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Ending Poverty? Critical Interrogations of Class Subjectivities, Agency, and Ideologies in Discursive and Embodied Texts From a U.S. Nonprofit

Brandi Lawless

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**ENDING POVERTY? CRITICAL INTERROGATIONS OF CLASS
SUBJECTIVITIES, AGENCY, AND IDEOLOGIES IN DISCURSIVE AND
EMBODIED TEXTS FROM A U.S. NONPROFIT**

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

The University of New Mexico
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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother, Renée Lynn Miller.

You always encouraged me to do something creative. You wanted me to be your star. When I decided to pursue a degree in communication, you said, “Why not be a writer?” In a way, I have become a writer. Before your untimely death, I hope you were proud of this endeavor. This dissertation is dedicated to you, mom. If it weren’t for the life that you gave me, I never would have had the experiences that led me down this path.

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I would also like to thank my family and friends. I wrote this dissertation at a difficult time in my life and could not have done it without the emotional support that all of you provided. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner for putting up with me while writing this dissertation! It has been a long road and you have always been by my side. For that and many other reasons, I love you.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores subjectivities, agency, and power relations that emerge in discourses and performances related to one U.S. nonprofit organization attempting to end poverty, referred to as Transforming Poverty Partnerships (TPP). The author analyzes training materials, interview transcripts, and performance texts documented through participant observation. This study reveals a number of discourses in each of the texts, which function to reproduce dominant societal ideologies about individual hard work as a pathway to success, individual responsibility to create change, the normalization of the middle class, and a reinforcement of whiteness. The author takes a praxical approach in using theories from critical intercultural communication, performance studies, and critical pedagogy as a framework for understanding how subject positioning is realized and actualized in this organizational setting, how agency is enabled and constrained, and how texts reveal discourses, which ultimately function to reinforce and/or resist hegemonic

systems of oppression. This framework and analysis leads to several recommendations for this nonprofit, with implications for similar organizations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Problem Statement

In 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the “War on Poverty,” a comprehensive legislative plan aimed at decreasing the growing poverty rates in the United States. Poverty became a public issue which sparked heated discussions about welfare reform that continue to be a part of today’s political soapboxes. The state of the nation in 2010 shows an interesting parallel to the perceived poverty epidemic of the 1960s. Economic prosperity is declining and at least 15.1% of the population currently meets the U.S. poverty guidelines (United States Census Bureau, 2011).¹ The so-called War on Poverty has been revived with new legislation targeting affordable health care, extended unemployment benefits, and educational finance reform (Thomas, 2011). However, some portrayals of individuals in poverty have a different kind of “war” in mind. For example, last year South Carolina Lieutenant Governor Andre Bauer made a comparison between poor children and stray animals in a statement about free lunch programs. He stated, “You’re facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a person ample food supply. They will reproduce, especially the ones that don’t think too much farther than that” (Weeks, 2010). More recently, a *New York Times* editorial described the “new resentment” of the poor, pointing out that Republicans, who have long argued that tax cuts should be for everyone, have made moves to eliminate tax credits for working families to make things more “fair.”² Negative portrayals of the lower and working class in the United States reproduce discourses that embrace a normalization of middle class prosperity and meritocracy.

The normalization of the middle class becomes most apparent in recent political discourses that emphasize the needs of the middle class over other classes (Kohn, 2011; Krugman, 2011). Rather than a continued effort to fight poverty, some politicians have emphasized the threat that the economy poses to the middle class. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont was recently quoted as saying, “Since 2000, nearly 12 million Americans have slipped out of the middle class and into poverty” (Jacobson, 2011). Similarly, news articles have documented threats to the American Dream (Dubay, 2011). More recent news articles have noted “class warfare” rather than a war on poverty (Shapiro, 2011). Such discourses point to resentment felt by middle and upper class U.S. Americans toward poor U.S. Americans. This emphasis on middle and upper classes, even in discussions of poverty, ignores conditions that affect those living in poverty and also neglects individual experiences of lower- and working-class individuals. Public discourses that both represent public attitudes about the poor and construct such attitudes, such as the idea that everyone can find a job if s/he wants one, subsequently legitimize failing anti-poverty policies and bolster ideologies that claim everyone has the opportunity to achieve economic equality and success (Lepianka, van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2009).

U.S. discourses about poverty are also often tied to race (Clawson & Kegler, 2000; Lens & Cary, 2010). Political addresses, media, and education systems perpetuate these discourses. Clawson and Kegler explain that college textbooks, for example, depict poverty as a “Black” issue, a finding that became evident by coding visual images of “the poor” in textbooks. Their findings point to the nuance that connects race and class. Although the wording used to describe poverty was not necessarily raced, the images

used to emphasize such claims disproportionately showed African Americans in poverty. Lens and Cary (2010) also suggest that such discourses affect the way that social services such as welfare treat people in poverty differently (including discrimination and negative treatment) based on race.

Growing conversations by politicians, academics, and news media outlets about the poor and poverty call for investigations into U.S. national discourses that construct representations of the poor and subsequently constitute subjectivities of individuals at all class levels. Mohr (2008) frames poverty as a human-rights issue, arguing that people in poverty need communication as much as they need food, water, and shelter. He claims that the poor have been deemed politically voiceless, creating discourses about poverty that leave out individual voices and experiences. In this dissertation, I attempt to explore some of those voices.

A colleague and I have been asked by a non-profit agency that I call Transforming Poverty Partnerships (TPP) to assess and evaluate the program's effectiveness working with people in poverty. I have chosen to use pseudonyms for the organization in order to honor a promise of confidentiality, the openness with which the organization's staff members are inviting evaluation, and a desire to honor the relationship I have built with the non-profit organization. This evaluation includes a comprehensive analysis of the program's training materials, the structure of the organization, and interviews with participants. TPP is a national nonprofit organization whose goal is to end poverty in this lifetime. More specifically, this organization seeks to create learning communities that help build social and economic capacity. In order to accomplish this goal, the organization pairs up people in poverty with "allies" from the middle class, in hopes of

pulling them above the poverty line. Before doing so, people in poverty are coached by a TPP staff member on various ways to pull themselves out of poverty. The program is relatively new and during the time of data collection, used some for-profit training materials about poverty that have been criticized for reinforcing a monolithic and uniform understanding of class (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2008a; Osei-Kofi, 2005). While such critiques are important to heed, TPP has set a goal of answering and moving beyond such criticism in order to pursue a socially just mission.

TPP has implemented its program across the country with more than 60 initiatives in several states. The program includes a sixteen-week training session for people in poverty and a short (one to four hour) training session for middle-class allies. On average, people in poverty are given \$25 per week to participate. The program culminates in a “graduation” after which people in poverty and their middle-class allies are paired up and begin their one-on-one relationships with allies from the middle class, and group relationships with multiple allies and staff. In addition to these one-on-one relationships, participants at all levels are asked to come to meetings that address larger policy and community issues. Problematic structural issues that have emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their needs at these meetings include such topics as inadequate public transportation, difficulty associated with prison re-entry, predatory lending practices, housing, the criminal justice system, and a lack of gyms with access for people with disabilities. Most of these community issues being addressed are brought to the table by individuals in poverty (e.g. a clothing exchange program from plus-sized women was thought of and is now managed by a TPP participant). Plausible solutions sometimes emerge from individuals in poverty and at other times are offered by staff members.

In many ways, TPP organizational and training texts embrace a stereotypical understanding of poverty in that their training materials often homogenize social class group experiences (i.e. descriptions that all people in poverty use the same informal register and language and value relationships more than achieving tasks, while people in the middle class use more formal register and are very achievement oriented). Yet, TPP has sites across the country, indicating that their participants come from different national, regional, ethnic, gendered, and religious backgrounds, in addition to shared socio-economic status.

To say that poverty looks the same for all people does an injustice to the people served by TPP, does not address the unique problems that may exist in different regions of the country, and denies ways that intersecting forms of identification, such as race, sex, and sexuality, become additional sources of discrimination. For instance an African American, lesbian, mother of two in the South, experiences poverty differently than a white, heterosexual male without children in the Midwest. In summary, this nonprofit organization has the potential to increase the relevance of its programs and a better opportunity to produce social change if it expands its understanding of culture to include broader understandings of more varied subjectivities.

As a critical researcher I seek both to understand the positionality of individuals and groups and to identify hierarchies and systems of oppression that influence those subjectivities. Particularly, in investigating the nature of social class, these systems of power and oppression are overwhelmingly supported and reinforced by dominant U.S. discourses that encourage individuals to believe that these class systems are helpful in creating individual success. In other words, most U.S. Americans are led to believe that

individual hard work inevitably leads to success. Such narratives infuse the very programs that seek to improve the quality of life for the lower and working class. By visiting multiple TPP sites and conducting in-depth interviews with TPP participants (both in poverty and in the middle class), I attempt to uncover the ways in which identities are produced and performed and the ideologies fostered by the organization, by utilizing a framework that emphasizes stronger connections between theories of culture and theories of identity, subjectivity, intersectionality, hierarchical positioning, and agency.

In this dissertation, I utilize TPP as a case study to make sense of ways in which culture and poverty can be used productively in academic conversation about nonprofit work related to poverty. In other words, I explore contemporary critical understandings of culture as they relate to poverty. Because TPP has sites in many regions of the United States and because it has garnered national media attention, this organization is ripe for analysis. First, I offer a theoretical foundation for understanding culture, poverty, subjectivities, and transformational education. Next, I use this framework to accomplish a number of tasks. In order to evaluate TPP, I first explore the ways in which texts used by the organization about processes of educational transformation and assumptions about individual responsibility limit the potential of the relevance of the written training materials. The materials I evaluate are produced by a for-profit organization called aha! Process Incorporated. TPP has built a relationship with aha! that moves beyond supplier/purchaser. In many ways, the two organizations are interconnected. Second, I look to transcripts of interviews conducted with TPP participants (both middle class participants and those in poverty). Third, I analyze field notes about individual bodily

performances of poverty. Finally, I offer suggestions for future directions, aligned with a social justice mission, which takes into account the intersectional nature of individuals' subjectivities.

There are several goals for this project: (1) to understand how TPP discourses produce and maintain class subjectivities, (2) to uncover how the performances of these subjectivities produce social class hierarchies and ideologies that serve the middle and upper classes, and (3) to offer recommendations for a revised model.

Rationale

The Context of Poverty In The United States

The United States government has implemented a number of programs that seek to address growing poverty rates. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009 increased funding for such programs (U.S. Government, 2011). One program in particular, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), created a \$5 billion emergency fund for families slipping into economic crisis (Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Government funded programs such as Head Start (an early education program), the National School Lunch Program, the Children's Health Insurance Plan, and Earned Income Tax Credit are all long-standing programs aimed at individuals that fall below the poverty guidelines determined annually by the Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Government, n.d.). For 2011, a family of four that has a combined annual income of \$22,350 or less would fall below the U.S. poverty line (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). As of 2010, one in six U.S. Americans was utilizing government programs such as Medicaid (state funded health care for the poor), unemployment benefits, or food stamps (Wolf, 2010). These numbers

are expected to increase if/when health care reform takes effect in 2014. Despite the government programs that seek to alleviate poverty, U.S. poverty rates have steadily increased over the past decade (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

Organizations such as the Center for American Progress and The National Academy of Sciences have critiqued the U.S. poverty guidelines, claiming they are outdated and unrepresentative of what poverty looks like in the United States (Greenberg, 2009). Critics suggest that the current measurement is flawed because the cost of living has exponentially increased, the United States has experienced significant inflation since the measures were created in the 1960s, and there are no adjustments based on regional location (guidelines are the same for all U.S. citizens) (Greenberg, 2009). Similar critiques have been noted in public newspaper and televised discourses (Pearce, 2010). Such critiques point to unequal access to resources for individuals who fall just above the U.S. poverty line, yet are struggling to make ends meet. Newman and Chen (2007) refer to this “near poor” group of Americans as “the missing class.”

Some scholars have also indicated a gap in access to social services for particular social groups (A. Nandi, Galea, Lopez, V. Nandi, Strongarone, & Ompad, 2008; Treadwell & Ro, 2003). Treadwell & Ro (2003) note that social perceptions have created a circumstance where poor men (particularly men of color) are positioned as undeserving of government health care services. These perceptions lead to institutional discrimination of these individuals, limiting access to programs that are supposed to help those in need. Nandi et al. found similar outcomes for undocumented Mexican immigrants.

Nonprofit Approaches to Poverty in National and Global Contexts

In order to fully contextualize approaches to poverty, I review current work being done by U.S. and international nonprofit organizations. This summary demonstrates the common goals of these organizations as well as some divergences. This summary is important for demonstrating the unique approach used by TPP to tackle a common social issue.

In reaction to growing poverty rates and the critiques of government approaches to poverty described above, many nonprofit organizations have created various approaches to ending poverty (Gronbjerg, 1990). Some nonprofit organizations specifically aim to alleviate poverty and others focus on providing resources related to specific factors that influence poverty such as education, health services, and career services. Still, Gronbjerg (1990) argues that nonprofit organizations are often, if not always, expected to “incorporate major attention to the poor” as a way to address community needs (p. 212). Currently, the local nonprofit organization offers an arguably more efficient way to improve impoverished circumstances than government welfare services because it moves beyond a transfer of monetary funding (from the government to individuals) to providing direct services and educational programs (Marwell, 2004). Nonprofits are seen as “mediating institutions” that bring services from the state to citizens (Marwell, 2004, p. 266).

This mediating role heightens expectations for nonprofit organizations’ perceived responsibility for the poor. In some ways, nonprofit organizations are expected to make up for the failures of government and “address unmet demands” that follow such failures (Gronbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001, p. 687). These expectations may be exacerbated by the decrease in public resources in a time of economic recession. Further, anti-poverty

nonprofit organizations are unevenly distributed across urban areas that need these services most (Joassart-Marcelli & Wolch, 2003; Peck, 2008). Now, more than ever, nonprofit organizations are left with an overwhelming responsibility to fight the “war on poverty” with limited federal funding and grassroots organizing.

Eisenberg (2000) argues that these grandiose expectations for nonprofit organizations fail to recognize systemic issues that must be addressed through policy and advocacy. He argues that “poverty, racism, environmental degradation, lack of health protection, [and] declining trust in government” cannot be tackled by nonprofit organizations alone, but must be the focus of citizen mobilization (p. 325). Consequently, many nonprofit organizations trying to address individual needs are tangled in a web of services, attempts to meet community needs, and policy changes.

Due to the pervasiveness of poverty and the so-called “war on poverty,” several nonprofit organizations have made it their goal to end poverty. These organizations vary in scope; some are global and some are national, and they target various aspects of poverty (i.e. hunger, children, homelessness, inadequate housing, etc.). Some organizations that have garnered national attention in the United States include Community Action Partnership, which has worked on various aspects of social class in the U.S. including developing affordable housing for senior citizens living in poverty (Cohen, 2011), Kids in Distressed Situations (K.I.D.S.), which has stepped in to facilitate donations of clothing and toys to children living in poverty (KIDS, 2010), the Family Independence Initiative (FII), which works with communities (specifically multiple families) to move entire groups out of poverty (Family Independence Initiative, 2010) and Move the Mountain Leadership Center, that has spearheaded the *National Circles*®

Campaign to “eradicate poverty in our nation, in our world” (Move the Mountain, 2011).

These nonprofit organizations take different approaches to poverty including efforts to improve education, change local policies, and challenge negative stereotypes of the poor.

Community Action Partnership is a national nonprofit organization that was set up under the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act as a way to wage war on poverty. This umbrella organization supports over 1000 local agencies “serving the poor in every state” (Community Action Partnership, 2011). The local agencies provide a number of resources including education programs, food pantries, and job training. Additionally, the number-one service offered by the local agencies is “citizen participation” or community service opportunities. Community Action Partnership is also tied into national lobbying efforts. The organization claims to help “17 million low-income Americans achieve economic security” every year.

Kids in Distressed Situations (K.I.D.S.) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 that focuses on gathering donations for children living in poverty. Donations include clothing, toys, schoolbooks and other necessities. This organization partners with corporations and manufacturers to offer new articles of clothing, claiming that it builds self-esteem for children in need. The organization claims to have helped over 4.7 million individuals with over \$1 billion worth of donations (KIDS, 2010). The organization works with communities experiencing “chronic poverty” such as those affected by natural disasters.

The Family Independence Initiative (FII) focuses on communities, rather than individuals, claiming that entire communities can pull themselves out of poverty if given the right resources. To do this, FII brings together families in a community, provides the

group with a computer, and encourages them to pool resources and “self-organize.” All the while, the organization’s leaders continue to advocate for new policies that improve conditions for the poor (Family Independence Initiative, 2011). FII claims to address community-specific poverty issues, negative stereotypes of the poor, and public policy.

Move the Mountain Leadership Center is a nonprofit organization that seeks to eliminate poverty across the globe. The organization leads the *National Circles® Campaign*, a movement aimed at inspiring and equipping “communities to resolve poverty and thrive” (Move the Mountain, 2011). The organization claims to work in at least 100 communities and also focuses attention on “families” in such communities. The model utilized by Move the Mountain is said to incorporate best practices from several academic disciplines.

A number of nonprofit organizations have also been working in larger efforts to end global poverty. Groups like A Future Without Poverty Inc., Care, International Poverty Solutions Collaborative, and Poverty Resolutions have a broader scope calling for global responsibility and attention to diversity. These groups have attempted to raise awareness about poverty in countries such as Haiti, Kenya, and Mexico. A Future Without Poverty, Inc. claims to challenge “The Myth of No Effect” by arguing that one person can make a difference in the global fight against poverty (Future Without Poverty, Inc., 2011). The organization concentrates on programs that emphasize education, empowerment, enterprise, and environment. Moreover, the organization’s end goal is sustainability for communities that are currently afflicted with poverty. Recently, the organization has sponsored projects in Haiti, Peru, the U.S., and Mexico. A website description of the mission notes, “A Future Without Poverty, Inc. is a non-profit

organization that was born through the realization that handouts were not enough to fight poverty.”

Care is an internationally recognized “humanitarian organization fighting global poverty” (Care, n.d.). The organization specifically works with women in poverty, arguing that women have the capability of pulling their families, and consequently entire communities, out of poverty. In its effort to end poverty, Care maintains programs that improve education, increase access to clean water, and prevent the spread of communicable disease. Care emphasizes that the organization works on several levels, hoping to strengthen “capacity for self-help,” provide economic stability, influence policy-making decisions, and address discrimination.

International Poverty Solutions Collaborative is a new academic initiative located at The Ohio State University. The organization’s website overview claims to focus on individuals, families, and communities that are afflicted with poverty, rather than focusing on the causes of poverty (International Poverty Solutions Collaborative, n.d.). In order to do so, the organization works in rural and urban areas in the United States, with the goal of reaching international communities within two years. This “collaborative” is unique in that it is an interdisciplinary campus venture, incorporating over 13 colleges across the campus.

Poverty Resolutions is a nonprofit organization located in the United States that focuses its efforts internationally, particularly in Haiti. This organization’s goal is to help people help themselves. Additionally, this nonprofit seeks to improve Americans’ awareness about global poverty by comparatively raising awareness about U.S. American personal wealth. Poverty Resolution addresses global poverty issues through education

and micro-finance programs. Poverty Resolution claims that these are the best ways for adults in poverty to become self-supporting and efficient.

Although these are only a few examples of how the nonprofit community is working toward alleviating poverty, there are several hundred organizations working in local communities on similar issues. Each organization described here takes a unique approach toward ending poverty, yet they share a similar thread: individuals have the capacity to change their own circumstances. This assumption is reiterated in mission statements that claim to “help those who help themselves” or aim to generate “self-sufficiency.” This pattern adds to a growing discourse about people in poverty and the making of their own circumstances. Even though many of these organizations focus on advocacy and policy building, their mission statements emphasize the individual’s capacity to change his/her own circumstances, an ideology described above in relation to larger social discourses about poverty. Such ideologies become important in trying to understand how individual subjectivities are constituted by discourses. Such ideologies may be present in Transforming Poverty Partnerships and garner heightened attention.

