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# Introversion-Extraversion and the Constitution of an Activist: Exploring Personality Value Patterns in Social Movement Engagement

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*Introversiion-Extraversiion and the Constitution of an Activist:  
Exploring Personality Value Patterns in Social Movement Engagement*

An Honors Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology  
Bates College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelors of Arts

By  
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Lewiston, ME

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## ***Abstract***

The proliferation of contemporary, left-leaning social movements aimed at countering societal injustices represents popular and significant avenues for activist engagement among young adults. Compared to the social movement activity of previous generations, present-day activism encompasses a diversity of loosely organized, cause-driven movements, which embrace notions of intersectional identities and rely on diverse forms of participation to advance their goals. Given the increased opportunities for social movement participation, the high visibility of contemporary activism due to social media, and the rejection of hierarchical movement leadership structures, barriers to social movement involvement have declined dramatically and millennials participate in activist efforts at significant rates. However, despite the changing nature of social movements and the embrace of horizontal, “flat” leadership models, levels of approbation are not equally divided within a group; some participants inevitably receive greater recognition for their contributions to the cause than others. This thesis explores whether certain forms of activist participation are perceived to be valued more than others based on cultural privileging of extraverted over introverted personality traits and styles of engagement. Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected through a survey and interview process with college-age social movement participants, I conclude that despite widely held conceptions and stereotypes about activists and their personality traits, many highly engaged students do not conceive of themselves and their contributions in stereotypical ways. The disjuncture between students’ personal understandings of their efforts and the cultural trope of an activist, suggests potential points of reconsideration for activist and social justice movements.

## ***1. Introduction***

*We behave in certain ways to look cool – I think it’s interesting that in this new movement of activism that many people our age participate in, it’s cool to be knowledgeable about injustice - it’s cool to be politically active – it’s cool to be woke.*

*~ Laura\*, research interview participant*

In the contemporary political climate, one defined by hyper-partisanship and changing forms of political engagement, involvement in progressive, left-leaning social movements has become a relatively mainstream activity. Compared to previous eras of social movement activity, contemporary activism has shifted to encompass a diversity of loosely organized, cause-driven movements aimed at demanding social, political and economic justice at all levels of society. Especially among members of the millennial generation, frequently characterized as the most progressive age demographic due to their strong support for liberal – often bordering on leftist and socialist – ideologies, concern for social justice and involvement in activist movements has become relatively mainstream (Thompson 2016). Facilitated by the breakdown of traditional political parties, the spread of activist rhetoric via online and social media platforms, and the proliferation of large-scale social movement actions, opportunities for social and political engagement abound (Bennet 2012). Defined by their “diffuse and decentralized” nature (Norris 2007), modern forms of social and political engagement which transcend the limits of formal two party politics, have reconfigured the ways in which people relate to politics. Within socially and politically liberal circles claiming a political identity and professing an engagement in left-leaning social movements is perceived positively, if not expected.

For many, involvement in social and political activism becomes a part of their identity. Typified by the millennial slang term *woke*, usually expressed as a hashtag (#woke) to describe

someone who is aware of social, cultural and political inequalities, and “down with the historical fight against prejudice;” being regarded as woke within progressive millennial circles carries with it significant social capital and influence. As Anna Hesser (2016) describes in her New York Times’ piece, “Claiming the Woke Badge,” these days “it has become almost fashionable for people to telegraph just how aware they have become... “woke” is a back-pat from the left, a way of affirming the sensitive.” The present social and political climate encourages activist participation; involvement in or, at least, awareness of left-leaning social activism is relatively commonplace among progressive millennials. The broadening of forms of progressive politics and social activism has contributed to a climate in which increasing numbers of people are connecting to politics, whether through direct relationship with the cause, or by allyship. Due to expanding opportunities for civic engagement and decreased barriers to social movement involvement, greater numbers of millennials are claiming active and public identifications with the causes in which they participate – the Black Lives Matter (#BlackLivesMatter) movement, the struggle for transgender rights and anti-pipeline protesting (#NoDakotaAccessPipeline) to name a few.

In such a climate, where activism has become relatively mainstream, how then do people receive recognition for their engagement? Given the highly social nature of contemporary activist organizing, individuals’ identities within activist circles are often formed in relation to the larger group cultures and the engagements of other participants. In this thesis, I offer an examination of the social forces, specifically as they relate to perceptions of personality type, which contribute to individuals’ understandings of their activist engagement in an attempt to answer the following question: *Are certain styles and forms of engagement valued more than others in social activism?* and more specifically, *Are extraverted (highly visible) and introverted*

*(less overt) personality traits and styles of engagement valued differently in social activism?* I ask my research questions, not to make specific claims about the role of personality type in activism, rather in an effort to investigate the implicit social processes that occur within activist circles and to measure their impact on participants' sense of value.

An examination of these questions requires an exploration of how an individual's perception of value as a participant within a social movement contributes to or detracts from a sense of connection and commitment to the movement. Personality type and general preferences for interpersonal interaction shape perceptions of comfort and belonging within specific social contexts. In my research, I engaged in quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate participants', in this case, college students' and recent graduates', perceptions of personality trait value within social movement settings. For purposes of my research, over the course of the past academic year, I distributed an extensive survey, followed by an in-depth interview process with eight college-age social movement participants, to measure millennial social movement participants' perceptions of personality trait value based on their experience in activist causes. This research arises in response to patterns in the literature which simultaneously point to a growing understanding of personality as constitutive to an individual's relationship to their external surroundings, changing forms of contemporary activist organizing, and a rejection of hierarchical structure among social movement leadership.

My data revealed that, for many of my research participants, engaged in the nitty gritty of activist work, the more visible, extravert-associated performative aspects of activism were problematic. On the one hand, respondents acknowledged the importance of louder activism but, on the other hand, respondents believed that their own best contributions to social change derived from their quieter, reflective-based, introvert qualities. People expressed a desire for



congruence between their motivations for activism, actual contributions to social change efforts and the ways in which they were perceived by others. In instances where people expressed a lack of congruence between their motivations, contributions and perceptions by others, they also expressed discomfort and internal conflict about their roles and value as activists. Participants who struggled with feelings of being valued within the context of their particular activist group all qualified as “woke” from a cultural perspective however, their “woke badge” was not satisfying. In fact, in many cases it was uncomfortable. My research does not attempt to valorize one set of personality traits over another; Rather, if it is true as my research suggests, that social movement organizations unintentionally valorize one set of personality traits over another, and if this valorization influences participant perceptions of their value as activists, then organizations will be better served by understanding this dynamic.

### *Framing*

Modern social movements incorporate multi-layered approaches to social change and encompass a multitude of individual and collective forms of action including community building and organizing, education and advocacy work, engagement in formal politics, socially responsible lifestyle choices, protests and demonstrations and philanthropy (“Social Change Wheel” 2014). As political scientist Pippa Norris (2007: 640) explains, primary goals of contemporary social movements “often focus upon achieving social change through direct actions and community-building, as well as by altering lifestyles and social identities, as much as through shaping formal policy-making processes and laws in government.” As social justice movements have moved beyond the bounds of formal political processes, they have also broadened to incorporate a greater variety of missions predicated on notions of intersectional identities, systems of oppression and egalitarian principles. These principles are reflected in

contemporary social movements' embrace of horizontal, or "flat" leadership models, which reject hierarchical leadership designations and encourage the involvement of all participants.

A rejection of highly structured leadership patterns, however, does not preclude the formation of hierarchies within social activist circles and inevitably, some individuals become recognized for their contributions to the cause more than others. American culture privileges extraverted over introverted traits through the elevation of outgoing, public, attention-seeking and loud forms of engagement; introverted styles of interaction may be overshadowed by louder and more overt ones, especially in relatively unstructured settings. Furthermore, while multiple studies regarding the effects of personality on political engagement have found that people involved in social movement work tend towards extraversion, these findings do not preclude the important contributions of introverts in activist work. In this thesis, I aim to illuminate how activist circles may reflect cultural patterns which privilege extraverted traits over introverted ones and stimulate a discussion of practices which might best support more introverted individuals in their activist engagements. Grounded in the modern activist moment, my thesis incorporates a review of social movement literature as it relates to the contemporary theorizing on the role of identity and personality within activist engagement as a way to understand patterns of social value development within activist circles.

The thesis is organized as follows: I begin by providing a review of the academic literature on my topic broken into two sections, (I) Historical and contemporary social movement context and (II) Theoretical grounds of my research. I then offer a detailed overview of the quantitative and qualitative methods I used in conducting my survey and interviews. The subsequent portion of my thesis presents the data in two chapters, one focused on perceptions of trait value as derived from survey responses, and the other, detailing results of in-depth

interviews conducted with eight social movement participants. I conclude by providing a summary of my findings and connecting them to the established social movement literature. In addition, I acknowledge the limitations of my research methods and analysis, offer suggestions for future research and reflect on the overall implications of my findings.

## ***2. Academic Context for the Thesis***

### *Overview*

This chapter provides a review of literature relevant to my research question, which asks whether certain forms of activist engagement are valued and recognized more than others in social movement organizing. In this section I situate my thesis in the established literature on social movement theory, a field that emerged in the early part of the 20th century as a way to explain collective social and political action, and which was transformed following the New Social Movement mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s; The New Social Movements - feminist, peace, environmental, among others - revolutionized forms of social movement organizing, laid the foundations for contemporary styles of activist mobilizations, and set the stage for the emergence of theories which attempt to explain movement development and understand the identity related factors that influence individuals' participation in activist causes. As a field, social movement scholarship has continuously embraced evolving notions of collective and individual identity to explain the mechanisms of movement mobilization, as well as variability among participants' movement experiences.

Grounded in the modern activist moment, my thesis applies concepts of social identity theory to investigate the ways in which patterns of social value develop within activist circles. The present chapter is divided into two overarching sections - (I) *Historical and contemporary social movement context*, which incorporates an overview of social movement theorizing and offers an introduction to key characteristics of contemporary social movements, (II) *Theoretical groundings of my research*, which introduces concepts in social identity theory, and provides a review of scholarship regarding the relationship between personality and political engagement.

## *I. Historical and Contemporary Social Movement Context*

### *History of Social Movement Theorizing*

Social movement theory, or the study of contentious politics, emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a dynamic body of academic research to explain social movement mobilization and to predict models for future collective action. Donatella de Porta and Mario Diani (2015) state, “Social movement studies stand apart as a field because of their attention to the practices through which actors express their stances through a broad range of social and political conflict.” Defined broadly in the literature, social movements constitute “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (Goodwin and Jasper 2015: 162). As the nature of social movements has changed over time, so too has interdisciplinary theory regarding their development and organization. Initial attempts to explain social movement phenomena primarily viewed social movements as unrelated events that enabled marginalized members of society to express their societal discontent and assuage their psychological dissonance. This early theorizing on social movements, which emerged during the 1950s and 1960s, applied a predominantly psychological analysis to explain why social movement actors engaged in aberrant collective behavior, and espoused the belief that participants consisted of highly irrational and anomic members of society (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Following the movement mobilization of the 1960s, “a renaissance of social movement research occurred in both North America and Europe during the 1970s as a then younger generation of scholars sought to understand the emergence, significance, and effects of the social movements of the 1960s” (Edwards 2007). The rebirth of social movement theorizing beginning in the 1970s rejected these early or “classical” conflict-theory based explanations for social movement development,

and instead offered new primarily resource-, culture- and identity- based theories for social movement organizing which better reflected the interplay between macro- and micro-oriented explanations for social movement development and mobilization.

Two new and distinct bodies of social movement theory—resource mobilization theory and New Social Movement theory—emerged in the social movement literature to explain the post-WWII social movement organizing of the 1960s and 70s. In the United States, resource mobilization theorists including Charles Tilly (1977), Doug McAdam (1982), Jon McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977) proposed that social constituencies “mobilized effectively to pursue desired social change” (Edwards 2007) with structural arguments emphasizing the mobilization and management of tactical resources (i.e. money, time, space, people) as the driving factors behind collective social movement behavior. Additionally, as the body of resource mobilization theory grew, scholars (Klandermans 1984; McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977) began to embrace emergent ideas of collective identity in their theories to explain the ways in which movement leadership capitalized on a shared sense of identity among movement participants to further movement goals. Due to the New Social Movements emphasis on identity marginalization as an impetus for mobilization, notions of collective, group identity became especially salient during the period. However, despite evolutions in resource mobilization theory over time, these theories continued to ignore how micro-level factors including emotion, personality and people’s perceptions of self, influenced social movement development and participation.

In Europe, however, New Social Movements theory developed to explain “the origins, identity, and cultural significance of newly emerging social change constituencies” (Edwards 2007), and offered an alternative to American resource mobilization theory which largely took the existence of these social movement constituencies for granted. In their book, *New Social*

*Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, Hank Johnston, Henrique Laraña and Joseph Gusfield (1994: 3), detail the defining elements of new social movements, among which is their inability “to be clearly understood within the European or American traditions of analysis.” Typically characterized as “segmented, diffuse and decentralized,” the so-called New Social Movements — feminist, peace, environmental, etc.— which began in the 1960s, deviated sharply from social movements of previous eras, expanded the possibilities for social movement organizing and redefined the nature of political protest (Johnston et al. 1994). As compared to earlier forms of organizing, Johnston et al. (1994: 6) describe that, “New Social Movements do not bear a clear relation to structural roles of the participants. There is a tendency for the social base of new social movements to transcend class structure.” Prior to World War II, “Labor movements and the rise of new political parties,” characterized social movement organizing and scholars applied primarily Marxian analyses to understand pre-war movement formation, placing significant emphasis “on elements of ideology, commitment, and partisanship,” to understand the emergence of social movements and collective action. However, New Social Movements rejected class as a primary determinant of social movement organizing, instead positing theories of identity to address the rise of new categories of activism and participants’ motivations for joining.

New Social Movements evoked notions of individual and collective identity as the basis for mobilization. As Johnston et al. (1994) describe, New Social Movements were distinct from earlier social movement examples in that, “The background of participants find their most frequent structural roots in rather diffuse social statuses such as youth, gender, sexual orientation, or profession that do not correspond with structural explanations” (Johnston et al. 1994: 6). As a result, “The relation between the individual and the collective is blurred...many contemporary

movements are “acted out” in individual actions rather than through or among mobilized groups” (1994: 6). New Social Movements broadened the terms and conditions for motivating factors of political protest, according to Johnston et al (1994: 7), “New Social Movements often involve the emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identity...They are associated with a set of beliefs, symbols, values, and meanings related to sentiments of belonging to a differentiated social group.” Furthermore, New Social Movements adopted new forms of “disruption and resistance,” characterized by “nonviolence and civil disobedience that, while often challenging dominant norms of conduct through dramatic display, draw equally on strategies influenced by Gandhi, Thoreau and Kropotkin that were successfully used in the past” (1994: 8). New Social Movements fundamentally transformed the potentials for social movement mobilization and laid the foundations for contemporary styles of social movement and activist organizing. Contemporary social movement theory (written post-1990) is grounded in the initial theorizing of the New Social Movement scholars; the following section provides an overview of key themes emerging from recent social movement scholarship.

### *Key Themes in Contemporary Social Movement Scholarship*

Political scientist Pippa Norris (2007), in her chapter titled, “Political Activism: New Challenges, New Opportunities,” outlines key developments within the social movement literature since the 1990s, and demonstrates the ways in which contemporary theory expands beyond and often merges rigid distinctions between ‘conventional’ and ‘protest’ activism. As she (2007: 629) delineates, the major focuses of modern social movement theory include:

The widespread erosion of party membership in established democracies and questions about its consequences; The substantial revival of interest in voluntary associations and social trust spurred by theories of social capital; And the expansion of diverse forms of



cause-oriented types of activism, including the spread of demonstrations and protests, consumer political professional interest groups, and more diffuse new social movements and transnational advocacy networks.

When considered together, these overarching themes of contemporary activism demonstrate the diffuse and decentralized nature of modern political activity and suggest a breadth of opportunities for personal involvement in a diversity of causes, for instance, broad scale mobilizations including the women's, LGBT+, racial and economic justice movements. In addition, the decentralized, dynamic fluidity of modern political activity suggests a plethora of entry points to engagement; involvement in social causes is a smorgasbord, participants can choose from a variety of opportunities to best align their personal style, needs and motivations for engagement with their participation.

Social movement theorizing has evolved to reflect these changing forms of activist participation and organizing. In her characterization of New Social Movement theorizing, Norris (2007) emphasizes the evolution within the social movement literature which reflects expanded conceptualizations of political organizing beyond binary categories of citizen-oriented activity (typified by formal electoral and political engagement) – and cause-driven activity. She describes contemporary social movement theory as including a predominant focus on cause-oriented activism, characterized by mobilizations focused on specific issues and policy concerns. She (2007: 639) states,

Today it seems clearer to distinguish between citizen-oriented actions, relating mainly to elections and parties, and cause-oriented repertoires, which focus attention upon specific issues and policy concerns, exemplified by consumer politics (buying or boycotting certain products for political or ethical reasons), petitioning, demonstrations, and protests. The distinction is not water-tight, for example political parties can organize mass demonstrations, and elected representatives can be contacted by constituents about

specific policy issues and community concerns, as much as for individual constituency service. New social movements often adopt mixed action strategies which combine traditional repertoires, such as lobbying representatives, with a variety of alternative modes such as online networking, street protests, and consumer boycotts.

Despite overlap in organizing strategies, as Norris (2003: 4) describes, “compared with citizen-oriented actions, the distinctive aspect of cause-oriented repertoires is that these are most commonly used to pursue specific issues and policy concerns among diverse targets, both within and also well beyond the electoral arena.” Citizen-oriented activities, typified by formal electoral and political engagement, she argues, represent an excessively “narrow conceptualization of activism that excludes some of the most common targets of civic engagement which have become conventional and mainstream.” Additionally, protest activities, or any action taken in the name of dissent, such as strikes, boycotts, petitions and mass demonstrations, whether government directed or not, have become relatively mainstream organizing techniques, and should not be conceived of as distinct from conventional or citizen-oriented engagement.

