Research Articles

Religion, Family, and Justice: A Narrative Study of Adults Learning to Teach for Social Justice in the Deep South

Christen Victoria Warrington-Broxton

Trident Literacy Association

Audrey M. Dentith

Appalachian State University

The Deep South is a distinctive, complex socio-geographic region of the U.S. whose history and politics have been marred by societal inequities and injustices. This research considered theories of social justice education and transformative learning to understand the processes by which adults learn to teach for social justice in the Deep Southern context. Study data consisted of interviews with adult students enrolled in a doctoral-level course in education at a large, urban university in the Deep South. Narrative inquiry and Voice-Centered Relational Method were used in the process of data collection and analysis. Among the participants, familial and cultural religious narratives pervaded, deeply affecting a continual process of negotiation among the participants' understanding of teaching for social justice and their own socially-constructed identities. For five participants in this study, religious beliefs and practices of the family of origin were not only strong plot lines in their individual narratives, but were also significant influencers of their most basic understandings of empathy and justice, and their resulting self-efficacy to teach for social justice.

Keywords: Social Justice; Adult Learning; Transformative Learning; Self-efficacy; Deep South

Education is political (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001; Picower, 2012). Intentionally and by happenstance, educators convey, and students learn values during the process of teaching and learning. Even educators who believe they teach in neutral ways, can be unintentional enabling hegemonic forces at system, organization, and individual levels. However, there is a growing movement among teachers; an educational approach that directly challenges dominant discourses and the pervasive inequities apparent in schooling: Social Justice Education (SJE). A main function of SJE is to confront and analyze the political nature of learning, knowledge, truth, and coexistence as diverse people in a global society in formal learning environments; so, SJE "needs a theory of oppression" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 2). This theory guides educators in learning about the pervasive and internalized nature, and history of oppression; the many different and intersecting –isms that reinforce power, hegemony, and oppression; their own resistance to, and consciousness of these issues; and their sense of agency to take action.

Consequently, SJE is a profoundly political undertaking for educators (Cochran-Smith, et. al, 2009); and it can be risky, as well as rewarding for educators and learners depending on their roles and locations (Adams, et. al, 2007). Several studies outline the obstacles faced by SJE teachers working in contemporary schools (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Picower, 2011; Schindel-Dimick, 2012). For example, individuals teaching for social justice report fearing negative repercussions from leadership and peers, pressure to conform to a one-size-fits-all curriculum that does not address diverse needs, politically and ideologically oppositional environments, and an overall focus on merit-based, uniform learning that robs students of learning about social inequities in social studies curricula (Picower, 2011). Obstacles and negative experiences can affect teachers' beliefs about their ability to take action, or about their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) to teach for social justice; strongly influencing whether or not they choose to practice SJE in their classroom. Some of the participants in this study reported causing family members to feel offended, the withdrawal of family members, and a decreased sense of being able to identify with their family as they took on SJE and began expanding and altering their beliefs and actions to align with new knowledge.

This research aimed to expand the scholarship connecting SJE and adults' perceived abilities to teach SJE. All of the participants were attending a doctoral-level SJE class as part of an education doctoral degree program. Also, the participants were all practicing or preparing to become K-12 educators or university professors. Significantly, this class of adult learners was situated in the Deep South. The researcher was particularly interested in Deep Southerners as adult learners from diverse families, and their embedded cultural and familial experiences that contribute to or detract from learners' perceptions about SJE, and from their perceived abilities to teach SJE. As such, the following questions guided the investigation: How do SJE learners' families of origin influence learners as they make sense of their emerging knowledge of social justice education? How do cultural and familial narratives, beliefs, and practices affect learners' perceptions about their abilities and their feelings of willingness to teach for social justice?

Study Context: The Deep South

Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina constitute the Deep South. Not only is this region more socially, economically, and politically conservative than the rest of the country, it is often considered to be even more so than the remainder of the South (Black & Black, 2012; Bullock III, 2010). There is also a cultural narrative of racial, class, and religious tensions historically entrenched in Southern politics, adding a layer of complexity to both the process of education and the pursuit of increased educational equity in the South, especially the Deep South. Entanglements such as these are evident in legislation that directly affects marginalized citizens, like the restricting of voter identification. In addition, there is a uniquely concentrated amount of extremist groups and citizens with extremist views in the Deep South (Black & Black, 2012). Although extremist views may be evident in other parts of the country, numerous and heightened activities, particularly those that have garnered national attention - like the Mother Emanuel church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina - reveal this region as one that is ideologically distinct and deeply divisive.

The term "conservative" is often used to describe the Deep South. Conservatism refers collectively to modern socioeconomic patterns in the U.S., typically associated with the push to privatize education, support free market enterprise, lower or abolish taxes, deregulate, and limit federal government oversight (Black & Black, 2012). Understanding the Deep South as a conservative region was central to this study because SJE is progressive in nature. SJE is a framework for teaching and learning that encompasses many targeted approaches like social class analysis, feminist frameworks, culturally-relevant teaching, and multicultural education, all designed to challenge traditional and taken-for-granted assumptions about societal norms. Therefore, traditional, conservative Southern values can clash with those of SJE. As a result, the personal and professional consequences for people learning and teaching for social justice may be pronounced in the context of the Deep South. If adult learners are being taught to challenge values that dominate the entire region - values by which many families of origin in the region live - the process of learning to teach for social justice has the potential to be a transformative learning experience that may challenge the very identities of some learners.