Culture and Poverty

In their study of social service agency directors’ (including those who work in nonprofits) attitudes toward poverty, Reingold and Liu (2009) found that 44% of directors believe that “cultural transmission or learned lifestyles” cause poverty (p. 307). This line of thinking is not surprising considering a long history of academic and political conversations that identify a “culture of poverty.” The phrase “culture of poverty” is thought to have emerged with the writings of anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1959.³ Lewis used the word *culture* to describe the characteristics, attitudes, values, and behaviors that

were seemingly shared amongst the poor. The phrase was quickly taken up to describe the reasons that poverty persisted for ethnic groups such as Latinos (Lewis, 1966, 1975), Trinidadians (Rodman, 1971), and African Americans (Jones & Luo, 1999), for example. Moreover, a “culture of poverty” was picked up by policy makers, making its way into the Moynihan Report, produced by the Labor Secretary in the Johnson administration in 1965 in conjunction with the “war on poverty.”⁴ Once this report was leaked, the phrase entered common vernacular and continues to be used as a way to situate the poor within a homogenous cultural state. Using the phrase “culture of poverty” is problematic because it limits understandings of group attitudes, values and behaviors—hence group identities—to social class, rather than considering how class intersects with gender, race, sexuality, to produce multiple cultures. Using the phrase in conjunction with public policy can be deleterious because it ignores these other aspects of identity. Moreover, the phrase “culture of poverty” attributes the position of poverty to learned or culturally transmitted social practices. Finally, this approach to poverty ignores larger social systems and institutional contexts the function to keep people in poverty.

The *New York Times* recently claimed that after 40 years, the phrase has made a comeback, re-emerging in academic and political debates (Cohen, 2010). These discussions continue to talk about poverty as it relates to “the Black community’s culture of poverty” or “the Latin@ community’s culture of poverty,” which equates race or ethnicity with a culture of poverty and neglects social structures that keep people in poverty.⁵ Editorial responses to that article point out implications of a shift in the economic climate including: declining wages, loss of unionized jobs, increased college tuition, elimination of subsidies, etc.⁶ Understanding the context of a “culture of poverty”

in U.S. discourses is important in this study because it may be an underlying ideology that is perpetuated in TPP materials.

Several scholars have noted the importance of highlighting social class in research about identity (Engen, 2011; hooks, 2000; Lawless, 2012; Moon, 2001). Within TPP, “social class” is not a phrase that is part of the content. Instead, the worldviews, language patterns, and social practices are linked with “poverty” or middle class or wealth. Despite relevant arguments about the influence of social class on individual cultures, the use of the phrase “culture of poverty” leaves little room for individual experience, liminal spaces between social classes, contested spaces of overlap, and an understanding of social structures that impede the success of lower- and working-class individuals. Lewis’ (1965) claim to the phrase sparked decades of research on poverty, some of which was in alignment with his work; also there has been a series of oppositional responses (Allen, 1995; Beall, 2000; Coward, Feagin, & Williams, 1973; Gorski, 2008b; Harvey & Reed, 1996; Irelan, Moles, & O’Shea, 1969; Ortiz & Briggs, 2003; Roach & Gurslin, 1967).

Much of the contemporary research about poverty addresses this academic debate. Those who support an understanding of a singular “culture of poverty” argue either that structures produce and ensure that groups remain in subjective positions that are subjugated, and therefore a similar culture can be seen, or that people in poverty have developed systems of adaptation that allow them to create sustainable livelihoods, and hence have developed cultural systems of adaptation, while living in poverty. On the other hand, those who criticize this theoretical venture argue that claims about a “culture of poverty” are based in overgeneralizations about poverty that ignore race (among other identity categories), fail to identify a need or purpose for the concept, do not clearly

define said shared characteristics of poverty, and lack an explanation for a cause/effect relationship (Roach & Gurslin, 1967). Moreover, such research has been criticized for its hyperbolic use of negative representations of the poor including descriptions of crack babies and welfare queens (Ortiz & Briggs, 2003). Scholars who talk about the “culture of poverty” object to criticisms about negative representations, arguing that using the phrase to describe the poor highlights the *creativity* and perseverance of those living in poverty (Harvey & Reed, 1996). In other words, they claim that describing the poor as adaptable and creative overshadows the latter half of their arguments about having to use that adaptability to outsmart the welfare system.

In 1963 Lewis responded to the criticism of his work by differentiating impoverishment from the “culture of poverty.” He conceded to criticism that argued not all positions of poverty are the same by claiming that middle-class folks can become impoverished but not “live in or develop a culture of poverty” (p. 7). He maintained his argument that a “culture of poverty” can cut across different societies, and this concept does not dismiss the importance of intersectional research that addresses race, gender, sexuality, and region, among other categories. Indeed, he goes as far as claiming that the “culture of poverty” is a global issue that can be solved if we change societal value systems.

In summary, Lewis and other scholars endorsing the “culture of poverty” end up creating an us/them mentality that pits people in poverty against the middle/upper classes. This line of thinking has re-emerged as the U.S. economy continues to sink. As suggested earlier, imposing the concept of “culture of poverty” can create resentment from the lower and working classes by creating a monolithic understanding of what poverty is and

how it can be eliminated. A question to be answered is the extent to which the Horatio Alger myth that individual hard work can produce socioeconomic mobility (Weiss, 1969), and an ideology of liberalism that if individuals change their attitudes, values, and behaviors, then they can change their impoverished circumstances, are being reinforced in TPP's materials and participants' interview texts. These lines of thinking ignore larger social structures that keep people in poverty. Moreover, it may be that these ideologies are perpetuated in the "educational" texts and views of staff and trainers affiliated with nonprofit organizations like Transforming Poverty Partnerships and aha! Process. Therefore I will identify conceptions of the "culture of poverty" and implicated ideologies and examine where they emerge and how they relate to subjectivities.

Conclusion

In using Transforming Poverty Partnerships as a case study, this dissertation offers a critique of current approaches to poverty that can act to homogenize individual experiences. By challenging the discourses that emerge from micro and meso levels of analysis (examining texts produced and constructed by those working within particular initiative sites, and looking at texts across sites), and then examining how national and institutional discourses are replicated on the macro level, this project works toward understanding how social change is being or can be created. In other words, by illuminating how discourses are used to produce and maintain particular subjectivities in one nonprofit organization, perhaps members of and affiliates working with that nonprofit organization can begin to dismantle larger ideologies and hegemonic practices that do not serve their mission. Therefore, I seek to uncover individual subjectivities that are reinforced by ideologies around a "culture of poverty," and those that lie in

opposition to a homogenous view of poverty, in order to expose the injustices done to communities when experiences are homogenized. Wheeler (1998) argues that homogenization of a community can overpower a democratic process, allowing dominant views to become reinforced. Moreover, homogenization can reproduce ideologies that leave some voices and identities out of discourse (Conversi, 2008). Thus, homogenization limits individual agency and reinforces stereotypes about entire communities. It is these discursive processes and consequences that I seek to uncover in the current study.

This study becomes important due to the way that poverty is currently defined in U.S. public discourses. Even with declared “wars” against poverty, those who live in the trenches of poverty not only suffer from a shortage of material means, but also because of negative representations in public discourses, have a lack of public voice. As the above examples illustrate, the poor are framed as stray animals that drain the economy. These discourses ignore larger social-structural issues that keep the poor in poverty. For example, scholars in several disciplines have developed an understanding of “the cliff effect,” which is a phrase that refers to the sudden loss of resources and benefits after an individual in poverty takes a small wage increase (Nice, 2009; Prenovost & Youngblood, 2010; Romich, Simmelink, & Holt, 2007; Smith & Monaghan, 2011). The phrase “cliff effect” is used to describe the steep drop that one takes after paradoxically trying to move up. Thus, families are encouraged to stay in poverty rather than find work, for fear of falling off the cliff. Similarly, access to affordable healthcare and childcare is limited, making it difficult for working families to find support. Public assistance is difficult to attain if a family is just above the poverty line (Collins, Davis, Doty, Kriss, & Holmgren, 2006). Such social structures make it more difficult for individuals and families living in

poverty to be able to sustain a healthy lifestyle with a minimum-wage job. Public assistance and other resources for people hovering around the poverty line are inequitably distributed and in their current state, can cause more harm than good.

This dissertation seeks to understand how the structures of TPP (policies, procedures, norms, etc.) may reproduce dominant hierarchies and inequitable distribution of resources. In interpreting this nonprofit's texts, policies and procedures, and participants' experiences of them, I attempt to point to how the organizational, historical, and social structures act to enable and constrain participation. I hope to work with the organization to modify their policies and to produce practices that create change in local communities. Arguably, this change can occur on multiple levels: from the organizational leadership team's design of curriculum and programs, training materials, uncovering and acting to change structures and institutions that keep people in poverty, and educating community members.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this dissertation, several theoretical threads guide my discussion and analysis. In what follows, I explore metatheoretical assumptions that guide my research and I extrapolate relevant theories, conversations, and concepts from critical intercultural communication, performance studies, and critical pedagogy. Each of these lenses bolsters a critical approach to understanding culture(s) and poverty in TPP.

Metatheoretical assumptions: A Critical Perspective

In order to accomplish the goals of this study, I take a critical perspective to research. This paradigmatic perspective accomplishes the undertaking of identifying social hierarchies, power structures, and representations of groups and individuals. The critical perspective used in the current study is aligned with the goal of achieving social justice and equity (specifically for individuals living in poverty) (Swartz, 2006). The critical theoretical orientation used in this study offers a researcher the tools to uncover power structures, social hierarchies, and varying levels of privilege and oppression (Craig, 2007). Critical perspectives taken in the study of culture and communication have encouraged scholars to consider historicity, multiplicity, power, and ideology (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009). I understand this perspective as a way to frame the researcher as an active agent who can begin to enact change throughout the research process. The critical paradigm employed in this study, then, aims for praxis—a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. In other words, I use theory in this study to uncover structural issues in order to develop recommendations for curricular and organizational improvements within the nonprofit.

For many critical scholars, context is of utmost importance. Context refers to historical, social, political, and interpersonal factors (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Context is important to consider, as it frames issues, establishes norms, and encourages particular power relations and subject positions. Particularly, it is important to understand how contextual factors become structures, how relationships emerge within these various contexts, and how positions of privilege and subjugation emerge in relationships (Collier, 2002). In this project, I not only discuss the context of the nonprofit organization with which I am working, but also the various structures (policies, procedures and norms) and discourses and texts which produce races, ethnicities, nationalities, sexes, regions, religions, social classes, and ages as identity positions that are all working together to create and influence the experiences of people in poverty and those working to end poverty.

Additionally, such a discussion would not be complete without interrogating the historical and social contexts of poverty and class in the United States. Context both informs identity construction and is informed by cultural participation and thus is key to this research project. For example, a mentally challenged Latin@ woman living in generational poverty, who participates in TPP, will necessarily experience poverty differently from a white, single male who is experiencing situational poverty, because of the historical context of racism in the U.S. and the privilege traditionally afforded to males with white skin.

In utilizing a critical approach, I hope to understand the various cultures that inform TPP, the cultures that exist within TPP, the dominant discourses and ideologies that influence and are influenced by such cultures, and the ways in which a critically

based, social justice approach is beneficial for uncovering inequitable treatment, lack of inclusion, or constraints of agency in discourses and texts in this nonprofit working toward decreasing poverty. Through this approach, I work to interrogate the communicative systems that are used to structure the TPP movement to end poverty. Ultimately, this may lead to the ability to make recommendations for more successful practices in the future on behalf of TPP.

Analyzing discourses in this project draws upon my critical perspective by pointing to the dynamic exchange of meaning between individuals and groups within multiple contexts as revealed through interview texts and performance of identities within interviews. In analyzing discourses of poverty produced by TPP, I pay particular attention to how subjectivities are constructed by such discourses. Uncovering ideologies embedded in discourse (such as the American Dream, a “culture of poverty,” and individual meritocracy) may reveal specific ways in which these ideologies both emerge from and encourage particular subjectivities to be performed. In looking at the constitution of subjectivities through texts, I draw upon the postmodern notion of multiplicity by opening up an understanding of self that moves beyond a singular identity (Mansfield, 2000). Moreover, the study of discourse in this dissertation emphasizes a critical interrogation of the relationship between power and subjectivities. When individuals participating in TPP begin to understand these discursive relationships within the organization this can open spaces for larger discussions about policies and community engagement that may lead to the dismantling of social structures that reproduce systems of power in the organization and in the local community.

As part of a critical approach to this project, I embrace a social justice orientation. Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, and Murphy (1996) define social justice as “engagement with and advocacy for those in our society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced” (p. 110). These authors argue that a social justice approach for communication scholars involves considering ethics, attending to social structures, taking an activist approach to research, and building identification with others. My commitment to social justice stresses my desire to strive for equity for marginalized individuals. For example, in this study I am concerned with how people in poverty may be homogenized and marginalized compared to their middle- and upper-class counterparts. Moreover, I argue that a social justice approach bridges critical orientations with applied communication research, a combination that drives grassroots political efforts in a theoretically informed way. Ultimately, this orientation calls for systematic change of social practices and the larger institutions and structures that inform such practices. Swartz (2006) argues that social justice and communication are interrelated and that in order to create change we must start by communicating about injustices, inequities, and possible solutions.

Critical communication scholars with a commitment to social justice have had rich discussions within the discipline about social justice, agency, privilege, power, and oppression (Atkinson & Cooley, 2010; Dempsey et al., 2011; Engen, 2011; Hartnett, 2010; Hegde, 1996; Martin & Nakayama, 2006; Swartz, 2006). These discussions have included debates about whether social justice is an applied or theoretical venture, whether social justice work should engage scholars within the academy or people outside of the academy, and whether or not scholars should identify as activists. These conversations

have led to a contemporary assumption that social justice work is equated with activism (or is at least always in confrontation with politics) and is best undertaken by engaged praxis (i.e. theory and practice are essential to social justice work). Such scholarly discussion points to the potential for a social justice orientation to move beyond theorization into work that considers pragmatic approaches to social change. When tied to community based work, and more specifically nonprofits, this orientation has the potential to create more equitable structures and organizational practices by working from the ground up to create social change.

In line with this theoretical perspective, I hold a number of metatheoretical assumptions. Epistemologically, I believe that knowledge is produced by cultural expectations and dominant societal discourses; thus, knowledge is structurally determined in part. Ontologically, I understand that these social structures not only impact the way humans understand the world, but also have a major role in how subjectivities are constructed. Moreover, varying levels of agency can be seen in interactions between structures and institutions that constrain individuals and their actions.

Axiologically, I understand research to be value laden; theory and research practice are influenced by human values, making research a political venture (Anderson & Baym, 2004; Miller, 2005). My personal values infiltrate this research and include a bias toward work that enhances social justice. Moreover, my personal experiences certainly influence this work. I position myself within this research as a person who has first hand experience living in poverty and at the same time, someone who has moved out of poverty. I also have multiple cultural positions, many of which accord me privileged status. For instance, I am a white academic who has access to multiple resources such as

travel funding and information databases, and I am afforded daily privileges based on my skin color and normative sexuality. This personal experience drives my interest in researching issues of social class and poverty, specifically through the lens of social justice. It is my intention to continually interrogate my relationship to the research topic(s), the spaces I inhabit throughout this project, the relationships I form, and the texts that are produced by TPP in order to bring self-reflexivity and critique to my interpretations. Aune (2011) argues that such reflexivity is especially important for researchers seeking to uncover ideologies and hegemonic systems.

A Review of Critical Intercultural Communication

It is difficult to offer one definition of culture because the term has been contested and explored through a number of lenses. Any definition offered depends on the researcher's background and interests. The study of culture, which emerged in anthropology, has been theorized by social scientists as a homogenous, stable, and generalizable variable (Moon, 1996), by interpretive scholars as a set of speech codes which carry meaning, constitute group membership, and construct social practices (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), and by critical scholars as a site of ideological struggle in which systems of domination constitute subjectivities and identities (Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama, & Yep, 2001; Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009; Kellner & Lewis, 2007; Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Moon, 2010). I use the latter conceptualization as a lens through which I explore the relationships between culture(s) and poverty. Specifically, I define culture as a contested and fluid site of meaning where economic, political, social, institutional, and interpersonal contexts enable and/or constrain the production of individual and group identities and

subjectivities (extended from Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama, & Yep, 2001). Culture cannot be singular. I am positioned, for example, within multiple competing contexts such as academia and rural Pennsylvania, and thus my understandings of the world are complicated by my upbringing in poverty and my current position in the higher education system. Similarly, culture cannot mean one thing in the context of TPP where participants come from multiple class, ethnic, national, gendered, and religious backgrounds in addition to maintaining multiple relationships with individuals who have no doubt influenced the participants' worldviews. In addition, cultures are not only produced, but are also socially constructed and performed.

Critical understandings of culture emerged with the rise of cultural studies (particularly following the teachings of The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and British Cultural Studies) and became more common in communication research, through the work of such scholars as Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka (2009). Recently, a group of communication scholars began to differentiate themselves from cultural studies by defining themselves as *critical intercultural communication* scholars (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Though their work utilizes much of the same lineage as cultural studies (particularly from the Frankfurt School), it is situated within the field of communication, ultimately taking up that trajectory as well (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). One major difference between critical intercultural communication scholars and critical cultural studies scholars is their move beyond the study of social texts to focus on lived experience. The move to include human subjects in critical research highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of culture by highlighting individual lived experiences in addition to the continued study of texts. Centralizing individual experiences moves the study of

culture away from something that is static, or as group membership, into a contested space in which multiple experiences are recognized. For this reason, Halualani and Nakayama, among other critical scholars, argue that culture must always be looked at within social, historical, and political contexts. These moves to include individual voices within a backdrop of multiple contexts, greatly inform my methodology. In this dissertation, culture operates through various levels, positioning the nonprofit with an organizational or programmatic culture, perhaps (re)producing patterns of a “culture of poverty,” the cultural participation/construction of ascribed group identities and constructed/performed subjectivities by individuals working in/with TPP. Culture, then, is found in and complicated by the relationships built while at TPP meetings and events, the relationships that individuals have with others outside of TPP, and broader discourses from media, politicians, and everyday conversations about poverty. For example, many people in TPP note that they do not see themselves as being “in poverty.” Understanding how cultural identities are produced and subjectivities performed in TPP versus how they are performed in other contexts becomes important. Giving attention to cultures at each of these levels, therefore, is important to the overall goals of this study.

Within the critical intercultural communication literature, a number of concepts emerge that are relevant for a critical interrogation of texts of cultures and poverty. Here, I give an overview of such concepts including: cultural identity, subjectivity, power, interpellation, intersectionality, hierarchical positioning, and agency.

In the current study, I use *cultural identity* to articulate the ways that perceptions and understandings of an individual as a group member are imposed or produced by other individuals, groups, or public texts. Thus, an individual may be ascribed particular

identities not of their choosing. Related, yet in contrast, *subjectivity*, refers to theories of the self. The term *subjectivity* spans a lengthy trajectory that actually predates the word itself. Hall (2004) argues that the study of the subject began in Ancient Greece, whereas Mansfield (2000) starts his exploration in the 18th century enlightenment period. Hall (2004) argues that identity and subjectivity are related in that “we have numerous discrete identities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and a subjectivity comprised of all those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of ourselves” (p. 134). Hall’s definition of subjectivity points to the construct as one in which identities are negotiated within cultures, contexts, discourse, and ideologies. Thus, subjectivities are socially constructed and performed, rather than solely produced by others.

