Hampden County Table Stories: A Food Centered Health Equity Project Across the Lived

and Built Environment

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Abstract

As an African American, I've become fascinated with power. Who has power, and who doesn't. In psychology, Martin Seligman's theory of *learned helplessness* can best be summarized as one's perceived powerlessness to change a situation, which in turn leads to an internal belief of powerlessness. To give an example, if someone frequently experiences a certain hardship, like repeatedly getting pulled over by a police officer for instance, learned helplessness would suggest that those individuals might learn over time that the hardship is inevitable. Consequently, this can contribute to inaction. People come to believe that they can't change anything, and the cycle continues. Thus, learned helplessness theory suggests that individuals targeted by systemically racist structures are at greater risk for experiencing this phenomenon. In other words, oppressive structures can fuel beliefs of powerlessness, as people are being taught to feel helpless, when in reality they aren't.

Thus, the "Hampden County Table Stories" project combats powerlessness by empowering Springfield youth to realize their strengths in community engagement and community building. Through a practice called "photovoice," youth use photography, story, recording, and video to document, improve, and capture intergenerational, cross-cultural stories of health inequities in the food system and built environment. Through workshops and other activities, youth realize their power, advocacy, and strength, while illuminating health inequities in the broader Hampden County food system. In this paper, I will start with an introduction about power, then I will describe the story of what led me to this work, following that I will describe my community organizations, and conclude this paper with an overview of the project outcomes and my learning throughout this year.

Introduction: Mapping Power

The "Hampden County Table Stories" seeks to empower youth to realize their strengths in community engagement and community building; therefore, this is a project about power and empowerment. Thus, to build a framework of power, a great place to start is through a concept called *power mapping*.

Power mapping is a tool that is commonly used in community organizing. Used by scholars and activists like Marshall Ganz, Rinku Sen, Lorretta Pyles, and many others, power mapping helps orient ourselves outside of conventional frameworks that commonly restrict and limit the power of the so-called "powerless." As a result, organizers have developed a tool called the *Power Cube* to reframe and redefine alternative facets of power in society (Gaventa, 2009). Through categorizations like power-*over*, power-*to*, power-*with*, and power-*within*, organizers invite us to consider the ways in which we understand power. Whether positive or negative, or whether it's big or small, power is everywhere, and it's critical to understand it when working toward change. Hence, the following paragraphs explore the ways in which power presents itself in the world around us.

Power-Over

When considering power in the context of the *Power Cube* (Gaventa, 2009), some might notice that one category sticks out. Specifically, power-*over* tends to stand out from the rest. Why is that?

Scholars define power-*over* as the power that elite actors have "to affect the actions and thoughts" of people who are perceived as relatively "powerless" (Gaventa, 2009). This might look like a boss' power *over* their employees, or a teacher's power *over* their students; in both

cases, power-*over* categorizes certain individuals as "elite," while others are labeled as "powerless." Consequently, with such a dynamic in place, separation runs rampant as the "elite" begin to manipulate structures to maintain their sense of power (whether consciously or subconsciously); and what results is what Antonio Gramsci would define as *cultural hegemony* (Lears, 1985) in which this dynamic goes unquestioned by all.

Cultural hegemony is defined as the dominance of a ruling class to manipulate a culture so that their worldview becomes the accepted norm (Lears, 1985). In other words, societies become manipulated in ways that benefit the elite, while also shifting in ways that further restrict the power of the "powerless." This hegemonic power structure can be seen constantly through racial relations in the United States.

Historically, power-*over* in America has presented itself in the form of white supremacy – with a so-called "white elite" enforcing their power *over* a racially Black other. The Middle Passage is just one of many examples, in which those in power captured and forced nearly 12.5 million Africans aboard European and American slave ships to be sold as chattel (Willford, 2010). This is an example of power *over* Black individuals. Another example is mass incarceration, as American Black men are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of white Americans (Nellis, 2021). Further, consider American hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan or The Proud Boys; both of these organizations are rooted in white supremacy, and therefore exhibit ways in which Americans interpret power *over* Black individuals (Ku Klux Klan, n.d.; Proud Boys, 2021). Thus, seen through all of these examples, it is apparent that Black Americans stand in the face of oppressive systems that frame their identity as powerless; and when people are framed as powerless, it leads to a phenomenon known as *learned helplessness.*

Learned helplessness is a psychological principle in which people believe that they are unable to change a situation, so they simply give up (Seligman, 1972). Therefore, it's a principle of manipulating the strong to believe they are weak. To give an example, one major way to visualize this can be seen in elephant training. For context, elephants are roughly 21 times stronger than your average human (Ball, 2022). Yet, what if an elephant wasn't aware of this strength?