Theoretical Framework: SJE's Potential for Transformative Learning

"Transformative learning [TL] refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference...to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76). Like SJE, transformative learning underscores the political nature of reality and knowledge by means of safe, critical dialogue between learners and educators that focus on hegemonic systems and ideals (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012). Also, both learning frameworks of SJE and TL require students to tackle important tasks of critical reflection like uncovering and recognizing power structures, and examining taken-for-granted, possibly hegemonic assumptions (Brookfield, 2013; Picower, 2012). This is done by focusing on, and critically analyzing frames of reference, or assumptions upon which individuals base actions, emotions, and ways of

thinking (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Culture, language, personality, and religion are all resources used to develop habits of mind; assumptions through which people filter their experiences (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Habits of mind help to form world-views, resulting in overarching frames of reference from which people interpret the world around them. So, at its core, an essential goal of SJE is to transform learners' taken-for-granted assumptions about the injustices and biases that pervade education and society at large. As a result, SJE has great potential to transform worldviews, which is no simple matter when it comes to relationships that we have formed around worldviews we may or may not share with other people in our lives. For this reason, this study was designed to take into account how the identities of adults can be affected by SJE learning.

Identities are of central importance to SJE and TL because identities are influenced and shaped by the many social groups that a person both occupies and uses to define themselves and other people (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Socioeconomic status, ability, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and language are all social organizers that are used to create and negotiate identity; so, an individual has several ways of identifying. However, identity is also innately social and political in nature because it is formed and negotiated among an individual's family, culture, media, and societies (Tennant, 2012). Consequently, relationships play an essential role in the formation and development of identity (Britzman, 1993), as the research described in this article supports. In this situated and politicized reality, identity, narratives constructed around identity, and the relationships inextricably tied to both are all simultaneously engaged in the potentially transformative process of SJE. Just as identities and narratives are poised to gain from SJE, they are also put at risk by it because "[o]ur values and our sense of self are anchored in our frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18).

A key goal of the SJE course in which the study participants were enrolled was to challenge and transform frames of reference. Adult learners in this class were expected to become more aware of, and more willing to take action against the injustices that impact education in the U.S. Since SJE can have a ripple effect throughout learners' thoughts, assumptions, identities, relationships, and lives, it is critical for adult educators to gain a more complete understanding of how students deal with the information they gain within the contexts of their lives- formally and informally, professionally and personally.

Research has shown the social influence of the family on adults' ability, willingness, and perceptions about SJE. For example, Tisdell, Taylor, and Sprow-Forté (2013) analyzed how financial literacy educators "attempt to work with the underlying family scripts that inform their learners' beliefs about money" (p. 351). Most of the financial literacy educators interviewed believed that in order to change behavior, it was essential, especially for the learner, to better understand the family scripts, or narratives, that shaped their beliefs about money and finances. The family as a source of social modeling and social persuasion affects attitudes and behaviors, especially when it comes to life concepts like justice and oppression. This aspect of the adult learner's worldview is not examined in detail in SJE literature. Therefore, the objective of this research was to further scholarly analysis concerning adult learners' perceptions of how their families of origin have or have not influenced their beliefs, and willingness and ability to teach SJE.

Methodology

A narrative method of data collection and analysis was chosen for this study to encourage a shift in power of the research process from being solely with the researcher to being in the hands of the researcher and the participants. Participants were free to disclose any aspect of their past or present experiences in the articulation of their beliefs, and were encouraged to give feedback to the researcher on how their interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Narrative methods also offered the opportunity to provide deeper understandings of participants' contexts, histories, thoughts, and beliefs.

Participants' reasoning for and sources of their beliefs were just as important as the beliefs themselves; creating situated, contextual realities that lend themselves well to the study. Stories are an integral part of our lives. Therefore, stories participants told about themselves, their experiences with their families and peers, as well as how their tales were told were central to this work. Through the act of narration one negotiates identities like gender, race, class, religion, and sexual orientation. As such, narratives are collective comprehensions of people's realities (Rossiter & Clark, 2007), and narrative work plays a distinctive role in how individuals construct their ever-changing identities (Chase, 2005).

Data Collection

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant individually. Each interview ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours and thirty minutes, depending on the participants' willingness to discuss interview questions. Demographic information was collected at the beginning of each interview, the entirety of which was voice-recorded. Interviews were then transcribed, checked repeatedly for mistakes, and edited to eliminate all identifying information. Participants were also given copies of their interview transcriptions and given the opportunity to add or remove information.

Additionally, field notes were taken by the researcher immediately following each interview. Notes on perceived participant attitudes, body language, and tones were among the most significant notes taken. Member-checks, which are discussed further in the next section, were also done with individual participants via email and phone. Some additional data collection was done during member-checks as participants provided additional details or clarified issues. Finally, participants were provided with an opportunity to view and add any information they felt was missing, and to remove any information from their interview transcriptions that they felt made them identifiable.

