphasis on explicitly studying the cognitive component as well. The manuscript then explains the four attributes found within social justice scholarship that are grounded in metacognition: (a) self-awareness through consciousness-raising, (b) value in the narratives of others, (c) awareness of unseen forces, and (d) questioning of historical origins and intents. The manuscript concludes with emphasizing the

importance of acknowledging and actively pursuing further research in metacognitive social justice.

Manuscript 2 provided qualitative empirical support for metacognitive social justice through interviews with self-proclaimed social justice thinkers. A thorough thematic analysis juxtaposed with provisional coding of the seven transcripts showed a large degree of overlap of the participants' answers and the attributes of metacognitive social justice. This qualitative piece provided quotes and examples from self-proclaimed social justice thinkers in which they described how empathy, curiosity through questioning, and reflection guided them as they exercised metacognitive social justice, not just when engaged in social justice action or scholarship but in their daily decision-making and thought processes. These results provide support for cognitive commonality among very different self-proclaimed social justice thinkers. It also produced emergent themes of activism, discomfort and community support, as well as the need for training in social justice thinking. These topics provide ideas for further expansion of metacognitive social justice research and its role in these other emergent themes.

Manuscript 3 is a descriptive account of the creation of a psychometric instrument designed to measure the levels of metacognitive social justice attributes in undergraduate students. Taking the attributes described in the first article, questions were created with the idea that they would be indicators for that attribute. After first going through three rounds of individuals for readability, they were then put through two rounds of exploratory factor analysis, with each round either eliminating or revising of some questions until the final product of 16 items was created, 14 of which had a KMO value >.4. There is still room for growth and evolution of this instrument, but in its current state it provides a stepping stone for further refinement. When completed, it could then be used as a measurement of metacognitive social

justice as other researchers see fit.

Future Research

The avenues for further research are extensive. Beginning within the realm of higher education, an examination of where metacognitive social justice is evident and lacking could have a rippling effect for different disciplines to incorporate social justice into their curricula. Pedagogical research in fostering metacognitive social justice could open doors for a depth and breadth of cross-curricular collaboration. Although the idea began by focusing on higher education, metacognitive social justice has implications beyond this context, as supported by the interviews in the second manuscript. An embodiment of metacognitive social justice was found in the participants, but how did this embodiment begin and flourish? How is metacognitive social justice implemented in non-academic settings? At what point in children's lives do their cognitive awareness and control allow for their thinking to pivot to metacognitive social justice? Can this occur in an adult's life? These are just the tip of the iceberg of research questions to which this dissertation might lead. But words of caution: the attributes of metacognitive social justice are presented not as a panacea but rather as a deconstructed portion of social justice scholarship to be further explored and applied in the greater goal of achieving a socially just world.