When elephants are trained, they are taught to believe that *they aren't strong*. In order to do this, one first must tie a baby elephant's leg down to a pole. Then, for hours, and sometimes even days, the little elephant will struggle and struggle in attempts to get free; however, due to the rope, escape is impossible. Consequently, over time the baby elephant will be forced to give up, believing that the situation is helpless. The trainer has effectively deceived an elephant, something nearly 13 times more powerful than them, into believing that it is weak (Skillicorn, 2021). However, that isn't all. The most alarming aspect of this training is that this belief of helplessness isn't temporary. In future years, as the elephants grow much bigger and stronger, when tied down again, their sense of helplessness returns. Specifically, the elephants continue to believe that they can't break the rope. Instead, the creatures demonstrate how they've been taught to be helpless, when in reality they're strong beyond measure. Thus, similar results can be translated towards humans, as many of us may be unaware of our own strength.

For example, Laura Wray-Lake and Laura Abrams (2020) discovered this exact phenomenon in Rochester, New York. These researchers talked to numerous Rochester youth of color, in which 83.9% of participants naturally brought up the theme of violence, when no leading questions were directed towards that theme. Therefore, in Wray-Lake and Abrams' eyes, violence seemed unavoidable; and unavoidable violence was likely to have some side-effects.

Specifically, although some students used the violence as a catalyst for change, the majority of the students demonstrated that community violence resulted in disconnection, disempowerment, and disengagement. Therefore, like massive elephants bound to a pole, Rochester youth have similarly found themselves "bound" to a theme of community violence, in which some have learned to accept and normalize it, as a part of their culture.

Consequently, this is the danger of the power-*over* dynamic. Through the normalization of violence in a predominantly Black community, "elites" have affected the actions and thoughts of Black individuals to make them believe that their hardship is normal. In other words, Black individuals are taught, like elephants, to believe they aren't strong. Thus, research like this shows the importance of changing that narrative. We live in a society where people are unjustly framed as weak and helpless; yet, what if we could change that? What if there were other methods to recognize and harness one's power?

Reframing Power

In order to create good societies, it is mandatory that we reframe our understanding of power. Thus, instead of viewing power as a tool for manipulation over people, let's transition and explore ways in which power can encourage and uplift.

As mentioned before, the power *over* dynamic was not the only category in the *Power Cube*. Alongside power-*over* came three other dynamics: power-*to*, power-*with*, and power-*within*. Power-*to* is defined as the *agency* and ability of the so-called powerless to act on their own behalf by exercising their rights (Pyles, 2020). In other words, power-*to* can be understood as one's potential *to* take action in response to a circumstance; and a large way to measure that potential is by associating power *to* with power-*with*. Power-*with* is the synergistic

power that emerges from collaboration, alliance building, and solidarity with others (Pyles, 2020). Therefore, power-*with* is a unified power that is rooted from one another. It's having power together, and that togetherness further ignites one's power to act. Lastly, power-*within*, a power that exists outside of social constructs (Pyles, 2020), meaning that this is a power that's internalized. Thus, power-*within* is the confidence that leads someone to take action.

Researchers have concluded that digital storytelling is a highly effective tool to both empower and encourage people to be activists in their communities, and strive towards positive social change (Bouchrika, 2022). One example of this can be seen through the practice of "photovoice." Photovoice is a methodology that incorporates elements of photography, video, and story to create a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their story (About PhotoVoice, 2019). Therefore, photovoice reframes power by placing value on *everyone's* story.

For example, in the New York "Public Science Project," members engaged in participatory action research to address issues impacting urban youth. Be it mass incarceration, video surveillance, or education inequity, researchers guided New York youth to tell their stories, and after converting their stories into videos, the youth were able to witness the ways in which their stories positively impacted their community (Public Science Project, 2018). Likewise, in the "Hear Our Stories" project (2013), young Latina mothers took part as storytellers and created over 30 digital stories that incorporated images, videos, voiceover, and other elements to reshape the oppressive stereotype and narrative that was aimed at them (Hear Our Stories, 2013). By the end of the project, researchers concluded that the mothers' stories were impactful in shaping more sensitive public programs and policies focused on young parenting Latinas. In the "Setting the Tables Project" in Springfield (Harper, 2017), researchers worked alongside eight local youth

to create a photovoice project that tracked the path of food from local farms to school cafeterias. At the end of the project, the youth were able to critically consider the relationships that exist between their school food advocates and their school district's food services director. As a result, the project enabled the youth to present documentation to committee members in hopes of implementing a farm-to-school supply chain, which eventually led to a temporary addition of a "Puerto Rican Food Carnival" menu at Holyoke High School.