Cause-oriented activism, given its rejection of rigid organizational forms, has transformed the ways in which individuals engage in social change efforts. In her article “Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?” Norris (2003) outlines the generational evolutions in forms of social and political organizing, and demonstrates the ways in which young people are at the forefront of these changes given their willingness to adapt to shifting organizational forms. Contemporary activism has blurred strict distinctions between the social and the political and has expanded the realm of activism to include consumer, lifestyle and identity politics. In addition to diversified activist causes which appeal to greater numbers of social movement participants, given the “fluid boundaries, looser networked coalitions, and decentralized organizational structures” characteristic of cause-

oriented activist movements, as Norris (2003: 7) describes, “People can see themselves as belonging simply by ‘turning up’ or sharing political sympathies with an easy- entrance, easy- exit permeability of organizational boundaries, rather than ‘formally’ joining.” Furthermore, contemporary social movements comprise a greater diversity of modes of engagement; according to Norris (2003: 7), “The primary goals of new social movements often focus upon achieving social change through direct action strategies and community-building, as well as by altering lifestyles and social identities, as much as through shaping formal policy – making processes and laws in government.” The broadening of recognized forms of social movement engagement, in addition to reduced boundaries for entry, coupled with the rise of social media organizing, has produced a more inclusive and dynamic activist climate.

In his article “The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation,” author WL Bennett (2012) discusses the ways in which contemporary social movements have evolved to reflect and cater to participants’ personal interests and motivations for involvement, rather than collective action frames. He (2012: 20) identifies “social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties,” largely the product of neoliberal economic and political forces, as responsible for this shift in social movement organizing. Furthermore, Bennet (2012: 20) argues that an increase in “large-scale, rapidly forming political participation aimed at a variety of targets, ranging from parties and candidates, to corporations, brands and transnational organizations,” can be attributed to an evolution from primarily identity-based social movement mobilization, characteristic of the 1960s New Social Movements, to values-based mobilization. He (2012: 37) describes defining features of contemporary social movements, writing:

The group-based “identity politics” of the “new social movements” that arose after the 1960s still exist, but the recent period has seen more diverse mobilizations in which

individuals are mobilized around personal lifestyle values to engage with multiple causes such as economic justice (fair trade, inequality, and development policies), environmental protection, and worker and human rights. This large-scale individualized collective action is often coordinated through digital media technologies, sometimes with political organizations playing an enabling role, and sometimes with crowds using layers of social media to coordinate action.

Bennet's (2012: 22) analysis expands on theories which profess notions of collective and individual identity as the basis for movement mobilization, and demonstrates how a Western consumerist emphasis on the individual has contributed to a political climate in which "individuals increasingly code their politics through personal life style values." In comparison to previous eras of highly structured social movement organizing with clear demarcations of movement leadership, organization and notions of collective identity, contemporary activism is often predicated on "individualized collective action where large numbers of people join in loosely coordinated activities centered on more personal emotional identifications and rationales" (2012:26). Modern social movements, characterized by a relative lack of hierarchical and centralized structure and leadership, reflect more fluid forms of participant recruitment and cause identification. Given the increase in forms and rationales for engaging in certain social movements, decisions to identify with and participate in activist causes are highly individualized choices.

Scholars contend that contemporary social movements have become increasingly less hierarchical in terms of leadership and frequently exist at both the local and national level (Norris 2007; Sutherland et al. 2013). The prominent influence of social media organizing has largely facilitated this change due to the growth of technology which facilitates transmission of social movement rhetoric and enables greater engagement with the movement (Sutherland et al. 2013). Recent movements including Arab Spring, Occupy and Black Lives Matter are widely

recognized as successful examples of democratic mobilization against structural corruption. All three of these movements, among many other contemporary examples, have actively rejected the idea of hierarchical leadership in lieu of a more collective approach to organizing. However, as Neil Sutherland and company (2013: 24) clarify in reference to contemporary social movements, “This absence of *leaders* does not, however, mean that there was no *leadership*...there was no shortage of participants (or ‘leadership actors’) who temporarily performed leadership in specific moments, sometimes subtle and fleeting and sometimes overt and lengthy.” As the authors recognize, specific opportunity structures and personal identity traits may help facilitate the implicit leadership of certain actors throughout the duration of the movement. Given that implicit leadership is a necessary component for movement development, its ramifications must be further studied in part because “by refusing to acknowledge any kind of leadership, organizations may be at risk of re-creating the same hierarchical relations they seek to abolish as informal hierarchies rooted in power are likely to emerge (Sutherland 2013: 8).” Despite the inclusive organizational intent behind “flat” organizational structures, which aim to eliminate socially produced hierarchies and provide open platforms for all participants to express their ideas, this approach runs the risk of perpetuating other more subtle forms of stratification among participants based on pre-existing social hierarchies. Organizational hierarchies can foster or hinder participant retention by shaping interpersonal interactions and participant perceptions of agency and value within the group.

Scholars identify a multiplicity of factors which comprise activist identity formation within social movement contexts. Despite widespread engagement in social movement causes, many contemporary social movement participants eschew the label ‘activist’ to describe their engagement. In her book, *Patterns of Protest: Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements*,

sociologist Catherine Corrigan-Brown (2012), investigates the fluctuating, variable and intermittent nature of contemporary activist engagement. Based on her analysis of the Youth Socialization Panel Data – a longitudinal national probability sample of high school seniors initially interviewed in 1965 – she identifies that 65 percent of the panel survey respondents have engaged in activist efforts, either through membership in a social movement organization or participation in a protest event, at least once in their lives. Activism must be studied, therefore, as an activity of the majority, rather than of a select group of individuals. However, as she (2012: 123) discovers, not all individuals who participate in social movement efforts identify as activists themselves, and many participants fail to conform to the cultural image of “an “activist” — a lifelong participant, passionately committed to the cause... steadfast in their support and convictions...persist[ing] in their commitment to their causes over time.”

This disjuncture between engaging in activist behavior and claiming an activist identity echoes Chris Bobel’s (2007) work on activist identifications among individuals involved in Menstrual activism. As she (2007: 150) found in her research, many participants, despite their high level of involvement and passion for the cause, neglected to consider themselves to be activists because they believed they did not conform to the cultural conception of activist identity “linked to a particular set of values that shape the definition of activist;” among which include “the level of unyielding sacrifice s/he brings to her social change efforts...for her/his willingness to go to extremes in the service of the cause – no hardship, no trial is too much.” This constructed ‘perfect standard’ of activism, as she (2007: 156) describes, “sets an incredibly high standard, a standard of constancy and commitment that few even self-described activists could satisfy, especially those who do the work of publishing, teaching and other movement work that challenges dominant conceptions of ‘in your face’ and ‘on the street’ activism.”

## *II. Theoretical Groundings of My Research*

### *Identity and Concepts of the Self in Social Movement Theory*

While the literature on identity construction within social movements does not directly address questions of the perceived social value of different forms of activist participation, it sheds light on a variety of factors that contribute to one's conception of self-identity and sense of value in relation to a particular social movement. Although a relatively recent development in the field of social movement theory, scholars are increasingly studying the factors that influence how participants view their own identity within the context of collective movements to help explain individuals' reasons both in favor of and against engaging in various types of social movement participation (Stryker et al. 2000). The ties between one's conception of self, the collective identity espoused by the movement, and the types of social movement activities people choose to engage in are highly complex and unique to the individual, however, they can help account for the specific ways in which movements develop and change over time. In the introduction to the collection of essays published in *Self, Identity and Social Movements* (2000), editors Sheldon Stryker and Timothy Owens and Robert White pose the following series of questions to frame the content of their book and expose existing gaps in the social movement literature:

How are we to understand the differential willingness of movement members to provide resources to further movement ends? How are we to understand the fission and conflicts that occur within many social movements and the consequences of these? How are we to understand differences in who stays in and who drops out of movements?

While the influence of collective identity on movement actors has been studied extensively, their book engages the field of social psychology to explain the limitations of collective identity as a sufficient explanation for why people choose to participate in social justice causes in a variety of forms.

Compared to prior eras of social movement theorizing, where scholars primarily theorized concepts of identity in relation to in-group and out-group notions of the collective experience of activism, the contemporary focus has shifted to more individualized notions of identity to explain why people engage in activism in the specific ways that they do. This transition in the literature reflects broader changes in social movement rhetoric and organizing which have evolved to highlight individual expression in addition to, and often prioritizing over, collective action frames, as a means for political engagement. In *Self, Identity and Social Movements* (Stryker et al. 2000), Sheldon Stryker applies a social psychological analysis to argue that personal identity, given its ability to dictate individuals' choices and social interactions, can explain differential social movement participation among participants. In brief, he writes (2000: 21), "This theory invokes concepts pointing to differences among persons while rooting those differences in social structure, social location, and social interaction. It invokes a concept of self composed in part of multiple identities linked to interaction in networks of social relations." Stryker expands on the sociological symbolic interactionist premise to demonstrate how social identities as "potential competitors in producing behavior choice" determine people's participation in social movements. Based on the foundational symbolic interactionist premise in his theory that "society shape self-shapes social behavior," Stryker (2000: 26) conceptualizes identity as "self-cognitions tied to roles and thus to positions in organized social relation." Simply put, the symbolic interactionist frame contends that people's actions and interactions both shape and are shaped by shared meanings in society; in this light, the self becomes a mirror for society and as such, both society and the "self must be seen as multifaceted, composed of parts sometimes highly interdependent and sometimes not, some conflicting and some reinforcing, a self-organized variously" (Stryker 2000: 27). A nuanced interpretation of the



symbolic interactionist framework informs the premise of identity and identity salience theory, which as Stryker (2000: 26) articulates, “is a theory of role-related choice behavior deriving from a structural symbolic interactionism whose prototypical question is: why, on a free afternoon, do some persons play golf with friends and others take their children to the zoo?”

In his application of identity theory to social movement organizing, Stryker (2000) focuses on the ways in which identities and social linkages affect social movement membership recruitment and determine variations among participants’ involvement trajectories. He expands on popular notions of cultural identity, or identity interpreted to be the social ascription of “the ideas, beliefs and practices of society,” by introducing a symbolic interactionist understanding of identity to demonstrate the consequential effects of social interactions in determining participants’ behavior. Stryker situates his premise in the understanding that, “in complex, differentiated societies, persons live not in society as a whole but in small, relatively specialized units composed of others to whom they relate through occupancy of social positions and playing associated roles,” and therefore, it is important to consider the implications of identity on a practical scale. For example, with regards to participant recruitment, although it is assumed in the literature that pre-existing networks explain much new member acquisition; Stryker argues, alternatively, that “linkages to friends or other social networks, such as family or workplace contacts, *and* the identities related to these linkages may keep others out of movement membership.” The social interplay between various participants’ identities in social movement settings constitutes an important area of focus for social movement scholars given that, as Stryker concludes, “identities can wield their influence over action, independent of relationships that support, or fail to support, the identities.”

The concept of value identity as introduced to the social movement literature by Viktor Gecas (2000) expands conceptualizations of identity as being situationally bound and demonstrates the ways in which value identities “give meaning, purpose and direction to our lives.” In his essay, “Value Identities, Self-Motives and Social Movements,” Gecas (2000:95) draws on the sociological and social psychological value identity theories of Rokeach (1973), Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) and Shamir (1990) to propose a definition of value as,

Conceptions or beliefs about desirable modes of conduct or states of being that transcend specific situations, guide decision making and the evaluation of events, and are ordered by relative importance. Values serve as standards by which to live, as well as goals for which to strive.

Value identities conceived of as personal qualities, inform individuals’ intrinsic sense of self and provide an aspirational model for individuals’ self-concept. Gecas continues to identify the relationship between value identities, or character identities, and role identities. He argues:

Value identities, as elements of self-definition, can refer to desired personal qualities and desired social conditions. Elsewhere I used the concept “character identity” (Gecas and Moritmer 1987) to refer to value based identities that are typically expressed as character traits such as “honest,” “brave,” “compassionate.” Character identities emphasize the kind of person one is, whereas role identities become infused with value connotations or come to imply certain character traits. There is, however, a connection between character identities and role identities. Some role identities become infused with value connotations or come to imply certain character traits (e.g., the “compassionate nurse,” the “devoted mother,” the “brave soldier”). There may also be a self-selection factor in that certain kinds of people, possessing certain instrumental values, seek out roles associated with these values. However, character identities, even if originally associated with particular role identities, can be more diffuse and less situation-specific than are role identities.

Although value identities represent more enduring conceptualizations of identity which operate across, rather than within specific situations, his theory resides within the symbolic interactionist

framework given that character identities are “enacted, contested and affirmed within specific situations” (2000: 96). Furthermore, as Gecas (2000: 97) contends, it is character identities operating within specific situational contexts that “individuals are most likely to strive to protect in their self-presentations and impression management activities,” to maintain certain self-concepts.

Contemporary social movement scholars (Bobel 2007; Corrigan-Brown 2012) invoke Geca’s conceptualization of value identities in their research on differential movement participation. Gecas’ theory of value identity helps explain ways in which social movement participants understand themselves in relation to their movement engagement given the implications of value identities on self-esteem, self-efficacy and feelings of authenticity among movement participants. As he describes,

The self-esteem motive refers to the motivation to view oneself favorably and to try to maintain or enhance a favorable evaluation of oneself...Self-efficacy is the motivation to perceive oneself as a causal agent in one’s environment, as efficacious and competent. The deficit, and typically undesirable condition, of self-efficacy is experienced as powerlessness, helplessness, or inferiority. Authenticity refers to the individual’s striving for meaning, coherence, and significance...It also implies that individuals strive for congruence between their self-values and their behavior, since lack of congruence leads to feelings of inauthenticity.

Value identities render significant influence on social movement participants’ experiences of their engagement, and may determine in part participants’ involvement trajectories. Gecas (2000) contends that the extent to which a social movement “can sustain or enhance these self-motives (self-esteem, efficacy, and authenticity) via the ideology and value identities that it provides increases member loyalty and commitment to the social movement.” Value identities determine participants’ sense of self in relation to their engagement and may impact individuals’ decisions

to enter, stay or leave social movements and to engage in certain forms of participation over others. Furthermore, as Chris Bobel (2007) identifies in her study on activist identity formation, “Values figure prominently in the construction of personal identity perhaps across the population of social movement actors. Indeed, it is values that shape the very definition of who is and who is not appropriately considered an activist.” Social movement participants’ in/ability to identify identifications with specific value identity schemas espoused by activist movements reinforces feelings of in/authenticity and in/efficacy among participants.

Buchman and Eisner’s (1997) elaboration on the shifting cultural definitions of the self, further contextualizes the salience of value- based identity theory in the modern era. In their research, Buchman and Eisner argue that over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a transition in the cultural conception of the self from a utilitarian – motivated by material gain – to an expressive – based in emotional capacity – understanding. Drawing on the work of Robert Bellah (1985), the authors (1997) argue that,

While the utilitarian conception of the self focuses upon the individual's capacity for individual achievement and the pursuit of one's (material) interest, cultivating virtues such as sobriety, frugality, self-control, and industriousness, the expressive imagery of the self articulates the inner world of feelings and emotions, emphasizing virtues such as sensitivity, emotionality, authenticity, openness, and empathy.

Buchman and Eisner (1997: 158) draw on Inglehart’s (1997) theories, which propose that changing cultural value patterns – consisting of a shift away from materialist instrumental rationality to a modern emphasis on the quest for a meaningful life, work satisfaction, and a greater expression of the self – are the result of economic and political transitions from industrial to post-industrial societies, and apply his work to the concept of identity in that context. Though Inglehart himself did not directly address the impact of changing value patterns on identity

construction, as Buchman and Eisner (1997: 158) argue, “it seems to be obvious that effects on the relevance of certain characteristics of the inner self can be expected. In particular, those attributes of the inner self that contribute to the individual's capacity of self-expression should be greatly enhanced.” In a cultural climate which allows for greater individual expression, they argue, “individuals can rely on essentialist identities less and less and are forced to construct their authentic selves, which presupposes reflexive and introspective capacities.” Their findings suggest important insights for the role of identity and self-understanding within activist contexts as social movements serve as sites upon which movement participants form their movement identities through processes of self-expression in relation to other participants.

### *Activism and Personality*

Activism and social movement participation are avenues of political engagement which rely on the contributions of a diversity of individuals and typically imply a high degree of social interaction and active involvement. Despite variations in terms of the extent, mode and motivations for activist engagement among participants, scholars (440) have identified activist work as requiring an “expression of pro-social dispositions such as extraversion, agreeableness, and empathy,” by movement participants. According to Klar and Kasser (2009: 755), defined broadly, activism signifies,

The behavior of advocating some political cause (for instance, protection of the environment, human rights issues, opposing abortion, or preventing wars, etc.) via any of a large array of possible means, ranging, for example, from institutionalized acts such as starting a petition to unconventional acts such as civil disobedience.

Though activist efforts rely on a variety of forms of engagement ranging from internal planning operations to public large-scale protest demonstrations, certain forms of engagement are

inherently more visible to the public than others. In his book, *Activism!* (2002: 154), Tim Jordan states, “Activism is least visible when actions are being prepared and most visible when action is taken;” he contends that activism is always comprised of some combination of the “hidden and seen” and that “small actions are just as central to activism as large ones.” Furthermore, participants engage in social justice work for many different reasons; as Rene Bekkers (2005: 439) explains,

Civic engagement has many forms and colors. Citizens participate in voluntary associations not only to advocate their interests in politics, but also to find meaning in life, to express their social identity, to contribute to the well-being of others, and to improve their chances on the labor market – among many other things.

Neither participant motivations for joining and staying involved in social movements, nor the decisions of participants to favor certain forms of participation over others are monolithic. Activist efforts rely on a variety of forms of engagement ranging from internal planning operations to public large-scale protest demonstrations to accomplish their agendas. However, though a variety of forms of involvement are required for movement success, certain styles of engagement (i.e, protests and mass demonstrations) are inherently more visible to the public and are more commonly considered as defining of activism (Bobel 2007). Jordan (2002: 154) contends that activism is always comprised of some combination of the “hidden and seen” and that “small actions are just as central to activism as large ones;” many forms of engagement and a diversity of participants’ backgrounds and identities are crucial for ensuring movement success. However, as Jordan (2002: 154) states “activism is least visible when actions are being prepared and most visible when action is taken,” raising the question of whether certain forms of participation are perceived to be more characteristic of and valued in activist movements than others depending on their level of public visibility. Given the group and collective nature of

activism, and the prominent attention social movements receive in the media, it is logical to draw parallels between the highly visible, outspoken and extraverted styles of engagement, and the personalities of the individual activists themselves.