I give more attention to *subjectivity* over *cultural identity* because it provides a more holistic approach to understanding an individual’s relationship to societal discourses and more fully recognizes the polyvocal, multifaceted, contextual voices that participate in TPP. More often than not, I will use the term *subjectivities* (plural) to emphasize this multiplicity. I define subjectivity as a tension that exists between societal constitution and individual perception(s) of the self. Thus, following Hall (2004), an understanding of subjectivity recognizes individual consciousness and societal participation. Moreover, subjective positionings include identities that are interpellated as well as socially constructed in relation to others.

In this study, subjectivity is used as a way to more fully understand the positions of TPP participants and the practices that the organization has fostered thus far. The construct, subjectivities, is central to this study because it implies analysis of individual experiences and the discourses that position them. Moreover, analyzing subjectivities

necessarily implicates the study of texts, ideologies, and discourses as a way to understand how individuals are constituted, rather than fully agentic. I give attention to cultural identities as productions and ascriptions of group affiliations, as in “people in poverty” or descriptions of “blacks are touchy about race.” These group identities can be additional forms through which groups are assigned subjugated and privileged status positions in public texts and training workbooks.

Intersectionality is a concept used to understand how social categories uniquely come together to produce complex experiences and varying levels of power and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991; Hegde, 1996; hooks, 2000, West, 2001). In other words, the social categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, religion, social class, ability, and age cannot/should not be looked at as separate identity categories, but always in relation to each other. This way of looking at identities can reveal how varying levels of privilege emerge when a person is both privileged at multiple levels and marginalized at multiple levels. For example, white, straight, middle-class women might have more social status and levels of privilege when compared to a black, lesbian, women in poverty, but both may be considered somewhat marginalized when compared to white, straight, middle-class men. Intersectional investigations also are more contextually layered and relevant. For example, a comparative study on job growth between people in poverty and people in the middle class might have different results if sex, race, and nationality, along with regional histories around racism, sexism and immigration policies are included in the study. Thus, intersectionality enables a richer view of identities and subjectivities and cultures from multiple perspectives. I take an intersectional approach to research, in exploring multiple identities and positioning, and how those various parts

may exacerbate each other and thus perpetuate multiple positions of privilege and oppression. Here, intersectionality is taken up as a way to further destabilize any singular understandings of poverty.

Hierarchical positioning is the inequitable placement of individuals (or groups) over others based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and other social categories. Systems of hierarchical positioning are based on varying levels of access to resources, status positioning, and oppression (Johnson, 2006). Thus, hierarchical positioning determines the distribution of material goods at any given moment, and thus has real consequences for individuals at the top of the social hierarchy and those who exist at the bottom, as well as those who are positioned in between. Thus hierarchy in the TPP program relates to the contextual and social positioning of groups in relation to each other.

As described above, in TPP, people in poverty are paired up with people from the middle class in attempt to educate individuals in poverty about successful ways to improve economic and social capital. These partnerships are built on the foundation of class differences (one person is considered to be lower or working class and one person is considered to be middle or upper class) while racial and ethnic differences, and differences in sex, age, region, and religion are discounted or minimized (Lawless & Collier, 2010). A more holistic understanding of hierarchical positioning within the TPP organization becomes important to this study. Attention to hierarchical positioning might reveal the benefits and disadvantages of pairing up people in poverty with individuals from the middle class.

An understanding of power becomes important in understanding how relationships involved in TPP produce and maintain a singular class subjectivity, rather than a more holistic subjectivity that recognizes individual experiences. I describe *power* as a layered and emergent communication process of creating and maintaining positions of privilege and disadvantage. Power is produced through structures and various types of relationships among groups and individuals. I follow Foucault's (1972) multilayered approach to power, which explains the production of power-laden relationships through social practices. He argues,

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (pp. 92-93)

Such a definition exemplifies the ways in which relative status and privilege dynamically emerges between individuals and the systems in which they operate. Moreover, Foucault's (1972) explanation of the contextually constructed nature also highlights the varying material consequences that can be experienced. This is important to the current study because participants in TPP have been told that if they change their individual behaviors, then they can change their impoverished circumstances. This

prescription does not take into account context and individuals' relation to larger social structures and contextual variation.

An understanding of interpellation is important to this study because it makes social discourses relevant in discussions about individuals' subjectivities. Althusser's (1977) concept of *interpellation*, explains that subjects are never outside of discourse. In other words, Althusser argued that subjects are called into question or hailed by social discourses. Their recognition of this call consequently constitutes them as subjects. Althusser's understanding of interpellation is guided by his concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)—socializing systems such as schools, religious institutions, and families, whose job is to perpetuate the ideologies (taken for granted belief systems) associated with a dominant hegemonic system. Interpellation is connected to other concepts such as *ideology* and *hegemony*. Ideologies are (often) taken-for-granted belief systems, which emerge in discourse, that form understandings about wealth, interests, and history (following Cloud & Gunn, 2011, and their extrapolation of Marxist theory). Following Marxist thought, ideologies are often formed and imposed by the ruling class; yet, contemporary understandings of ideology move beyond class as a structural determinant of society. Some work on ideology marks these belief systems as false consciousness or a distortion of reality (Craig, 2007; Williams, 1977). Recent discussions of ideology have considered a more concrete relationship between ideology and reality (always asking a question about whose reality is being referenced) (Gunn & Cloud, 2011). Within TPP discourses, there may be an implication that it is the person in poverty's fault alone about being in or remaining in a place of being under-resourced, which is a version of "blaming the victim" for his/her own circumstances. There also may

be the suggestion that individuals can pull themselves out of poverty if they change their attitudes and emotions, (the workbook and trainers encourage those in poverty to create positive affiliations with those in the middle class in order to break away from dysfunctional addictions, and to develop emotional resources to sustain social class transitions) (Payne, 2011). These are common belief systems about “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps” and taking individual responsibility that operate in broader discourses on class and poverty and they may be reproduced by the training materials. By using these training materials, TPP may be serving as an ISA, or a socializing institution, that perpetuates ideologies steeped in abstract liberalism, individual meritocracy or the Horatio Alger myth.

Hegemony is a co-creation of social positioning and an accompanying hierarchy. Fairclough (1992) argues that ideology and hegemony are related in that the former is often used to create or reinforce the latter. Hegemony, however, incorporates more than just ideas; it is a structured understanding of “lived social process” (Williams, 1977). Moreover, hegemony is about consenting to such structured understandings. In other words, hegemony is the process of social participation that is based on ideologies or belief systems. It is this buy-in that creates a mechanism for discourses to become constitutive of subjects. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (2001) note that “Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth is... hegemony...What is hegemony is contested and variable according to situation” (p. 290). Together, these concepts are useful in understanding how individuals affiliated with TPP are called into question by discourses that help to produce subjectivitie(s). Thus, varying

texts that produce subjectivities and those that call into question the classed subject and cultural identity positions are important to analyze/critique in this study.

Finally, *agency* is a contested term that refers to the amount of autonomy individuals possess and/or enact at a given time. One debate that exemplifies the contestation between scholars related to agency is that of humanism vs. posthumanism. Gunn & Cloud (2010) argue that these perspectives to agency are seemingly in opposition to each other in that humanists (such as Rousseau) understand individuals to be completely autonomous, rational, and able to make their own decisions, while posthumanists (such as Foucault) argue that the individual is constituted by societal discourses, thus eliminating free will and autonomy. These two positions are set up as binaries, yet Gunn and Cloud argue that a healthy tension can exist between the two through what they refer to as *dialectical agency*.

Dialectical agency is the understanding that individuals are indeed constituted by discourse, but possess varying levels of autonomy. In other words, systems can be enabling and constraining and participants within those systems can begin to enact varying levels of autonomy, choice, and consciousness. Thus, if individuals become critically conscious of the ways in which they are positioned into social systems and macro-structures, then they can begin to change them through active participation in movements that attempt to break down oppressive barriers (Cloud, Macek, & Aune, 2006). This position more fully recognizes the potential that exists in activism.

I have a view of agency that is more consistent with Cloud, Macek & Aune (2006), which I bring to bear on this study. I lean on the side of posthumanism, in understanding that individuals can never be outside of discourse. However, I argue that

individuals can enact some agency if they become aware of their position within a matrix of dominating social structures. I follow Althusser's (1977) understanding that individuals are called into identity locations, and interpellated by discourses and texts, but rely on Foucault's (1972) argument that because power is based on relations between different groups or groups and institutions, there is the opportunity for some degree of agency. This is important to the overall goals of my study in that I see TPP participants as potential agents of change. This is not to say that TPP participants are not constrained, but instead I recognize a tension between structural constraints and individuals' abilities to change those structures.

Whereas Althusser might argue that agency is much more limited, I contend that change can happen on an individual level. More specifically, I argue that change can occur on all organizational levels. For instance in TPP, if the participants become more aware of how structures such as social norms, organizational and institutional policies, procedures and staff behaviors work to produce and maintain poverty, then they can begin to create change on both a micro-level (within the nonprofit), meso level by affecting agencies or policies in their local communities, and perhaps on a macro level (affecting curriculum or programming at the national level). Because TPP endeavors to provide a supportive environment with detail about resources, the organization offers potential to foster change at the individual level. Also, given the approach of the organization to create teams of those in poverty and community members to call for changing a relevant community issue, such as housing or transportation, there is potential for impacting structures and exercising agency. TPP's philosophy is that the program can

create individual change and community change. How those in poverty experience these calls for change is a key aspect of the current study.

A Review of Performance Studies

This study evinces several concepts and theories from conversations in performance studies as a way to more fully implicate the body and voice into conversations about subjectivity and culture. Performance studies is said to have emerged parallel to the critical turn led by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and the British School of Cultural Studies which flourished in the 1950s and 1960s (McKenzie, 2001). Pelias and VanOosting (1987) first positioned performance within the communication studies field, arguing that the subject area emerged from the traditional study of oral interpretation. Arguably, these authors were the first to name performance studies as a discipline, calling for “paradigmatic status.” In their groundbreaking manifesto, Pelias and VanOosting extend a number of traditional theater concepts as a way to concretize performance studies as an area of communication research. They claim that an understanding of *text* should move beyond literary texts, an understanding of *event* should include cultural events, an understanding of *actor* should include social actors, and an understanding of *audience* should include both active and inactive receivers of messages (Pelias & VanOosting, 1987). Pelias and VanOosting used communication principles to solidify a way to bridge gaps between scholars studying culture and those who study theater. Communication scholars are particularly interested in how performance is a mode of communication. Performance becomes a useful lens in this dissertation because it offers a research focus that is more specifically pointed to a mode of communicating subjective positioning.

Performance studies has a longstanding tradition of exploring culture through the lens of performance. Performance studies moves beyond the traditional purview of performance as an actor on a stage that is facing an expectant audience. Carlson (2003) begins to open up this discussion and move performance beyond the stage by writing, “Performance is always performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self” (p. 5). Carlson’s definition of performance situates the broader discipline of performance studies as one that takes up explorations of cultural participants. In other words, performance studies is concerned with how individual bodies participate in sociohistorical contexts.

Because performance studies emerged parallel to the critical turn, some scholars argue that performance studies is inherently influenced by critical theory (Carlson, 2003; Hamera, 2006b; McKenzie, 2001). In this dissertation, I take up the critical evolution of performance studies as a way to explore how everyday bodies are agentic and political. I define performance as: A highly stylized, everyday, political act in which individuals *do* culture. To be clear, this means that not every movement or action is performance, but those that are constructed by and reiterative of cultural and social norms are performative.

In addition to this definition, I follow Taylor (2003) in claiming the metatheoretical assumption that performance “is/as.” Taylor utilizes this marking as a way to note that the body *is* an epistemology and exists *as* an ontology. Ontologically, we are born into bodies that support our cognitive processes, yet cognitive processes cannot exist outside of the body. To be born into bodies means that we are always already performing based on our bodily canvases—the human containers that we have been

given. To be, means to be in a body, which carries with it memories and histories. What we have been is documented with/in our bodies in a way that cannot be documented any other way. Epistemologically, I understand the body as a site of knowledge production. In other words, by *doing*, we can actually produce knowledges that cannot be produced by other methods. I argue that in the study of culture and communication, cognitive processes have traditionally been privileged, ultimately excluding the body. Performing cultural identities, for example, produces individual lived experiences that are not duplicated by any other body. The way that one person understands and performs his/her social class, for example, is necessarily different from the way that another individual performs class because it is influenced by a unique field of experience that encompasses not only class, but also race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, etc. These knowledges are unique to each body.

Throughout this dissertation, I make numerous references to *the body*. This is a term that has been explored in multiple ways and in relation to multiple discourses. Indeed, the body has been studied as a product of space (Jackson, 2001), a mode of agency (Squires & Brouwer, 2002), a social construction (Butler, 1993, 1999), a text (Corey & Nakayama, 1997; Spry, 2000), and a site of knowledge production (Fox, 2007; Probyn, 1991). The interconnectedness of the body with everyday experiences has given life to theoretical and praxical (a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice) approaches that study the body. Moreover, new voices have made a space for themselves within the walls of academia that have pushed the boundaries of the field of communication in new and polyvocal directions. These nuanced understandings have given credence to the field of performance studies and have justified a number of

methodological approaches that were not recognized more than a decade ago as empirical and/or theoretical. In reviewing theories of performance and the body, the body is concretized not just as an agentic entity, but also as a freestanding text that has something to offer the field of communication. These myriad ways in which the body has been understood inform the way I approach this dissertation.

Specifically, I extend conversations in performance literature that discuss embodiment to give more attention to the ways in which the body performs social class. Social class is an important component of an individual's identity, is culturally bound, and influences everyday life. Like race and gender, class is operationalized through the body on a daily basis and carries real consequences for the classed individual. An understanding of *how* class functions to produce such lived realities is necessary for the individuals who experience class injustice and for the growing field of performance studies. Performance as theory and method has centralized the body as a mode of doing, knowing, and creating. The body as a mode of performance can be used as a lens to study the ways in which class and other social categories (i.e. race, sex, gender, sexuality) are enacted and maintained within cultural contexts like nonprofit organizations.

In carving out the unique qualities of social class, my use of the body takes up several of these conceptualizations. I define the body as a site of knowledge production, discourse, and materiality. Through this understanding, the body becomes a text that is read and written onto, a space where subjectivities become visible, and location on/through which epistemologies are created and understood. These are all essential to the study of social class because of its simultaneous visibility and invisibility, its social reproduction into dominant discourses, and its performative nature. If researchers (or

trainers or staff members) attempt to disregard one component of the body due to preference for another (focusing on class alone without race and sex, for example), the specific ways in which class is raced and operates would be compromised. Therefore, I approach my analysis of subjectivities and identities through this performance of intersectionality.

Dualism, the theory that describes the relationship between mind and body has been guiding research at least since Descartes famous quip, “I think, therefore I am.” The mind has since been deconstructed, mapped, analyzed, theorized, and praised. Meanwhile, equal attention has not been paid to the body. Indeed Conquergood (1991) explains,

Most academic disciplines, following Augustine and the Church Fathers, have constructed a Mind/Body hierarchy of knowledge corresponding to the Spirit/Flesh opposition so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions. (p. 180)

Conquergood’s observations show the failed efforts of scholars in the humanities to break down the binary between mind and body and need to further theorize the latter.

The emergence of the body in social science literature is marked by a growing understanding and acceptance of performance studies scholarship—an interdisciplinary field that has not only given credence to the body in the humanities, but has placed the body at the center of its theoretical foundation (Conquergood, 1991). Furthermore, performance studies has reconnected the once intimately related components of mind and

body. The interconnectedness of the body with everyday experiences has given life to theoretical and praxical approaches.

I understand embodiment as the representation of particular subjectivities and identities on/through the body. Embodiment is communication manifested in both everyday, mundane, taken for granted performances of self and community as well as heightened performances in specially bounded communication contexts such as classrooms, workplaces, and interpersonal relationships. The term embodiment brings together the physicality of bodies and the highly structured ways in which those bodies operate in the world. Most importantly, embodiment represents individual differences. The performer is central to any performance event because of the lived experience that often informs the performer's actions. In this way, performance studies is a sub-field of communication that takes personal narrative and places it at the center of empirical research. Theory, from this perspective, evolves out of the lived experiences that have been housed in and displayed on the body. Just as bodies change in reaction to experience, so too do theories. The performer then, is imbued with a sense of agency that is absent or undeveloped in other methodologies. The personal becomes empirical. The performer becomes what is researched, what is central, and what is important/interesting. A theorization of the body and lived experience adds to the literature on material conditions of social class, structures that produce class, and psychological reactions and attitudes about social class.

A contemporary understanding of the relationship between performance and the body is heavily guided by Butler's (1990, 1993) understanding of *performativity* as a stylized repetition and a culturally sustained series of acts, naturalized on and through the

body. Butler's theorization of the term was influenced by Austin's (1972) conceptualization of speech act theory (Loxley, 2007). In this theory, Austin described how individuals can *do* things with words, rather than just speak them into existence. Butler took this idea further in arguing that our bodies *do* gender (Loxley, 2007). Butler first utilized performativity to explain the simultaneous commonalities and differences that exist between sex and gender. She argued that by repeating performances of gender, they become naturalized on the body—so much so that we imagine them to be biological. Butler further draws from Derrida's (1982) concept of *citationality*—the idea that all texts cite texts that come before them. For Butler, the body is a text that takes up texts that come before it. In other words, the body meets cultural expectations by performing roles similar to those observed during the process of performativity. Butler's use of performativity nuances an understanding of the process that the body goes through to take up ideologies and reproduce hegemonic understandings of sex and gender.

Recently, scholars have tried to utilize Butler's (1990/1993) performativity to describe how other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality can similarly become naturalized on the body. Butler (1990) responds to these extensions of her work by stating, "The question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race" (p. xvi). Jackson's (2004) work on passing is one example of scholarship that attempts to transpose performativity onto race. She writes,

Theories of performativity have important implications for understanding not only sex/gender identity, but also racialized subjectivity...[Performativity] maintains itself by being unregistered, that its performers (both dominant and marginalized)

are less aware of the ways its production depends upon their own repetitions. Performativity names the iterative processes that do the ‘institutionalizing’ in institutional racism, and that do the ‘internalizing’ in internalized oppression. (p. 183)

Jackson’s use of performativity is one example of how the concept may be fruitful in conversations about the naturalization and “unregistered” nature of other institutionalized expectations of identity. In this exploration of TPP, it is useful to understand how multiple cultural identities become institutionalized. For example, race is rarely explicitly addressed in TPP materials and only discussed directly by some TPP staff; for example it was often dismissed with remarks such as, “racism isn’t an issue here like it may be in the deep South” in conversations in rural areas where the population is predominantly white. Race becomes unregistered and invisible in institutions because it “doesn’t need to be talked about.” Understanding how race is performed in relation to other group identity positions and overall subjectivities, therefore, becomes a unique way to understand the doing/being of living in poverty and working with TPP.