These studies emphasize the ways in which storytelling actively contributes to positive change. Storytelling can weaken power-*over* dynamics and redistribute power in ways that level the playing field. So, over the past year, I have participated in the "Hampden County Table Stories Project" and witnessed youth realize their power as change agents in society. By using photovoice, Springfield youth captured intergenerational, cross-cultural stories that in turn have power to transform the food system. In the following pages I will first tell the story of what led me to this work, then I will describe the Springfield Food Policy Council and Gardening the Community, the organizations I was partnered with during this project. Next, I will describe the "Hampden County Table Stories" project, and how the project fits into a broader framework of social change. And lastly I will reflect on my overall learning throughout the course of this project.

Story of Self

As an African American, I often find it hard to believe that I can make a difference.

I come from a lineage of people who were enslaved. My ancestors were stripped from their homeland, forced onto a ship, then subjugated to work in what we now label the United States. Consequently, when it comes to power, I once believed that I didn't have it.

For context, I grew up in a predominantly white community where nobody looked like me. While growing up, I had to normalize my classmates touching my hair, I had to explain to my teachers that I wasn't a part of the METCO program, I even had to listen to passing cars drive by and yell *nigger* at me. Therefore, in the midst of the turmoil, I didn't believe I could change anything. Yet, gradually over time this perspective would shift.

While sitting on an airplane en route to New Orleans, I somehow managed to ask my parents this question: *why did we move to a place where we are weak?*

Speechless, my mom slowly looked into my eyes and responded, "*we are not weak.*" We moved to empower those around us, and we did that through ABC. The ABC Program is a program for "a better chance." And my parents were offered to be a host family. Thus, through ABC, my family housed and cared for high-performing students of color in hopes that the environment might equip them for success (A Better Chance, 1963). Therefore, my family wasn't weak, as we were empowering students to be successful. Likewise, my understanding of power shifted, and I was invited to consider the ways that I was strong too.

During my freshman year of college, I took my first Civic Engagement and Service Learning (CESL) class; and while in that class, I was challenged to consider the ways in which my identity informs my potential for change. Initially, I didn't think that I was special. I didn't feel confident in my Black identity. I considered myself as having an "illegitimate" Black experience, because I grew up in a predominantly white town. I felt like other Black people didn't really share my struggles; so generally I stayed quiet. Yet, gradually over time, this dynamic would shift.

Eventually, a professor in the CESL department would invite me to participate in an anti-racist focus group. *Of all the people at UMass, do they really want me in the focus group?*

As mentioned before, I didn't feel like I was bringing anything, yet someone believed in me, so I boldly took the risk and decided to participate. Then, after hearing my input, I was empowered again. Specifically, a couple months later, my professor asked if I was interested in helping plan an anti-racist "Community Conversation Series." Yet still, I wondered, *why do they want me to help facilitate the series?* I didn't think I was valuable, yet my professor constantly believed in me, so I participated. By the end of that project, I thought I was done. Yet, following that conversation series, I was offered again to help co-author a chapter in a statewide anti-racist community engagement volume, with a chapter theme of "doing the work." Amazed at the opportunity, I was somewhat stunned with the title of "doing the work." Unbeknownst to me, I had been "doing the work" the whole time, and although they were baby steps, I actively participated because someone believed that there was strength inside of me.

So, a large reason why I do this work is because I want to encourage people and instill in them their power. I believe that nobody is weak, and we all are strong beyond measure. Therefore, this project seeks to empower and strengthen folks in need. Everyone has potential to make positive impacts toward social change. No one is powerless, and they should be aware of that.

Description of Community Organization:

In this project, I am partnered with the Springfield Food Policy Council (SFPC), a non-profit advocacy organization that works to facilitate racially equitable food and social justice by developing a vibrant local food system with urban agriculture at its center. Therefore, in context to power, SFPC works to ensure that all Springfield residents have autonomy over the food they eat. Why is this important? Because more often than not, many Springfield residents

don't have access to healthy food options. Specifically, consider what's happening in a neighborhood of Springfield called Mason Square. Mason Square is home to roughly 38,000 people, yet the entire neighborhood doesn't have a full-sized supermarket (Kinney, 2014). How could that be? Consequently, families in this area are forced to spend long trips leaving the neighborhood to get what they need; yet for people without cars, that isn't an option. Instead, these folks are forced to rely on fast food and packaged products as their primary source of food; and items like that have been contributing to rising levels of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Kinney, 2014).