Although a nascent development in social movement theory, sociologists and social psychologists have begun to conduct significant research on how personality traits and more psychological aspects of self-identity, including openness to new experiences, levels of self-esteem and needs for self-verification, can help explain involvement in social movements (Curtin et al 2010; Tindall 2004). While personality traits, such as shyness, sociability, willingness to display emotion in public settings and comfort with calling attention to one's self, are generally understood to represent a significant source of differentiation among individuals in their interactions with their environment and other people, the effects of personality traits on political behavior and social movement participation have not been studied extensively. As defined in the literature "Personality" refers to "a multifaceted, enduring, internal psychological structure" (Mondak 2011). Contemporary scholars typically analyze personality according to the Big Five-Factor model, which contends that the following traits – *openness to experience*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, and *emotional stability* – represent universally foundational aspects of personality. Within the social movement literature, the effects of extraversion on participation are of particular interest; while the area of study remains small, various scholars, including political scientist Jeffrey Mondak, have conducted studies which confirm a strong correlation between extraversion and political engagement. In his book, *Personality and the Foundations of Political Behavior*, Mondak (2011: 50) explains that today, adjectives to describe extraversion include words such as "energetic, bold, talkative, and outgoing," and extraverted individuals typically prefer highly social environments. Mondak

(2011) contends that in comparison to other personality elements, extraversion is the Big Five-Factor “for which links to civic engagement are most easily hypothesized because many aspects of political behavior include social components. Working on a petition drive, discussing politics with friends and neighbors and joining voluntary associations all entail social interaction.”

Additional research (Mondak and Halperin 2008; Gerber et al. 2009; Mondak 2011: 86) has confirmed that strong positive effects of extraversion exist “for acts such as attending and speaking at political meetings, volunteering for campaigns, and engaging in political discussion, but mixed and mostly insignificant effects for less socially oriented acts such as posting yard signs and contributing to candidates.”

The relationship between extraversion and increased volunteerism has also been documented in the literature (Bekkers 2005, Omoto et al 2010). Given that most political engagement is usually born out of volunteering, these findings have significant implications with regards to which type of people may be initially more attracted to engage in activist work. In the article, “Personality and Motivational Antecedents of Activism and Civic Engagement,” Allen Omoto and co-authors (2010: 1726) explain the cyclical effect of increased volunteerism on people’s commitment to political engagement, they write that it is through volunteer action,

That people learn more about social issues, interact with politically and socially engaged individuals, and develop skills and perspectives that increase their willingness to take on additional tasks for their organization and in other contexts as well. Thus, relatively simple acts of volunteering may change people so that they become more politically interested and involved than they were before they started volunteering.

This finding has significant implications for the reciprocal nature of volunteerism and political engagement; if true that extraverted people are more likely to engage in activism than non-



extraverts, activist groups likely reflect the preferences of these typically more outgoing and sociable individuals compared to those of their quieter and inwardly reflective counterparts. This dynamic likely is reproduced among generations, thereby further ingraining extraverted ideals in the fabric and culture of the organization and movement. Mondak (2010: 108) exposes patterns of extraverted tendencies among people engaged politically; in a series of interviews, he describes that “Extraverts struck interviewers as being quite opinionated. However, interviewers differentiated between opinionation on the one hand and being interested in politics and being politically informed on the other. Extraverts talk (and talk) the talk, but they do not necessarily walk the walk.” This finding in conjunction with research proving higher rates of political involvement among extraverts suggests relevant implications for the development of trait value patterns in social movement cultures. Furthermore, given Klar and Kasser’s (2009: 771) finding that activist engagement is associated with higher levels of reported well-being among participants to the extent that “people self-identified as an activist, expressed commitment to the activist role, and reported engaging or intending to engage in activist behaviors,” a deeper examination of the implications of extraversion on political and social engagement is crucial for understanding the development of specific activist expectations and cultures.

### ***3. Methodology***

I used both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate whether certain personality traits and modes of activist engagement are valued over others within social movement contexts. My research methodology consists of two distinct phases; the design and distribution of an extensive survey regarding individuals' perceptions on activist engagement, and a follow-up series of eight in-depth interviews with social movement participants. Here I detail the processes used to complete both methodologies for my project and situate my methods within the context of Bates College as the primary site of my research.

#### *Survey Design*

I created an electronic survey (included in Appendix I) intended to measure respondents' opinions regarding the perceived value of various forms of activist participation at three levels of analysis: First, in the context of movements broadly (for example, what are traits commonly associated with activists?); Second, in terms of participants' direct experience engaging in activism (for example, to what extent do you feel that your traits are valued by movement participants?); And third, on an individual, self-reflexive level (for example, what are traits that describe your activist personality?) As defined by Chambliss & Schutt (2013: 163), survey research is "research in which information is collected from a sample of individuals through their responses to a set of standardized questions." I used the online survey maker, Qualtrics, to create a survey comprised of a series of multiple choice, short answer and sliding scale questions, which allowed respondents to answer each question according to their own comfort level. Each question displays a specific set of response options; for questions that measure the degree to which a person identifies with the statement, a series of ascending response options – none, a

little, a fair amount, extensive – are provided. My project fulfills the Bates' Institutional Review Board requirements for research projects that involve human participants and I followed the Board's guidelines when conceptualizing my survey and during the consequent interview process.

The survey's function is threefold: first, to investigate respondents' perceptions of activism and activists from a general, abstract perspective; second, to measure respondents' feelings of value and recognition based on their direct movement experience; and third, to examine respondents' personal reflections on their engagement. The first portion of the survey gathers quantitative information, for example demographic and biographical details about involvement in social justice work. It also asks respondents to indicate their own personality traits; this information serves to contextualize further subjective responses and provides a general profile of the sample itself. Initial questions identify respondents' race, gender, sexual orientation, geographic background, class year, type of college/university attended, college major, and political orientation. In addition, I ask respondents about their backgrounds in activism, including the type, extent, primary location either on or off campus, typical position held, number of years, and level of commitment in their activist engagements. The next series of questions are prompts designed to measure the degree to which respondents identify with certain introverted and extraverted tendencies; on a scale of 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree), respondents rank their level of association with a list of 12 statements based on the Myers and Briggs extraversion-introversion scale. Although the prompts do not comprise a comprehensive measure of participant personality type, the selected statements elicit participant reflection on personal dispositional tendencies and serve to prime respondents for subsequent survey items.

The latter half of the survey asks for individuals' opinions on activism movements more broadly, as well as respondents' perceptions of activism based on their personal involvement in social justice work. To measure beliefs about stereotypical activist traits and social movement cultures, the survey included questions designed to investigate whether movement cultures promote and/or value certain personality types and forms of engagement over others, in particular referencing extraversion and introversion and, additionally, requested survey participants to provide a list of three adjectives that they associated with activists. In general, the survey largely focuses on respondents' own experience in social justice work, and explores the degree to which individuals feel their activist contributions and personality are valued in social movement contexts, and whether certain traits and/or forms of engagement have been encouraged over others in their personal experience. The questions which focus on differences in perceived value of extraverted versus introverted forms of engagement include a sliding scale and write in option for survey participants to indicate the level of appreciation for their respective characteristics. Within this section of the survey, I also include questions regarding changes in activist engagement patterns over time and factors which may influence those changes – time constraints, declining personal interest, excessive demands from movement leadership, feelings of discomfort in activist circles, etc. To conclude, the survey asks participants to explain their relationship to the term 'activist' and whether they identify as such. Taken in combination, the various sections of the survey shed light on how variations among people's perceptions of their personality influence their experiences engaging in activist work.

My survey was open to anyone who had participated in social justice/activist work, however, it was specifically intended for college students and recent grads. I promoted it via college club email listservs, individual emails and on Facebook through a public link generated

by Qualtrics. The survey link was distributed in two separate blasts, first over the Bates College Thanksgiving break and again at the beginning of the college's winter break to increase the likelihood Bates student respondents would have sufficient time to take the survey. I specifically sent my survey to student groups which focused on community- and campus-based activist work, including the Feminist Collective, Bates Student Action club, the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships, the Multifaith Chaplaincy and the Sociology major listserv. Given my own involvement in the activist community at Bates College, my personal network at Bates consists of many students who are socially and politically engaged both on and off campus. As a result, my subjectivity as a researcher may both increase and limit the generalizability of my results to other populations. It is worth noting that while my peer group consists of a disproportionate number of highly engaged social activists predisposed to take my survey, this sample may be more likely than other students and survey participants to think of intergroup hierarchies in a nuanced and critical way.

Given the deductive nature of my research, defined by Chambliss & Schutt (2010: 25) as "The type of research in which a specific expectation is deduced from a general premise and then is tested," I approached this project with the general hypothesis that while social movements and activist circles rely on both introverted and extraverted participant personality traits in their organizing, individuals who display higher levels of extraversion, receive greater recognition for their contributions to the cause. This hypothesis is premised on the assumption that contemporary social movement organizing incorporates both public, demonstrative forms of action in addition to less visible styles of participation: behind-the-scenes strategizing, logistical planning, communications planning, community building work, and the act of deep listening and critical reflection. Most activist causes require visible public action to spread the movement

message, and rely on the extraverted and enthusiastic energies of movement participants; however, a recognition of the public, extraverted nature of activism does not preclude a discussion of less public forms of engagement and the contributions of activists who participate in less visible/quieter ways.

### *Survey Analysis Methodology*

I received 96 total survey responses, 89 of which contained sufficient answers for complete analysis. To analyze the survey data, I used the statistical analysis software program, SPSS, to interpret quantitative data and measure the relationship between personality type and respondents' perceptions of activist participation. As expected, most people in the study marked some combination of both introverted and extraverted personality traits to describe their tendencies, and many described themselves as having a relatively even mixture of introverted and extraverted traits. To condense the 12 personality measures into a single indicator, I determined respondents' identification with each prompt as either more introverted or extraverted, creating a sum score for each respondent to represent their overall dispositional tendencies. Each respondent's score fell within a range of 12-24, with those scoring between a 12-17 classified as introverted and between 18-24 as extraverted. Personality scores were used in further survey analysis to identify trends between respondents' personality types, levels of activist participation and respondents' feelings of value in social movement spaces. I completed cross tabulation analysis to investigate the relationship between specific demographic indicators, personality types and feelings of value within social movement spaces. Furthermore, in the review of textual submission, I often cross referenced respondents' statements with their personality scores to further contextualize their responses.

Additionally, I incorporated quantitative analysis for a variety of questions which measured respondents' opinions regarding the perceived value of various personality traits as they relate to forms and styles of activist engagement within social movement contexts. For certain measures, including, "In your experience internally within social justice causes and circles you have been a part of, what characteristics [based on list] do leaders and participants value in terms of the participants themselves?" and, "In your experience with activist engagement, to what extent do you feel like your extraverted/introverted qualities were appreciated?" I attended to the mean and standard deviation values to provide a more complete story of the data. Furthermore, for various measure, I converted results into charts to visually depict the survey results and demonstrate the significance of various findings. Responses to questions such as, "Of the following qualities, which three best describe your activist personality and approach to participation in social justice work and movements?" and, "In your experience internally within social justice causes and circles you have been a part of, what characteristics do leaders and participants value in terms of the participants themselves?" are represented graphically to better show variation among values.

I performed qualitative analysis and extensive coding for survey items which contained an option for participants to write in explanations. For each question which included written responses, I classified responses as pertaining to a specific level of analysis –general perceptions of activism, perceptions based on direct social movement experience, or participants' self-reflections on feelings of value in activist involvement – and coded individual responses as indicative of trends of valued/undervalued in relation to introversion and extraversion in social movement spaces. For the question, "What are three traits associated with activists?" respondents wrote in three characteristics of their choosing, which I then combined into various analytic

categories to describe activist personality and engagement styles as seen from the perspective of a broader, cultural level. Additionally, I coded the textual response components of multiple survey items including, “Do you think movements value certain character traits over others?” and, “To what extent do you feel like the character/personality traits you bring to activist causes are valued by the broader cause/movement and/or participants/leaders?” for trends indicative of various perceptions of extraverted versus introverted participation. For each survey item, I analyzed responses for patterns of either abstract or experiential perceptions of participant activist engagement and noted nuances among respondents who described specific tensions between introverted and extraverted engagement styles.

### *In-Depth Interviews*

Based on trends identified in the survey data, I conducted in-depth interviews with participants of varying personality dispositions and backgrounds in activist work, to further explore the ways in which personality type and social dynamics impact activist engagement. I approached the interview process largely as a continuation of the survey item, “Do you identify with the term activist? Why or why not?” to record interviewee reflections on the implications of claiming the activist label within the overall dynamics of activist engagement. As Chambliss & Schutt (2013:195) describe, “Intensive or *depth* interviewing relies on open-ended questions to develop a comprehensive picture of the interviewee’s background, attitudes, and actions;” I used the interview process to more fully examine factors which define individual activist’s styles of engagement and to reflect on the complexities of activist identity. Over the course of the second semester, I interviewed eight current, and recently graduated college students with backgrounds in activism, social justice work and social movement participation, about their feelings of comfort/discomfort in activist spaces, perceptions of activists in general and reflections on their



own engagement styles. Conversations were focused on the perceived impact of personality type on social movement participation, and on respondents' experiences of recognition and appreciation, or lack thereof, within activist circles.

I used the purposive sampling method as defined by Rubin and Rubin (1995) to identify my interview participants. As they describe, informants should possess knowledge about the situation being studied, be inclined to talk, and represent a variety of viewpoints. To select my interview participants, I referred to the final question in my survey which provided participants the option to leave their email address to discuss their perspectives further. Seeking a sample of individuals with diverse perspectives, I reviewed each contactable participant's survey and created a new, smaller pool of individuals representative of various personality profiles and levels of social movement engagement. From this pool, I contacted ten respondents and requested to speak with them more in-depth about my research topic and their survey responses, eight of them agreed to be interviewed for this project.

At the beginning of each conversation, to contextualize the research and guide each participant in their thinking about my questions, I provided my interviewee with a summary of the survey data findings, and gave a brief explanation of my own motivation for project. The interviews, which typically lasted between 30 minutes to an hour, followed an interview guide (included in Appendix II) comprised of ten open-ended questions loosely based on themes suggested in the survey and included questions such as, "How would you describe your activist personality and how does it fit into the activist work you have engaged in?" "Have you ever felt encouraged/discouraged to participate in certain ways over others?" and "How do people acquire recognition (social capital) within activist circles?" In every interview, the conversation evolved into a back and forth between myself and the participant as we discussed our personal

experiences and general perceptions having engaged in activist work. Lastly, before conducting each interview, I received verbal consent from each participant to have their responses tape-recorded and included in my thesis, provided I create pseudonyms and exclude all identifying information.

Due to the limited sample size, I was not able to include substantial racial or gender diversity within the population I chose to interview. Of the eight interviewees, two identified as Arab-American, one as Asian American, and the rest as white. With regards to gender diversity, two of the participants identified as male, five as female and one as non-binary/female. Furthermore, five of the interviewees are current Bates students in their senior year, two recently graduated from Bates, and one a junior at the University of California, Berkeley. Personality wise, the interviewees were chosen to represent a spectrum from highly introverted to highly extraverted personality profiles, with most participants identifying with aspects of both personality styles. The eight participants represent a diversity of forms and causes of social movement engagement and all have extensive backgrounds in activist work. Of the eight participants, four have held or currently hold a leadership position in a Bates College social justice oriented club or organization, one served as the president of her college intentional-living housing co-op, and the other three have engaged in a variety of influential ways in social movement activism. Causes represented by the sample include racial justice, gender justice and sexual assault prevention, Democratic Party organizing, mental health activism, initiatives to establish a sanctuary campus, commitment to ethical consumption and participation in community-building work. The final interview sample is largely reflective of the demographics of survey respondents, as predominantly white, female, Bates College students with significant backgrounds in activist involvement. While I attempted to include relative diversity with regards

to race and gender, my priority was to include variation in terms of personality type and background in activist engagement in identifying interview participants.

### *Interview Data Analysis Methodology*

Following the conversations, I transcribed each interview listening closely for themes related to participants' broad conceptions of activist traits and value patterns within activist circles, as well as interviewees' personal reflections on the evolution of their understandings of activism. I coded each interview by hand and used the following categories divided into three groupings to analyze participant responses; general, abstract perceptions of activist traits, the effects of these perceptions on participant experience, and interviewee reflections on their own engagement styles and values in activist work. Specifically, the coding measures I used include:

- Activist traits defined broadly/stereotypically
- Participant identified effects of stereotypical styles of engagement based on experience
- Participant feelings of inadequacy/hesitation/conflict of interest in activist engagement
- Patterns of activist commendation and recognition
- Patterns of most valued and commended characteristics/styles of engagement
- Evolution of participant understandings of activism beyond initial black/white beliefs
- Introverted traits as the grounding for extraverted engagement

While largely reflective of themes introduced and explored in the survey, the interviews offered a chance for participants to reflect more deeply on the anecdotal experiences that have informed the evolution of their thinking on activism and activist cultures. For the purposes of confidentiality, all interviewees names have been changed to preserve their identities.

### *Context of Bates as Primary Site of Research*

It is important to situate the views of the research participants within the Bates College sample context. Located in the former mill town of Lewiston, Maine, Bates College is a small (1700 students), highly selective (22% acceptance rate), residential liberal arts college and member of the NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Association) Division III athletic conference. The cost of attendance at Bates is substantial (\$65,000/year) and over half of students pay full tuition to attend. While the Bates student body is overwhelmingly middle and upper class, 13% of students are the first of their families to go to college and the average financial aid reward (\$43,500) covers nearly 70% of total tuition and fees.

My thesis primarily reflects the opinions of a small contingent of Bates College students who are engaged in activist efforts both on and off campus. In general, the Bates student body consists of a relatively progressive and predominantly liberal population of students between the ages of 18-22. A strong political and social justice consciousness exists on campus; many students are involved in civic engagement through direct service opportunities facilitated by the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships and through Community Engaged Learning (CEL) requirements incorporated in many classes. In addition to community service work, there are also opportunities for involvement in local and student led political and social organizing initiatives. These activist opportunities typically concentrate among a small proportion of students, whether through participation in student groups including the Bates Democrats, Bates Student Action, and The Concerned Students of Color or via independent and small student group efforts to demand change on and off campus. Activist cultures at Bates solidify fast due to the small student body and the high degree of familiarity among students and certain individuals inevitably become seen as campus leaders for their activist engagement.

## ***4. Survey Results and Data Analysis***

### *Overview*

The following section includes an analysis of data collected from a 34-item survey designed to measure social movement participants' perceptions of their own, and others' activist engagements. The analysis weaves together a combination of quantitative measurements (demographic breakdowns, personality profiling, activist background information, and numerical indicators of perceived social movement value) in addition to qualitative, textual responses (participant reflections on past social movement engagements, general qualities associated with activists, and social movement engagement styles in relation to personality type). Specifically, the survey asks respondents to reflect on how culturally defined introverted and extraverted personality types and engagement styles influence perceptions of participation value within social movement contexts.