Voice-Centered Relational Data Analysis

A unique means of data analysis, the Voice-Centered Relational Method (VCRM) of analysis (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003), was chosen as a means of acknowledging and honoring the interplay between storyteller and listener. The retelling of participants' stories was regarded in terms of social justice, as a political process that

required considerations of sharing research power, and acknowledging and checking researcher bias. Member-checks were done after each interview both to obtain additional data, and in an effort to share research power and check researcher bias. The storyteller and the listener, the participant and the researcher, can both affect the ways in which experiences are narrated and then retold. Each can change the meanings derived from stories, and they can influence one another, or even become new parts of the other's life experience. Furthermore, to gain experience in the VCRM, the researcher conducted two pilot studies prior to the study discussed in this article. From these pilots, the researcher learned the value of participant feedback to ensure that transcriptions were accurate, interpretations of participants' families and emotions were representative, and that analysis was as balanced as possible. Also, VCRM helped the researcher gain an appreciation for using a semi-structured interview approach so that participants were encouraged to follow their own trails of thinking (Riessman, 2008), fostering a more authentic narrative flow.

VCRM was also used because it demands that participants' narratives be analyzed in great and deliberate depth. Such a method seeks to reveal truths about ourselves and the way we think about all aspects of our being through our thought and speech patterns. There is also an underlying assumption in VCRM that relationships are the very foundation of human development (Gilligan et al., 2003). VCRM theorizes that learning and knowing are strongly tied to the identity socialization people undergo through the individuals and groups in life.

VCRM requires at least four analysis steps, each referred to as "listenings" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 159), each drawing attention to the constructive, collaborative nature of narrations of the participant and the interpretation of the researcher and participants. The first listening requires that analysts listen for the plot of the participant's story, or patterns in thought and speech. It also requires the researcher to critically reflect on their personal reactions to participants' narratives. In several instances during the research process, personal reactions of the researcher were specified in field notes taken immediately after each interview. These reactions were explored during the analytic process, and taken note of in the research write-up as instances of identification with, and empathy for research participants' experiences and emotions.

The second listening involves the creation of I-poems (Gilligan et al., 2003). I-poems are the first-person voices of the participant taken directly from interview transcriptions. They are created by taking the pronoun 'I' and the following verb ("I said" or "I believe"). The function of I-poems is to explore overarching trends in how individuals think and speak about themselves. Finally, the third, fourth, and any subsequent listenings of the VCRM are the same. The researcher listens for what Gilligan et al. (2003) call "contrapuntal voices" (p. 164), or a chorus of patterns through which people can discuss themselves, others, and their experiences in complementary, contradictory, positive, negative, or ambivalent ways, and at times with no patterns at all. Once a potential voice is identified, the researcher listens through the full set of data for contradictions and confirmations of it; redefining and refining the voice with each listening as appropriate.

In an effort to share research power and promote authenticity, participants' narrative analyses were shared with them upon completion, and participants were encouraged to suggest changes to the in-depth analyses of their narratives that they felt were not truly representative or were

inaccurate. This was done so that participants could maintain control over their own stories by providing feedback and making suggestions on aspects they would like to have added, changed, or removed. Only one participant requested a change-a clarification of details concerning family.

Findings

Five study participants regularly and independently told of religious backgrounds and family that fostered new notions of social justice, and contributed to their perceptions of confidence to teach for social justice. Each of these five study participants self-identified as described below.

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Self-Identified Characteristics
Kayla Sue	Female, Biracial (White/Native American), 33 years old, heterosexual, Pentecostal Christian upbringing, currently Pentecostal Christian, Independent political affiliation, former public middle and high school English teacher, and currently a graduate assistant overseeing preservice teachers.
John	Male, White American, 37 years old, homosexual, Southern Baptist Christian upbringing, currently Agnostic, Democratic political affiliation, and currently a public high school French teacher and Gay-Straight Student Alliance sponsor.
Lila	Female, White American, 35 years old, heterosexual, extremely conservative Presbyterian Christian upbringing, currently unaffiliated Christian, Democratic political affiliation, former public elementary school English-as-a-Second-Language teacher, and currently a graduate teaching assistant.
Sarah	Female, White American, 29 years old, heterosexual, Jewish upbringing, currently Jewish, Democratic political affiliation, former educator at Jewish elementary school, and currently a graduate assistant.
Hazel	Female, Black American, 56 years old, heterosexual, Black Baptist Christian upbringing, currently Black Baptist Christian, Democratic political affiliation, former lawyer, and currently postsecondary law instructor.