Thus, frameworks like this demonstrate significant injustice. Many Springfield residents are facing numerous challenges as food justice repeatedly is deemed as unimportant, and in 2021, the city of Springfield committed itself to constructing a Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, right in the middle of Mason Square (Kinney, 2021). Therefore, I mention this press to emphasize the importance of the Food Policy Council's work. Instead of feeling intimidated by injustice, SFPC seeks to equip and change Springfield for the better.

Some examples of this can be seen through advocating. First, consider the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which provides monthly incentives to SNAP holders when they purchase fresh, local, fruits and vegetables from Massachusetts farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, and mobile markets (Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program, 2017). These incentives can range from $40 to $80 a month, depending on one's family size. Yet, despite that fact, HIP helps empower the people who need it. Likewise, in 2019, SPFC helped advocate for the development of the Springfield Culinary Nutrition Center, which now provides every student in Springfield access to fresh foods cooked from scratch (Culinary and Nutrition Center, 2019). Therefore, just like HIP, students now have autonomy over the food they have at school. Even

more recently, during the fall of 2022, SFPC director, Liz O'Gilvie, was invited to Washington DC to attend the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. While there, she described the current work going on in Springfield, and how other states might consider replicating local practices (Ending Hunger, 2023). So, having mentioned all of these accolades, I think it's fair to claim that SFPC has already made a significant impact towards creating a more equitable Springfield. Therefore, in hopes of continuing these strides towards equity, in this project the Springfield Food Policy Council partners with Gardening the Community, another food justice organization, to help empower young students to realize their strengths in community engagement and community building. Thus, what follows is an overview of the "Hampden County Table Stories." First I will describe the project, then I will discuss the outcomes, and lastly I will explain how this project contributes to positive social change.

Hampden County Table Stories

In hopes of creating positive change, we have developed the "Hampden County Table Stories: A Food Centered Health Equity Project Across the Lived and Built Environment." Overall, the goal of this project is for youth to realize their strengths in community engagement and community building; and having been empowered this way, participating youth will greatly contribute to SFPC's mission of facilitating racially equitable food and social justice within the local community of Springfield.

So how did we get here? To start, this project has developed from numerous other projects conducted by the Springfield Food Policy Council. For example, I've already referenced the "Setting the Table" Project, in which eight local youth used photovoice to track the path of food from local farms to school cafeterias (Harper, 2017). Yet, I haven't mentioned other projects

like the "Holistic Evaluation in Urban Agriculture" Project, which sought to study the neighborhood effects of infrastructure in context to healthy food access (Shostak, 2022). In all of these projects, youth participation has proven to be a significant component towards creating positive change. So, we hypothesize that if we further empower local youth, this project will make an impact on food justice and health equity in both Springfield and the greater Hampden County.

In regard to participants, this project engages with twenty high schoolers around the Springfield area; we met two times a week, starting in December. As a facilitator, I worked alongside two amazing organizers, and together the three of us facilitated workshops about power and strength. The first organizer that I worked with was Liz O'Gilvie. Liz is the director and board chair of both the Springfield Food Policy Council and Gardening the Community. The second organizer that I worked with was Terrell James. Terrell is a member of Fertile Ground, a social justice organization that seeks to transform food systems from the ground up, and he is also a PhD student in the Anthropology department at UMass Amherst. Therefore, with both organizers' guidance, I assisted in the project by helping run workshops. Specifically, by utilizing the methodology of photovoice, the majority of our workshops revolved around illuminating health inequities through storytelling, video, photography, and other media. Currently, the project is still underway as the winter weather was incredibly unfavorable, but eventually we plan to share our stories and results with the broader community, elected officials, and other policy leaders to more effectively demonstrate the need and proposed pathways for food systems policy change. Likewise, another potential hope would be to develop a "food stories audio trail," including QR codes, pictures, videos, and reflections from the students involved in the project. This would act as an easy and accessible way to preserve and impact our local community. Plus,

the students involved would physically have an opportunity to access and view the fruit of their labor.

Nonetheless, by implementing these strategies, we believe that participating students will greatly realize that they have potential. Instead of feeling weak, youth will feel equipped and capable to actively participate in community engagement and community development. What follows are the current project outcomes, and overall analyses for how this fits into the framework for social change.