Based on my analysis of the survey responses, in general, extraverted and highly visible styles of participation are perceived to be more recognized and valued in social movement contexts in ways that overshadow less conspicuous forms of engagement. However, when broken into three levels of analysis – respondent perceptions of activism in general, perceptions based on personal experience, and participant self-reflection on activist engagement style – the data reveals nuanced categorical trends. While on an abstract level respondents expressed primarily extraverted, assertive and public-oriented forms of engagement as characteristic of activists and activism, and defining of social movement value patterns, based on respondents' own experience, despite a higher overall perceived value for extraversion, respondents reported that both introverted and extraverted traits appear to be valued in social movement contexts. Furthermore, on an individual, self-reflexive level, participants identified predominantly

introverted traits as descriptive of their social movement engagement style, revealing significant discordance from the broad, cultural conception of the activist type.

*Survey Participant Information*

*Demographics:*

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents identified as white, female, Bates College students in their junior and senior years. However, despite its relative homogeneity, the sample represents significant diversity in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, class year, college major, region and political orientation. The following table provides a demographic overview of survey respondents – in most categories, respondents had the option to select more than a single response and some values indicate a sum greater than 100%.

***Thesis Survey Demographic Breakdown***

Race	82% White, 9% Black, 6% Asian, 3% Arab, 3% Latino
Gender	75% Female, 20% Male, 7% Non-binary
Class Year	56% College junior or senior, 25% College first year or sophomore, 15% Recent college graduate
Bates vs. Non-Bates	86% Current or graduated Bates student
Political Orientation	66% Liberal, 40% Progressive, 15% Socialist, 13% Socially liberal economically conservative
Sexual Orientation	64% Heterosexual, 36% Queer, 10% Questioning
College Major	Predominantly social science – sociology, psychology, politics
Geographic Region	48% New England, 23% Mid Atlantic, 18% Midwest, 9% West Coast, 8% South

While my research does not focus on any singular demographic category, taken in conjunction with other survey measures, these demographics help elucidate and provide nuance for the findings presented throughout the thesis. Additionally, an understanding of the sample's characteristics as reflective of the Bates student body helps situate the research within the cultural context of selective, private, New England, liberal arts colleges.<sup>1</sup>

### *Participant Personality Profiles:*

The subsequent section of the survey, which measures respondents' personality traits based on their identification with certain indicators of introversion and extraversion published by the Meyers Briggs Institute, reveals the overall dispositional tendencies of the sample. Information related to survey participants' personality characteristics provides helpful context for analyzing trends regarding the perceived value of introverted and extraverted social movement engagement styles. It is important to note that these measures do not serve as complete indicators of people's personality types – due to their subjective and limited nature; in the survey, they largely function to prompt participants to reflect on their own tendencies and, to inform their responses to subsequent survey items. Based on each respondent's score, which consists of the sum of their responses to the individual measures, people fall along a spectrum of highly introverted to highly extraverted personality types. Overall, participants tended to identify more strongly with introverted than extraverted qualities, though many participants displayed roughly equal numbers of introverted and extraverted tendencies. Of the 87 surveys analyzed, 50 individuals selected statements primarily indicative of introverted tendencies and 37 of

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<sup>1</sup> The gender breakdown of the survey participants is not representative of Bates' gender distribution which constitutes an even male to female ratio. The race breakdown, however, is more reflective of the Bates student body, which is currently comprised of 76% white students and 24% students of color.

extraverted tendencies; however, nearly 30% of total respondents selected roughly equal numbers of introverted and extraverted responses, and thus fall somewhere in the middle of the introvert-extravert spectrum. For clarity of analysis, participants are either categorized as predominantly introverted or extraverted.

The distribution of personality profiles along the introversion and extraversion spectrum, reveals significant variation in personality type among sample respondents. Examples of prompts used to measure individuals' level of introversion and extraversion included: I tend to think before I speak, I tend to feel overstimulated in busy environments, I have a wide range of friends and know lots of people, etc.; while not direct predictors of individuals' behavior and levels of comfort in social movement spaces, these prompts measure personality attributes, often evoked in activist cultures. The statements with the highest standard deviation among survey respondents were as follows: I prefer to recharge my energy by spending time with others rather than alone, people see me as reflective or reserved, and I consider myself to be outgoing or a people person – indicating that respondents' identification with these measures had the greatest determinant on overall personality distributions of the sample.

Notably, among female and male survey participants, the introvert and extravert ratio reflected significant variation. In general, while the sample fell more heavily introverted (60%) than extraverted (40%), males displayed higher levels of extraversion than female and non-binary identifying individuals; this disparity may be explained by limitations of sampling.



	<b>Introvert (%)</b>	<b>Extravert (%)</b>
Male (16 respondents)	25%	75%
Female (67 respondents)	66%	34%
Non-Binary (6* respondents)	67%	33%

\*Non-Binary individuals had the opportunity to select more than one gender category

Given the relative proportion of male versus female respondents, it is difficult to make conclusive statements pertaining to gendered personality differences. However, as revealed by the data, extraverted qualities in social movement contexts may be reflective of leadership styles typically perceived as more masculine such as confident, outgoing and assertive; therefore, male survey participants perhaps reflect a self-selecting sample of those who possess higher levels of extraversion and who find social movement spaces affirming of their traits and gender.

#### *Activist Engagement Trends:*

In addition to personality profiles, the survey also measured respondents' backgrounds in activism to contextualize individuals' perceptions of different forms and styles of activist engagement. Respondents represented a wide range of experiences and histories of activist engagement. Within the sample, racial justice, electoral politics, gender and reproductive justice activism, environmental justice, local issue organizing, and education equality work signified the most popular causes for activist engagement. Furthermore, in their own social movement trajectories, respondents reported engaging in a combination of high and low commitment forms of participation, the most common of which included voting in local/interim elections, practicing socially conscious consumption behaviors, attending social justice organization meetings,

participating in protests, facilitating social justice spaces and holding leadership positions in activist organizations.

Overall respondents represent a highly experienced and dedicated sample, nearly three quarters of survey participants indicated participation in activist work for three years or more, 30% of that cohort reported five or more years of engagement. When asked to rate the level of their commitment, a majority of respondents (40%) reported patterns of on and off commitment, an additional 30% indicated significant commitment and minimal commitment respectively. In general, respondents reported increased participation over time, and among the individuals who reported decreased participation, time constraints and feelings of discomfort in activist circles were cited as the primary reasons for leaving. Respondents expressed a high degree of emotional investment for their activist engagement; in response to the question, “to what extent do you feel emotionally invested in your activist work on a scale from 1 to 100,” the mean response value was 70, and most respondents further elaborated through a written explanation. Written responses conveyed themes of strong emotional commitment to the work, for example, “I have strong emotional ties to the work I am involved in, as well as other causes with which I am not actively engaged,” and “Everything is connected, I am a person, therefore what I consume and do/how I interact and work is inextricably intertwined with justice, oppression, and activism.” Others who reported lesser degrees of emotional investment, often identified feeling overwhelmed, mental health challenges, and feelings of inefficiency in social movement spaces as reasons for their reduced sense of emotional commitment. Overall, most participants expressed a deep sense of care for their work, suggesting that survey responses reflect the opinions of individuals who are highly invested in and committed to their activist engagements.

Regarding the primary location for most people’s activist engagements, either on or off campus, roughly even numbers (30%) of respondents reported engaging predominantly in one of the two locations; an additional 20% of respondents reported engaging equally in both contexts. On the subject of most typical roles within social movement activism, 40% of people identified themselves as influential participants, 30% as minor participants, 14% as leaders and 17% as allies. Additionally, as shown in the following table, among the sample, an equal proportion of male and female participants identified as movement leaders; more women, compared to men, identified as influential movement participants, whereas a greater number of men than women identified as minor movement participants.

*Most Typical Social Movement Position Vis-à-vis Gender*

	Leader	Influential	Minor	Ally
Male (16 respondents)	11%	33%	39%	17%
Female (67 respondents)	11%	44%	26%	19%
Non-Binary (6* respondents)	43%	29%	29%	0%

\*Non-Binary individuals had the opportunity to select more than one gender category

Information presented with regards to survey participants’ backgrounds in activist engagement is intended to provide a broad “big picture” view of the sample’s activist context, one based primarily in the culture of a small, New England, liberal arts institution. In my analysis of the data, I refrain from making specific claims which relate participants social identity characteristics (race, gender, etc.) and their perceptions of value in social movement involvement given the limitations of the sample.

## *Traits of Activists*

The following section of the chapter presents survey findings pertaining to the qualities associated with activists and the perceived value of various forms of activist engagement.

Findings include both numeric and textual responses and are broken into three levels of analysis:

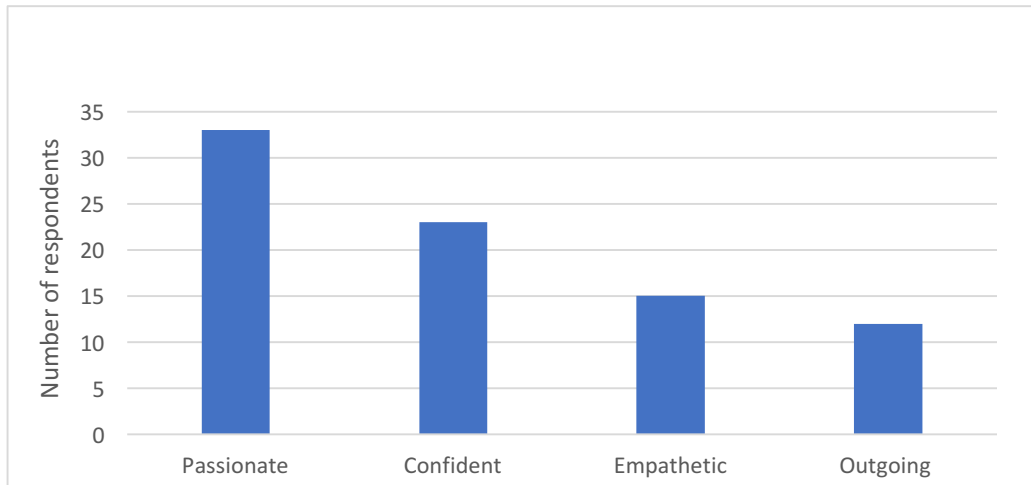
- 1) On a general level, the traits participants associate and perceive as valued among activists and within social movements thinking broadly.
- 2) On an experiential level, the traits participants perceive to be most recognized and valued by others, based on their social movement engagement.
- 3) On a self-reflexive level, participants' reflections on their personal relationship to patterns of trait value among activists and within activist cultures.

### *I. Activist Traits in General*

#### *Numeric Analysis:*

Survey participants were asked to write in three adjectives of their choosing to describe activist personality traits; despite variation among responses, many survey participants included the same or similar adjectives indicative of extraverted traits in their answers. As represented in the chart below, respondents most often identified the following characteristics – passionate, confident, empathetic, outgoing – as associated with their cultural conception of an activist.

*Primary Traits Associated with Activists in General*



Of the 87 responses to the survey item, 40% included the word passionate, 26% confident, 17% empathetic and 14% outgoing. The following table provides a list of secondary adjectives used to describe activists' personalities divided into five categories. These additional traits are organized around specific themes relating to activist personality traits and tendencies, identity characteristics and levels of investment.

*Secondary Traits Associated with Activists*

Intellectual Attributes (29 total)	Extraverted Tendencies (48 total)	Empathic Tendencies (15 total)	Level of Commitment (31 total)	Bold Personality Traits (27 total)
Open minded – 6	Outspoken – 9	Caring – 4	Persistent – 6	Courageous – 4
Organized – 5	Enthusiastic – 8	Connect with others – 2	Determined – 6	Intrepid – 3
Intelligent – 3	Sociable – 5	<u>Cooperative – 2</u>	Strong – 5	Initiative Taking – 3
Educated – 2	Leader like – 5	Kind	Committed – 3	Drive – 3
<u>Forward Thinking – 2</u>	Assertive – 4	Selfless	<u>Resilient – 2</u>	Brave – 3
Liberal	Articulate – 3	Compassionate	Persevering	<u>Energetic – 2</u>
Critical	Charismatic – 3	Optimistic	Invested	Go getter
Thoughtful	Loud – 3	Good listener	Loyal	Fearless
Understanding	Vocal – 2	Patient	Dedicated	Fervor
Progressive	<u>Strong Speaker – 2</u>	Approachable	Invested	Inflexible
Inspiring	Bold		Motivated	Stubborn
Knowledgeable	Bad listener		Strong willed	Manipulative
Idealistic	Aggressive		Hardworking	Persuasive
Informed	Self-assured		Focused	Tough
Curious				Daring
Independent Thinker				

The list above represents a combined total of the secondary adjectives respondents associate with activist personalities and styles of engagement on a broad, cultural level. Among them, adjectives indicative of a high level of extraversion comprised the largest category; conversely, those suggestive of empathic capabilities comprised the smallest category. Respondents’ reflections on the qualities and forms of engagement most valued in social movements further develop these findings.

### *Textual Analysis:*

In general, survey participants found that on a broader movement level, highly visible personality traits and engagement styles received greater recognition within social movement contexts than other activist participation forms. In response to the question of whether movements value certain character traits over others, many respondents listed extraverted and public-oriented personality traits, namely confidence, charm, outspokenness and a willingness to visibly engage in activist work, as preferred traits for social movement participants. The theme of “visible” activist engagement, or the display of more extraverted character traits, surfaced consistently among respondents. According to one respondent, extraverted participants “have an overwhelming presence,” and therefore their qualities and contributions are more recognized and valued. As expressed, overall, activist participants believed strong, loud and extraverted personalities to be most appreciated in social movements, because as one participant stated, “those are the voices that are heard most easily,” or as another indicated, “the ones that get the [organizer] jobs.” Furthermore, multiple respondents remarked that assertive and vocal personalities frequently overshadowed the contributions and engagement styles of more introverted participants, thereby creating activist spaces defined by the contributions of extraverted participants. One respondent stated,

I think we associate the most assertive and best public speaking individuals as the faces of social movements. Thus, although we do not directly not value individuals who more quietly partake in social activist efforts or do more “behind the scenes” work, their efforts are not really visible to other participants or just outsiders to the movement.

In their consideration of activists and activism in general, participants evoked extraverted, dominating personalities and forms of engagement to be both characteristic of and most valued in social movement cultures.

Respondents pointed to the cultural privileging of extraverted and self-confident leadership traits as an explanation for why certain personality types receive greater recognition in activist work. As one respondent explained, “I think people really look up to someone who is not afraid to speak up for what they want and it’s really easy to look at that and think they are a great leader.” More specifically, another respondent articulated how traditional, hierarchical conceptualizations of leadership are often reproduced in social movement settings, stating:

While all personality types have a role in advocating for a particular movement, not all movements are that inclusive [and] traditional conceptualizations of leadership (masculine, poised, outgoing, charismatic) can manifest within social movements the same way they do in any social space, thus excluding voices.

Furthermore, another respondent compared strategies used to attain leadership within social movements to strategies used in industries where leadership is explicitly hierarchical. As one participant, a self-identified activist leader herself, wrote:

I think that some of the most visible activists get to where they are due to assertiveness and manipulation rather than deep listening. I think this is an aspect of people working within a society where they know that those types of strategies are effective. People exercise manipulation and assertiveness in banking careers and the film industry, due to the competitive nature of these fields...I think that is what many activists in the mainstream do to attain this sort of power as well.

Despite the recognition among social movement participants that collaboration among people of all personality types and engagement styles is crucial for the successful development of social movements, given cultural tendencies to value loud and assertive personalities and leadership



over more reserved and reflective styles, activist causes and leadership often reflect extraverted rather than introverted contributions and personality types.

## *II. Activist Traits from Experience*

### *Numeric Analysis:*

A significant number of survey prompts attempted to gauge respondents' sense of being valued in relation to their direct participatory experience in activist work. Survey items designed to measure individuals' experience asked participants to consider the perceived value of their contributions, both in direct relation to other participants, as well as to the broader movement itself. The data presented in the following section incorporates both big picture patterns of value, as well as specific examples of traits perceived to be valued (or not) in activist engagement. Given that value is a subjective term, for the purposes of this research it incorporates elements of recognition, appreciation and praise for activist work as felt by participants.

Broadly speaking, in response to the question, "To what extent do you feel like the character/personality traits you bring to activist causes are valued by the broader cause/movement?" 20% of respondents felt that their traits were always valued, 36% usually, and 47% either somewhat, infrequently or never. Further analyzed according to participant categorical identifications, the findings reveal patterns among those who reported feeling either valued or undervalued in movement contexts. When considered in relation to the participant movement position, the more influential the participant's role in the movement, the likelier the participant was to perceive of themselves as being valued within social movement spaces. Among social movement leaders and influential participants, the majority reported feeling either usually or always appreciated in their engagement; in contrast, the majority of minor participants

and allies felt that their contributions and engagement styles were undervalued by the broader movement.

*Perceived Level of Value by Movement Vis-à-vis Position in Movement*

	Never	Infrequently	Somewhat	Usually	Always
Leader (14)	0	0	2 (14%)	4 (29%)	8 (57%)
Influential (40)	0	2 (5%)	8 (20%)	21 (53%)	9 (22%)
Minor (26)	1 (4%)	6 (23%)	12 (46%)	5 (19%)	2 (8%)
Ally (17)	3 (18%)	6 (35%)	4 (24%)	4 (24%)	0

\*Respondents had the option of selecting more than one option for typical position held within movements.

Though the results of the above cross-tabulation are not particularly surprising, they suggest implications for the ways in which perceptions of engagement value may reinforce levels of participation. For example, if minor participants persist in feeling undervalued in their engagements, what does that signify for their movement retention rates? A deeper examination of the development and existence of trait value patterns within social movements sheds light on this finding.

When examined by personality profile, the survey item revealed relevant trends among participant personality types, indicating that a greater number of introverts than extraverts feel their contributions to be undervalued (people who answered never, infrequently, somewhat) than valued (usually, always) by the broader movement. This finding is represented in the following chart; of the 89 total respondents, 45% indicated overall feelings of undervalue, and 55% of value.

*Level of Perceived Value in Social Movements vis-à-vis Personality Type*

	Valued (49 – 55%)	Undervalued (40 – 45%)
Introvert	24 (49%)	<b>26 (65%)</b>
Extravert	25 (51%)	14 (35%)

While there is equal representation of introverts and extraverts among those who perceive their engagements as usually/always valued by social movements, of those who felt undervalued in activist spaces, the majority identify as introverts.