The systematic application of a Voice-Centered Relational Method of analysis revealed common themes, or findings. The most prominent finding of the study was that the participants' families of origins' religious backgrounds and practices influenced participants' understandings of, and confidence in their abilities to teach for social justice. In telling detailed stories about their families of origin, the participants discussed in this article revealed how their families' religious beliefs impacted their current identities, behaviors, and beliefs, especially regarding their perceptions about SJE. Although participants were asked about religion only twice (to describe their family of origin's religious beliefs and their own) while being asked demographic questions, religion was a prominent theme among the five participants' narratives, discussed independently of the researcher's prompts. Other aspects, such as political affiliation, were also inquired about in two separate interview questions, but were not discussed independently or with any great emphasis by the participants. It was clear that the political nature of teaching for social justice was inhibited or enhanced by the deep familial religious experiences of these participants. Familial religious beliefs and experiences were presented as one of the most influential factors in their identity construction, their most basic understandings of justice, and consequently in their confidence to teach for social justice.

Understandably, familial religious beliefs and practices play a strong role in Deep Southern learners' lives. Much of the Deep South is also known as the Bible Belt, a region of the U.S. that maintains a pervasive cultural narrative of conservative Christian religious values (Black & Black, 2012; Bullock III, 2010). Since familial religious beliefs and practices constituted much of participants' stories and conceptualizations of social justice, it became pertinent to organize and analyze the shared plot lines along which these five participants narrated. While telling stories about how their families and histories shaped their views of SJE, the topic of religion manifested in three primary themes: 1) the Golden Rule-applied to cultivate a sense of empathy and fairness; 2) religion as a motivator to advocate and serve in the community; and, 3) religion as a deciding factor in determining voting habits.

Empathy: The Golden Rule

Four out of five participants referred to the Golden Rule, or a similar concept of treating others with kindness and fairness. Kayla Sue grew up in a Pentecostal Christian family, both parents and her brother all went to seminary school to become pastors. She explained how her family of origin instilled a sense of fairness and empathy in her from an early age:

> They [parents] love people, no matter how you came, what shape you were, or, you know, class, whatever. They just loved people. In word and deed. It sounds a little scriptural to say it that way, but it's true, they did it…and so did my grandparents on both sides loved people.

Likewise, John, a high school teacher who sponsored his school's Gay-Straight Alliance, told stories about his religiously and socially-conservative grandparents who raised him and his brother. His grandparents were influenced strongly by their work experience in the military, causing them to take on a "don't ask, don't tell" policy toward John as a gay man. While it was

clear that John felt rejected to some degree by this family policy, he always described his grandparents as good people who taught him moral values by using religious principles:

> It was all church, church, church. Yes. *Very* church…and, uh, I don't know. Just…I, I got a lot out of that. Uh, like, you know the Golden Rule and things like that. Treat others how you would want to be treated.

Additionally, Sarah remembered her Jewish family telling stories of being treated with religious intolerance. These stories taught Sarah what it meant to treat others with fairness:

> Well my mom's always been really focused on, uhm, treating everyone fairly and my dad too…. But, yeah so definitely my family…did have a lot to do with it, in their own way. They did, yeah. Yeah, they would just tell me stories about their lives growing up, and unfair things that happened to them, or unfair things they saw. They actually did that a lot.

Last, Lila told impassioned tales regarding growing up in a religiously and socially conservative Presbyterian family in the South:

> I think that she [my mother] instilled, and the same thing with the growing up in the church and wanting to help people and wanting to do the right thing and wanting to live in a way that's, you know, kind and caring and, you know, the Golden Rule and all of that stuff. I think that that, those are all a huge part of who I am, and who I am as a teacher, and who I am as a person.

Kayla Sue, John, and Lila's families used Christian values to promote justice and empathy while Sarah's family told stories about the historical persecution and current marginalization of Jewish people to communicate what it means to treat people equitably. In each account, the message is strong: Families often utilize religion as a starting point for understanding and explaining basic social concepts like fairness and justice to their children. This can lead to taken-for-granted epistemological understandings of what justice and equity mean to people once they become adults, especially adults like those in this study who are exploring a teaching and learning framework like SJE that involves deep critical reflection and dialogue centered on such concepts.

Justice: Religious Motivation to Advocate

In addition to shaping understandings of fairness, participants also described how their families' religious views shaped their understandings of justice and what it means to be an advocate for justice for oneself, others, and the community. Lila, Hazel, and Sarah all discussed their parents' religious beliefs (conservative Presbyterian Christian, Black Baptist Christian, and Jewish, respectively) as strong family narratives that encouraged them all to become advocates for social justice. Each woman's story highlights the diverse pathways in which pious familial narratives can lead to an individual narrative with strong social justice themes. Lila spoke about the effect her parents' religious beliefs had on her life as a young person:

When I was like, I think, fourteen maybe, I was good friends with a little girl whose dad was part of the whole Operation Rescue, which is like, you know, blocking the doors to abortion clinics…So I participated in one of those and got put in jail…When I was fourteen, yeah. And uhm, for doin-, trespassin. I mean that's [trails off, eyes wide]…But my parents were really proud of me for having, you know, wanted to make a difference in saving babies lives, you know. Like that's… that's the way I was raised [laughs].

However, Lila no longer agreed with her mother's controversial religious activism. Instead, she reflected on how she originally thought of justice as "saving people" or converting others' ways of thinking to match hers, and has more recently adapted her views to be more inclusive and tolerant of difference: "Okay, maybe I don't have to save anyone [laughs]. You know? Maybe [laughs]…we're all just trying to get along and doing the best we can. And I can learn from them and they can learn from me."