Project Outcomes

To reiterate, the primary objective of the "Hampden County Table Stories" is for youth to realize their strengths in community engagement and community building. So, when considering the overall outcomes, a telltale way evaluating project success would be to examine the positive impact felt by participants. In other words, the question at hand is *do the participating youth now feel empowered?* We believe that the answer to that question is yes.

In numerous ways, we have witnessed the participating youth significantly grow throughout the course of this study. For example, during each of our workshops the students jotted notes, asked numerous questions, actively reflected when a certain topic resonated with them, and even some students have gone as far as pursuing literature in context to the food we eat and our relationship to the land. In this last case, students specifically started a book club in which they read through Dianne Glave's (2010) environmental history story entitled *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage*. From there, I was able to sit on a zoom call and have a podcast style discussion with the students about the book. I asked questions like what was the book about, why did they choose it, what motivated them to read it,

and what were their takeaways. Then after, having received their permission, I was able to share our discussion through the monthly newsletter of both Springfield Food Policy Council and Gardening the Community. Therefore, I mention all of this to emphasize the ways in which students have been realizing their power. Students are using their autonomy to be changemakers in society, and we're super encouraged for the future of Springfield.

However, as is expected, while we experienced many successes, we also experienced some inevitable setbacks. First, as I mentioned earlier, a large component of this project involves actively going into the community and capturing videos of environmental injustices in hopes of making change. This might look like interviewing someone within the community, or taking a photo of a dangerous intersection, then telling a story about food accessibility and transportation. Overall, this method of research is a crucial step towards project success, for if we didn't document injustice, we wouldn't be able to proceed further as we needed this media for the photovoice element. So, having explained this significance, I tragically acknowledge that very little documentation has been taken thus far as our schedule was significantly impacted by the weather. Specifically, Springfield experienced a lot of rain and snow this winter, and since many of the youth commute to our office, many of our meetings were canceled or often postponed. Consequently, most of our meetings revolved around introductory workshops, as we weren't able to physically go out and capture injustices. Yet, that was not all.

Due to this dramatic shift in schedule, the project also began to overlap with the collegiate spring academic school year at UMass Amherst. As a reminder, facilitator Terrell James, and I, are located in Amherst during the semester. Springfield is roughly 40 minutes south of Amherst. Therefore, the distance between the two locations became strenuous.

Nonetheless, the two of us toughened it out by jumping back and forth between Amherst and Springfield at least once a week. But, unfortunately for me, while I was returning to UMass one day, my car started smoking, in which I later learned, my radiator died. So, as I didn't have a vehicle anymore, I was significantly prevented from being as active in the project as I wished. Yet, despite the challenges, we still intend to finish this work.

As the weather gets nicer, we currently are planning to continue this project into the summer, and in an overall sense, this combats a large amount of challenges. One, by working in the summer, we mitigate the risks of cancellations and postponement because the weather is a lot better. Two, as both Terrell and I live locally in the area, conducting the project in the summer would also give us more time and access with the kids. And three, conducting a summer project also provides more access to more youth in general. The summer is a period where youth are free from school, sports, and other extracurriculars, and throughout the winter we've had challenges as these elements have played significant roles in student attendance. So, in summary, if given an opportunity to do this project again, I believe that there would be a lot of value in working in the summer rather than the winter.

Yet, once again, I truly believe that this project still is, and will be successful. Every time I step into work, the youth are enthusiastic, engaged, hopeful, motivated, and driven to step into their calling as leaders. Of all the things that these youth could be doing, the students work for the betterment of their community, and that's empowering. They're heart for this work is contagious, and simply working with them strengthens me. Wherever these high schoolers find themselves in the future, I trust that they'll make a huge impact on the world around them. People may not acknowledge their strength, but I can already attest that they're strong beyond measure.

Project Analysis

Thus, now coming full circle, as youth realize their power, this project beautifully fits itself within the framework for social change.