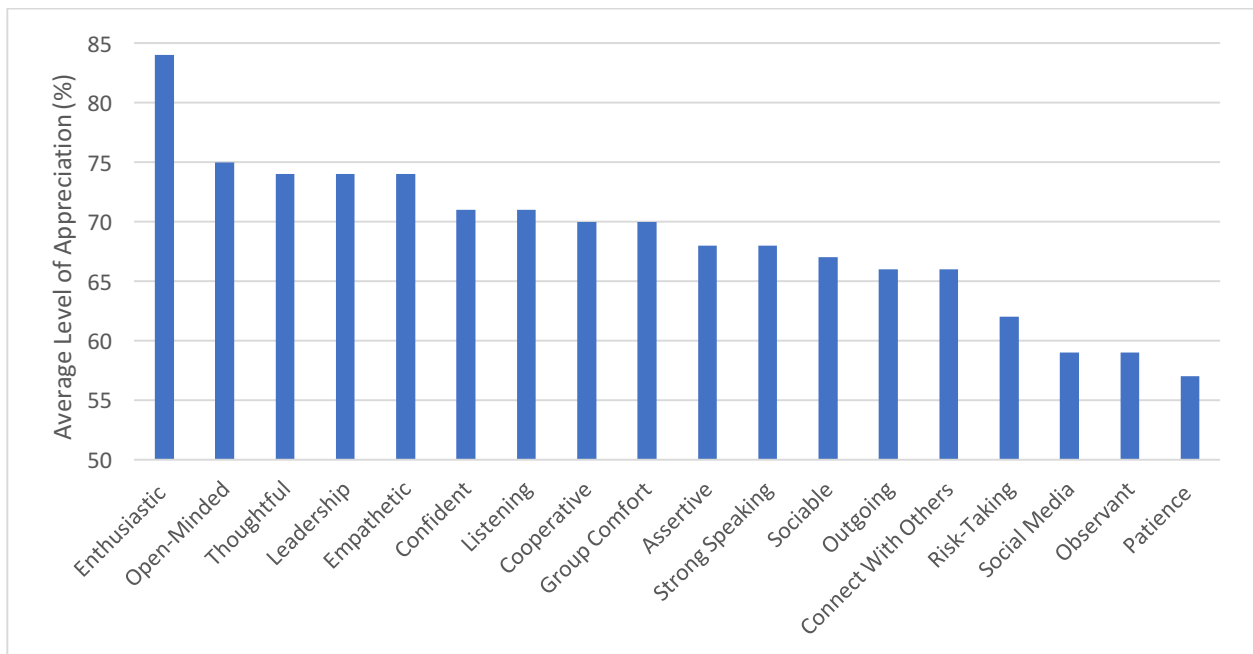
Relatedly, regarding individuals’ perceptions of their more introverted versus extraverted engagement styles, respondents indicated a belief that their extraverted qualities were valued significantly (mean of 71) more than their introverted ones (mean of 42). As the table below represents, both categories share similar standard deviation values, however, the introversion values are slightly more spread out around the mean than those for extraversion.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Introversion Value	42	21.5
Extraversion Value	71	20.5

Furthermore, most survey participants confirmed that in their experience, social movement leaders often encourage participants to engage in certain forms of activism over others, specifically extraverted ones. The following qualities, predominantly associated with extraversion and extraverted styles of engagement, were listed among traits indicated as most valued in social movement settings: confident, courageous, charming, charismatic, masculine, poised, extraverted, outspoken, sociable, assertive, willingness to engage visibly, manipulative, passionate, outgoing, ability to connect with others, confrontational and strong personality.

However, responses to the following question, “In your experience internally within social justice causes and circles you have been a part of, what characteristics do leaders and participants value in terms of the participants themselves?” reveal more nuanced interpretations of activist trait valuation. Based on respondents’ rankings, (on a scale from none, not much, a fair amount to a lot) a variety of personality traits, both those commonly considered extraverted and those generally considered to be introverted, fell within the value range of a fair amount to a lot. Traits perceived to be most valued based on experience include: enthusiastic, open-minded, thoughtful, strong leadership abilities, empathetic and confident. In contrast, traits perceived to be comparatively less valued in the context of survey participants’ own engagement, include: patience, observant/intuitiveness, ease of social media presence, risk-taking, ability to connect closely with others. The average level of appreciation for each trait is depicted by the chart below:

*Most Valued Traits in Social Movement Engagement – Participant Experience*



The following page consists of a more detailed list which includes the standard deviation in addition to the mean for each trait. The standard deviation serves to further describe the mean value with larger numbers indicative of more disperse, and smaller of more concentrated response values around the mean. For example, for traits such as “enthusiastic” and “outgoing” which represent smaller standard deviation values, most respondents ranked the perceived value of each trait within a more narrow range of the mean, compared to traits such as “patient” or “observant” with higher standard deviation values.

*Traits Perceived to be Valued Based on Experience*

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
<i>Enthusiastic</i>	84	21
<i>Open-Minded</i>	75	26.5
<i>Thoughtful</i>	74	26
<i>Leadership Abilities</i>	74	25
<i>Empathetic</i>	74	25
<i>Confident</i>	71	25.5
<i>Strong Listening Abilities</i>	71	26
<i>Comfort Level in Large Groups</i>	70	28
<i>Assertive</i>	68	27
<i>Strong Speaking Abilities</i>	68	27

<i>Sociable</i>	67	24.5
<i>Outgoing</i>	66	21
<i>Connects with Others</i>	66	25.5
<i>Risk-Taking</i>	62	25
<i>Social Media Presence</i>	59	27
<i>Observant/Intuitive</i>	59	28
<i>Patience</i>	57	29

As depicted, based on their social movement experience, participants perceive a combination of traits indicative of introverted and extraverted personalities and engagement styles to be valued in activist contexts. Compared to response trends for other survey items which also explore participants' experiential perceptions of value, these findings portray a more complex picture which complicates findings that suggest extraverted traits to be predominantly or even exclusively valued in social movements. These findings are further contextualized by participants' textual explanations.

#### *Textual Analysis:*

Among survey participants who expressed higher degrees of perceived valuation for their contributions, many participants either identified as extraverted or mentioned extraverted engagement styles as characteristic of their own involvement. An extraverted female respondent wrote, "I am always engaged in the movements I involve myself in and believe that my voice helps lead others." Given her high level of identification with extraverted qualities and her

selection of “strong leadership abilities, passionate and confident” to describe her activist involvement, it is likely that this respondent would describe her personality as fitting squarely within the demands of social movement involvement. Even a self-identified “outgoing” participant who described his activist participation as infrequent, found, in general, that organizations appreciated his attitude and personality despite his limited involvement. An introverted female respondent, though she found her contributions to be “definitely valued” by the broader movement cause, clarified that in her opinion, “it can be easier to jump into the movements when extroverted, energetic, comfortable around large groups, etc.” A female student who claimed, “my personality/style blends well with activist circles and I pretty much always feel valued,” described an element of incongruence in that, when she expressed critique or skepticism related to the movement itself, other movement participants seemed to become frustrated. An extraverted respondent who described her engagement style as “strong leadership abilities, thoughtful and enthusiastic,” further contextualized that, “enthusiastic individuals with strong leadership skills are most highly valued” in social movement organizing.

Many respondents alluded to extraverted engagement styles as predictors for commendation and recognition in social movement contexts. Respondents indicated that friends and other highly engaged movement participants were most receptive and appreciative of their engagement. As one respondent stated, within social movement circles activist engagement is recognized, “By others who are also committed, yes. By those who take a more passive role, no.” Friends also served as important reinforcers of activist appreciation; according to another respondent, “Because most of my friends are activists, I feel highly appreciated, especially for my social media presence.” Publicly oriented engagement styles, especially, received greater recognition within social movement circles; as one respondent stated, “I think when I participate

in activist causes, people appreciate the enthusiasm, passion, etc. that I bring to the table. I think it's always encouraging to see people who are passionate to be part of the larger movement.” Especially in activist roles and forms of participation that relied on significant speaking engagement, respondents reported high levels of validation for their involvement, stating “It has always been appreciated when I took the microphone,” “Others appreciate that I am usually unafraid to speak up in meetings,” and, “I showed up and chanted and yelled, which felt good even if I wasn't sure I felt it was effective.” However, respondents also expressed the belief that recognition for participants' passion and enthusiasm should not preclude validation of a variety of engagement styles, especially those which may be perceived as more introverted or less visible. As one survey participant expressed:

I believe everyone brings different aspects that they flourish at into activism. It is important to acknowledge these traits because it helps reach out to larger groups of individuals. It's important to understand that not everyone is outgoing, confident, or loud, however, the quieter people who are at the activist meetings, and the ones in the middle of a protest share something in common, that is being passionate or expressing that a change is needed.

While participants identified both introverted and extraverted engagement qualities as critical to movement development, it is often through demonstrations of extraversion that participants' engagement (both introverted and extraverted) is recognized. As the following respondent indicated, while she conceives of introverted qualities to be instrumental for movement success, “Being able to think and contemplate is not appreciated until those thoughts are expressed [visibly], and maybe not even appreciated until they are relayed to an audience/in a rally.” Despite the respondent's belief that introverted qualities often inform extraverted engagement, she found movements in general to only acknowledge the extraverted and public aspects of



participation. Given the greater visibility of extraverted forms of engagement, introverted and extraverted styles are often conceived of as distinct and within a hierarchy of value rather than as complementing one another.

In contrast to those who perceived their contributions to be highly valued, survey respondents who felt their participation was less recognized in movement spaces often identified introversion or introverted engagement styles as characteristic of their participation. Multiple respondents alluded to their failure to manifest certain extraverted expectations when it came to their activist involvement. Upon reflection on their activist participation, introvert-identifying respondents stated: “I don’t think I am outgoing enough,” “I feel like I am not as outgoing or personable when engaging with others,” and, “My personality traits when it comes to activism aren’t very loud and in your face, so therefore I am not seen as a REAL activist.” Furthermore, respondents indicated feeling that their personality and/or engagement style did not match the activist culture espoused by the organizations or movements in which they had engaged. As one respondent stated, “I feel as though certain activist groups are fitted for only one type of person, so when I do not fit that mold, it is hard to find my place in that organization.” For another survey participant who values “thinking really deeply about issues and getting other people to question/challenge what we’re taking for granted,” more introverted forms of engagement are not “always what people want in more energy-driven, action-based movements.” Relatedly, an introverted respondent expressed that while their contributions are typically valued by the broader movement, they are not “what catch people’s attention.” Another respondent expressed that “because I get so nervous being in the spotlight and so much activism necessitates that you put yourself out there, my shyness is not valued by the activist community;” and believed that due to the popularity of public protest in activism, her shy personality did not fulfill the cultural

trope of an activist. Compared to more visible, extraverted styles of engagement, respondents who characterized their tendencies as introverted reported feelings of inadequacy within the context of the movement.

Multiple respondents perceived their “behind the scenes” social movement contributions to be less valued and acknowledged than bolder forms of engagement, such as attending rallies, protests and direct actions. One survey respondent who experienced significant anxiety in protest situations due to discomfort in large crowds, expressed that, “people don’t value the planning work as much as protest attendance.” Additionally, some respondents evoked gender and other social hierarchies as factors which contributed to the lack of recognition they felt for their work. For one female survey participant, gendered patterns of social deference influenced her experience within social movement spaces: “I feel like if I was more assertive and clear in public speaking I would maybe be more respected. I also think this is a gendered issue in that I think my more confident male co-leaders get more respect...” Another female respondent further elaborated on the relationship between gendered and racialized hierarchies and patterns of recognition for certain forms of activist engagement over others. She explained:

Oftentimes, the quieter work (of listening, caring for others, supporting behind the scenes) gets swallowed up by the louder work (direct action, public speaking, etc.) which I’ve found also falls in step with gendered and racialized hierarchies (i.e. if you assimilate into white masculine ways of being – take charge, speak up, take space, be entitled – by, for instance, holding the megaphone, taking a lead role in a direct action, or confronting opposition in a public and combative way) you are more validated in the space and your work is seen more as legitimate activist work.

Mutually exclusive distinctions between loud and quieter forms of engagement were often evoked to distinguish an authentic from non-authentic activist. Even an introverted respondent

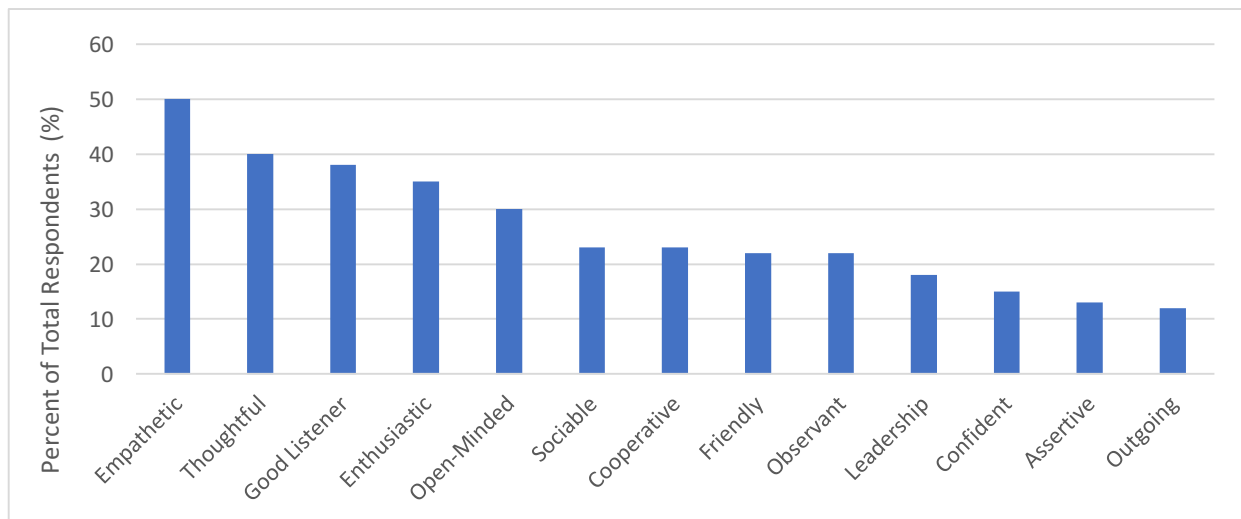
who felt that her contributions were usually valued by the movement, lamented not feeling “willing enough to take risks/bold actions and make it a part of my social media presence.”

### *III. Respondents’ Personal Reflections on their Personality Traits*

#### *Numeric Analysis:*

As far as survey respondents’ characterization of their own participation and strengths in the context of their activist work, the traits respondents most often indicated to describe their personal engagement styles are represented in the following table and are reflective, predominantly, of introverted, and quieter personality qualities. For the survey item, participants selected the top three traits to describe their social movement personality from an extensive list of adjectives; this selection contrasts the predominantly extraverted traits respondents provided to describe activists and activism both on a general and experiential level.

*Self-Identified Qualities to Describe Participants’ Personal Engagement Style*



As revealed by the graphic above, half of the total respondents indicated “empathetic” among their defining activist characteristics and an additional 40% of respondents provided either (or both) “thoughtful” or “good listener” in their top three traits. Conversely, traits

suggestive of greater extraversion – leadership abilities, confident, assertive, outgoing— comprised the lowest bracket of associated traits. In comparison to previous categories of analysis, on a self-reflexive level, participants perceived introverted over extraverted traits to be most characteristic of and valuable to their activist engagement.

### *Textual Analysis:*

Many respondents reported feeling conflicted with regards to the amount of recognition they received for their highly visible and extraverted activist work. Even among respondents who felt comfortable engaging in social justice work in an extraverted capacity, some felt frustrated that their more reserved and reflective contributions went undervalued. A respondent expressed:

I can take the leadership role when needed, I'm fairly good at talking to crowds and organizing/directing people, so I think that's valued. But a lot of the time I feel like I want to think more deeply about the action or social justice issue than the people around me, and that wanting to take time for insight and considering all points of view and seeking out more knowledge isn't as valued, when people seem to just want to jump to action.

Furthermore, given the highly social nature of activist and social justice work, various respondents mentioned acquiring social capital and influence through others' recognition of their visible activist contributions. One survey participant, the former president of a university cooperative (co-op) house, expressed how her extraverted engagement tendencies allowed her to acquire greater recognition for her activist work among her peers. She states:

The activist space I have thus engaged in, namely the co-op environment, has emphasized social capital and extraverted social justice performativity above actual engagement and involvement. Hence, qualities like leadership skills and articulateness have aided gain[ing] in social capital but little in benefitting the greater movement...My ability to talk social justice has enabled me to befriend/gain the approval of people considered

popular in these communities. My assigned “woke” status as a white person has been thoroughly recognized and been taken as a stand-in for possible activist and community engaging work.

As described, extraverted forms of activist engagement often have a compounding effect on reinforcing individuals’ social capital within social justice circles. A male respondent recounted a similar experience wherein his expressive tendencies and social privilege elevated his position within activist circles, he explains:

I have gotten a disproportionate amount of praise for activist work I do in my life. I think it has to do with how vocal I am, the thoughtfulness that people perceive in my speaking (white, male privilege) and who I am speaking to (often less radical/engaged white people).

Social recognition for one’s overt, vocal engagement, for many, may serve as a predictor for sustained social movement engagement.

Notably, among introverted participants who felt that their activist contributions were appreciated, most identified their sense of value as arising from either personal, or interpersonal group value, rather than extrinsic, public validation. One participant, stated, “Introverted qualities are not valued as much just from the outside, they are appreciated a lot from people on the inside who can see that the introverted people take a lot of time doing the ins and outs of the planning of things.” For some, introverted forms of engagement allowed participants to engage in ways more in line with their personality “to get stuff done promptly and quietly” and “do the behind the scenes work no one wants to do.” Specifically, participants found that their introverted engagement styles enabled them to form deep relationships with others in their work. As one respondent stated, her introverted engagement styles were “helpful with connecting amongst others in the group – and useful in creating a community through thoughtfulness, discussion, and smaller charts, etc.” Furthermore, another survey participant felt that her

introverted contributions were highly valued because “sometimes listening is one of the most impressionable ways to help your cause.” Introverted participants who either did not seek extensive public validation, and/or found personal fulfillment through their engagement, felt that their contributions were more valued by both the broader cause and other participants.