An I-poem was created from Kayla Sue's transcribed discussion that described her journey to becoming a teacher. The I-poem allows for a clear line of thinking and storytelling to be followed between the influence of religion and the decision to teach and affect others' lives:

I don't have a story
I taught
I just remember
I knew
I had
I…
I'm, I'm
I make a lot of my decisions
I pray
I just felt
I know
I'm going to
I'm going to teach

Hazel told several stories about how her childhood experiences shaped her desire to work for justice by becoming a lawyer, then a law instructor, and now an adult learner of SJE. Though she gives it the title "philanthropic," she explained how her family's religious narrative shaped her drive to work for the greater good:

We were raised with a philanthropic theme in the house. Social service where you are here on earth – religious family – you are here on earth to serve others. That is your sole purpose whether your job be doctor, lawyer, Indian chief, engineer. You are here to help other people.

Though at times Sarah seemed closed off during the interview process – possibly out of worry of having herself and her family be misinterpreted or misrepresented - she did talk at length about how her family's religious experiences shaped her views of justice and why it is important to be

an advocate:

> My family…uhm…well…not to like…turn them into like cartoons or whatever, but I feel like, like the whole thing about anti-Semitism. That was something we talked about a lot, growing up…and…they had experience and I had ex…I mean, I experienced a little bit but they had experienced more. It's like, so I feel like that really…I feel like that really has become the core of like why I became drawn to this area [social justice education]. And then studying sociology, then made me really understand, like, you know, the, the full depth of it, of all the problems.

In each instance, strong religious family narratives and behaviors emanating from religious beliefs shaped the ways participants viewed significant concepts of justice and advocacy.

Politics: Voting along Religious Lines

A family's religious views can influence the behavior and decision-making of the individual, including but not limited to such serious considerations as voting in elections and what politicians to support. Most participants (four of five) did not believe their family of origin's political views had a significant impact on their current identities, behaviors, and beliefs. Rather, most tended to describe their families' political views as resulting actions taken on behalf of their religious views. Of these four participants, three divulged experiences in which their families' religious beliefs guided the voting habits and related political actions of the family. So, several participants were not seeing their families' narratives in a sociopolitical nature.

Conversations concerning the importance of religion on political views were taken into consideration because of the lack of connection made between religious beliefs and political views. Three participants, including Kayla Sue, hinted at strong connections between religious and political views, and also stated that they believed their families' religious views shaped them as individuals. However, when faced with the question of political views directly affecting them as individuals, three participants directly denied their family's political views as significant influencers.

Though Kayla Sue did not perceive her family of origin's political views as having a significant influence on her, she did discuss her family's political views as they were influenced by their religious beliefs:

> My parents politically are pretty much straight ticket Republicans because they've never met…mmm, you know, a Democratic candidate they think, was gonna be aligned with their values. So…they never vote Democrat, no matter what. Like they'll vote, [but they'll] either vote for nobody, or vote for a Republican.

This family narrative reveals a highly consequential theme: Familial religious beliefs can serve as guides in deciding voting habits. Nearly every story involving her family revolved around what she saw as a relatively progressive Pentecostal Christian belief system, the churches in

which her family members served as ministers, and describing her family as socially and politically conservative.

Still, only Hazel and Lila believed their family's political views had any consequential impact on their current identities, behaviors, and beliefs. First, Lila was raised in a conservative Presbyterian Christian family that encouraged her from a young age to protest at local abortion clinics, or advocate correcting a perceived injustice. While discussing her parents' political views Lila explained:

> I mean, it's very much the conservative Christian thing. Where it's like, you know, you would never vote for someone that, unless they were against abortion. It didn't, it doesn't really matter what else they thought of, you know. Like that's a deciding factor, you know.

Rozell and Smith (2012) describe political activism, especially in regards to abortion, a common occurrence among Southern evangelical Christians. Thus, from an early age, Lila was taught what it meant to be a conservative activist, and this centered on the anti-abortion movement.

On the other hand, Hazel's narratives described how a family's religious views can influence progressive activism. As the second participant who directly addressed the tie between family narratives of religion, political views, and self, Hazel reported: "We are very politically astute, because my father was a politician. So, we're very politically astute. We talk about politics. *To. The. Hilt.*" In fact, Hazel made a point of distinguishing her family as a political Black Baptist Christian family. Her familial narrative not only told of the importance of service to one's community, but it also told of the historic involvement of the Southern Black Baptist church in the Civil Rights Movement (Rozell & Smith, 2012). Hazel went into detail about both how active she was in her church, and how actively she and fellow church-goers discussed political events:

> I'm in a Black church. Big church. Big, political church. Have a lot of elected officials that come to my church. The man who integrated [this university] is the deacon in my church. Yeah, yeah. One of those big, big churches…they make sure that everybody in there that's young is up to date with voter registration, photo ID, Trayvon Martin, uhm, you know, uh, attack on males…When we get into Sunday school Sunday, they will say, "Did anybody hear? Did anybody hear? What do y'all think about the shutdown?" They'll start the conversation. And I'll just get to hear others…So, yes. So, church is a big deal.