An understanding of the body’s role in performances of cultural expectations is also taken up in Roach’s (1996) theorization of *surrogation*. Roach explains that surrogation is a process of reproduction and recreation. Put simply, surrogation is a way to body a cultural role forward. He writes,

In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of social relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory

alternatives. (p. 2)

Roach further explains that the process of surrogation can be quite messy in that a person trying to surrogate a role may fail to meet the expectations left by the previous role holder, or they may end up exceeding expectations and transform the original role. For this reason, Roach claims that surrogation is bound to be riddled with errors, gaps, fissures, and failure. An understanding of surrogation adds to the knowledge we have about the specific ways that bodies take on cultural roles. However, Roach does not go far enough in theorizing specific bodies in this process. Important questions to ask, for example, might be, “What happens when a body that is racially different from the original role holder attempts to surrogate a role?” Attention to more specific bodies would be useful in continuing to theorize the body as ontology and epistemology. In the current study for example, looking at the expectations for the performance of social class can illuminate how the body is implicated in broader discourses about poverty. It is important to identify if particular bodies are screened out from participation in TPP, or disciplined as being out of the norm, in particular sites across the U.S., due to participants’ struggles with continuing addictions, mental illness challenges, or sexual orientations that are not consistent with conservative Christian values and churches which are involved. It is important to identify the ideologies that create the standards for successful class performance and cultural participation and the consequences for not meeting those standards. This focus can reveal ways in which individual subjectivities have been shaped, enabled, and constrained.

Surrogation and performativity are specifically useful in understanding how social class is embodied, yet the construct of social class is rarely inserted into conversations

about the body and performance. Performance and social class share something in common. They are both contested terms (Allen, 2004; Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2005). What it means to do performance is changing within the field of communication and across other disciplines. Exploring social class through a performance lens is, however, very consistent with the goals of this study. Like race, gender, and sexuality, social class must be explored in order to understand the nature of identity construction and intersectionality. Without it, cultural scholars and performance scholars have painted an incomplete picture of how the body operates and what it is that the body is actually performing.

Above, I detailed a number of theories that have attempted to address the performative nature of the body. Specifically, these theories have paid attention to the particular ways in which the body performs race or gender. Attention to the body in many ways helps us to understand the process of identity construction and “privileges the body as a site of knowing” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 180). I argue that performance literature needs to further explore the classed body as a site of knowing, to highlight the importance of social class within individual subjectivities that include multiple identity categories. Because the focus of TPP is social class, such specificity becomes important in understanding and evaluating the organization’s goals. Below, I offer a justification for looking at the unique qualities of class and the ways in which its performance can be theorized. First, I explore a unique understanding of class subjectivity. Second, I interpret class’ unique contributions to identity development. Finally, I offer two concepts to further this discussion: *class realization* and *class actualization*. These concepts provide

new language to the critical scholar in order to understand the process of class subjectivity.

As I explore a new understanding of class subjectivity through the terms *class realization* and *class actualization*, it is important to note a similar concept that ties these two concepts together: *class consciousness*. Class consciousness is the product of neo-Marxist conversations about individuals' positionalities within capitalist discourses and cultural experiences. From a psychological frame of reference, the term is simply defined as one's awareness of his/her membership in a particular class (Centers, 1998). More recently, the term has been used by hooks (2000) to demonstrate a critical awareness of one's place in society and Kelsh and Hill (2006) to explore one's understanding of the social structures that perpetuate a capitalist society. In most cases, the usage of the term denotes an awareness of the power structures surrounding class, but addresses such cases very broadly. A more nuanced understanding of the term is called for in order to explore the ways in which individuals experience their class identities and utilize those experiences in day-to-day performances of the self.

I refer to class consciousness as an umbrella term. Under class consciousness the two distinct processes of class realization and actualization work to inform the moment at which individuals become critically aware of class positioning(s). I delineate between these concepts because I see class consciousness as a pinnacle moment of awareness, whereas class realization and actualization denote the processual nature of such awareness. Moreover, the two concepts I offer here develop specificity in how one comes to understand his or her position within a number of interwoven cultural discourses. By parsing out these two concepts in a detailed manner, researchers can come to a clearer

understanding of how individuals come to a class consciousness. With an understanding of how social class informs individuals' subjectivities researchers can offer a discussion of how such a category *works*. These terms open up a new door for scholars to explore the complex nature of class and how it works on and through the body. More importantly, such terms help me to distinguish the unique performances that constitute a classed subjectivity apart from, yet informed by, those associated with race, gender, and sexuality. My descriptions of class realization and class actualization can certainly be applied to other cultural identity categories (i.e. gender realization and actualization). Yet, my purpose here is to explore the nature of class subjectivity, as it emerges in texts and discourses related to the work of TPP. Once an understanding of class performances is more defined, these performances must be looked at in relation to other group identity positions

Class realization refers to the process through which an individual comes to understand the ways in which class guides his or her worldviews, behavior, and social interaction. This process is important to the discussion on subjectivity because it takes agency into account. By recognizing that individuals learn norms, values, language, and behaviors that are associated with particular classes, researchers can understand the classed subject as a conscious and active individual who exercises some degree of individual agency and makes choices to belong to and perform into one class or another. This is not to say that individual choice is outside of contextual constraints and interpellated positioning. Instead, some room for agency is created. Moreover, this term indicates the dynamic and fluid nature of social class. In understanding what it takes to be a part of one social class or another, the classed individual can choose to make changes to

parts of his/her identity—which may or may not be recognized by others and may or may not be consistent with representations.

Class realization most often occurs within these moments of Goffmanic performance. Individuals' behaviors aligning with one group, such as those in poverty, always emerge in relationship to and in comparison with other groups; in other words the differences that exist between groups contribute to understanding of each group identity. When lower or working class individuals interact with individuals from the middle or upper class, they are more likely to notice difference and become aware of their own class subjectivity. Because the media is fraught with discourses about social class and the norms associated with each subsequent category, individuals are consistently called into such discourses and encouraged to recognize themselves within such circumstances. Moreover, an individual can undergo the process of class realization on multiple occasions. Different groups and different contexts regularly present new challenges to our worldviews, consequently calling us to consider our own position in society's hierarchical class system.

In addition to the cognitive processes of class realization, it is important to theorize the ways in which class is enacted through the body. *Class actualization* refers to the visible and invisible ways in which class is performed in and through the body. Because the system of social class is a learned ideology and is taken for granted, the body is used as a tool to produce/show/maintain communication codes associated with class. The body, then, becomes an important component of social interaction. It is used to demonstrate, for example, solidarity that could be built among individuals who share the same class background. It can also be used as a way to show potential change to a group

in which the classed individual is acting into. Because class is such a taboo topic in our society, it is very unlikely that a person from one class would be comfortable saying to another, “I want to be a part of the upper class. I do not have the money to do so, but I can pick up the walk and talk with enough practice.” Those who want to move up in class do not just adopt a new way of talking; they are also required to *show* those in the upper classes that s/he is capable of fitting in. The body does the work and takes on language codes, posture, clothing, and conversational topics in hopes of being construed as “fitting in,” and ultimately deserving of acceptance into the group.

Class actualization is important in discussions of cultural performance because it represents individuals’ motivation. Being a recognized member of a cultural group requires the use of social practices that demonstrate affiliation, behaving according to prescribed norms, and being recognized by others as a member of the group (Philipsen, 1992). The creation of a social identity, therefore, is not completely up to the individual. Values and meaning (even when written on the body) need to be acknowledged, responded to, and validated (Goffman, 1967). In order to define oneself, an individual has to consider other parts of the social interaction. Identity is indeed a social and interactional accomplishment. Therefore, class actualization is reminiscent of the top of Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation and its attached hierarchy of needs. Much like Maslow’s apex of “self-actualization,” it is difficult to achieve a complete sense of one’s class subjectivity. Class actualization takes work, unfolds over time, and must be interactionally acknowledged. Indeed, the classed subject may never fully reach class actualization. Taken together, these concepts unify an approach to the mind and body by recognizing that subjectivity affects both cognition and embodiment. These constructs

solidify the body epistemologically and ontologically, as mode of knowing and doing, in conjunction with the mind.

Under the dominant narrative of the American Dream, U.S. American societal discourses ask participants to buy into the idea that they can move up in social class. Following Freire's (1970) arguments, this narrative is asking participants to desire normative ways of being and doing that are consistent with U.S. ideologies and history. In understanding class realization and class actualization through a critical lens, lower and working class individuals who live in poverty can begin to understand how they are constrained and, as well, possibly experience opportunities to modify some of the structures that reinforce these constraining systems. Freire's work can undoubtedly be critiqued for its overly utopic understanding of the world and, several writers have pointed out a lack of practicality (Ellsworth, 1989). Freire's work does point out the structural constraints that often prevent critical thinking from occurring. However utopic, this work points toward a way to better understand how subjectivities are produced and performed. By combining Freire's innovative work on empowerment of the oppressed with the neo-Marxist understanding of class consciousness, people in poverty can be offered the opportunity to move into a *critical class consciousness*, if they do not already have it, in order to recognize intersectional identities, multiple subjectivities, and situated knowledge(s). Depending on the results of the interviews, this process might prove useful for middle-class participants of TPP who may benefit from a lack of class consciousness, but whose conduct subsequently reproduces ideologies about entitlements to middle-class success.

This approach to class embodiment can be used to develop a more complex understanding of the individuals in lower and working classes, which ultimately works toward social justice and recognizes more holistic subjectivities, rather than singular identities. By applying this approach to an analysis of TPP texts and discourses, I can come to a more detailed understanding of how subjectivities are produced and performed. Moreover, this framework may be useful in developing a new model for training and relationship development in TPP.

In addition to the framework described above, an understanding of *affect* is, in my opinion, the best way to evince an assertion of the body as epistemology and ontology. Affect is almost purely concerned with the body, in that it is pre-cognitive and pre-emptive. The simplest definition of affect is something that moves us (Werry & O’Gorman, 2007). Moreover, Gould (2007) argues that affect moves us to *do* something. Thus, the body becomes a site of knowing and doing, before reason and rationality are added to the equation. Gould claims, “With the term *affect*, I am trying to preserve a space for human motivation that is nonconscious, noncognitive, nonlinguistic, noncoherent, nonrational, and unpredetermined—all qualities I argue play a role in political action and inaction” (p. 23). In other words, affect is what is registered in the body before the mind can process a cognitive response. Gould’s definition places affect beyond a feeling or an emotion, into a domain that solidifies everyday performances as political. Moreover, it hardens an understanding of the body as an ontology—a state of being and a space for motivation that is not yet influenced by the rationality and reason that drives hegemonic ways of knowing.

If the body can be read as a text, as suggested above, then affect is an important way to understand how ideologies are taken up by the body and/or rejected. A person's weight, clothing, personal artifacts, tattoos, and piercings are all examples of ways we portray our worldviews, which are also expressed through the body. The body, then, is a way to nonverbally demonstrate support for or rejection of the ideological expectations that shape our cultural identities. At one TPP site, for example, clothing and hair were viewed as so important for success in the workplace that the initiative created a "makeover" program for qualifying participants. Participants believed that a more professional look reflected the change in social class that they were undergoing through the program. This example could demonstrate how an individual might affectively experience a particular class worldview and subsequently be moved to take on the bodily role of a new class. They could choose to accept or reject standards of outward appearance, subsequently accepting or rejecting a new worldview. Though this is a simple example, Gould argues that affect drives us to create "social reproduction and social change" (p. 27). She demonstrates this through the example of the affective bodily experiences of sexuality that come into conflict with hegemonic structures which ignore LGBTQ rights, and how this moves AIDS activists, for example, into actions of protest. In TPP, such social reproduction and social change could come as a result of the work that the organization does in the local communities (e.g. nonprofit clothing stores, prison re-entry programs, etc.). Giving attention to affective responses around identities, material conditions, and unjust policies could enhance grassroots organizing and structural change at the local level.

The term affect is useful in breaking down the Cartesian mind/body split that so often plagues the social sciences. In doing so, the body becomes more seriously realized as its own ontology and epistemology. When Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am,” he ignored the body as a potential mode of existence. Gould counters his arguments in noting that existence does not depend on rationality. She might say, “I feel, therefore I am” or “I feel, therefore I act.” Gould’s (2007) assertion that affect moves us politicizes the everyday performance. Whereas Roach (1996) and Butler (1990) describe the processes that we undergo to meet (and perform) cultural expectations, Gould moves such performances into a political zone, arguing that affect sparks activism. Gould explains that in order to understand affect, you must understand action. Moreover, she argues that the body is a political nucleus—a point in which activism emerges. Affect is useful for performance studies scholars who study the body in that performance can be used as a method to manage affective responses in a productive way for individuals (Werry & O’Gorman, 2007). Performance can help individuals to communicate their affective responses and make sense of them cognitively. In other words, affect can move an individual to perform his or her protest, either in the streets or on the stage. Analyzing performances that are driven by bodily ontologies, once again drives the field in new directions and helps scholars to understand how lived experiences documented on/through bodies become implicated as agents of change within larger social structures.

Finally, an understanding of Taylor’s (2003) concept of *the repertoire* explicitly describes the body as an epistemology. The repertoire is always in tension with what Taylor refers to as *the archive*. The archive represents the need for cultural memory to be documented in order for it to exist and be cited as useful. Most academics, for example,

value documented ways of knowing such as journal articles, books, and other similarly documented types of material. This is the archive, or what Taylor describes as “supposedly enduring materials” (p. 19). Other items that might fall into the category of archive include bones, buildings, artifacts, videotapes, audiotapes, etc. The archive emphasizes the common phrase, “If you can see it, you can believe it,” calling for tangible documentation of memory and history. Taylor argues that the archive ignores a wealth of information that cannot be documented, but instead, is produced by the body—the repertoire. Types of knowledge that exist in the repertoire include dance, song, language, movement, and sport. The repertoire takes up the body as a way of knowing in that particular experiences and memories are passed down explicitly through bodies. Taylor explains that these knowledges cannot be documented, because in doing so, something is inevitably lost (ex. if you look down to take notes, you miss part of the performance). She also notes the importance of counting the repertoire as valid knowledge by writing, “If performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity” (p. xvii). Taylor’s arguments reaffirm Counqergood’s (2002) previously described assertion that “experiential knowledges” recover subjugated knowledges. Thus, the repertoire is useful in extending our understandings of cultural histories and memories, by including a diverse group of voices and experience, ultimately challenging hegemonic ways of knowing.

The archive and the repertoire should not be held in opposition to each other. Instead, they should exist in tension with one another. For example, TPP participants learning how to be middle class may not be able to understand such a bodily performance from reading what has been documented on a page. Instead, they must watch other bodies

do middle class, listen to them speak middle class, and practice a similar performance. Thus, it is important to document information, but not at the cost of losing the repertoire. A decade before Taylor's exploration of the archive and the repertoire, Phelan (1993) claimed that scholars must tirelessly labor over documenting performance. Like Taylor, she notes that performance would inevitably be altered, and something would be lost. However, she argues that the act of writing about performance is transformational. Together, the archive and the repertoire have the potential to create new ways of understanding that are influenced by documented histories and performances.

In TPP, the training materials serve as a form of archive—documenting what the middle class should look like and what expectations participants will be held to if they want to succeed. The daily performances of social class that participants of TPP do, constitute the repertoire. It is important to analyze both the archive and the repertoire to look for commonalities, slippages, or disconnects between the two. This comparison may illuminate what is being left out of the training that might be useful in a new model.

Together, these concepts illuminate the assertion that the body is/as ontology and epistemology. This theoretical understanding of a relationship between the body and performance demonstrates how the smallest of everyday performances are political, in that they exist within social, political, institutional, and interpersonal contexts (Hamera, 2006a). In small ways, the body can contest what previously were hegemonic discourses operating as a mode of agency. Within the context of TPP for example, individuals who are being taught how to perform middle class through talk and appearance might challenge the notion that middle class is equated with success by continuing to speak in a register that is more comfortable and familiar to them.

Not every bodily act is political, nor are all acts performance, under the definition I have described here. Performance in this study is not every act of the body, but those that take up cultural norms and expectations. Indeed the body is choreographed and trained to en/act various cultural expectations (Foster, 2007), and is a product of culture (Butler, 1990; Roach, 1996). Still, Foster (2007) claims that just in placing our bodies within political contexts, our bodies can become a mode of resistance that tries to challenge social norms. In this study, I interrogate whether bodies are being used as a mode of resistance or how they perform the status quo. The body, then, is both transformed by culture(s) and transformational for culture(s). These assumptions guide my understanding of performance as a highly styled (culturally shaped) political (engaged and/or resistant) act of doing culture (and reproducing hegemonic systems).

A Review of Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is an interdisciplinary area of study that is embraced by some scholars in education, sociology, and communication (among others). It is used both theoretically and methodologically in understanding education as an emancipatory process. Theoretically, critical pedagogy is linked to the critical paradigm of research, specifically with roots in the Frankfurt School of critical theory and Marxist thought (McLaren, 2007). Methodologically, some critical pedagogues have reflexively analyzed their own non/traditional classrooms in order to offer teaching techniques for instructors interested in emancipatory education (Cooks, 2003; Fassett & Warren, 2007; hooks, 1994, 2003; Nainby, Warren, & Bollinger, 2003; Shor, 1987, 1988, 1996). Many scholars refer to critical pedagogy as praxical (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2004; hooks, 1994). Furthermore, Giroux describes critical pedagogy as inherently

political because it encourages educators to foster critical environments where students can challenge the status quo (Giroux, 1988, 2007). I define TPP as an educational enterprise; the theoretical investments of critical pedagogy guide my assumptions about educational practices and greatly influence the recommendations that I make regarding an effective TPP model.

Critical pedagogy sometimes comes into contestation with subject areas referred to as “radical pedagogy” and “feminist pedagogy.” Much of the information explored in these areas of inquiry overlap with critical pedagogy, making the lines between them ambiguous. For example, hooks (1994), a scholar who is widely recognized as an important contributor to critical pedagogy, identifies as a radical pedagogue. She argues that much of the literature in critical pedagogy is written by white men and much of the work in feminist pedagogy is written by white women; thus, current literature in critical pedagogy reflects white (and therefore limited) perspective on pedagogy, leaving little room for voices of color (specifically women’s voices of color). In my review of the critical pedagogy literature, the most frequently cited and recognized authors are indeed white men (see for example Giroux 1988, 2004, 2007; Kincheloe, 2007; McLaren, 2007; Shor, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1996; Warren, 2005). While it is certainly not the intention of these authors to marginalize voices in the field (judging by their work on democracy in education), this is a shortfall that needs to be addressed. In recognizing the importance of race and racial positioning, the material consequences of racism, and the historical events that have encouraged racism, critical pedagogy scholars can add to these conversations. Kincheloe (2007) argues that the use of “critical” in front of the word “pedagogy” is important in keeping with the specific lineage that develops from the Frankfurt School.

Identifying with critical schools of thought means paying attention to issues of power difference, class hierarchies, privilege, oppression, and capitalism—all constructs that are important in the case study about the work of the nonprofit organization. I choose to use the term *critical pedagogy* over other “types” of pedagogy as a way to take up the lineages associated with this subject, yet remain committed to inclusivity of multiple voices.

A number of concepts that emerge in the literature on critical pedagogy are important for understanding the educational practices of TPP and future possibilities for a new educational model. Here, I explore the most central concepts, including: (1) oppressed/oppressor, (2) subject/object, (3) banking/problem posing, (4) critical consciousness, and (5) dialogue.

First, an understanding of the *oppressed* and the *oppressor* is useful in identifying positions of power that emerge in educational settings. To be oppressed means to be dominated by social structures and positioned at the bottom of the social ladder. To be an oppressor means to have some level of privilege that is greater than that held by another individual or group of people within a particular context. Oppressed/oppressor relationships are produced by broader discourses and institutional policies and practices. Thus, individuals can be positioned as oppressors in one circumstance and oppressed in another circumstance.

These labels become important in the TPP setting. Examples of how the oppressor role might emerge include individuals in leadership roles such as coaches, or coordinators who choose and present training materials. Critical pedagogy scholars insist that school systems (or social systems that sustain poverty) can change if education is “the practice

of freedom” (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). In other words, many scholars practice critical pedagogy in hopes of transforming the rigid structures discussed above into democratic spaces where students (or TPP participants) are free to contribute to knowledge production (Alexander & Warren, 2002; Giroux, 2007; Martin, 2007; Shor, 1992).