Participants’ reflections on whether they adopt the label “activist” to describe their social movement commitments help to situate respondents in relation to broader narratives of who and which traits constitute an activist. When asked to describe their level of identification with the term “activist,” several themes emerged to characterize respondents’ acceptance or rejection of the title. Roughly equal numbers of respondents, in their response to the question “Do you identify with the term activist?” responded yes, no, and sometimes. Among those who claimed the label “activist” to describe their own involvement, many respondents found the term to be reflective of the nature and level of their involvement in social justice causes. Claiming personal ownership of the term activist, for some respondents, connoted a sense of pride and confidence in their engagement; as one participant declared, “I AM an activist...My ethical beliefs have led me to taking political/social stances in the ways that I engage with others.” Others expressed a sense of duty in claiming the label, statements made included, “I fight for what I believe in,” “I believe there is potential for progress and I see myself as a progress maker,” and, “I identify with being an activist because the only way to make change that we want to see in this country and in the world is by making our voices heard in whatever capacity possible.” Other participants expressed that activism and citizen engagement are synonymous concepts, stating, “I am proud to be an activist. Citizens should be active. The terms should be coterminous,” and, “Because I do advocate for others, I do find the term activist engaging with my identity.” Furthermore, some respondents indicated intentionally describing themselves as activists to counter its exclusive

connotations; a participant explained that she claimed the identity “Because I do activist and social justice work! And I hate when people make this term exclusive, so I am asserting myself into the category of activist.”

Social movement participants who chose not to identify with the term activist expressed discomfort related to the term’s narrow cultural definition and conception. Multiple respondents described their engagements to be unqualified and undeserving of the title “activist;” as one participant described, “To me, this term has an all or nothing connotation. I feel uncomfortable claiming it for myself knowing that others do so much more.” Another participant clarified that rather than calling himself an “activist” he preferred to say, “I participate in activism,” because as he explained, “there is a little bit of a stigma on someone calling him/herself “an activist”, unless they are a full-time organizer.” For many, the word “activist” remained reserved for people who committed significant amounts of their time and energy to the work. Others explained how their social justice engagements and actions failed to reflect the cultural image of an activist as someone involved in protest and direct action work. According to one respondent,

At times when I am engaging in protests I feel like an activist, but I am not regularly posting on social media. I pursue activism through working in the non-profit world towards a social justice cause – but that doesn’t feel the same as “activism” or defining myself as an activist. I equate activism with going to protests regularly, posting on social media, community organizing, etc. more so than just having a social just-focused career.

The belief that, to be considered an activist, one must participate in large-scale, public oriented activism, influenced the extent to which respondents felt they could identify with the term. For one survey participant involved in small-scale, interactional activism, the label “activist” was something she felt conflicted about because, as she stated,

The term “activist” elicits a picture of a person with a megaphone in hand, t-shirt with an activist quote on it, Facebook full of activist-y articles etc. While I am passionate about

social justice, and while on an individual level discuss, call out, and debate social justice issue[s]. I'm not "outwardly" an activist, so I don't like to label myself as an activist when people are out there dedicating their lives to social change. But I do participate in daily micro-level activism.

Rigid conceptualizations of who constitutes an authentic versus inauthentic activist may impact social movement participants perceptions of their own value within activist settings.

Introverted-identified respondents, or those who preferred to engage in social movement activism in more "behind the scenes," micro-interactional ways, expressed hesitation to claim the label "activist" to describe their involvement. As one participant described, "activist" is a "public" term. It implies large scale change but does not acknowledge micro-interactions and small change." Other participants indicated discomfort with the term's connotation of high public visibility; as one respondent described,

I think there's a public perception of the word activist that makes you feel like you have to be very visible in the public eye to be an "activist" but at its core it means doing work towards a cause, which I do. So sometimes I feel more connected with the word than other times, mainly because I feel I don't fit the publicly held image of an activist, but I am doing work on a different level of activism.

Although respondents often classified their social justice related engagements as "activist work," individuals rejected the "activist" label because of its extraverted implications. Especially for more introverted participants, the term felt exclusive to their styles of engagement; according to one respondent, "As a quieter person, I feel like if you're not the leader then you are not the activist." Furthermore, due to negative associations with its extraverted connotations, other respondents, despite the nature of their social movement engagement, chose to distance themselves from the label. As one respondent stated,



I think though the work I do is activist work, the term is now so negatively associated with people just yelling about things they don't really understand and not listening or just being rabble rousers (in a negative sense) or people who just talk and never act, therefore I don't classify myself as such.

For some, using the word activist to describe their involvement precluded a deeper and more reflective understanding of their social justice engagements.

Additionally, multiple respondents alluded to a fear of receiving undue social recognition in claiming the title "activist" to describe their efforts. As one respondent indicated, the label "activist" creates a degree of separation between those who participate in movements and campaigns and those who do not." Other respondents further clarified this "degree of separation" as one which reinforces harmful social hierarchies among people who may or may not choose to use the term; sentiments expressed included, "It's not always my place to be an activist. And I don't want to claim an identity feature (like activist) that could serve more to boost my own ego and reinforce privilege than actually advance a movement or cause," and, "I think it can be a hard term because it is a label and I wouldn't want to go around being like "look at me, I'm an activist" because that just seems like patting myself on the back." Furthermore, for another respondent, claiming the title "activist" seemed to be an unnecessary qualifier for her engagements, stating:

Although I think the work I do could be aligned with that [activist], I think taking on the label of an "activist" is me trying to prove to others that the work I am doing is causing change and deserves recognition - when that is unnecessary because I will just continue doing my work regardless of having that label.

Tensions surrounding the degree of social recognition and valorization received by asserting the term "activist" often influenced whether social movement participants claimed the identity for themselves.

## ***5. Presentation of Interview Data***

### *Overview*

The following section both affirms and expands on themes reflected in the survey data regarding the ways in which perceived patterns of personality trait value in social movement contexts shapes individuals' engagement experiences in activist work. In a series of in-depth interviews conducted with eight social movement participants of varying personality types and degrees of involvement in activist causes, interviewees shared their thoughts, reflections and anecdotes regarding their own experiences and perceptions of value in activist work. Throughout the conversations, interviewees consistently noted tensions between extraverted, large-scale modes of activist participation, and more reflective, small-scale types of engagement, and described social pressures operating within activist contexts that either discouraged or encouraged certain forms of participation. Most interviewees alluded to stereotypical perceptions of activists as intensely committed social movement participants highly comfortable with extraverted forms of engagement; the stereotype of the extraverted activist filtered and shaped interviewees own view of themselves as activists and even their acceptance or rejection of the “activist” appellation. Furthermore, conversations revealed examples of ways in which narrow and rigid understandings of who and what styles of engagement constitute true activism contribute to feelings of, guilt, discomfort, being judged and inadequacy among individuals involved in activist work; these affectual responses have consequences for the production of hierarchical patterns of participant value and social capital distribution within activist circles. When reflecting on their own engagement, all interviewees identified introverted, reflective modes of engagement as the foundation for both their large-scale, public-oriented activism and

their smaller-scale, more intimate participation, regardless of whether they self-identified as extravert or introvert, and expressed a desire to broaden understandings of activist engagement.

### *Interview Data Analysis*

In discussions about activists and their personality traits from a broad, “big picture” perspective, interviewees echoed the extraverted descriptions of activists revealed by the survey data. When asked the question, “What comes to mind when you think of an activist or someone highly involved in social justice work?” participants provided portrayals of very vocal, loud, passionate people engaged in public and visible displays of activist work. For Ella\*, a Bates College senior, activists embody extraverted qualities. She stated:

I pair someone who is willing to go to rallies with the nature of what an activist is, or people who are willing to do the more extraverted work of door-knocking, trying to get petition signature on the street corner, going to pipeline protests, talking to your senator – a lot of those seem to require qualities of extraverted people.

Beyond the nature of their engagement, Ella also expressed that activists are people who “are personally committed to what they’re working for – you have to be a devoted person, and have motivation to put yourself in places that are uncomfortable.” Multiple interviewees echoed Ella’s conception of activists as people highly committed to their causes. Jeremy\*, a recent Bates College graduate, said:

I generally think of someone who is full time devoting themselves to fighting oppression and building solidarity and resistance. But I think the term activist has big anti-institutional connotations as well...it has to do with the word radical, activists have to be threatening a structure, the people who I know who are activists are often on the front lines, they are the ones with the megaphones, that’s the image that comes to mind.

On a self-reflexive level, participants' reflections on their personal relationship to patterns of trait value among activists and within activist cultures.

Many interviewees expressed similar views of activists as people positioned at the front lines of social justice causes, however, not always with positive connotations. Maya\*, a University of California, Berkeley student described that, in her opinion, activists:

Are definitely very vocal, they are very passionate, using powerful rhetoric confidently whether positively or negatively. They are active on Facebook. They have a lot of social capital, they are very involved in organizing, know how to project, people who know how to raise their voice, take up a lot of space in conversation, talking a lot, sharing a lot, can get really excited about whatever they care about and [are] also very knowledgeable.

For Ari\*, a Bates College senior, passion and excitement about social issues, however, are not always sufficient qualities to constitute an activist identity. They explained that “people sometimes confuse passion for activism, so people who are very passionate about social issues and stuff might call themselves activists,” despite not having the requisite level of commitment to claim the title of activist. Other interviewees expressed similar tensions about the activist label and engagement in productive social change work. In her interview, Laura\*, a Bates College senior, critiqued the practice of publically claiming the identity of an ally, stating:

I think the word ally is interesting, I think that people who are caught up in social hierarchies will end up defining themselves as allies and kind of readily throw that around or even post it on Facebook which always feels weird to me because it doesn't really feel necessary to broadcast the fact you are an ally, you don't need to be calling yourself an activist or an ally to just do the work.

For Laura and others, actively proclaiming an activist or ally identity serves to reinforce participants' egos rather than positively defining their contributions.

Based on their own experiences engaging in activist work, interviewees alluded to ways in which social movements themselves might encourage these stereotypical notions of

engagement and foster tensions amongst participants. Interviewees expressed perceptions of activist cultures as often incentivizing loud, public forms of engagement. Maya described many of the activist spaces she had been exposed to at Berkeley as representing a “performance fetish,” she states,

I think there is an activism performance fetish... going to a protest, getting arrested and it's like... there are other forms of activism. Not a lot of people are trying to get arrested or don't feel like they're doing something when they get arrested. Why do we associate our activism with that kind of performance? I think we immediately associate with engagement loud engagement, vocal engagement. Because activism is more performance based I think it's inherently more extraverted and social. you need to be able to see that you care and you're showing up.

Extraverted forms of activism are often upheld, at least on a stereotypical level, as the most worthy and exciting forms of engagement, potentially obscuring the value of other less loud and visible forms of participation. Ari's articulation of the evolution of their activist engagement in the context of Bates activism echoes Maya's critique of performance activism. As they describe,

In the beginning I was very much about things that were very outspoken like marches or tabling...but now I don't participate in those things anymore because marches make me very anxious and they always have but I was like, no, this is the way you do it so you're going to do it this way. But now, a lot of the work that I do is very written, not vocal at all. I read a lot of articles and I share a lot of articles [online] and I write a lot of articles and I want to be a paralegal after school and that is very written based, it is not very physical like marching. I don't think one is better than the other but I do think people think one is better than the other and if you are not physically present somewhere then it's not as valid as maybe writing would be or boycotting.

Ari's reflection contextualizes the ways in which larger social forces and pressures may contribute to individuals' sense of value in social movement spaces and dictate their engagement. Furthermore, multiple interviewees referenced social media activism as a site of tension among

social movement participants; while some interviewees engaged in significant social media activist posting, others neglected to engage online due to feelings of discomfort surrounding their social media presence. For Sara\*, a self-identified introvert committed to social justice, the dynamics of social media activism were uncomfortable. She expressed that an emphasis on “conspicuous” activism may limit its potential, stating:

Because social media has created this space where activism has to be conspicuous, where you have to put a huge paragraph of like this is what I think and look at all of these pictures... I think it has actually narrowed the scope of activism to being visually appealing and conspicuously visible.

The prominence of social media as a platform for activist engagement, especially among the millennial generation, has further reinforced conceptions of activism as consisting purely of attention-seeking, highly articulate modes of participation.

Interviewees provided anecdotes of instances in which they felt that displays of conspicuous, loud and passionate forms of engagement overshadowed the original intention and purpose of activist efforts. Eliza, a student Democratic Party leader, described two recent occasions where she believed flashy, “feel-good” activism precluded deeper engagement with the activist cause. In the weeks leading up to the November 2016 presidential election, Eliza helped organize a group of students to protest outside the venue where Donald Trump was scheduled to give a campaign speech; while she was pleased with students’ enthusiasm and high attendance at the event, she worried that the loud, feel-good quality of the anti-Trump protest overshadowed its substantive quality. She described,

It felt like we as a group were in it for the feel-good feeling and for the attention and I felt that we weren’t committing as a group to the issue and to the point of being there longer and it was cold and such and I was really frustrated because that's the kind of activism I don't want to be a part of - the kind that shows up to make itself seen and then runs away.

Similarly, when participating in the Boston Women's March following Donald Trump's January 2017 presidential inauguration, Eliza reflected on the nature of large-scale, extraverted activist efforts, and on the specific feel-good quality of the march. She expressed,

I think especially if I'm not a leader of what's happening, I get really nervous about the direction a crowd is going and often feel like I don't want to be supporting that. The Women's March I think is a really good example of that. I felt conflicted about what was happening there. I didn't think everyone was thinking about all the implications of holding up all these signs about vaginas.

Though Eliza said she appreciates the value of big, attention-grabbing activist demonstrations and enjoys participating in rallies and protests, she is weary of the glorified nature of certain forms of activist engagement, stating, "activism has this ultra-glorified view and sometimes people want to be a part of it for that part of it [glory] and don't necessarily think about everything else that it will take." For Eliza, large scale protest activism must be supplemented with sustained, small-scale engagement to create meaningful social change.

Interviewees further articulated their opinions surrounding a preoccupation with visible performance in activist causes. Specifically, multiple participants alluded to feeling pressure, either from other activists or self-inflicted, to engage in social movements in certain ways; these social pressures, both explicit and implicit, shaped participants' understandings of activism and their roles as activists. Ari, though capable of engaging in extraverted forms of participation if necessary, described feeling uncomfortable to be pressured to do so. They stated:

I've had people in my life who are very, very activist... you could tell they were judging a little bit, like why didn't you participate in this, why didn't you attend these meetings... I feel like they foster a lot of power but not in a good way. Like a lot of dichotomous power. They exclude a lot of people. I'm just not into it.

Laura articulated internalizing feelings of pressure and subtle judgement from other social movement participants in her own group involvement. She described,

There's definitely social pressure if you're not engaging in a certain way or if you decide not to go to a protest or something; it's either within your head or people will comment on it and be like why aren't you going to that protest.

Eliza\*, a Bates College senior, expressed a similar critique of patterns of participant value formation in social movements, stating, "I've seen that people feel like their identity as an activist is determined by other people. I think that's like a huge problem in the field. They feel like they have to prove themselves to the people who do the most apparent and visible work." Given the influence of both direct and indirect social pressures within activist communities, social movement participants seeking recognition for their engagement may feel that their sense of validation is dependent on the perceptions of other participants.

Many interviewees referenced feeling elements of inadequacy and guilt related to their social movement involvement. Matt\*, a recent Bates graduate with an extensive background in gender justice activism and an extraverted personality type, expressed feeling least confident in his activist participation and leadership when attempting to conform to expectations of what his engagement should look like. Reflecting on a TEDx talk he presented while a student at Bates, he explained:

I hate my Ted Talk so much. I cringe every time I watch it or listen to it – it was so not me. I had to be this other person to present the message I thought I was supposed to say. I felt really not confident, I felt like I had to force it. Authenticity would have been the answer, you know, and I had to say what I thought people wanted me to say, or be the ally people wanted me to be.

Matt's TEDx talk was largely born out of the social pressure he felt to present himself in a prescribed way, rather than as a reflection of his sense of authentic self and message.



Additionally, for Sara, the experience of negotiating external pressures in the development of her relationship to activist work produced many feelings of guilt and shame. Sara expressed high levels of discomfort when engaging in loud, protest activism. As she described, “I don’t like being the person in big crowds or yelling things.” She recounted a recent conversation between herself and a close friend that happened in anticipation of the January 2017 Women’s March on Washington; though Sara wanted to show her support for the cause, she declined the invitation to travel to the march with her emphatic friend given her introverted personality and aversion to crowds. She stated,

I felt terrible, I felt really guilty and I also felt like maybe I would be judged, like you don’t care as much about this as you should. And maybe I should put that aside, put aside my discomfort for the greater good of my country. So in that sense I do wish sometimes that I felt more like I wanted to be visible about my activism but it is hard for me to think I could ever feel that way.

Multiple interviewees echoed feelings of guilt either when failing to engage in certain ways or while struggling to commit sufficiently to the work. As Eliza elaborated,

I feel like it's like a moral critique. If I tell someone I don't have time for something or I don't know what's happening with this social justice issue, I feel like I'm being selfish and immoral, not incompetent necessarily...I absolutely have a very deep internalized guilt when I feel like I'm not doing enough and I think that's a big problem of the social justice movement that you have to be a workhorse in order to feel ok.

Self-critical feelings among participants shape individuals’ engagement in social movements in specific ways. For Eliza, a desire to meet specific expectations and receive acknowledgement for her engagement led her to over-commit. When a third-party organizer repeatedly asked her to facilitate a student activist network on campus, she felt pressured but also hesitant to take on the role. She described:

I wanted to be one of the people who was recognized as fighting for social justice, and was frustrated that I was not, so I dove in more than I wanted and then regretted my involvement because I felt like I didn't have the energy or time for it.

The significant social pressure Eliza felt to meet certain expectations for her activist involvement resulted in feelings of being pressured and overwhelmed and, in hindsight, a negative participatory experience.

Interviewees also expressed how broader trends of activist recognition shaped their personal engagement patterns. When asked to describe forms of social justice participation that are most recognized, interviewees often alluded to visible participation styles that are acknowledged by a larger collective. Ari, in their interview explained that, “whoever organizes first” receives the most recognition and mentioned the student organizer Alex\*as an example. Ari states,

They [Alex] organize so much. They get a lot of recognition regardless of whether the mode of their activism is actually well-attended or well-organized. It doesn't matter because they organized it so they're going to get all the credit for that. I feel like staff and faculty recognize that. I feel like resumes recognize that.