While Hazel and Lila perceived a connection between their family's religious and political views, it was evident that three of the participants did not view political views as a significant influence on their own perceptions and their conceptualizations of social justice. This theme, in particular, highlights the influence of family on emerging understandings of SJE. Furthermore, it reveals the incredible necessity of social justice educators to encourage adult learners of SJE to critically reflect on the multitude of ways in which their families of origin affect their identities, influence how they perceive new knowledge, and how they continually negotiate between these aspects of their lives to create a new and ever-developing sense of self.

Discussion: A Continual Process of Negotiation

This study explored familial influences on social justice education (SJE) doctoral students' personal narratives as adult learners and educators. SJE is an incredibly political process not only within the schools where educators work, but also within their own personal lives. The literature of teacher education for social justice needed increased discussion on the contextualized, home lives of adults as whole learners whose families of origin serve as influencers prior to, during, and after classroom SJE learning. Emphasis was put on the sociocultural and sociopolitical nature of identity, and how identity can be challenged and affirmed (Nieto & Bode, 2012) by the family during the learning experience, rather than focusing on how this is done in the learning environment. While participants discussed how their prior attitudes and beliefs about social justice were influenced by exposure to SJE on their doctoral coursework, it was clear that each was navigating an internal, continual process of negotiation. In the diagram below, the interactions between life narratives has been shown. It is important to note the reciprocal nature between narratives, which indicates the process of negotiation between these narratives. Pervasive cultural narratives such as Deep Southern Christianity, affect the family narratives of the participants, deeply influencing each of the five participants' intellection of social justice.

Also, note the educator and adult learner narratives are both part of the individual narrative:

Vital mediations were flowing between participants' families' religious beliefs, unique individual identities, and their emerging comprehension of not only what they were learning about SJE, but also how able they felt to teach for social justice and the roles they could or could not see themselves playing in current and future opportunities to teach for social justice. In this process, families and familial religious narratives served as both supports and conflicts to creating new personal narratives.
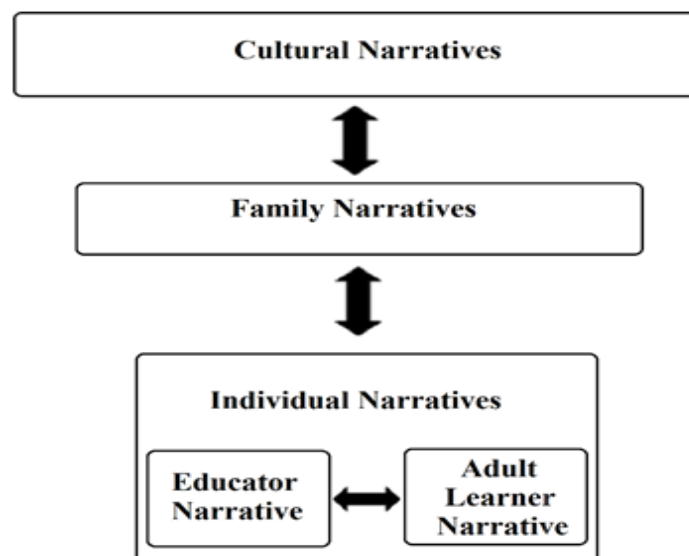

Figure 1. Life Narrative Flow

Negotiations Between Cultural and Family Narratives

Participants told of powerful and potentially transformative processes of integrating, separating, and reintegrating their individual narratives with and from cultural and family narratives (Rossiter & Clark, 2007) as they learned to teach for social justice. For example, Lila and John were moving away from their families' religious narratives in specific social ways, while holding on to overarching lessons of fairness and justice. They used their familial experiences, actions, and values as launching pads from which they could envision

working for social justice in their own unique ways. Each participant practiced self-authorship in which each drew links between current their learning experiences in order to participate in their own "process of constant revision" (Boes, Baxter-Magolda, & Buckely, 2010, p. 5) among what they knew, what their families modeled for them, what they learned, and what SJE instructors, speakers, and texts modeled. By doing this, the participants gained mastery experiences (Bandura, 2012) that made them feel more capable to teach for social justice.

Lila's mother was proud when Lila was arrested for protesting at an abortion clinic with her family. Since then, Lila has distanced herself from her mother, but has become more comfortable as a SJE learner and educator. She retained the skills for protesting and conservative activism learned from her mother, and took on new roles that aligned more with the progressive activism she wanted to participate in as a social justice educator. Hazel was raised in a politically active church that worked to racially integrate the same college she attended. Her past experiences in her family's church were now also reflected in the SJE she encountered in her doctoral work. This provided a new educational space in which she could utilize her past experiences to further appreciate the SJE knowledge she was gleaning from her studies. Sarah's family told stories of their encounters with anti-Semitism. Her awareness of the historical experiences of Jewish people, told by family and experienced in her own life, caused her to become deeply interested in and to seek out social justice-centered graduate programs. Having exposure to principles of SJE served to solidify the importance of religious freedom and the inherent injustice of her own experiences as a Jewish woman. Kayla Sue, who was raised to view Jesus as a representative of human rights by her father, participated in a progressive group of young Christians who fought for more inclusive churches. She conceptualized Jesus not only as the cornerstone of Christian faith but as a symbol in the struggle for inclusivity and progressive values.