Similar to the oppressed and oppressor roles, the subject/object dichotomy is used by Freire (1970) to explain the ways in which students become *dehumanized*. The subject/object dichotomy is important in discussions of education because students are often treated as objects while instructors are treated as subjects with valuable experiences that become important in the classroom. Students are expected to listen to the teacher, memorize information, and regurgitate it, most often in the form of multiple-choice exams. Freire (1970) explains that “education thus becomes an act of depositing” and illuminates this statement with the metaphor of teachers as active depositors of information and students as inactive depositories of information (p. 72).

Freire (1970) claims that education can be a humanizing process through which students are moved from the position of inactive objects to active subjects. In TPP, then, those in poverty can become active subjects. However, the current educational system is said to have a dehumanizing effect. Freire asserts that dehumanization “marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it...” (p. 44). Students, then, are not offered the chance to explore their own experiences in a way that counts in the classroom. Consequently, their understandings are shaped by a system in which one way of knowing exists. For this reason, Freire argues that students fear freedom, in the sense that they fear the unknown. This is an important question to examine in the context of TPP training.

The banking system of education, which is in common use, is in direct opposition to the problem-posing system. The banking system of education is one that assumes students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. In other words, students' brains are banks that can be filled with information if the student is persistent in memorizing the information fed to them. This system suggests that the teacher is all-knowing and the information they impart should not be challenged. Thus, individual lived experiences are not asked for/offered, even if one's voice is left out of what is being taught by the teacher.

This approach is problematic for Freire (1970, 1998) on two levels. First, a primary contention of critical pedagogy is that there can be no teaching without learning. Teachers should be learning from students as much as students are learning from teachers (Freire, 1998). Freire argues that teachers should shift power to students, calling this move "progressive." Freire notes, "By 'progressive' I mean a point of view that favors the autonomy of the students" (p. 21). To ignore individual experiences, then, ignores the humanizing process that Freire hails as progressive. Second, this system is problematic because it disempowers students by limiting their agency and their ability to recognize the oppressive structures that keep them in their place as docile learners/citizens. Thus, students become oppressed and complicit in reproducing a hegemonic system that transmits and dictates knowledge rather than fostering a sense of collaboration (Bartolomé, 2007). In regard to TPP, the degree to which participants enact their agency and challenge oppressive structures, could include perhaps, questioning the training materials, the celebration of middle class norms, or predatory lending practices.

Freire's (1970) solution to the failure of the banking system is to implement and encourage a problem-posing system, in which teachers and students become more critical of the information that is disseminated to them. Thus, students become teachers in their own right by offering their experiences as opposition for the information transmitted to them. Moreover, discussions of diversity become more fruitful as the hegemonic voice (middle class white, straight, male, perhaps Christian, voice in TPP) that is most often centralized, is challenged and deconstructed with multiple, intersectional voices. This is the democratic process referred to above. In TPP, for example, training could become educational if personal experiences were shared in the classroom, trainers/coaches recognized the multiplicity of voices and standpoints, and training materials became less homogenous.

Alexander and Warren (2002) warn, however, that a move to include diverse voices in the classroom can commodify bodies and actually reproduce oppressive structures. For example, asking a student of color to speak on behalf of all students of color ignores the humanizing process discussed above. They write, "The pitfalls of [democratization in education] include a homogenizing of voice, the standardizing of opportunity, the generalizability of experience and among others, the exoticization of culture" (p. 341). Cooks (2003) extends their point by arguing that when a call for active participation goes out, white students' voices can dominate discussion. Cooks argues that white instructors need to become more aware of the ways in which their whiteness impacts the classroom (i.e. makes white students feel more comfortable and students of color feel marginalized). Moreover, she encourages instructors to point out white students' whiteness to them. In doing so, Cooks claims that discussions of diversity can

explore white privilege, yet de-center white voices. These recommendations raise questions about how to incorporate diverse voices in training settings like TPP and the effects of centralizing particular voices. Such questions are important to explore in the observations of performances and interviews.

Critical consciousness is a concept that emerges from the Marxist construct of class consciousness (McLaren, 2007). Freire (1970) utilizes the term to describe the point at which an individual becomes aware of his or her participation within a matrix of hegemonic structures. Furthermore, he offers the Portuguese term *conscientizacao* to explain the process that one goes through to reach a critical consciousness. Such terms solidify the political nature of critical pedagogy—pointing toward the possibility of social change through activism. Freire argues that critical consciousness is not just about awareness, but also intentionality. He notes that consciousness must be “consciousness intent upon the world” (p. 79). By this, Freire means that critical consciousness is not only an outward understanding of the world, but should also be transformative for the individual. The extent to which *conscientizacao* is evident will also be given attention in the current study.

Finally, an understanding of dialogue is important for the development of a critical pedagogy framework because it is one tool utilized to achieve social change. For Freire (1970), dialogue is a combination of reflection and action. It is utilized in developing a critical consciousness. Freire writes, “Only dialogue which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93). It is important to note that communication and dialogue are not synonymous. Communication

is an umbrella term used to describe the transactional process through which meaning is shared. Coercion, for example, is considered a form of communication, but could never be a part of dialogue, which requires active listening, a sense of respect and open mindedness, and the co-creation of meaning. Dialogue creates the *possibility* of social change, in that by sharing multiple viewpoints, something new can emerge through collaboration.

Like many of the concepts in critical pedagogy literature, this concept is quite idealistic. In TPP training sessions, for example, communication could be top-down and prescriptive in that “new” norms of communication are being taught and new value systems being recommended. Freire’s understanding of dialogue is that there is potential for sharedness and the co-creation of meaning. I include dialogue as a guiding construct that may have implications for a different kind of teaching/training model for TPP.

The most useful tools of critical pedagogy for the current study are those that communication scholars suggest as extensions of the concepts described above (Alexander & Warren, 2002; Banks & Banks, 2000; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Nainby, Warren, & Bollinger, 2003; Sprague, 1992, 1993; Warren, 2005; Warren & Hytten, 2004). Fassett and Warren’s (2007) introduction of *critical communication pedagogy* is particularly useful in highlighting issues of subjectivity, agency, dialogue, and culture. Fassett and Warren (2007) build upon the Freirian framework described above and centralize communication as a tool for relationship building, identity construction, and societal participation. Fassett and Warren describe tenets of their model of pedagogy, which include an understanding that identity is constituted in/through communication, culture is central to critical communication pedagogy, and everyday communication

practices are indicative of larger social structures. Thus, Fassett and Warren move beyond Freire in contending that communication enables and constrains individual participation in societies. Fassett and Warren urge scholars who are utilizing a critical pedagogical approach to identify communication practices that could increase agency for participants in educational contexts.

More specifically, a critical pedagogical framework is especially useful in highlighting issues of identity and subjectivity. This framework has been used to explore issues of class (McLaren, 2007; Shor, 1988) and race (Alexander & Warren, 2002; Cooks, 2003; Warren, 2005; Warren & Hytten, 2004), for example. McLaren (2007) argues that social class becomes more relevant as the world moves toward a more globalized structure. He argues that humans live in a globalized capitalist economy where capitalist ventures like the IMF bank spread ideologies on an international level. Capitalist ideals privilege Western ways of knowing, creating hegemonic belief systems that perpetuate Western ideologies. These ideologies are easily taken up by educational systems (Bartolomé, 2007). For this reason, McLaren claims that social class becomes the most useful lens through which we can understand the structural determinants of race and gender. This does not mean that race, gender or social class should not be studied on their own or in relation to each other. McLaren argues that because social class is connected to materiality, it becomes a fruitful way to understand the production, consumption, and labor associated with capitalism. McLaren's assertions also become useful in analyzing TPP, a not-for-profit organization that highlights issues of social class and its relations to other identities. Thus, class is a useful lens for understanding wider societal ideologies that are produced and maintained within the context of TPP.

A Critical/Cultural Performance Methodology

Above, I detailed a number of constructs and theoretical evolutions that become important to this study. In this dissertation, I bring together three lenses (critical intercultural communication, performance studies, and critical pedagogy) as a means of evaluating, critiquing, and offering recommendations for improving the current model of relating and training/teaching used by TPP. Critical intercultural communication is most useful in addressing issues of context, power, intersectionality, hierarchical positioning, and subjectivity. These critically informed concepts shed light on contemporary understandings of how individuals are constructed with/in cultures and by discourses. In my application of this perspective I also consider issues of equity and justice, goals that are not always included in other approaches to culture and social class.

Performance studies literature runs parallel to critical investigations of culture, but makes it imperative that researchers address how the body is implicated by cultures and performs cultures. My focus on the body builds upon previous work about poverty and social class and expands research that focuses on nonprofit relationships among staff, community and clients (Chen & Collier, 2012). Finally, critical pedagogy is useful in assessing how identities and subjectivities are taken up by the training materials and are consequently constituted by these texts, as well as constructed by trainers and participants. Critical pedagogy is a useful lens for identifying how power relations are produced both in the texts and in the trainer/participant relationships. Moreover, critical pedagogy can be a useful tool for exploring a model of TPP that could potentially work from the ground up, utilizing the voices, bodies, and minds of participants from all class

levels. Together, these lenses provide adequate tools for evaluation and suggestions for construction of a modified model.

Critical Discourse Analysis as Methodology

The analysis of texts is useful in answering questions about cultural reproduction, ideologies, subjectivities, and other critically informed constructs, because the concepts are linked. Grossberg (1984) argues that cultural studies and textual analysis overlap in that they can bolster each other's goals of interrupting/deconstructing the ways in which "messages are inserted into, produced by, and function within the everyday lives of concrete human beings so as to reproduce or transform structures of power and domination" (p. 393). Grossberg's analysis of texts and culture can be illustrated by the methodology of discourse analysis. Jørgensen and Philips (2002) explain that the word *discourse* is "the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in varying domains of social life...discourse analysis is the analysis of these patterns (p. 1). Thus, the overarching goal of discourse analysis is to connect language to social participation.

Textual analysis and discourse analysis are slightly related, with the latter being more expansive and contextual. Texts and discourses are linked in that texts are one source of data looked at in a discourse analysis. An understanding of discourse moves beyond individual texts and looks at social interaction *with* texts. A primary contention of discourse analysis, then, is that language constitutes/influences social reality (the extent of which is contested). Discourse analysts concentrate on the form and function of language in order to ascertain an understanding of the ways in which individuals see the

world and participate in the world. Thus, context, discursive practices, and interaction become important in the current study.

Critical discourse analysis is one approach to discourse that emerged out of the umbrella of discourse studies. Wodak and Meyer (2009) explain that in the 1990s a group of discourse analysis scholars with critical leanings met to discuss the potential of critical discourse analysis. Amongst attendees were Kress, van Leeuwen, Van Dijk, Wodak, and Fairclough. These scholars have different theoretical investments, but all systematically approach text in a way that looks for issues of power and embedded ideologies. Critical discourse analysts understand power as embedded in texts as a way to reproduce understandings of social positioning and reinforce hegemonic understandings of culture. Moreover, the critical approach to discourse fosters researcher self-reflexivity and extension of critical theory (particularly the Frankfurt School) (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). These assumptions are relevant to the current study because they encourage me to be reflexive about my own upbringing in poverty and how that affects my interpretations. Moreover, these assumptions push me to consider context when identifying how subjectivities are produced and performed in this nonprofit organization. For example, in the current study I am interested in the social, historical, and political contexts that inform the way that people in poverty interact with individuals in the program, construct their own identities, and inform their performance in the program's weekly activities. In order to understand these contexts I look to broader discourses about poverty, community discourses about historical issues such as racism, and the conditions of poverty in each community. Moreover, I am concerned with how these contexts similarly inform the training materials and organizational development of TPP. Finally, this project attempts

to understand how such contexts inform relational development amongst all individuals who participate in TPP.

The discipline of critical discourse analysis is quite heterogeneous (and praised as such). Offering a single definition is impossible and does an injustice to the multiplicity inherent in the method. Wodak and Meyer (2009) argue that if one is to discuss, explain, or critique CDA, they must specify the author/approach that they have in mind. In my approach, critical discourse analysis is a systematic way of looking at texts that pays attention to how language functions in order to position individuals into societal structures, and subjective positions that are influenced by varying levels of power, privilege, oppression, and agency. I use CDA to understand individuals' use of language, their bodily performances, their constitution by texts, their constructions of subjectivities, and the possibility of limited agency. I argue that CDA is appropriate for identifying hegemonic systems that act to exclude and homogenize, in hopes of dismantling them and creating social change at various levels. My definition emerges from an understanding of the critical paradigm, and follows some of Fairclough's (1992) assumptions. I argue that the methodology of critical discourse analysis is most useful in understanding how individuals participate in TPP discourses and are constituted by such discourses. CDA is useful in understanding the processes of production and consumption of text and consequently the constitution of subjectivities.

Conclusion

Together, these areas of study create a comprehensive framework that can be used to understand training materials, interview data, and individual participation in TPP. Additionally, this framework is also useful in developing an effective model for the

growth and development of TPP that is economically, politically, and socially just. Critical intercultural communication becomes important in describing how nonprofit organizations constitute a cultural setting, shape subjectivities, and produce ideologies. This area of research continually reminds me as a researcher to consider political, economic, social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. Performance studies is equally important to this study in implicating the body as a site of knowledge production. Performance studies gives attention to individuals' roles that are enacted within contexts. Critical pedagogy draws attention to trainer-participant relationships and individual agency within the TPP training/educational contexts. It provides a critical lens through which training materials and communication models can be analyzed.

Finally, critical discourse analysis is a useful methodology for understanding how the texts that I will be analyzing are linked and work together to produce subjectivities and cultural identity positions and re/produce ideologies. In other words, CDA analyzes how individuals are constituted by texts and the ideologies and larger social practices that are implicated by texts. Thus, this project looks at TPP through many lenses. This multilayered approach will enable me to analyze the various ways in which cultures and subjectivities operate.

This theoretical framework creates a rationale for the following research questions: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced and performed in training materials used by TPP, embodied texts, and interview texts? (2) What do subjects' status positions and relationships that emerge in TPP reveal about levels of agency? and (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the TPP texts?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

For this project, I draw from a number of texts including training materials, interview transcripts, and individual bodies. These texts provide materials for a comprehensive evaluation of TPP as they cover participants' experiences from the beginning of the program to the end. Moreover, I argue that these texts must be looked at as interrelated in that they inform the way each of the others is interpreted.

Procedures

After learning about Transforming Poverty Partnerships, I chose to work with the nonprofit organization due to my interests in social class. TPP is a useful site for analysis in that it works at both micro and macro levels in its efforts to end poverty. This organization has recently received national attention and coverage by a PBS, cable network channels, and major news broadcast outlets. TPP is continually undergoing structural changes and has greatly expanded over the past three years. The dynamic nature of the organization makes it ripe for analysis and desirable in the sense that it has the potential to create social change. The national leadership of the nonprofit has expressed openness to feedback about what the program is accomplishing and willingness to revise the current program and consider new policies and procedures.

Selection of Sites

In order to analyze how subjectivities are produced and performed in this nonprofit organization, it is important to have a diverse sample of sites. TPP has 62 sites across the United States at present and partners with a variety of types of organizations (i.e. religious institutions, state-funded agencies, community action programs, national

not-for-profit organizations, and private funders) in order to accomplish their goals. I worked with TPP administrators to identify sites for interviews with people in poverty and middle class allies that met a variety of requirements. We decided it was important to visit sites that were: (1) located in different geographic locations, (2) partnered with different types of organizations, (3) experiencing various levels of “success” with the program, and (4) those that were newer as well as those that were well established. These criteria generated participants and staff with a level of diversity based on income, race, region, and religion.

I chose six program sites to visit including locations in the Midwest, the South, and the Southwest. I was also able to attend two regional Conferences of Practice in the Midwest and Southwest. Moreover, sites included those with a spiritual/religious mission, those partnered with city agencies, and those partnered with local nonprofit organizations. Finally, some of the sites were new and some were established and had been in place for four years. The variety in site choices allowed me to look at the impact of contextual issues such as material conditions and levels of poverty, racial dynamics, religious affiliations, and leadership. Context becomes very important in distinguishing the uniqueness of poverty for particular communities. For example, the sites in the South have what participants described as a “racial divide” in that the strong majority of individuals in poverty are African American and the middle-class allies are almost all white European Americans. In contrast, sites visited in the Midwest were comprised of a majority of white European American participants, with some African Americans who were living in poverty. These factors are important in interpreting the participants’ responses in interviews.

At each of these sites, I worked with a local coordinator to recruit interviewees. A recruiting script was used to contact potential participants and explain the interview process. I chose to interview people in poverty and middle class allies in order to understand multiple class experiences and the interaction between these individuals. Approximately seven people at each site agreed to be interviewed for a total of 57 individuals.

Data Collection

Data for this project was collected in a variety of ways. First, TPP administrators provided copies of training materials including workbooks, facilitator guides, and handouts. Second, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals and I also conducted focus groups at various sites. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) argue that qualitative interviews are useful in understanding how individuals construct their own knowledge and aid researchers in understanding “the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews” (p. 173). Moreover, Van de Mierop (2011) argues that collecting narratives evinced from in-depth interviews is a particularly apt method for studying poverty because it gives the interviewer personal perspectives about how identities are constructed and negotiated. In-depth interviews allowed me to explore individual experiences from various class and cultural identity positions.

IRB procedures including informed consent were followed for all interviews (see Appendix A for copy of Informed Consent and IRB procedures). Interviews took place in a private room and lasted for approximately one hour each. Interviews were audio recorded, with permission, for accuracy. People in poverty were always interviewed separately from their middle-class allies to ensure comfort and to limit a positive

response bias. I used a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that participants were responding to the same questions, allowing me to look for patterns across responses, yet providing me with flexibility to engage with participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Participants were asked to explain things that were working well with TPP, and things that could be improved. Participants were also asked about their class backgrounds, their definition of poverty, and any useful skills that they took away from the training (see Appendix B for Interview Guide).

In addition to interviews, I chose to concentrate on individuals' bodily performances as a way to privilege the body as a site of knowing. By observing TPP participants in the interviews and at their weekly meetings and taking detailed field notes about the way they spoke, dressed, and built relationships, I attempted to privilege the body before the cognitive (Gould, 2007). Specifically, I noted vocal pace, posture, tone, facial expressions (including smiling), eye contact, vocal drawl, dialect shifts, and clothing style. Some of these communication codes were realized early on in the interviews and informed later observation, whereas others were utilized inductively at the start of my interview process. Together, these embodied communication codes aided in an analysis of everyday performances.

Data Analysis

Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis is a multifunctional tool used to link texts to larger social practices. His overall goal is "social and cultural change," something that is unique to his approach (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9). Fairclough's method is particularly concerned with issues of power, agency, and cultural participation. In order to attend to these dynamics, he uses a nested three-step model that looks at the

text in relation to wider social contexts. This approach is systematic in that he attempts to look at multiple levels of meaning that emerge within texts. Fairclough tends to look at individual texts in relation to larger social contexts. He argues that his method is multifunctional, multidimensional, historically situated, and critical. Moreover, he follows Foucault (1972) in understanding that discourses are intertextual and have been ordered and organized in a way that limits an individual's understandings of social systems and structures. Because of Fairclough's emphasis on social change, I argue that this method is most appropriate for this project and its critical goals that feature a social justice orientation.

In his approach to discourse, Fairclough (1992) utilizes a three-step method including analysis of the forms and functions of the text, the discursive practices surrounding the text (including production and consumption), and interpretation of wider social practices. Fairclough's overall goal is to understand how social constructions of reality (such as ideologies and understandings of relationships) are embedded in texts, and subsequently create and maintain the social structures that guide cultural participation. In recognizing this goal, the researcher must not only describe the text, but also make interpretations about how the language within the text functions to reproduce power and social structures that enable and constrain individual cultural participation.