This quotation exemplifies the ways in which compounded social recognition reinforces value hierarchies within social movement circles. Jeremy indicated a variety of forces which influence the extent and forms of his participation, stating:

A lot of times there have been incentives to engage, all the praise I was getting, pressure for my resume, professional pressure. I definitely feel pressure when I have a relationship with someone who I deeply respect on a political level, people I'll fully defer to. I know that if something is important to them, I'd make an extra effort to go.

Beyond personal interest in and commitment to social movement activism, additional factors including positive social recognition, resume pressure and social ties also informed individuals' engagement choices.

Interviewees described many ways in which social capital and influence is accrued in activist settings and contributes to the establishment of a social pecking order in activist spaces. As Maya expressed, "I think social activism and performance gets so tied in with recognition...based on what other people think about you and what you're doing, you receive greater acknowledgement and reinforcement for your work." Laura further reflected on how social groupings in the context of activist work may produce patterns of who continues in their activist participation, stating:

It's interesting because the social hierarchies about these things often pertain to certain social groups, like if you're into social justice, your friends are also probably into...it's weird when it becomes an actual clique rather than something that people are just interested in or showing up for.

Interviewees explained how individuals who have attained social prominence and acknowledgement through their engagement may influence patterns of activist recognition and participation. Especially in the context of close-knit and highly social environments such as Bates, as Jeremy described, "certain circles of people have been elevated to this ridiculous and sometimes unwarranted godly level of respect as activists and as people, and I do think they have lots of influence." He explained that individuals who hold significant social capital in activist spaces create certain criteria for activist recognition, "If there is someone you thought of as particularly thoughtful, intentional and well educated in the work that they do then you look at how that person views other people and in turn how you might be perceived by people like that." He also described how these perceptions may snowball and contribute to the elevation of some

people over others. Jeremy explained that sometimes recognition, “grows exponentially throughout the chain - you hear about this one person from five different people and before you meet them they are a hero to you.” Though Jeremy identified the social and friendship component of activism as foundational for positive activist cultures, he also recognized that some individuals, especially newcomers, may feel excluded based on the expectations that certain activist circles project. He stated:

I think people can be socially elevated by association...I know for a fact that can be intimidating for a lot of people or discourage people. If you don't fit the general description of an activist (and I think it's less black and white than just outgoing or not), you just kind of give up and are like I'm just going to go play soccer instead, and that is just unhealthy.

Individuals who do not view themselves as activists may feel unqualified to participate in certain social movement cultures.

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed how their personal understandings of activism and activist identity have evolved to incorporate broader interpretations. When asked about their current relationship to the word “activism” and to the concept of an activist identity, many interviewees responded with open-ended definitions of what the terms meant to them. In his reply to the question, Matt chuckled to himself briefly and elaborated, “Activism. I am really into the concept that resistance is so flexible, and loving; and anger has its place, but I just feel like some people want to be angry to fit the activist definition or whatever.” Matt's understanding of activism expanded far beyond his initial, limited concept of activism as people in the streets fighting injustice. Laura expressed a similar, broad understanding of an activist as “somebody who challenges in their own way,” stating that,

Everybody has their own way to do it and there is no right way, because once you start talking about the right way you get into the hierarchy we were talking about and who is doing it [activism] better, and who is not doing it better than others.

By reflecting on and expanding her definition of what forms of involvement constitute authentic activism Laura is more conscious of social hierarchies in activist communities. Ella also expressed an evolution of her understanding of activism and now claims the activist identity as her own, stating, “I am enthusiastically adopting the term activist to describe myself because I feel like it has definitely become part of my lifestyle to do and enjoy work that impacts people positively and to willingly putting myself into positions to demand social change.” Sara, though she does not consider herself an activist as conventionally defined, sees her actions and lifestyle in-line with those of activist communities. As she articulated,

I think that it [activist] should be defined more broadly... when I think of an activist I don't think of myself but when I think of someone trying to make a difference, then I do think of myself...I actively try to use myself to make a difference but I wouldn't call myself an activist.

Viewing her actions in accordance with conventional definitions of activism could serve to increase Sara's confidence in her social change work and potentially empower her to engage further.

All interviewees, including those who felt comfortable with extraverted engagement styles, indicated predominantly introverted qualities as the foundation of their activism. As Eliza expressed, “I feel nervous doing something really loud and bold without first thinking through it.” A frequent participant in large-scale activist efforts herself, she described instances in which her engagement in these publicly-oriented, extraverted actions has made her second guess her involvement and regret not thinking through her participation more deeply. Though she recognizes the need and benefits of highly visible, direct action engagement to draw attention to

the cause and provide solidarity among participants, at times, she has felt the original intentions of the activist engagement to be obscured by the novelty of flashy participation. Many interviewees alluded to strong groundings in empathy, a sense of community, and deep-listening as the building blocks for their activist participation. As Matt described, his activist identity began to take shape during high school when a group of friends from his Quaker camp introduced him to, “some new level conversations of what it meant to be an ally, what it means to be a good person, and how to support movements as a person who does not belong to an affinity group of the movement per se.” He continued that his, “strong foundation of being an intentionally empathetic and communicative person” has helped to evolve his self-understanding and inform his current relationship to activist work. To explain his personality, Matt described himself as “very external, extraverted too,” however, with a “very quiet/reflective energy” that often feels like his default mode. Furthermore, he explained that, “despite my extraverted personality, I find that I thrive both successfully and thoughtfully when engaging in smaller spaces,” as opposed to less intimate settings. As he discussed, entering a career in community organizing would enable him to access salient aspects of his personality and also engage directly in communities. He stated:

I think a lot of my skills are catered to that position [community organizer] as it involves people, and energizing people and connecting and confidently reading a community space and assessing needs and assessing individuals needs in a way that is empathetic and thoughtful and will ultimately benefit the community.

Given his confidence in both his introverted and extraverted characteristics and abilities, Matt considers himself to be particularly suited for community organizing. Other interviewees also expressed feeling most comfortable in and connected to activist cultures that value deep listening and reflection. As Eliza stated, in her own activist engagement, she has felt particularly assured

in her contributions given that, as she described, “most of the spaces that I’ve been a part of people have been very in tune to listening to each other and creating a space where people feel comfortable.” Other interviewees related their activist engagement trajectory specifically to an evolution in their understanding of personality. As Laura explained, while she initially engaged primarily in loud and extraverted forms of activism, she now sees her engagement to be more grounded in her introverted side, stating:

I think the past couple of years I have become more introverted or more reserved in different ways – not that I’m not extraverted anymore, just that I think more critically about where I put my energy, especially in terms of working towards social justice, whether that is educating myself or talking to other people or educating people or just engaging in general with that type of thing.

Though she still participates in large-scale, public displays of activism on occasion, she views her strengths in social movement organizing to lie more in the reflective nature of the work.

## **6. Conclusion**

### *Overview*

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive summary of my research findings as presented throughout the thesis and relate their significance to themes suggested by the relevant literature. Next, I engage the limitations of my research sample, method and analysis of the data. Finally, I conclude by providing suggestions for future research and reflect on the overall implications of my findings.

### *Summary of the findings*

I approached my research question of whether certain forms of activist engagement are valued more than others in a multi-faceted way; First, identifying activist personality traits from an abstract perspective; Second, surveying trait value patterns based on participant experience in social movements; And third, asking research participants to reflect on their own feelings of value in their activist engagement. Based on my analysis of survey and interview data, I identified a significant disjuncture between participants' general conceptions of activists and their traits, and the reality of their experience as participants in social movements. Overall, survey respondents perceived activism to be the purview of extraverts, but when queried about their own experiences engaging in activism, and upon personal reflection regarding their own personality traits and strengths in relation to activist work, respondents expressed that introverted, interpersonal and reflective forms of engagement formed the foundation of their activist engagement. Additionally, research participants identified that in their own work, while introverted forms of participation often received some form of recognition, more visible and extraverted means of engagement were valorized. However, on a personal level, when participants were asked to contextualize their own personality strengths and tendencies in



relation to activist work, they often identified more introverted forms of engagement as being foundational and most valuable for their involvement.

In general, both survey participants and interviewees alluded to loud, visible, overt forms of participation as characteristic of activism and activist personality types. In response to survey measures probing characteristics commonly associated with activists and the question of whether movements value certain personality traits over others, people consistently indicated that extraverted traits, as opposed to introverted traits, were more associated with activists. It is important to note that empathy, commonly considered an introvert trait, was also often identified as characteristic of activists, in addition to more predictably extraverted traits such as outgoing, passionate and confident. In my research, empathy may be considered foundational for both extraverted and introverted modes of activist participation. A theory to explain the identification of empathy as important to both modes of participation is outside the scope of this paper, however, it is possible that the term, as presented, is too ambiguous; more specificity exploring connotations of the term might yield a different, more nuanced result.

In their own experiences of activist participation, although respondents consistently reported that highly visible, extraverted styles of engagement – protest involvement, public speaking, leadership initiative, etc. – were incentivized and more recognized in social movement contexts; introverted qualities such as reflective capabilities, deep listening and thoughtfulness – were also identified as valued by other participants and movement leadership. In self-reflecting on their own personality traits, respondents consistently assigned value to their own introverted traits such as thoughtfulness, cooperativeness and being a good listener. Yet as revealed in the interviews, though introverted traits such as thoughtfulness and deep listening are identified as valued in social movement contexts, they are not identified as the modes of participation that

garner the most attention and recognition. Tensions deriving from this dichotomy shaped participants' views of their own participation and sense of value within the context of their activist engagement; the mutually exclusive distinctions between typically extrovert versus introvert forms of engagement, in addition to social pressures operating within activist contexts, were identified as formative of their own sense of value in their work.

On an individual, self-reflexive level, when asked to situate their personality qualities and strengths within the context of their activist engagement, participants predominantly identified introverted traits as descriptive of their social movement engagement style, revealing significant discordance with the commonly accepted cultural image of an activist, as well as the trait value patterns associated with activism that participants identified based on their own experience. Overall, participants assigned far greater value to their own introverted qualities and reported feeling conflicted regarding the disproportionate amount of social recognition extraverted styles of engagement receive over more introverted ones.

Furthermore, in reflecting on their relationship to the term activist, respondents expressed a variety of explanations to describe their level of identification with the term. For some respondents, who found the term to be an accurate description of the nature and level of their involvement in social justice causes, claiming the activist label to describe their work generated a sense of pride and confidence. However, for many, the term "activist" failed to reflect the reality of their social and political involvement; participants expressed significant discomfort related to the term's narrow cultural definition and limited connotations. Additionally, multiple respondents alluded to unease with the amount of approbation the "activist" title attracted, describing the attention as unwarranted and excessive. Overall, respondents expressed a desire to expand the term to represent greater diversity in the forms of social movement participation and

provide a more comprehensive notion of who constitutes an activist – arguing that conceptions of activist identity and work must include a wider variety of qualities generally associated with introversion.

### *Connections to the Social Movement Literature*

Differential perceptions of trait value among movement participants echo key concepts from the social movement literature which applies theories of social identity to explain variations in social movement participation. As Gecas (2000) theorizing on value identities in relation to social movement participation establishes, value identities, or “beliefs about desirable modes of conduct or states of being that transcend specific situations,” impose significant influence on social movement participants’ experiences of their engagement, and may shape participants’ involvement trajectories. Gecas’ (2000) assumptions are based on his contention that “individuals strive for congruence between their self-values and their behavior,” given that this coherence leads to increased feelings of authenticity, as well as self-esteem, and personal efficacy. He argues, the extent to which a social movement “can sustain or enhance these self-motives (self-esteem, efficacy, and authenticity) via the ideology and value identities that it provides increases member loyalty and commitment to the social movement,” and therefore, social movements must strive to establish this sense of congruence among participants in order to ensure their sense of value. My own research supports Gecas’ (2000) theories on the relevance of value identities in social movement contexts and implies ways in which movements can foster feelings of value and recognition among all participants, not just for those whose forms of engagement are highly visible. Earlier in the thesis I expressed that based on Gecas (2000) theorizing, value identities determine participants’ sense of self in relation to their engagement and may impact individuals’ decisions to enter, continue with or leave social movements and to

prefer certain forms of participation over others. My research participants' observations of their own and others' social movement engagement, suggest that a greater recognition of the value of introverted forms of social movement work among participants may promote the "increased feelings of authenticity, as well as self-esteem, and personal efficacy" that Gecas describes.

Additionally, academic literature which investigates characteristics of contemporary social movement organizing, informs the relevance of my findings to the modern activist context. Scholars (Norris 2003, Bekkers 2005; Norris 2007; Omoto et al. 2010; Bennet 2012) identify contemporary social movements as defined by a relative lack of hierarchical and centralized structure and leadership, and reflective of more fluid forms of participant recruitment, cause identification and motivations for involvement. Decisions to identify with and participate in activist causes are highly individualized choices and the forces that influence attraction and retention of participants within social movements are inherent in the interpersonal interactions of group operation. The patterns identified in my research findings, which point to the implicit privileging of extraverted over introverted traits in activist engagement suggest ways in which social hierarchies emerge in social movement contexts which profess egalitarian models of leadership or "flat hierarchies." These hierarchies affect the way in which group members come to view their value as participants in activist work. In his discussion of implicit hierarchy formation under non-hierarchical movement leadership structures, Tim Jordan (2002: 70) confirms the effects of extraverted traits on the development and maintenance of social hierarchies, he states:

Flat hierarchies tend to hide bumps...For example, open meetings require the confidence to speak in public, as well as rewarding articulate speakers. Informal networking in cafés and bars, or after meetings, requires both charm and the ability to be present...The different skills needed for these different moments of co-ordination can underpin the

emergence of implicit hierarchies, as can other intangible factors such as history within a group, charisma or the sheer amount of time someone may devote to a group.

Jordan's characterizations of flat leadership structures as facilitating the development of implicit hierarchies, reflects the influence of trait value patterns on participants' perceptions of their value as activists as described in my survey data and participant interviews. Throughout my research process, students continuously indicated that certain styles of visible engagement – predominantly ones which showcased extraverted tendencies – increased participant recognition, endowing their participation with greater value.

Regarding social movement literature which links extraversion and social movement engagement, my findings suggest that while there exists a strong correlation between activism and extraversion, perhaps this relationship is reinforced by a general perception of activism as being the domain of extraverted personalities and styles of engagement. Scholars argue (Bekkers 2005; Mondak 2010; Omoto et al. 2010) that extraverts are drawn to civic engagement and volunteer work at higher rates than introverts, implying that social movements often consist of more self-described extraverts than introverts. My findings suggest the need for an investigation of this assumption; if it is true that extraverts engage in activism at higher rates than introverts, perhaps their involvement creates a self-reinforcing cycle, contributing to an amplification and elevation of extravert value in social activist circles, and encouraging greater participation of extraverts and extraverted participation styles. Furthermore, as Susan Cain (2012) argues in her best-selling book *Quiet*, American culture overwhelmingly privileges loud, charismatic and extraverted personality traits and leadership styles over introverted ones. As she describes in her case study of leadership models espoused at Harvard Business School, “We see talkers as leaders. The more a person talks, the more other group members direct their attention to him, which means he becomes increasingly powerful as a meeting goes on.” Her example illustrates

the American ideal of a strong, successful leader and remains relevant to a consideration of social movement leadership. Cain's argument that American society breeds a culture of extraversion, in conjunction with literature on the relationship between activist involvement and extraversion, and in relation to my research findings which point to an overvaluing of extraverted forms of participation, calls for a greater reflection on the ways in which movements foster extraverted cultures of engagement and the implications these cultures have on movement participants who prefer to engage in more introverted ways.

As Catherine Corrigan-Brown (2012) demonstrates through her research on patterns of activist trajectories throughout the life-course, there is no standard path or progression for activist engagement; the contours of engagement change over time with different forms and varied levels of intensity. She (2012: 123) exposes the fallacy of the stereotypical image of an activist, stating that, "the larger-than-life nature of this image, the lifelong, intensely committed, and passionate activist is far from typical," and explains that this false stereotype "obscures the fluctuating and intermittent nature of most participants' engagement. However, as she contends,

Thinking of oneself as an activist is not merely a matter of semantics: identifying as an activist has important implications for individuals...Significance of the activist identity lies in the fact that individuals who identify in this way participate, on average, for more years and are less likely to disengage than are those who do not identify in this way. These findings demonstrate the role of organizational structure in shaping the social ties and identities of participants, which, in turn, affect their trajectory of participation over time.

Corrigan-Brown's call to reconsider the ways in which organizations shape activist identity relates to my findings regarding the effects of patterns of trait value on participants' understanding of their own engagement, and point to ways in which social movement cultures shape perceptions of value among participants. A deeper reflection on how social pressures and

expectations operate within social movement contexts is crucial for understanding motivations for and trajectories of participants' activist engagement. As Roger Gould (2000: 236) succinctly summarizes, "When we learn something about social ties and activism, we are not just more knowledgeable about social ties and activism; we are also in a position to say more about incentives, about ideology, about emotions, and a variety of other issues besides."

### *Additional Themes Suggested in my Research*

In the course of my research, other relevant themes emerged which I did not include in my analysis due to limitations in the scope of the project and characteristics of the sample. I am including them here to provide a more comprehensive view of research participants' reflections on activist engagement, as well as to suggest avenues for further research. Most significantly, participants frequently indicated that the experience of their social identity, primarily race and gender, was highly consequential to their activist engagement. On the subject of race, both white participants and participants of color expressed that exposure to racial privilege in social activist settings greatly influenced their motivations for and preferred style of engagement in activist work. As one survey participant stated, "As a person of color I try to get involved whenever possible. To me activism is a way to remind others that I belong and that this is my country too;" for this individual, experiences of marginalization informed her desire to participate in activism. Another respondent reported, "The things that I work on are incredibly important to me, coming from multiple non-dominant/underrepresented/marginalized groups. All of the work I do is an extension of my own life." White-identifying respondents and participants belonging to other dominant identity categories cited their experience of social privilege to be highly constructive of their engagement, according to one male participant, "The fact that I am a white heterosexual cis

man definitely (rightfully) shapes and limits the ways that I can and should be valuable to certain broader causes/movements.”