Negotiations Between Family and Individual Narratives

Some of the participants' families were supportive of their changing perspectives and diverse viewpoints as each developed their own individual narratives. For example, Hazel painted a vivid picture of Deep Southern politics, Black Protestant activism, and prior experiences with racial discrimination that reinforced in her a deeper appreciation of the immediacy and relevance of SJE in modern society. She felt strengthened by the knowledge she was gaining about social justice learning and empowered to continue working within her community as an agent of change. Sarah's family supported her endeavors to become a social justice educator. Their experiences with Anti-Semitism instilled a value for justice that has persisted in Sarah's individual narrative as an adult learner in search of an outlet for creative energy that could be used for progressive social change.

On the other hand, as some participants adapted to their new learning and began negotiating new individual narratives, they found themselves in conflict with their family narratives. As Lila rejected the conservative evangelical Christian aspect of her family narrative, her mother rejected her newfound values, and she dealt with what Freire (2010) noted as a tense interplay "between what we inherit and what we acquire" (p. 125). Though her family narrative was in direct conflict with her current self as an adult learner and social justice educator, her sense of self-efficacy to practice SJE increased. Because of her exposure to SJE coursework and notable

speakers like Sonia Nieto, Lila decided to use her experience with religiously conservative activism to better envision her new potentialities as a more progressive activist and social justice educator. Perhaps Lila found a safe haven among her peers (Picower, 2012) in order to cope with this tension.

Finally, John's religiously and socially-conservative grandparents enacted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy in regards to his sexuality as a gay man. Yet, John refused to teach in a "state of fear" (Picower, 2012, p. 56). He risked being rejected by his peers in a socially conservative region, and thus risked losing his job as a high school teacher in order to serve as an advocate for gay, lesbian, transgender and transsexual students in his school. He also wanted to take further action by conducting his dissertation research with the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) he sponsored to examine its effectiveness. It appears that John was putting SJE into action by developing students he worked with in the GSA as activists for one another in their school (2012).

Whether their familial narratives served as supports or conflicts, participants used their familial religious narratives as foundational models that reinforced or stood in contrast to their new SJE views of equity, justice, and advocacy. So, for some, SJE fulfilled its transformative potential as a learning process that challenged family narratives.

Negotiations Between Adult Learner and Educator Narratives

Hazel reported that as she learned more about SJE, she felt an increased ability to incorporate her new role as a social justice educator into her work as a law school instructor because the courses affirmed her past experiences and current efforts. As Hazel discussed the influence that her family's church had on her intellections of SJE, Hazel revealed ways in which overarching cultural narratives like Deep Southern Christianity influenced her family's narratives, and then her individual narratives. The effect of her family's religious beliefs on her individual narratives as a growing SJE adult learner and developing SJE practitioner are illustrated in Hazel's Family Reflection Voice I-Poem:

> I was little
> I thought
> I said
> I came
> I felt
> I wanted
> I said
> I am
> I'm not
> I teach
> I teach the same way
> I do
> I do it all the time
> I can do it
> I have to know

I have to read
I just can't say
I hate all this
I can't do that
Understand what I feel
Why I feel
I'll say
I think
I say
I do

In this I-poem, Hazel emphasizes the sociopolitical nature of her position as an educated Black woman with the power to create real change by using her knowledge of SJE. She grew up within a Black Protestant church that emphasized political action, showing the pervasive connection between religion and politics in the Deep South (Green, Kellstedt, Smidt, & Guth, 2010). which seems to have greatly influenced her as a teacher of law, encouraging her to teach for social justice in a way that she hopes will make her students, who are also mostly Black American, feel empowered by the courses she teaches in law.

John, a public school teacher, believed the new understanding of oppression he gained through his SJE courses helped him to comprehend how his identity as gay man presented him with new, unique opportunities to serve as an agent of change. He felt much more comfortable speaking with others about his sexual orientation and advocating for diverse students. His desire to conduct his dissertation research on whether Gay-Straight Alliances truly provide safe spaces for students in public schools like the one he sponsored at the school in which he taught, would expand SJE literature on the topic. Likewise, Kayla Sue, a high school English teacher, noted an increased comfort with discussing racial issues as they appear in young adult literature she used in the classroom.

Additionally, Lila's story illustrated how aspects of her cultural and family narrative of race, religion, and politics, as well as her experiences with SJE coursework supported her in becoming an active agent of change. She felt empowered to reject conservative Christian evangelical cultural and family narratives as she experienced transformative learning in her SJE-centered doctoral program. Rejecting evangelical Christianity is no small undertaking considering the strong role this cultural narrative plays in the Deep South's preoccupation with pre-Civil War cultural preservation (Rozell & Smith, 2012, pp. 134-135). Despite being raised conservatively, Lila felt a sense of self-efficacy to utilize her identity as a White, middle class woman to practice SJE as a graduate teaching assistant, serving as an empathetic model, mentor, and activist to a mostly White, middle class female student group.