The first step in Fairclough's (1992) method is descriptive. At this level of analysis, I will identify how the various texts reflect three functions of language including: ideational, interpersonal, and identity functions. At the ideational level of analysis, I will look for the ways in which language "constructs social reality" and builds belief systems (p. 169). Moreover, I ask questions about what type of information is

being included, what is being left out, what is taken for granted, and how day-to-day understandings of the world are represented. This level accomplishes the goal of understanding how texts begin to create social reality for individuals who consume them.

In analyzing the interpersonal function of language, I will give attention to how language within texts begins to construct social relations and social interaction. In other words, I ask what voices are being included, what voices are being left out, who is speaking for whom, and what the overall intentionality of the text is. These questions begin to illuminate subject positioning within relationships. Identifying the genre of the text can identify some of the overall intentionality of a text. For example, for-profit training materials might have many audiences that go beyond nonprofit organizations to include motivational seminar participants, college students, and businesses. Linking the interpersonal to issues of production, in analyzing some of the TPP training materials, the producers/authors may take the role of an authority figure on poverty, hold a particular level of influence over some of the readers, and expect to make a profit for their work. Moreover, the ways in which TPP texts talk about different classes (poverty, middle class, and wealth) may be evidence of hierarchical positioning and subsequently the reproduction of hegemonic structures. Overall, the interpersonal function of language begins to identify the ways in which groups are positioned in relation to each other, and how authority is created.

In identifying the identity function of language, I will look for ways in which conceptions of “the self” are constructed. Fairclough (1992) argues that identities are “reproduced, contested, [and] restructured” in texts (p. 137). Therefore, this level of analysis is important because researchers can begin to deconstruct the ways identities are

positioned by texts. At this level of analysis, I will consider how the author is represented and how other characters are framed in relation to the author of the text. More specifically, this level of analysis reveals how cultural identities such as race, sex, class, gender, religious affiliation, sexuality, etc. are framed and/or ignored. Additionally, understanding the values and claims asserted by the author can reveal important information about the construction of identities. Fairclough refers to this function as pinpointing “identity,” however in my study, this level of analysis is applied to building understanding about both a) cultural identities which are produced and ascribed, as well as, b) subjectivities, which are the confluence of intersecting identifications, and a more dynamic, fluid, and reciprocal location of speaking and acting.

Another step of analysis in Fairclough’s (1992) approach to CDA is an understanding of the discursive practices that surround a text. This includes an exploration of the production, distribution, and consumption of a text. Some TPP sites, for example, use different versions of the training materials or have chosen to leave out particular sections of the workbook. This change in distribution would necessarily change the way in which training materials are consumed. Context becomes very important at this level of analysis because social, cultural, and historical events and ways of knowing can influence the ways in which the text is created and how an audience may interpret the information. A key concept to understand at this level of analysis is Kristeva’s (1980) use of *intertextuality*. Kristeva first utilized the term as a way to challenge the assertion of modern literary scholars that texts can be reduced to a single meaning intended by the author. She argued that we must look at a text in context, which reveals that texts are inherently influenced by previous texts. Kristeva argued that recognizing the genealogy

of a text encourages researchers to look more holistically at a text's position within historical contexts (Allen, 2000). Fairclough takes up intertextuality as a way to understand how ideologies are perpetuated in texts. His goal is to historicize texts as a way to deconstruct production. Thus, if one can identify the influences of other texts, then they can reconstruct an intertextual chain that follows the evolution of ideologies. For this reason, it is important to look at the TPP texts I have identified in conjunction with broader societal discourses about poverty.

Additionally, understanding the social and historical contexts at the time of distribution and consumption of a text can reveal multiple ways in which the text could be interpreted by an audience. For example, the religious contexts at some of the TPP sites may deter some participants and spark interest in others. Similarly, the historical context of race relations in the South may influence how an African American in poverty orients to a partnership with a white middle-class ally. Thus, the events that occur before and during the time that a text is consumed may have an effect on how people consume it.

The third step in Fairclough's (1992) approach to CDA is offering interpretations about wider sociocultural practices, based on the functions of language and the discursive practices surrounding texts. An integral part of this level of analysis is an understanding of ideology and hegemony. Ideology, or taken for granted systems of belief that produce status positions and characterize relations between groups (Hall, 1985) also creates and maintains expectations for cultural participation and relations between groups (Williams, 1977). Fairclough follows Althusser (1977) in understanding ideologies as a way to interpellate subjects into discourse, and thus constitute their subjectivities. Fairclough

(1992) argues that texts are “ideologically invested,” linking them to social practices (p. 89). I agree with Fairclough who has a less limited view of agency than Althusser, and endorse a more agentic subject.

Equally important to this level of analysis is an understanding of hegemony. As described earlier, hegemony is the co-creation of social positions and an accompanying hierarchy. This hierarchy is maintained through ideologies. In other words, ideology and hegemony are related in that the former is often used to create and enforce the latter. Hegemony, then is a process of buy-in, where individuals who are not in positions of privilege implicitly consent or reproduce the social systems that keep them in their place. For example, when individuals in poverty talk about their hopes to change their situation and their abilities to move out of poverty on their own, they have bought into a hegemonic understanding of individual meritocracy. Fairclough (1992) argues that understanding discursive practices and functions of language can point to such ideologies and hegemonic structures.

Moreover, Fairclough (1992) follows Foucault (1972) in understanding discursive formations. For Fairclough, discourses are grouped in a way that limits every individual’s understanding/consciousness of the world, thus systematically organizing the way that each of us thinks, and limiting knowledge about social structures and systems that constitute our subjectivities. Fairclough argues that identification of ideologies and hegemony can point out the discursive formations that organize texts.

Furthermore, this identification is where Fairclough (1992) envisions social change. In other words, if researchers can identify discursive formations at this level of analysis, then they can begin to deconstruct them. Fairclough therefore argues that this

level of analysis calls upon researchers to look at the ideological and political effects of texts. In doing so, researchers can make interpretations about individuals' participation with/in cultures, and more importantly, the ways in which individuals are positioned into particular races, classes, genders, sexualities, etc. in relation to each other. This level of analysis is important for understanding how TPP participants' levels of agency are enabled and constrained by poverty discourses.

Although this approach has three distinct steps, it is by no means meant to be linear. Instead, researchers utilizing this approach should fluidly move between the different steps in order to make larger interpretations. For example, if during textual analysis a researcher identifies ways in which an author or speaker made him/herself the authority figure on a subject, the researcher might move to the more abstract level of analysis in order to interpret how that move to exert influence reproduces larger dynamics of social oppression.

Before explaining how this method is most appropriate for my case study, I make two important extensions. First, Fairclough (1992) tends to limit the understanding of a text as oral or written language. I argue that his definition can be extended to include the body—a text that can be read for meaning and written onto. A contemporary understanding of the body as a text already exists in performance theory, and can extend critical discourse analysis.

If one of the goals of CDA is to understand how people are positioned within social structures (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), then it makes sense to look at the actual individuals being positioned and constructing their own positions. Moreover, this extension of *text* answers Kress' (1990) call for critical discourse analysis to look at more

everyday texts. Grossberg (1984) also argues that textual analysis and cultural studies should focus more on cultural meaning, social structures, and everyday life. The body is the most everyday of texts, and is often the most taken for granted.

I recognize the risk in making this extension in light of authors such as Taylor (2003) and Foster (2003) who have worked hard to distinguish embodied knowledge/memory from traditional texts such as those that are written. As previously noted, Taylor asserts that the body has been traditionally left out of what is deemed as text. Yet, I argue that her introduction of the repertoire into academic vocabulary makes similar moves to what I am trying to do here. Taylor argues that it is dangerous to separate “performance practices from the people who perform them and from the ideological framework that gave them rise” (p. 195). I follow Taylor’s assertions by claiming that the body can and should be considered a text—one that is read and written onto and demands scholarly attention. By including the body as text in a critical discourse analysis, a method that already considers the ideological frameworks that Taylor adamantly notes, embodied knowledge is necessarily analyzed in relation to dominant belief systems. I refer to this relationship between the body as text and larger social practices as *embodied discourses*—a term that draws from Taylor’s explanation of the repertoire as embodied memory and from the previous definition of discourse as social interaction with texts.

Second, I argue that Fairclough’s (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis can be applied to lived experiences and observations in interview contexts. By including field research as a text in analysis, researchers are better able to understand the process of production and consumption by directly looking for the ways in which individuals

consciously and unconsciously consume and produce texts. Moreover, by looking at interview transcripts, critical discourse analysis can more specifically identify the ways in which language functions on interpersonal and identity levels by analyzing how individuals talk about themselves, position themselves in relation to others, and discuss social relationships. Finally, this extension can be useful in understanding intertextuality in that the critical discourse analyst can look for connections between verbal communication in interview transcripts, and nonverbal communication that becomes apparent on the body. This is an extension of the way that intertextuality has traditionally been conceived of as a chronological chain. I argue that intertextuality can also refer to the ways in which texts (more broadly) inform other texts. Thus, the training materials inform the bodily performance of TPP participants, and certain performances, such as using formal register, inform other performances, such as joking or contesting the utility of such talk in informal contexts, for example.

Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis, in conjunction with these extensions, becomes useful when applied to my case study of TPP. As described above, the organization has a lengthy training process that utilizes materials that tend to generalize class experiences. I argue that CDA is useful in looking at the written training materials, transcripts of interviews with TPP participants, and the bodies of the individuals who participate in TPP. In order to answer the research questions, an application of Fairclough's (1992) approach requires a systematic investigation of training manuals and workbooks, analysis of interview transcripts (which both ask about the training texts and look for consumption of the training texts), and finally, requires observation about the way the participants' bodies take up training materials (for

instance, what are they wearing, how do they sit, and what tone are they using).

Fairclough's approach is most suitable in that it emphasizes the intertextual interplay amongst these texts, and has the potential to achieve social change by deconstructing the discursive formations that are utilized in the TPP training materials.

To accomplish this multifaceted analysis, below I move from giving attention to training materials/organizational written texts, to interview transcripts, and finally to the body as text(s). The first step is analysis of the form and function of the training materials, produced, in part, by a for-profit company, in order to provide background of the discourses that TPP participants were asked to consume. Second, I move to an analysis of the interview transcripts.

Finally, I expand traditional approaches to CDA by analyzing the body as a set of texts. Throughout the interview and observation process, I noted any time the individuals tried to talk about and use TPP concepts, when they could not remember the concepts or examples I requested, and when they mispronounced or misused a concept, among other performative moves. Moreover, I had the opportunity to observe some TPP participants during their weekly meeting (including instances where a person in poverty was meeting with their middle-class ally), in which I was able to further observe the verbal and nonverbal embodied discourses. These observations were particularly useful in understanding the interplay between texts and social practices.

With regard to applying an analytical framework, performance theory can be successfully integrated into Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis. In Fairclough's first step, I accomplish a descriptive analysis by linking the ideational level of meaning to *class realization*. For example, I looked for the cognitive processes

associated with embodied discourses as they are related to the building of worldviews. I also looked for meaning at the interpersonal level by analyzing performances that occurred within relationships between people in poverty and their middle-class allies. In step two of Fairclough's approach, I linked the discursive practices of production and consumption to the performative concepts of *class actualization*, *surrogation*, and *affect*. Observations of performance become important in the second step of Fairclough's method because evidence of production and consumption becomes more apparent in the slippages that occur in the recitation of TPP concepts by the participants. In analyzing singular texts, it is difficult to fully understand how texts are consumed. Yet, when analyzing a text against a body that has consumed it, the "success" of production/consumption can become apparent. Third, I accomplished an analysis of sociocultural practices by looking at various rituals that are enacted in TPP and interpreting how such practices reinforce wider societal ideologies.

After an analysis of all three texts, it is important to be flexible in moving from description and more concrete levels of analysis (form and function) to more abstract levels. I not only looked at how power, ideology, and subjectivity are implicated in the texts, but also the ways in which the texts inform each other and how ideologies become apparent on the body through production and consumption. For example, if an individual being interviewed attempted to use concepts from the training materials, I noted whether or not s/he successfully or unsuccessfully named and applied such concepts. If a concept is misrepresented or misnamed, I argue that this indicates a slippage between production and consumption—the performance of the individual being interviewed has not consumed the text in the way it was meant to be read. This can also indicate to what

extent an individual is interpellated into TPP discourses. Thus, I moved between texts, looking for connections and ways that each text bolsters a larger argument about ideological beliefs and hegemonic structures. For example, if an ideology such as “pulling yourself up by the bootstraps” becomes apparent in the training materials, is reiterated in interview texts and is then put into practice by the body, then I can make a stronger argument about links between texts, discursive practices, and sociocultural participation. The multiple texts become evidence for arguments made about any singular text—an approach that strengthens the CDA methodology.

Conclusion

In summary, I utilize Fairclough’s (1992) method of CDA as a way to understand texts and the extent to which they reflect efforts to create potential social change within TPP sites and their communities. On a micro level, Fairclough’s approach is useful in analyzing each of the texts in this study: training materials, interview transcripts, and individual bodies. On a macro level, Fairclough’s approach asks the researcher to move to a level of abstraction that considers larger social contexts, hegemonic structures, and cultural participation. This is particularly useful in understanding how TPP training materials are influenced by broader social discourses about poverty and subsequently perpetuate dominant worldviews. Thus, Fairclough’s method is apt for considering TPP texts within broader discourses about poverty.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TRAINING MATERIALS

My first exposure to this nonprofit organization was through the training materials. I have to admit that before I put my academic blinders on I was, in some ways, impressed with the materials. Had I received these materials when I was living in poverty in rural Pennsylvania, I may have been “empowered.” Memory banking was a skill that I was highly adept at. If I could memorize information and regurgitate it on a multiple-choice exam, I could show that I was better than where/what I came from. I absolutely remember code switching to make sure that I sounded a particular way when I was with a particular group of people. I remember a desire to own name-brand clothing and the disappointment I felt when I had to settle for the Walmart brand. I remember thinking about what it would take to leave my lower-class background behind. So, looking at the workbook may have helped me feel as though I can traverse impoverished circumstances and work toward success. As I later note, many people in poverty that I interviewed had this same glimmer of hope. I understand what they are seeing and sensing, and yet I think that their engagement with poverty materials can be much more stimulating and effective. I think that that they could grow even more if they had access to more information about what has kept them in poverty. It seems like the workbooks are trying to keep a secret by trying to hide the presence and influence of social structures. I now look at these materials and think/know that they can be better. Empowerment is not just about learning a set of “rules” for success, but it is about creating ground-up change. It is about awareness and enactment of agency—something that cannot be accomplished through a transmissional approach to education.⁷

This chapter explores the ways in which ending-poverty training materials represent class subjectivities and relationships. I specifically look at two publications produced by a for-profit organization called aha! Processes Inc. aha! produces multiple for-profit texts about anti-poverty. Here, I refer to two of these publications: *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities (BOP)* by Ruby Payne, Philip DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith and *Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life (GA)* by Philip DeVol. The aha! website notes that these materials are primarily used by non-profit organizations, schools, and training programs that, “aim to provide a safe, agenda-free learning environment” for people in poverty (DeVol, 2011).

The *GA* training program was created as a way to teach individuals living in poverty how to pull themselves out of their circumstances and participate in the middle class. This aha! program was designed to take four months to complete, and participants are often monetarily compensated for attendance. The *GA* manual is organized into fifteen modules including: (1) Getting Started, (2) What It's Like Now, (3) Theory of Change, (4) The Rich/Poor Gap and How it Works, (5) Hidden Rules of Economic Class, (6) Eleven Resources, (7) Stages of Change, (8) Self-Assessment Regarding Resources, (9) Building Resources, (10) Community Assessment, (11) Your Plan for Getting from Poverty to Prosperity, (12) Creating Mental Models for Your Personal Path Out of Poverty and for Community Prosperity, (13) Closing and Transition, (14) Where to Go to Build Personal and Community Resources, and (15) Reading List. Several of the chapters discuss theories of individual change and others focus on social group and community development.

The *BOP* book outlines financial, cognitive, and communicative differences that exist between groups living in poverty, middle class, and wealth. The book is broken into 15 chapters including: (1) Definitions and Resources, (2) The Role of Language and Story, (3) Hidden Rules Among Classes, (4) Patterns in Generational Poverty, (5) Role Models and Emotional Resources, (6) Support Systems, (7) Mentoring and Bridging, (8) Discipline, Choices, and Consequences, (9) Resources and Resiliency: Internal Assets, (10) Improving the Work Performance: Teaching What is Needed to Do the Job, (11) Creating Relationships with People in Poverty, (12) Developing Personal Skills for Working with People in Poverty, (13) Improving Agency Policies and Internal Processes, (14) Improving Interagency Collaboration, and (15) Poverty Culture, Addiction,

Treatment, and Recovery. The materials include information on financial resources and management, communication norms for different classes, and strategies for resource development. *BOP* is primarily geared toward individuals who did not grow up in poverty. This text is used in training programs across the country that attempt to expose professional community members to the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the poor in order to “build an accurate mental model of poverty” (Payne, DeVol, Smith, 2001, p. 5). *BOP* highlights differences between people in poverty, people in the middle class, and people in wealth in order for social service and other professionals to better understand clients who are living in poverty.

Bridges Out of Poverty has been critiqued for its monolithic understanding of class and its blaming of the victim for being in poverty (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2005). These critiques are also part of the context in which these materials are evaluated. Though widely used across the U.S. and certainly having some impact, this analysis uncovers the implicit agendas in the aha! materials and suggests ways that the materials can be improved to have even greater impact. Therefore, I return to my research questions for the analysis of these training materials: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced in the aha! materials? (2) What do subjects’ status positions and relationships that emerge in the aha! texts reveal about levels of agency? and, (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the aha! texts? To accomplish these goals, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of the aha! materials. In what follows, I first analyze the interpersonal, identity, and ideational functions of language in and across the two texts. Second, I explore the

production and consumption processes that influence each text. Finally, I move to a more abstract level of analysis by considering the textual links to broader societal ideologies.

Analysis

Descriptive Analysis: Interpersonal, Identity, and Ideational Functions of Language

The language used in *Getting Ahead* functions to produce particular worldviews, understandings of social interactions, and understandings of self. In analyzing the interpersonal function of language in *GA*, a social hierarchy emerges and is emphasized throughout the text. It becomes clear that readers are positioned as subjugated to middle class or wealthy individuals. Frequent comparisons between poverty, middle class, and wealth literally center the middle-class lifestyle as the norm—something to be desired. Visual examples that position poverty on the left, wealth on the right, and middle class in the center are used to delineate lifestyle characteristics between the three class groups. For example, the text describes what drives each class group including “entertainment” for people in poverty, “work” and “achievement” for the middle class, and “financial, political, [and] social connections” for the wealthy (DeVol, 2006, p. 47). These comparative tables reemerge in several of the modules, further emphasizing the cultural differences between the groups and the centralization of the middle class. The text states that people in poverty need to “know and be able to use the hidden rules of the middle class” (p. 4).

Furthermore, schools, agencies, and corporations are described as “middle class” throughout the text. DeVol (2006) claims, “Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class” (p. 44). In describing these institutions as middle class, the text emphasizes that day-to-day operations require middle

class ways of knowing. In other words, in order to be successful in the social world people in poverty must learn how to be middle class. Thus, even small aspects of a person's life (e.g. picking children up from school) become wrapped up in social class and follow a normalized middle-class pattern. Individuals who do not follow these cultural codes are considered less-than the standard of middle class and subsequently abnormal.