As I explained earlier, more often than not, certain individuals are taught to feel powerless because of x, y, or z. Maybe it's because someone looks a certain way or does a certain thing. Maybe it's because someone doesn't have experience, or because they don't have a particular amount of something. Nonetheless, by framing certain individuals as "powerless" while uplifting others as "elite," people exhibit significant injustice, and it overall perpetuates a pattern of socialization and oppression. Again, I reference the power-*over* dynamic. When so-called elite actors manipulate and affect the actions and thoughts of people who are perceived as "powerless" (Gaventa, 2009), manipulation, helplessness, hegemony, and destruction begin to run rampant. Yet, lucky for us, these structures aren't impenetrable. Throughout history, numerous different movements have challenged this dynamic, and one major example of this can be seen through the Black Panther Party.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was a revolutionary organization with an ideology of Black nationalism, socialism, and armed self-defense, particularly against police brutality (Easley, 2021). Holding onto the tenets of freedom, housing, employment, and peace, one of the major points of the Black Panther Party was to have "power to determine the destiny of our Black Community" (Easley, 2021). Therefore, the BBP was centered around power and autonomy. The Panthers understood that they had power, and they created a movement to invoke that awareness in others. Yet, this isn't a rare occurrence. Another major instance in which power

was reframed was through the development of the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) in Chicago.

In this example, teachers stood on the front lines as they organized and challenged themes regarding "free market education reform" (Uetricht, 2014). Essentially, these teachers refused to roll over when the local legislature continued to offer them extremely poor contracts. Likewise, these teachers refused to do nothing as Mayor Richard M. Daley introduced Renaissance 2010, a program aimed at shutting down sixty to seventy schools deemed low-performing and under-utilized (Uetricht, 2014). Yet, the Chicago teachers knew their value, and they fought back. As a result, through both community based partnership and organizing, the Chicago teachers union initiated a strike and walkout that nearly shut down downtown Chicago in a sea of roughly 30,000 strikers and supporters (Uetricht, 2014). Therefore, these teachers proved that they had power, despite what anyone said about them.

Lastly, I'd like to reference the ways in which power was reframed through the United Farm Workers (UFW) union in California. Similar to the BPP and the CORE Chicago, members in the UFW were viewed as powerless. They experienced terrible working conditions, extremely low pay, and were simply expected to roll over and take it (Shaw, 2010). However, instead of giving in, the farm workers boycotted and picketed in hopes of changing the system; and eventually their resistance led to the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) in 1975 (Shaw, 2010). Therefore, again this is an example of the so-called powerless, exhibiting great strength. In other words, I reference these movements to emphasize the ways in which power transforms society when we embrace it outside of just the elite.

So, when it comes to the framework of social change, the "Hampden County Table Stories Project" ignites a power within Springfield high schoolers. Like the many movements of

the past, we're striving for the participating youth to realize their strength, when systems might teach them otherwise. Thus, the overall takeaway is that *Springfield students are strong*. They bring immeasurable value to our local communities, and have significant potential to create positive social change.

Personal Reflection

In conclusion, having finished writing a 20 page paper about youth empowerment, I think one of my biggest learning outcomes over the course of this project has been an internalized realization that I have power myself.

As I referenced in my story of self, I sometimes find it hard to envision myself as a changemaker. Essentially, I never really thought I'd have the potential to change policies or ideologies, so instead, I believed that injustice was inevitable. I felt like I wasn't equipped to change things, like there was nothing I could do about it. Sometimes I felt like I didn't have the time to do the work, and other times I felt like it would be a significant toll on my stress and wellbeing; and with a presumption like that, I figured I'd stay out of change work. Yet, over the course of a year, I've slowly begun to realize that this isn't true. Specifically, I learned that "doing the work" wasn't exactly what I perceived it to be. Social change work was more than movement making and advocacy, and after learning that truth my internalized helplessness began to shake free.

Over the course of the year, I've been learning that "doing the work" can present itself in many different shapes and forms. For example, I am enrolled in a class with thirteen other students who are equally undergoing projects that contribute to positive change. Some of these projects involve art, some of these projects involve legal literature, some of these projects have

involved cooking, yet all of these projects are still considered "work" that seeks to create a more equitable and just world. Therefore, when it comes to this project it's cool to think that I'm doing the work too. Despite the numerous setbacks due to the weather, despite my doubt regarding who might actually read something this long, despite all my other concerns, it's cool to know that I'm still overall "doing the work." I might not ever know what results from a workshop, or a conversation, or an essay, but I have the privilege to plant a seed, and maybe over time that seed might grow into something spectacular.

So, in summary, participating in this project has made me feel strong. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow from staff Liz O'Gilve and Terrel James, and I'm also grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow from the amazing Springfield youth. Nonetheless, if you were to take anything from this project, I invite you to consider the power within you. All of us have power, so let that light shine; as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same (Williamson, 1992). Therefore, we have the power to empower one another. When someone is in need, you have the potential to be bold, get uncomfortable, and use your power to make a difference; and after doing that maybe they'll use their power to help someone else too.

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