Conversations with interviewees further reinforced the salience of social identities in their social movement engagement. White interviewees often indicated the experience of negotiating their racial privilege in social movement contexts to be formative for their approach to activist involvement. As Maya\*, the UC Berkeley student expressed, in her leadership position as the president of her university co-op house, “I had to deal with the irony of the fact that I am a white person taking up space as leader because I’m extraverted and passionate about something. What does it [my leadership] mean for minorities or introverts?” Understandings of and resistance to the ways in which race and other identity systems operate to form social hierarchies is essential for activist engagement and leadership. In his own experience, Matt\* indicated that for him learning “what it means to be a good person, how to support movements as a person who doesn’t pertain to an affinity group of the movement per se,” has been the most transformative aspect of his engagement. Jeremy also expressed ways in which his identity as a white, cis man, have shaped his feelings of comfort and discomfort in social activist circles, stating that while in college, he felt most outside of his comfort zone, “Around the people who did not praise me, young radical college students, those who are not white or on the gender binary – I felt uncomfortable in not fully understanding all that they knew.” In contrast, Laura\* an Asian American student, said about her own social movement participation, “I think it’s interesting that I almost have an automatic social in because of my marginalized identities.” In social movement contexts, her experience of inhabiting marginalized racial, gender and sexual identities has influenced her sense of belonging and feelings of comfort within activist circles.



I include a discussion of the effects of social identities in my conclusion, to demonstrate the highly complex ways in which social identities such as race and gender influence individuals' views of their social movement engagement. The correlation between an individual's experience of their social identity, their personality tendencies and their engagement in social movements impacts levels and modes of activist participation; there is a need for further research to shed light on the factors that shape social movement participants' perceptions of the value of their activist engagement.

### *Methodological Limitations*

It is important to note the limitations of my research sample to accurately frame my findings and their implications. First, my thesis primarily reflects the views of a small contingent of Bates College students who are engaged in activist efforts both on and off campus. Generally speaking, the Bates student body is one endowed with significant privilege; an elite, selective and expensive New England small liberal arts school, the student body is overwhelmingly white and wealthy. Though the demographics of the college have changed over time to reflect a more diverse student body, still only a quarter of the college's 1,700 students are students of color, and over half of all students pay the full tuition (\$65,000 a year) to attend. It is necessary to provide an overview of Bates student demographics to contextualize research participants' activist involvement and relationship to social movement causes.

Additionally, many of the views expressed in the research are based in participants' engagement in Bates activist efforts and reflect a specific situational context. I recruited survey participants via college organization email listservs and through my personal Facebook network, consequently, a significant proportion of students who responded to my survey either knew me personally or by association. As a student involved in the Bates social justice and activism scenes

myself, my reputation among my peers also influenced who responded to my request for the survey, as well as who left their contact information to be interviewed – as a result, participants’ views are reflective of a particular subset of students. Furthermore, to recruit interview participants, I selected individuals based on those who left their emails in the survey, of which, the majority were either personal friends and acquaintances.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

My thesis, though comprehensive in methodology, is limited by its sample and overall research context. For future research, I propose an expansion in sampling methods to reflect a wider diversity of activist contexts and increase the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, a comparative research model, which contrasts activist perceptions from a variety of large- and small- scale contexts, would be useful for identifying nuances in trait-value patterns and the operation of social pressures across contexts. Furthermore, expanding the research sample to reflect the views of demographically diverse social movement participants, particularly with regards to race and gender, is imperative for better understanding the ways in which social identities work in concert with personality type and social pressures to create trait value patterns within movement.

Beyond accounting for limitations in the sample, my research findings also suggest areas for future research related to the established literature on social movements. Areas for additional research include: the role of social media and online activism in the establishment of trait value patterns within social movement contexts; the relationship between emotions and emotional expression in social movements and perceptions of participant value (Jasper); practical applications of my findings – what are people needing in their work to feel valued? what hinders the creation of a sense of value and inclusion?

### *Overall Implications of the Research*

After nearly a year of engaging the question of whether certain forms of activist participation are valued over others in social movement contexts, I conclude that a reconceptualization of the forms of engagement that constitute activism is needed to increase participants' sense of value in their engagement and inspire sustained social movement involvement. My research shows that people on both sides of the introvert-extravert spectrum feel conflicted regarding the value of their contributions to social movement work and identifies a problematic imbalance regarding the disproportionate value overt engagement styles receive over less visible forms of participation – those typically grounded in more introverted and reflective forms of engagement. Activist efforts on a global, national and local level require the varied engagements of a diverse membership to achieve their means; it is through the combination of behind the scenes organizing, community education initiatives, in the streets protesting, in addition to many other forms of involvement, that social movements succeed in effecting social, political and cultural change.

In asking participants to reflect on their perceptions of value of varied forms of activist engagement in terms of introversion and extraversion, I struggled with the tension of recognizing the importance of overt forms of engagement to social movement organizing, while also implying that perhaps, introverted styles of engagement are undervalued among participants and by movements broadly. On multiple occasions, research participants prefaced their reflections by stressing the importance and value of participating in overt forms of engagement to ensure that I would not interpret their opinions outside that context. Activism, by definition, consists of action taken against the status quo to demand change, and is often predicated on modes of participation that challenge expected norms of social governance. Engaging in, organizing and promoting

highly visible, direct action mobilizations — protests, marches, rallies, public demonstrations, etc. — represents a central element of social movement organizing; it is largely through these displays that movements publicly demonstrate their demand for urgent social change, further their goals, and engender a sense of solidarity among participants. As people join in social movements to stand up against injustice and demand change, they must expand beyond their individual realities and see their actions as part of a greater collective; for many this process of publically proclaiming an identification with a cause is difficult; it pushes people out of their comfort zones. And, for many, surmounting discomfort represents the most transformational element of their engagement; challenging oneself to engage in new, often initially uncomfortable ways, is an essential aspect of activist work. For the implications of my research, I want to be clear about what I am *not* trying to suggest: that participation in overt, highly visible activism, including protests and mass demonstrations, is either overvalued or unnecessary to the cause, and therefore should be discouraged. These forms of engagement are incredibly important to social movement organizing and should be considered as such. Furthermore, I believe that activist engagement which challenges people to participate in new and at least initially, uncomfortable ways, can transform those people by expanding their sense of personal limits and capacities.

The question of perceptions of value by participants within social movement contexts raises implications for participants' experiences of their activist engagement – both in terms of their initial motivations for joining, as well as to explain sustained activity within the cause. I have approached my research with an understanding that activist engagement consists of many forms of involvement rooted in people's empathic concern for humanity, desire for justice and commitment to create positive societal change. While I recognize the importance of engagement in overt, large-scale actions, I am basing my findings in the understanding that less visible,

smaller-scale, more introverted participation is of significant value to social movement organizing as well; it is the constructed dichotomy between the two styles of engagement – extravert and introvert – upon which I frame my research process. Overall, my findings expose a significant disjuncture between the ways in which people conceive of activists and activist engagement broadly, as being the domain of extraverts and extraverted styles of participation, and participants’ personal understandings of their engagement as rooted in more introverted qualities. This disconnect was reflected in participants’ accounts of their own experience engaging in social movements, and many participants alluded to feelings of discomfort, guilt, and inadequacy arising from the salience of this dichotomy in the context of their own participation.

Based on my research findings, in instances of participant discomfort in relation to their engagement, I contend that a fine line exists between pushing outside of one’s comfort zone in a productive way and conforming to social pressures for engagement. My findings raise important implications regarding the ways in which social forces operate within activist contexts to produce a hierarchy of trait value patterns which determine who and what forms of engagement receive the most value and recognition. Especially within the context of small communities such as Bates College, where there is a high degree of familiarity among individuals, the impact of these social forces may be magnified given the close-knit social nature of the school. While my thesis raises questions regarding the nature of activist participation broadly, my findings are especially relevant to the research context in which they were conducted and must be considered in terms of their implications for activist organizing and civic engagement at small liberal arts schools. In politically liberal and progressive environments characteristic of many selective colleges and universities such as Bates, many students enter with a deep commitment to creating

progressive social change; as a community, it is important that we support and do not discourage students from engaging in a diversity of ways. Being cognizant of a diversity of forms of participation and the ways in which they may resonate with certain personality types and preferred modes of engagement, could empower students who wish to engage in social change to realize how to best utilize their strengths and tendencies in relation to their social engagement. Furthermore, given that many people come into their political and social consciences during their college years, as they become more independent and gain a deeper awareness of contemporary social issues, a consideration of the effects of trait value patterns in a college activist context is formative. It is important to be conscious of the forms of participation that are valorized and ways in which discursive value patterns may contribute to detrimental hierarchies among those committed to activist work. Social change movements rely on the unique personality strengths and engagement styles of a diversity of participants to accomplish their goals and it is critical that we create activist cultures that value and recognize, as well as reflectively critique, the engagements of all and not just a highly visible few.

In my research interview with Sara, she discussed the story of her father, a lifelong activist, who, when she was 11, dedicated himself to what she describes as “conspicuous activism,” or the work of helping inspire political agency among citizens in Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries. She provided his story to contrast her own social and political engagement, which, as she indicated, takes a more introverted bent, referencing her work with local non-profit agencies, commitment to ethical consumption and aversion to large-scale protesting due to her fear of crowds. Throughout our conversation, Sara continued to circle back to her father’s glorified approach to activism to contextualize her own – consistently reckoning

with feelings of doubt and inadequacy in comparison to her father's social and political engagement.

In her anecdote, Sara shared that her dad frequently mentions that “when he dies he wants people to say he made a difference,” and that throughout her life, people have consistently remarked on her father's impressive activist trajectory and selfless dedication to the causes for which he fights. But Sara, though she admires her father's passion, tireless commitment and selfless spirit, struggles with his convictions, stating that:

For him, for someone to make a difference you must leave your family, your community, your country, by dedicating your life to things that are broken elsewhere and abandoning everything else – and I think about that from time to time and how his way of conceptualizing activism implies that the kinds of thing I want to do to make a difference – the way I live my life, how I form relationships, the care I have for my community, the causes I choose to be involved – that those are not making a difference, that I am not doing enough - and for me, that just seems like such a narrow definition of what it means to be an influential person.

Sara's story serves to illustrate what I have attempted to argue through the presentation of my research – the question is not whether novel, conspicuous and overt styles of activist engagement are important or valued in social movement contexts, that is already affirmed. Rather, how do we broaden conceptions of what constitutes activism – the forms and styles of engagement, varying levels of commitment and required personality traits – to empower and validate people in their work?

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## ***Appendix I:***

### Thesis Survey

Welcome to my thesis survey which investigates the influence of personality type on activist engagement. Anyone who has had any experience engaging in social justice/activist work (defined as broadly as possible) is welcome to take this survey - all types of involvement from attending a single group or organization meeting to leading a political protest count as activist participation! Your responses and identity will be kept completely confidential. THANK YOU for choosing to participate in my study, feel free to contact me with questions or for further conversation at sgnabasi@bates.edu.

#### Q1 Class Year

- First year - Class of 2020 (1)
- Sophomore - Class of 2019 (2)
- Junior - Class of 2018 (3)
- Senior - Class of 2017 (4)
- Graduated in 2016 (5)
- Graduated in 2015 (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Q2 Race/Ethnicity (can select more than one response)

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- Latinx (3)
- Asian or Asian American (4)
- Native American (5)
- Arab or Arab American (6)
- Mixed race (7)
- Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Q3 Gender (can select more than one response)

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary /gender queer (3)
- Transgender (4)
- Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 Sexual Orientation (can select more than one response)

- Heterosexual (1)
- Gay/Lesbian (2)
- Queer (7)
- Pansexual (3)
- Bisexual (4)
- Questioning (5)
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 Political Orientation (can select more than one response)

- Liberal (1)
- Progressive (2)
- Conservative (3)
- Socially liberal, economically conservative (4)
- Libertarian (5)
- Socialist (6)
- Anarchist (7)
- Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 College Major

Q8 Are you or were you a Bates College student?

- Yes - Current Bates student (1)
- Yes - Graduated Bates student (2)
- No - but I attend(ed) a small liberal arts college (3)
- No - I attend(ed) a medium size college/university (4)
- No - I attend(ed) a large research university (5)

Q9 What region(s) of the United States do you call home if any? (can select more than one response)

- New England (1)
- Midwest (2)
- South (3)
- Southwest (4)
- Northwest (5)
- West Coast (6)
- Mid Atlantic (7)
- Not from the United States (8)

Q10 My thesis is specifically focused on the role of introversion/extraversion on activist participation. For the purposes of my survey, I am using the following definitions of introversion/extraversion from the Myers & Briggs foundation to guide my questions.

Extraversion: I like getting my energy from active involvement in events and having a lot of different activities. I'm excited when I'm around people and I like to energize other people. I like moving into action and making things happen. I generally feel at home in the world. I often understand a problem better when I can talk out loud about it and hear what others have to say. Introversion: I like getting my energy from dealing with the ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside my head, in my inner world. I often prefer doing things alone or with one or two people I feel comfortable with. I take time to reflect so that I have a clear idea of what I'll be doing when I decide to act. Ideas are almost solid things for me. Sometimes I like the idea of something better than the real thing.

Q11 Answer to the best of your knowledge, to what extent do you identify with the following statements? (1 is strongly disagree - 5 is strongly agree)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to think before I speak. (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ In unstructured conversations, I tend to let others speak before I do. (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to feel overstimulated in busy environments. (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to seek out recognition and validation for my work. (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I consider myself to be an "outgoing" or "people person." (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel comfortable in groups and like working in them. (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have a wide range of friends and know lots of people. (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer frequent social interaction over more substantial interaction. (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer to recharge my energy by spending time with others, rather than spending time alone. (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am seen as "reflective" or "reserved." (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel comfortable being alone and like things I can do on my own. (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer to know just a few people well. (12)

Q12 Throughout the following portion of my survey I use the terms activism, activist engagement, social movement participation, and social justice work interchangeably to imply any type of intentional involvement in a cause with the goal of affecting progressive social change.

Q13 To what extent have you participated in activist work for the following causes?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Community organizing on behalf of local issues (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Disability/Mental health (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Electoral politics (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Environmental/Environmental justice (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gender justice (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ LGBTQ+ activism (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Racial justice (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reproductive justice (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (9)

Q14 Since you began college has your activist participation been located mostly on or off campus?

- Entirely off campus (1)
- More off campus than on campus (2)
- Equal (3)
- More on than off campus (4)
- Entirely on campus (5)

Q15 How many years have you been engaging in activist work?

- 5+ years (1)
- 4 years (2)
- 3 years (3)
- 2 years (4)
- 1 year (5)
- < 1 year (6)

Q16 How would you rate the level of your involvement?

- Significant commitment (1)
- On and off commitment (2)
- Minimal commitment (3)

Q17 To what extent have you engaged/do you engage in the following forms of activist participation?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Attended a social justice related group/club/ organization meeting (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Led meetings for a social justice club or organization (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Held a leadership position in a social justice related organization (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Made socially conscious decisions regarding your consumption habits (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Voted in local and interim elections (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Campaigned for local and interim elections (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participated in community organizing for local social and political initiatives (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participated in advocacy work related to a cause (tabling, door knocking, canvassing) (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participated in education initiatives related to a certain issue (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Wrote publication and educational materials for an issue (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Wrote an op/ed for a social/political issue (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Posted frequently on social media about social justice (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attended and participated in a protest related to a social justice cause (13)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Helped lead and organize a protest (14)

Q18 To what extent do you feel emotionally invested in your activist work? (please provide a brief explanation if possible)

\_\_\_\_\_ Explain: (1)



Q19 In your experience internally within social justice causes and circles you have been a part of, what characteristics do leaders and participants value in terms of the participants themselves?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Outgoing (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Enthusiastic (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Confident (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Assertive (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Risk taking (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sociable (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong group and public speaking abilities (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Empathetic (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong listening abilities (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Patient (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cooperative (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Observant/Intuitive (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Open minded (13)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thoughtful (14)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ability to connect closely with others (15)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Comfortable in large groups (16)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Leadership abilities (17)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ease of social media presence (18)

Q20 What are three personality traits you associate with activists?

Q21 Of the following qualities, which three best describe your activist personality and approach to participation in social justice work and movements?

- Outgoing (1)
- Enthusiastic (2)
- Confident (3)
- Risk taking (4)
- Assertive (5)
- Sociable (6)
- Strong group and public speaking abilities (7)
- Empathetic (8)
- Strong listening abilities (9)
- Patient (10)
- Cooperative (11)
- Thoughtful (12)
- Observant (13)
- Open minded (14)
- Ability to connect closely with others (15)
- Comfortable in large groups (16)
- Strong leadership abilities (17)
- Ease of social media presence (18)
- Other: (19) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: (20) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: (21) \_\_\_\_\_

Q22 To what extent do you feel like the character/personality traits you bring to activist causes are valued by the broader cause/movement? (Please explain)

- Never (1)
- Infrequently (2)
- Somewhat (3)
- Usually (4)
- Always (5)
- Explain (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q23 To what extent do you feel like your contributions to the activist cause are recognized and valued by the other participants? (Please explain)

- Never (1)
- Infrequently (2)
- Somewhat (3)
- Usually (4)
- Always (5)
- Explain (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q24 How would you describe your most typical position within social movement activism?

- Leader (1)
- Influential participant (2)
- Minor participant (3)
- Ally (4)

Q25 Do you think movements value certain character traits over others? (yes, sometimes, no -- please explain)

Q26 Do you think leaders in social justice causes often encourage participants to engage in certain forms of activism over others? (i.e behind the scenes planning versus direct protest and demonstration versus public advocacy initiatives)

- Yes (1)
- It depends (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- No (3)

Q27 How has your level of involvement in social justice work changed over time?

- Consistently engaged throughout (1)
- Increased participation over time (2)
- Decreased participation over time (3)

Q28 If you no longer participate in a certain activist cause, what were some of the factors that contributed to your leaving? (can select more than one response)

- Time constraints (1)
- Declining personal interest (2)
- Excessive demands from movement leadership (3)
- Feelings of discomfort in activist circles (4)
- Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix II*

### *Interview Guide*

- 1) Ask for informed consent
- 2) Explain context of my research: research question, survey results, how I chose interview participants, etc.
- 3) Explain a little about your activist background and trajectory
  - Where? When? In what capacity? For how long?
  - Position within movement?
  - Emotional investment?
  - Any feelings of comfort or discomfort within movement?
- 4) How would you describe your activist personality (along the lines of introversion/reserve v. extraversion/outgoing) – how does it fit in with (or not) with the activist work you have engaged in?
- 5) What has the most challenging aspect of your activist engagement been?
- 6) What comes to mind when you think of an activist or someone highly involved in social justice work? Do you fit this profile?
- 7) What forms of social justice participation are most recognized which ones are less so? should they be more recognized?
- 8) Have you ever felt encouraged/discouraged to participate in certain ways over others?
- 9) How do people acquire recognition (social capital) in activist circles?
- 10) Elaborate on your relationship to the word activist.