Throughout the *GA* materials, there appears to be a psychological emphasis that suggests cognitive changes will best move people out of poverty. There are many references to the need for “motivation” and “persistence.” For example, DeVol (2006) claims, “Another thing we must have to change is motivation...being ready, willing, and able” (p. 70). Moreover, motivation and persistence are listed as an essential resource for people wanting to move into the middle class. Under this resource list, people in poverty or those “in crisis” are described as “avoid[ing] work when possible,” or “giv[ing] up easily” (p. 95). The middle class or “thriving” category claims that the successful individual “actively seeks to maintain motivation and persistence—and assist others in finding theirs” (p. 90). These guiding assumptions draw attention to the individual and unfortunately take away much-needed attention from larger challenging systems such as abusive payday lending laws, levels of bureaucracy in government programs, restrictive educational loan policies, and institutional norms.

Examples offered in the *GA* materials frequently valorize partnerships between middle class and those in poverty and endorse middle-class values and communication styles. The materials generically represent the middle class as achievement-oriented, educated, self-sufficient, and future-oriented. For example, in the resource lists described

above, people in the middle class are described as being able to see “the big picture,” “make plans,” and “promote motivation and persistence” in others (p. 90). Middle-class individuals are “life-long learner[s]” (p. 88), asset builders (p. 86) and “lead by example” (p. 94). On the other hand, people in poverty “often lie and deceive others (p. 94), “often goof off while on the job” (p. 95), and may be “part of a hate group” (p. 93). These highlighted positionings solidify the normalization of the middle class and represent lower and working class individuals as sub-par or abnormal.

GA materials present those in the middle class and those in poverty as binary opposites. For example, the materials claim that people in poverty value the present whereas the middle class values the future (DeVol, 2006, p. 47); people in poverty believe in fate, but the middle class believes in choice (p. 93); and those in poverty overvalue relationships while those in the middle class value achievement (p. 47). As a result, class subjectivities are presented in a way that can influence individual goals, language use, and relationship formation between those moving out of poverty and middle-class allies.

In addition, advice to those in poverty takes the form of linking socioeconomic mobility to leaving some people, and previous relationships, behind. DeVol (2006) claims, “In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement” (p. 44). Such advice suggests that valuing relationships is a norm violation, and discounts the potential for alliances and relationships across class levels to address economic policy change or solicit broader community support. Such examples also connote that relationships held by those living in poverty are deterrents to socioeconomic mobility.

Language in the *GA* text functions on an identity level to illustrate how conceptions of the self are produced and maintained. The voices of poverty presented are relatively generic or universal. The readers find texts in which people who are living in poverty are constructed to all come from the same social position. I contend that social class is the central identity category being discussed in the *GA* materials that is being emphasized as well as homogenized. The author argues that social class is irrelevant. For example, DeVol (2006) writes, “[*GA*]...is not about social class. Social class is about judgment, comparison, and snobbery—and takes place in all economic classes” (p. 1). The text describes the focus as economic class rather than social class, and argues that it is a stand-alone category that should not be conflated with social class. Such a definition supports a monolithic understanding of class as the individual’s acquisition of money. Moreover, denying a more holistic view of class based on social discourses and norms in the U.S. that position persons in poverty as lazy, uneducated, lacking initiative, and as potential criminals; and structures such as unfair labor practices, legal bureaucracies, and predatory lending agencies; acts to discount the lived realities of those who are classified as living in poverty (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semington, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2005). By dismissing the social context and hierarchies experienced, and calling social class judgmental and snobbish, the *GA* workbook discounts social class experiences and the context that produces individuals’ opportunities, and ultimately erases their everyday experiences.

Language functions to produce similar hierarchies, constructions of class groups, and worldviews in the *Bridges Out of Poverty* text. In *BOP* a class hierarchy is reinforced again through the use of the labels “poverty,” “middle class,” and “wealth.” Moreover,

the reader is assumed to be at least middle class and a professional who works with people in poverty on a day-to-day basis. This is assumed from the beginning, as the title of the workbook implies that it is for “professionals” working with people in “poverty.” The book addresses poverty as if it is outside of the reader. For example, one checklist/survey asks the reader, “Could you survive in poverty?” (p. 40). Questions such as this one suggest that the readers have never been in poverty and fit into the middle class.

Texts from *BOP* support a top-down class hierarchy as they suggest readers use the book as a lens to “view their clients” and “understand people from poverty” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 11). Moreover, the book frames the middle-class reader as active; they are responsible for providing resources, “using appropriate discipline strategies and approaches,” “teaching the hidden rules,” and “increasing individuals’ achievement levels through appropriate instruction and treatment” (p. 68). The text frames people in poverty as alien or the *other* who must be explored and “directly taught” proper behaviors and norms (p. 37). Indeed, the text contends that “clients [in poverty] need to be told” how to perform middle classedness (p. 34). People in poverty, while the subject of the text, are de-centered as the text normalizes middle-class ways of knowing and doing. Additionally, the middle-class readers of *BOP* are framed as authority figures on class (and subsequently poverty). In one section of the book, people in poverty are referred to as “protégés” and the role of the reader is described as one who “mediate[s] individuals to middle class” (p. 102). This language further emphasizes a top-down approach to building relationships. This assertion leaves out the voices of people in

poverty as active producers of reality, thus interpellating them into essentialized positions of being uneducated, overly reliant on entertainment, and lacking motivation.

Language functions ideationally in *BOP* to produce monolithic understandings of different class groups. Whereas the *GA* materials use labels to define “economic classes,” *BOP* takes a step further by assigning people in poverty their own culture: *the poverty culture*. The frequent use of this identifier further homogenizes social class and perpetuates an understanding of low-income individuals as the *other*. Like the *GA* materials, *BOP* chooses to leave out discussions of race, ethnicity, region, sexuality, ability, gender, nationality, and religion. The authors pay token attention to the importance of these differences. They note, “poverty is relative” and only exists “in relationship to known quantities or expectations” (p. 6). One line also states, “Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries” but does not explain this assertion (p. 6). In other words, the authors note that poverty is not a one-size-fits-all position (and may be responding to critiques that their work assumes that it is), but move forward in their framework without room for multiple lived experiences under the label of “poverty.” These examples serve to homogenize and paint a colorblind picture of poverty; if everyone experiences it, then race or nationality do not matter. The text assumes, for the most part, that there is a knowable culture of poverty that can be explained to curious onlookers who can prepare themselves to help *change* these individuals.

The framing of both the *BOP* and *GA* materials in terms of economic class points to a larger issue concerning the homogenization of the culture of poverty and individuals who experience poverty. The monolithic portrayal of poverty in *aha!* materials includes blanket generalizations about what poverty looks like, who experiences poverty, and how

people experience poverty. The comparative tables in the *GA* materials describe people in poverty as experiencing a unified set of motivations for “survival” and “entertainment,” having a present orientation with regard to time, using a matriarchal family structure, and being fatalistic, while those in the middle class are presented as oriented toward work and achievement, having a future orientation to time, using a patriarchal family structure, and believing in individual choice and the potential to change one’s circumstances (DeVol, 2006, p. 47). Perhaps in recognition of his use of broad stereotypes, DeVol supplements this table with the explanation that “understanding the hidden rules can help you *if* you don’t think of them as your identity” (p. 46). This explanation proves the point that simply charting presumptions made about broadly defined class groups overgeneralizes diverse social experiences related to economic stability and does implicate “identities.” Despite DeVol’s warning, he constructs bi-polar identities for people in poverty versus the model identity of a middle class individual.

The materials do mention in a few places that there are exceptions to the patterns and there may be cultural variations in experiences of poverty. There are also statements that indicate working on poverty issues without dealing with race, ethnicity, gender, and other cultural issues is not possible. However after giving a token nod to cultural group variations, the text emphasizes that the focus is on economic class alone. While these statements point out the importance of complicating poverty and recognizing difference, they also brush off these issues as less important. To say that poverty looks the same for individuals who identify with diverse races, ethnicities, sexes, geographic regions, religions, etc. is not consistent with numerous calls for moving beyond essentialist, overgeneralized characterizations that describe members of one culture group, such as

those living poverty, as if they share the same psychological attributes, affective orientations, and behavioral tendencies (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000; Leondar-Wright, 2005; Shome & Hegde, 2002; West, 2001). Thus, the descriptions of different class groups offered by the aha! texts ignore a call for intersectionality that would better represent lived realities of people in poverty and the middle class whose day-to-day interactions are also influenced by the numerous social categories that amalgamate into their subjectivities.

Such monocultural descriptions have been similarly criticized in that such characterizations do not reflect individuals' multiplicity of cultural group memberships, and the ways in which individuals are positioned differently according to intersecting cultural representations (Collier, 2005). Experiences of poverty and treatment by others for a white, single, thirty-year-old male in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho are decidedly different from those of an African American mother of three, who is single, forty-five, and living in a small town in Mississippi. Arguing that economic class can be looked at in isolation, regardless of social class or race, sex, ethnicity, gender, region, religion, etc. does not provide a relevant foundation from which individuals live and learn about impoverished circumstances nor offer valid strategies for change. Because poverty impacts people from different regions, nations, sexes, races, and sexualities both similarly and differently, the material consequences of such circumstances are necessarily experienced differently by different groups. In sum, the representation of poverty in the materials neglects broadly circulating stereotypes, systemic racism and sexism, and ways that groups are singled out and experience poverty differently.

Additionally, the lack of attention to social categories beyond economic class (i.e. race, sex, age, region) ignores the multiple and different contexts in which people in poverty experience their circumstances. Recognizing other identity categories throughout the materials is important because institutions and people stereotype based on these categories, make judgments based on the intersections of these identity categories, and most importantly, assign resources based on such views. The materials suggest that people in poverty need to work with institutions to earn resources and power, but how individuals moving out of poverty should approach this is not described. While the purpose of the materials is not to change societal practices and norms related to racism, sexism, and other systematic forms of oppression, to ignore these and to describe skills in ways that presume they will work effectively for members of all groups is unrealistic and could set program participants up for failure.

The ideational function of language becomes even more apparent when examining particular concepts specific to frameworks used by aha! Processes Inc. and descriptions of communication competence. First, aha! has coined and co-opted specific concepts that help drive new worldviews and understandings for people moving through either of these trainings. These include (1) *generational and situational poverty*, (2) *the hidden rules*, and (3) *casual and formal registers*. Each of these concepts appears in both *BOP* and *GA* and recurs throughout both of the texts. Payne, DeVol, and Smith (2001) define generational poverty as “being in poverty for two generations or longer” and situational poverty as “a shorter time [that] is caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.)” (p. 7). In *BOP*, these concepts are introduced early on in order to help readers identify which “poverty culture” to apply to their clients. In *GA*, these concepts

are never defined, but are referred to when addressing mindsets and skills that differ between the middle class and poverty. DeVol (2006) simply writes, “Generational poverty and situational poverty are different” under a list of key points to remember (p. 44). Placing this point in a list before DeVol describes various “discourse patterns” and behaviors of different class groups, suggests that the characteristics he offers can only be applied to generational poverty—a caveat that is unclear, but nevertheless should be used to point out that poverty is not a one-size-fits-all subject position. Here, he begins to tell readers how poverty is not a homogenous experience, but falls short in details.

Another concept, *the hidden rules*, is at the core of both texts and is used to guide many of the examples in both *BOP* and *GA*. DeVol (2006) defines the hidden rules as “unwritten and unspoken cues and habits” of different groups (p. 45). This is the same definition offered in *BOP*. He further explains that “all groups of people and all cultures have their own hidden rules” and understanding them helps us to “fit in” (p. 45). Some examples of hidden rules of people in poverty include “I know how to physically fight and defend myself physically” or “I know how to move in half a day” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 40). Middle-class hidden rules include “I know how to order in a nice restaurant” and “I know how to help my children with their homework” (p. 41). These examples are brief, but demonstrate the stereotypical nature of such “rules.” Moreover, the lengthy lists of hidden rules that are offered creates a negative framework through which people in poverty can be viewed in contrast with a more positive framework through which people in the middle class are viewed. Not only are different class groups represented as fundamentally different, but different values such as achievement, employment, education, and the future are also assigned to each class.

At some points in *GA*, the “hidden rules” are linked solely to economic class.

DeVol (2006) clarifies the concept by naming them “the hidden rules of economic class.”

The emphasis on economic class is exacerbated by explanations such as,

We will be studying the hidden rules of economic class only. Middle-class people of all racial and ethnic groups share some economic class rules; the same is true for people in poverty and wealth. We are not studying other sets of rules. (p. 45)

This explanation can be problematic in that it creates worldviews in which race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other social categories are ignored. In an effort to centralize class, once again other parts of a person’s identity are subsequently erased from TPP participants’ worldviews.

Two final concepts include *casual and formal registers of language*. In *GA*, DeVol (2006) uses a small table to describe different types of language used by varying classes. He defines the formal register as “The standard sentence syntax and word choice of work and school. Has complete sentences and specific word choice” (p. 50). Casual register is defined as, “Language between friends and is characterized by a 400- to 800-word spoken vocabulary. Word choice general and not specific. Conversation dependent on nonverbal assists. Syntax often incomplete” (p. 50). In addition, DeVol describes the formal register as direct, chronological, and abstract. This lies in contrast to the casual register, which is described as circular, common, and reliant on others. In *BOP*, examples of casual register are tied to the communication of people in “generational poverty” (p. 53). In describing the casual register, Payne, DeVol, and Smith (2001) write, “Almost always the TV is on, no matter what the circumstance,” and “casual register is used for everything” (p. 53). Examples of the casual register include sentences such as “Ain’t his

other brother there?” and “Remember that time Walter got drunk and wrecked her car?” (pp. 51-52). Again, these examples function to create worldviews that position people in poverty as uneducated and reckless, as opposed to the professionalized middle class. Heavy reliance on these concepts throughout both texts continues to construct an understanding of social class groups as homogenized and fundamentally different from other class groups.

In the materials, suggestions for moving out of poverty are based, in part, on an overly simplistic and linear conception of communication competence. While there is ample attention to different registers of formality, vocabulary and nonverbal cues, recommendations for those in poverty to learn to think and speak like members of the middle class reflect a series of problematic assumptions. These include: a) persons moving out of poverty should and will be able to perform the expected “middle class” behaviors across all situations, b) the “middle class” verbal and nonverbal messages used by persons moving out of poverty will be understood similarly, viewed as acceptable, normative and effective, c) transmitting the appropriate messages will be effective, in that their behavior will garner them membership into the middle class, and using middle class behaviors will move them out of poverty. Each of these claims is open to question.

The conception of communication competence advanced in the texts implies a transmissional model of communication that is based on “one-way” communication “from a sender to a receiver.” The language used in the materials presumes that using “middle class” behaviors with “middle class” intentions will be understood as intended and rewarded. Models of interpersonal communication across contemporary textbooks (see McCornack, 2010) teach that communication is transactional, meanings are “in

people” as well as emergent and dynamic across messages, and affected by “noise” and “feedback” and context rather than simply “in messages.” Communication scholars who call for a transactional approach have long criticized this one-way type of communication (Craig, 2007; Deetz, 1994; Shepherd, 1993). In saying that communication is a transaction, these scholars recognize that there is more than one party involved in meaning assignment, and context matters.

In the *GA* materials, individuals are taught that by behaving according to expected norms they will be perceived as competent by employers and co-workers and become successful. This focus leaves out the other parties involved in communication as well as the dynamic ways that the norms about what is appropriate change depending on the relationship, situation, productivity, organizational climate, and levels of privilege present between both parties. This overly simplistic view of communication and agency takes for granted the messy and dynamic nature of day-to-day communication.

At the ideational level, the language of *BOP* functions to construct a social reality that is entirely middle class. The text is framed in a way that emphasizes middle-class norms and takes for granted other ways of knowing. Moreover, the frequent use of “middle-class” as a state or as its own culture assumes that there is a static and knowable middle class. This, then, takes up a similar transmissional model of communication that encourages middle-class professionals to share knowledge of acceptable, preferred lifestyles with their client/protégé. This approach to learning and relationship building becomes more like parent-child teaching, than a collaborative alliance and leaves out the multiple voices of people in poverty. Thus, the potential for dialogue is stifled in favor of a transmissional approach.

This transmissional approach supports a model of communication competence that is outdated. Several of the chapters in the *BOP* book focus on teaching communication skills in order to successfully move a person in poverty into the middle class. For example, the book explains, “Teaching clients...to use the adult voice (i.e., the language of negotiation) is important for success,” (p. 117) “Clients and program participants need to be taught the hidden rules of middle class,” (p. 47) and “Discourse patterns need to be directly taught” (p. 37). These quotations suggest that communication competence or effectiveness will directly impact a person’s financial outcomes. Such a simplistic view of communication competence ignores context and individual positionalities. Collier (1998) encourages us to ask “competence and acceptance for whom? Who decides the criteria? Who doesn’t? Competent or acceptable on the basis of what social and historical context?” (p. 142). These questions point out that the language used in *BOP* constructs a social reality in which some voices are included and others are left out.

Discursive Practices: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

The texts analyzed here are greatly influenced by the contexts in which they are produced. These texts were produced within the broader context described earlier—one in which the middle class has been normalized and valorized compared to the poor and working-class groups. The aha! texts draw from the same “culture of poverty” discourses that position the poor as subjugated to the middle class. Despite critiques of Payne’s (2001) framework (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2008; Osei-Kofi, 2005) that claim her material produces a monolithic understanding of poverty that ignores other aspects of individuals’ identities, the same homogenizing themes continue

to be utilized and centralized in later aha! publications such as DeVol's (2006) *Getting Ahead* workbook and newer editions of the *Bridges Out of Poverty* series.

These materials are used in workshop and training programs to specifically address issues of economic class and aim to improve the livelihood of people living in poverty. Moreover, the publisher notes that the trainings using these and similar materials are being conducted in every region of the country and in such settings as prisons, court-ordered programs, healthcare, mental health associations, and various schools. Further the materials are being used in big cities, small towns and with people from many races and ethnic groups.

Transforming Poverty Partnerships uses the workbooks in 62 communities across 23 states. In lieu of a specific TPP ally training, many sites require their allies to go through a training designed by aha! staff. Training time varies and ranges from 2 to 16 hours. However, staff at various TPP sites have indicated that they make alterations to the texts to suit their needs. These alterations include site-specific adjustments (accounting for race, sexuality, etc.), inserting more time for discussion, and/or leaving out particular modules. Several participants in poverty across the sites that I visited indicated that they did not finish the *GA* workbook. The *GA* text that is actually discussed and utilized changes during the implementation stage and this inevitably affects consumption of these materials.

The production of these texts occurs in a broader political, historical, social and economic context in the U.S. Both texts are based on Ruby Payne's framework for understanding poverty. When *Bridges Out of Poverty* was published, U.S. anti-poverty policy was in flux. In 1996 (only a few years prior to publication), steep welfare reform

was underway. One specific policy, deemed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), altered the goal of social welfare from a program that helped needy individuals and families to one that rewarded needy families for hard work. This act was passed under President Bill Clinton, whose campaign promise was to “end welfare as we know it” (Ellwood, 2000) and to make a “covenant” with “the hard-working middle class” (Clinton, 1991). Moreover, E. Clay Shaw, Jr., the Republican who introduced the bill, did so on the grounds that poverty was the cause for heightened immigration. He claimed, “The inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty was written before welfare...People came to this country to work. Now the question becomes, ‘Are these handouts a magnet that is bringing people into this country? To some degree, they are’” (Lacayo & Blackman, 1994).

PRWORA not only shifted anti-poverty policy, but also forever changed the discourse associated with poverty. The name of the bill itself frames poverty as an individual problem—not a social one. It calls for hard work and personal “responsibility.” Moreover, the link between welfare and immigration frames poverty as an immigrant issue. Such discourses became an important context for the production of these texts and invariably influenced the framework on which they are based. Together, these issues demonstrate a foundation from which Payne’s framework emerged—one in which American Dream discourses of hard-work and individual meritocracy are reinscribed, poverty is closely aligned with people of color, and middle-class white values are upheld.