Only Sarah felt that she was still learning SJE theory and not quite ready to act on her newly gleaned knowledge. The I-Poem created from her transcript revealed these tensions and emerging self-efficacy:

I would
I think

I feel
I definitely feel a lot more ready
I've really thought about it
I would be
I really didn't think it through
I was aware of some of it
I wouldn't want
I would want
I think about it
I've been thinking more
I feel
I'm trying to
I can
I mean
I'm trying to
I haven't quite figured it out yet
I'm kind of torn
I mean
I want to
I want to
I definitely feel
I can

Sarah was hesitant to claim her family's narrative of experiencing religious discrimination as Jewish people in the Bible Belt. She seemed as though she was still negotiating how she wanted this experience to be told in her own story. While Sarah's inaction could be argued as what Picower (2012) called a tool of postponement (pp. 75-78), she was eager to learn more, and was interested in gaining more knowledge on how she could put her new SJE knowledge and empowerment to constructive use.

Implications

The importance of SJE in contemporary education cannot be understated. Here, it is clear that these learners' families' religious beliefs were extremely important in the formation of participants' understanding of SJE. They embraced and questioned new knowledge of SJE and the actions required to achieve their new, developing goals. Religious beliefs stemming from their family histories offered insights into their learning and how, in their role as teachers, they could work to achieve equity and justice through the innately political act of educating the next generation.

As a result, each participant negotiated a heavily religious background within new understandings of SJE in ways that were fundamentally changed by their perceptions and subsequent actions. Four participants were in positions that offered opportunities to put the principles of SJE they learned in their graduate class into action, and each of them indicated ways they were then putting theory into practice.

In these participant responses, it is evident that educational opportunities to learn about oppression and inequities increased their confidence to teach for social justice. However, the opportunity to critically reflect on their family narratives of religion was also noted by each participant as a powerful experience that helped them gain insight into how their families shaped their perceptions and actions. It is essential to conduct further research into the importance of having adult learners critically reflect on both the influence of their family narratives and how they negotiate between family narratives, new knowledge, and their individual, dynamic beliefs, goals, and actions.

Recommendations

The Deep Southern adult SJE learners who shared their narratives for this study were heavily influenced by the religious beliefs and experiences of their families of origin. Their processes of continual negotiation between the influence of family and SJE coursework sparked participants to repeatedly and independently regard the role of religion as not only one of their strongest family narratives, but also as a strong cultural narrative of the Deep South. Even so, the participant sample of this study was limited to five participants. Future research analyzing the negotiations between self, family, and culture and SJE would greatly benefit from a larger group of participants and increased data collection. Furthermore, purposeful inquiry should be made into the specific role that the families of origin's religion plays in adult learners' beliefs, understandings, synthesis, and considered roles in SJE.

And, while education can transform thinking, adult learners may also be greatly influenced by familial religious beliefs and regional culture, as indicated by these participants who were influenced by their families' religious beliefs and Deep Southern cultural narratives. It is vital to support SJE learners in acknowledging and analyzing how their unique familial and cultural narratives can potentially shift or support their worldviews, and place their existing beliefs either at odds or in line with their learning.

Social justice adult educators must make it a point to guide learners in critically reflecting on how their perceptions of education and justice are shaped by their familial narrative and pre-existing practices and beliefs. To accomplish this critical self-reflection, adult educators can utilize what Rossiter and Clark (2007) call concept-focused autobiographical writing (pp. 108-118). Instructors assign topics, like family religious beliefs, in a SJE course to examine how this aspect of their life influences their beliefs about social justice and education in general. Giving adults a chance to write and reflect on this typically unexamined aspect of their foundational conceptualizations and can help them realize the extent to which their cultural and family narratives play a role in how they think as a learner and educator. Though challenges will likely occur, when adult learners have the space to analyze their experiences in an organized manner that will promote critical learning, students can gain a confidence in their ability to take action in new ways (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, pp. 105-125). When necessary, adults can renegotiate their personal narratives within their own contexts (Rossiter & Clark, 2007), and create or participate in safe havens (Picower, 2012) in their college course or work settings so that they more effectively navigate the political nature of going "against the grain" (Cochran-Smith,

2004).

Highlighting the continual process of negotiation between the self, family, and culture in addition to incorporating opportunities for SJE adult learners to talk and write out how they have come to, interact with, and choose to utilize SJE concepts. Social justice educators can make religion a stronger consideration when asking adult learners to critically self-reflect on how their identities affect their beliefs about SJE, especially in regions like the Deep South. It is essential for SJE students to be offered opportunities by their instructors to critically reflect on the importance of our past experiences and our politicized concepts of self because "[p]erhaps the most relevant relation to adult learning is the empowering realization that to critically reflect on one's life story is to claim the authority to rewrite it" (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 25).

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Christen Warrington-Broxton *is a graduate of Lesley University's Program in Adult Learning and Development in Cambridge, MA. She is now an instructor and site director with Trident Literacy Association in North Charleston, South Carolina.*

Audrey M. Dentith *is a Professor and Director of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.*