In addition to the contexts in which these texts were produced, the ways in which these texts were distributed is important to this analysis. First, the overlapping language and use of Payne’s framework for understanding poverty demonstrates intertextuality

between the two texts. These texts are often distributed in the same community with the intention of educating groups of individuals in poverty and those in the middle class. The intertextuality of the texts becomes important because of the possibility for relationship building between and across class groups. More detail about the extent to which this is achieved, and how participants describe consumption, is reflected in the analysis of interview texts.

Distribution, nonetheless, does affect consumption and is inconsistent according to the facilitators who adapt the texts. In my conversations with individuals who participated in training that used these texts, I learned that often times some chapters or modules were skipped or left out of the training. The module that was most frequently left out (according to participant responses) was the final module in *Getting Ahead* on community building. This module is one of two places in the workbook that links individual capacity to larger social structures. Moreover, it is the only module that incorporates a problem-posing, critically-engaged approach to training that may lead to increased levels of agency (Freire, 1970). Thus, the distribution and facilitation of the texts influences the consumption of the texts.

Sociocultural Practices: Identifying Discourses, Ideologies, Agency, and Power

Within both texts, issues of power, agency, and hegemony become problematic. In this section, I analyze how these constructs are implicated and implicate wider societal ideologies and social practices. Previously, I described the intertextual relationship between the two training texts. Here, I move to a more abstract level to analyze points of interdiscursivity within and between the two texts. Discourses in these training texts overlap, reinforcing dominant middle-class ideologies for both middle-class readers and

individuals who are trying to move out of poverty. A class hierarchy is reinforced, normalizing the middle class and placing the brunt of responsibility to change class positioning on the person in poverty. When one looks at this set of discourses together, an intertextual chain is formed. Foucault (1972) describes this intertextual chain by arguing that all knowledge is formed out of a “network of references” that must be uncovered and broken down. Three discourses emerge from this analysis, including: (1) education and resources create power, (2) individuals have the ability to choose their path in life and, (3) hard work equals success. These discourses became evident in the repeated value placed on individual change, visual images of a social/economic ladder that one is expected to climb, and lists of tools that make moving out of poverty and into a middle-class lifestyle possible.

In the *GA* materials, power is presented as an individual capacity, rather than a relational production. The materials offer a definition of power that implies that it is what an individual has with regard to resources that is important. The *GA* workbook contains an entire module about 11 different resources that make an individual successful. These resources include: financial, emotional, mental, formal register, spiritual, integrity and trust, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, motivation and persistence, and knowledge of hidden rules (DeVol, 2006, p. 64). As indicated in this list, one cannot move up in class unless they match their financial success with a knowledge of middle-class ways of talking and middle-class hidden rules. Moreover, the description of “mental” resources, for example, claims that people need to have “the mental ability and acquired skills...to deal with daily life” (p. 64). This instance is representative of other places in the text that indicate knowledge leads to success.

In *GA*, knowledge of resources is connected to “power.” Individuals are told that they have “power” to change their own circumstances. For example, the book explains that “with the information we have, we can gain power in our lives and in our communities” (DeVol, 2006, p. 4). A middle class understanding of power as described in *GA* is guided by “taking responsibility for solutions” (p. 47). Moreover, DeVol explains, “the more resources a person has, the easier it is for him/her to change” (p. 21). The activity paired with this explanation is titled, “deciding to change,” suggesting that increased resources and subsequently a higher-class status are directly related to personal decision-making. This worldview ignores an understanding of external forces that both enable and constrain individual agency. This orientation is limited and ignores societal systems and relations between institutions, structures and individual actions that function to keep class hierarchies in place.

In *BOP*, power is also related to building resources. This text also includes an entire chapter about different resources (financial, spiritual, relationships, coping, emotional, mental, linguistic, etc.) that one can possess and increase. The text explains that when a person lacks resources, they live in “the poverty culture” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 27). The text continues, “Once it has been determined that the problems being faced by clients or employees are not systems issues, the resources of the individual should be analyzed” (p. 28). While a recognition of systems issues is important, this line suggests that it is possible for individuals to exist outside of “the system,” a contention with which Foucault (1972) and Althusser (1977) would disagree, based on interpellation. In other words, these authors would argue that individuals living in poverty are called into question by systems like welfare, food stamps, and WIC. Even

if these “systems” are not a part of the individual’s everyday life, they are still drawn into discourses about “what poverty is like” that include such factors. Thus, the individual’s day-to-day experiences are tied up in a web of discourses that need to be navigated. Whether increased resources or information, these are the tools for socioeconomic mobility, to be increased, and used for personal success—not one part of the complex picture of poverty and relationships that are contextually produced and socially constructed.

Language in both workbooks constructs a world in which a binary understanding of power is constructed; power is a set of resources and skills, and some have it, and some do not. This limited view of power, agency, and competence ignores critical calls to consider context (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010). Such a portrayal of power lacks recognition of the role of social and economic structures such as high interest rates for pay day lending, food stamp regulations, unemployment office policies and procedures, or section eight housing programs, that maintain and perpetuate institutional policies and normative systems limiting agency and options for social mobility. As Foucault (1972) argues, power is not an individual capacity; it is a communicative production, and exists in relations between groups or between groups and institutions. Fairclough (1992) follows Foucault in arguing the power cannot exist outside of the parameters of discourse. The materials, therefore, oversimplify ideas of power as an individual capacity rather than an interrelated and fluid set of discursive processes, group/institutional practices, and individual actions that are intricately connected to discursive formations.

Agency, a contested term, is understood in this study as the dialectical tension between individual capacity and interpellation or control of an individual by discourse.

The aha! materials produce an acontextual view of agency that assumes high individual capacity for participants to move out of poverty given the mastery of middle class values and orientations. This results in an overarching discourse that individuals have the ability to choose their paths in life. The materials offer many examples of how individuals can increase their abilities to take action and work within structures such as employment agencies, educational institutions, or community organizations. For example, both *GA* and *BOP* suggest that changing talk to be more formal and middle class helps people in poverty navigate agencies and organizations. In *GA*, DeVol (2006) describes the formal register—a required resource—as “having the vocabulary, language ability, and negotiation skills to succeed in work and/or school environments” (p. 64). In *BOP*, the authors suggest that a more formal register will help people in poverty appeal to police officers, counselors, welfare department workers, and health care providers” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 34). Moreover, both texts introduce the concept of *hidden rules*, or “knowing the unspoken cues and habits of both middle class and wealth” (DeVol, 2006, p. 64). DeVol explains that people in poverty should “think of the hidden rules as a choice” (p. 46). He further explains that these rules are useful in navigating different class settings. These do-it-yourself suggestions for change imply that attention is being paid to increasing individual agency and that people have the ability to move out of poverty. However, the texts do not describe the extent to which these options for action are contextually enabled *and* constrained. In other words, the person in poverty’s agency is assumed to be high, in part because institutional contexts such as public policy are not considered.

Again however, the assumption seems to be that using particular behaviors will enable the individual to move out of poverty, to reap the rewards such as receiving financial help, a job offer, or a new partnership with a middle-class person. While these “recipes” may enhance participants’ abilities to produce a meal, they are predicated on the assumption that the ingredients are within reach, a fully functioning kitchen is accessible, and there is a standard meal that everyone will want to cook and find nourishing. Thus, levels of agency need to be contextualized and examined in the context of power relations.

The *GA* materials place responsibility on individuals in poverty to take action, obtain resources, find information, and perform expected ways of talking. This points to a discourse of “hard work equals success.” Such a focus puts both the blame and responsibility on the “victims,” the persons in poverty, instead of pointing out the important social systems and structures that have enabled conditions of poverty to endure. There are assumptions that changing individual attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about new ways of behaving will increase economic mobility. This characterization of individuals’ abilities to move out of poverty is one of the major critiques of such programs offered by educators (Gorski, 2006, 2008). Those in poverty (the victims of social constraints) are “blamed” or held responsible for their own victimization and are expected to move themselves out of their current circumstances. The assumption seems to be that acquisition of these mental models and behavioral skills used by the middle class are the major steps to economic mobility. Further, only five pages are devoted to contextual assessment.

In summary, the emphasis on the individual implies that people in poverty can, with the tools provided in the materials, increase their levels of agency sufficiently to move out of poverty. The recognition that agency is both constructed and produced and that contextual forces both enable and constrain individual action is missing.

Such assumptions about individual responsibility are driven by ideologies. By taking an interdiscursive approach to analysis, undergirding ideologies are revealed. This is accomplished through the identification of intertextual chains and an understanding of the “network of references” that link discourses together (Foucault, 1972). As previously mentioned, the discourses that emerged in the training materials have roots in public policy surrounding welfare reform that took place relatively soon before these texts were produced. These discourses are also linked to wider ideologies about The American Dream, the Horatio Alger myth which claims that any individual’s hard work can produce socioeconomic mobility, and broad social claims about a “culture of poverty” (Perrucci & Wysong, 2007). When the authors of the training materials talk about individual choice and change, they are not creating new knowledge. Instead, following Foucault (1972), I argue that these word choices inherently reference previous discourses, ultimately carrying on an intertextual chain. This chain of texts forms a discursive formation, limiting the way that poverty, the middle class, and agency are discussed, based on the social practices that have come before. Additionally, these intertextual chains produce underlying ideologies that are taken up by readers and can become taken for granted.

An interdiscursive analysis of the three discourses listed above reveals an important ideology. When the individual in poverty is discussed as the agent of change,

who through hard work, education, and behavioral/language choices can become a more successful person, an ideology that responsibility lies with the person in poverty becomes apparent. Moreover, this expectation of responsibility fosters a “blame the victim” framework, which assumes that if individuals have tried all of these techniques (i.e. if they begin to talk in a formal register, if they have made a budget, if they have gained friends in a middle-class network) and they still have not moved out of poverty, then they have done something wrong. This blame-the-victim attitude is dangerous because it ignores larger social structures and systems such as the cliff effect, predatory lending, racism, sexism, and homophobia that enable and constrain a person’s ability to become financially stable. These ideologies and social practices are reinforced by public policies like those that limit/eliminate funding from families who may make enough money on paper, but are struggling to support their families.

The intertextual links between public policy, discourses, and ideologies reveal the relationship between discourses and social structures. Foucault (1972) argues, “Discourse and system produce each other...” and by studying this relationship, researchers can uncover *preterminal regularities*, or the process by which normative systems are produced (p. 76). This analysis reveals the preterminal regularities, or normalization process, that links agency to individual change. Thus, through discourse, an acontextual view of agency becomes a standard worldview about individual responsibility and potential, which influences the social practices of individuals within larger organizations (like TPP).

Throughout the materials a number of commonly circulating ideologies are being taught and reinforced. Within these ideologies, the middle class is codified as an ideal,

which perpetuates a class system in which the gap between ultra wealthy and other classes widens. Most prominent is a discourse that supports the Protestant work ethic and the idea that it is each person's individual responsibility to "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." This set of values, which emerged from early Puritan colonists is characterized by hard work, savings, productivity, and a sense of religious devotion and self-denial (Perrucci & Wysong, 2007). This ideology is implicated in the aha! training materials. Indeed, one page of the *GA* workbook contains an illustration of a ladder—presumably the economic ladder that one can climb to be successful (DeVol, 2006, p. 44). Other textual examples include recommendations that those in poverty develop spiritual resources for "support and guidance" through belief in "a divine purpose" (p. 64), and recommendations to build social capital with people who will be able to offer favors down the road (p. 66).

Moreover, the *GA* workbook describes middle-class ways of thinking such as (1) education is "crucial for climbing success ladder and making money," (2) social emphasis is "on self-governance and self-sufficiency," and (3) "language is for negotiation" (pp. 48-49). These examples imply that if individuals work to find the right resources and relationships, their efforts will be rewarded—the basic tenants of an individual meritocracy ideology (McNamee & Miller, 2009; Perrucci & Wysong, 2007). There is an overarching emphasis on success coming to individuals who work hard. In one list that describes characteristics of middle class versus poverty, characteristics of a successful individual include, "I have a full time job—40 hours a week," (p. 85) versus a description of a person in poverty which explains, "I avoid work when possible" (p. 95). There are multiple references to taking personal responsibility and looking for solutions.

DeVol (2006) explains, “If you are held accountable for your choices and behaviors, then you will change” and “If we raise your awareness about the benefits of change, then you’ll become motivated to try new behaviors” (p. 22). These examples illustrate an emphasis on the individual’s capacity to create change in their own lives—a key feature of an “American Dream” ideology. Furthermore, in *GA*, examples of middle class statements include, “I’m accountable to myself,” whereas a person in poverty might say, “I’m not accountable to anyone” (p. 94). Moreover, middle-class individuals are described as “motivated,” “planners,” and “persistent” (p. 95). People in poverty are taught to “take action” and “maintain” their goals in order to be successful and middle class (p. 80). These understandings are reinforced in *BOP*, which suggests that “individual achievement” is an overarching goal of the text (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 68). The chapter on “Discipline, Choices, and Consequences,” best exemplifies a driving effort to educate the poor on “behavioral expectations” and the rewards that they may reap if they are motivated to meet such expectations (p. 107). The authors explain that making new choices can be difficult as people in poverty “don’t perceive the behavior as their own; it hasn’t arisen out of their thinking, intentions, desires, or motivation...” (p. 106). This example is evidence that middle-class ways of knowing are most appropriate and set an expectation that is not necessarily shared by all individuals and class groups. Statements like these and use of metaphors about moving up and climbing ladders of success, tap into a bank of discourses that have for centuries encouraged individuals to believe that they should and can make the changes they need to in order to be successful in U.S. American society.

Not only do the materials reinforce common U.S. American discourses that claim individual hard work will result in success, but also suggest that the “American Dream” is accessible to everyone, and achievement is open to all who learn how to communicate in preferred ways. The representation that there is only one middle class and experiences are similar and stable is a socially constructed myth. As already mentioned, the middle class is culturally diverse. Due to systems of racism, sexism, and xenophobia, the experience for a Black middle-class immigrant related to “the American Dream” for example, is necessarily different from the experiences of a White middle-class man, or a Latino male or female. Additionally, the lack of attention to difference within the materials supports a deeply embedded ideology that U.S. society should be colorblind, (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Wise, 2010) rather than color conscious. While economic class categories are recognized, other social categories of difference are dismissed and passed off as irrelevant. What would strengthen the materials is to not only include attention to how race, ethnicity, sex, regional affiliation and the like intersect and overlap with social class, but also the ways that individuals can both recognize widely circulating systems of racism and oppression and also understand the ways in which they can, with the support of their communities and other allies, take action against the systems.

Unlike the *GA* materials, which encourage people in poverty to change their own circumstances, the *BOP* book approaches the ideology that success comes from hard work from the perspective of those who have already achieved a middle-class status. The normalization of the middle class is reinforced by language that frames the reader not only as middle class, but also as an expert, teacher, mentor, role model and professional. The reader, then, becomes the middle-class support staff who help people in poverty

learn rules, steps, for the individual to “become whole” (read “middle class”). Indeed, if the middle-class role model uses “appropriate discipline strategies and approaches” then they will increase “individuals’ achievement levels through appropriate instruction and treatment.” In *BOP*, the ideologies of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” and the “Protestant work ethic” are more directly stated. Middle-class “teachers” are given specific instructions for teaching their “clients” how to act as if these assumptions will enable them to be successful. Moreover, *BOP* offers stories of [white] families who have “succeed[ed] in achieving middle class” or had a journey that “ended happily” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 81.) How did they do it? By “consciously play[ing] the part of a middle-class role model” (p. 81). In *GA*, the normalization of middle class is casually referred to, whereas in *BOP*, it is an explicit expectation. The authors of *BOP* state, “In the case of those who will assist individuals from the poverty culture, the mentors can be anyone with the knowledge of [middle-class] rules and values of middle class” (p. 84). Language such as this reinforces a master narrative that individuals with higher economic status are more educated, knowledgeable, and able to help create social change. In other words, the texts interpellate readers into a discourse that validates their class upbringing by relating it to success and worthiness to teach others, thus causing the readers themselves to validate their higher status.

The normalization of the middle class subsequently marginalizes individuals from lower- and working-class backgrounds. The representations of people in poverty as lazy, uneducated, drug addicts are perpetuated in the *BOP* text. In *BOP*, an entire chapter is devoted to the relationship between “poverty culture” and “addiction.” Moreover, descriptions of “concerns” about working with people in poverty include their

“impulsivity” and “cognitive issues” such as “impaired verbal tools” or “impaired special orientation” (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001, p. 137). Indeed, people in poverty are even framed by *BOP* as delinquent as the authors inform readers, “Discipline and sanctions should be seen and used as forms of instruction” (p. 117). As this is a guide for working with people in poverty, such stereotypes are sure to be put into action. Thus, extreme generalizations and perceptions of the poor as inadequate in *BOP* reinforce social status hierarchies, and sociocultural practices that inhibit productive cross-class relationships.

In summary, the ideological discourses in the materials reaffirm the Protestant work ethic, a colorblind sense of individual meritocracy, and the availability of the “American dream” in that all individuals who work hard, who develop particular resources and relationships, and learn to behave competently following middle-class rules, can be rewarded by moving out of poverty. Differences in where individuals from different communities enter into poverty, and differences in systemic treatment due to nationality, citizenship, race, ethnicity, or region, are not reflected in the ideologies surrounding individual hard work and the “American Dream.” In order to best understand how to help individuals living in poverty, it is important to ask whether or not reproducing and valorizing values and ideologies that are reinforced in U.S. society that contribute to widening economic gaps are really in the best interest of individuals who are going through ending-poverty training.

Conclusions

The *GA* and *BOP* materials contain discourses that enable and constrain individuals trying to move out of poverty. They offer information and behavioral options that can increase individuals’ levels of agency, yet the materials fail to move beyond an

overemphasis on individual capacities, and dismiss oppressive social systems that influence class positionality. In general, the analysis of the aha! materials demonstrates that training materials such as these are unquestionably operating within the structures that keep privilege and disadvantage, social status hierarchies, and ideologies about social class in place. This is important because the findings in these texts represent patterns in larger discourses (Fairclough, 1992) and serve to reinforce those discourses. The value of social hierarchies, reinforcement of dominant ideologies, colorblind portrayals, and a monolithic understanding of class, reproduce the status quo and ultimately offer little in the way of suggesting changes to institutional policies and broader systems that produce and reinforce poverty in the U.S. The discourses present individual agency as dramatically increased due to the aha! materials and pays limited attention to larger systems of oppression. Rather than creating a climate of critical consciousness in which class positioning is understood as multicultural, complex, dynamic, and intersectional, and offering relevant, contextually informed options for individual conduct as well as collaborative options for change, *GA* and *BOP* construct class subjectivities in a way that does not move beyond status quo conceptions.

The materials would be stronger with a reconsideration of the way(s) in which “middle class” and “poverty” are used. In most cases, the middle class is homogenized and represented in a way that cannot possibly represent the multiple lived realities of persons who consider themselves to be a part of this group.

The discussion of (economic) class in the materials necessarily implicates social class and references to putting aside or overlooking the construct of social class should be deleted or revised. Examples through the materials about being judged on the basis of

clothing choice, formality of talk, and use of time are actually references to social class and also point to how U.S. American media, political discourses, and family talk, among other texts, teach individuals to make social comparisons, and ultimately orient toward or away from groups and individuals.

This analysis draws attention to the ways in which individuals are made responsible for their own circumstances—and steps to end poverty are framed as occurring one person at a time in these texts. My critique should be read as a call for training programs and materials to work with those in poverty, individuals with resources, non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, and larger institutions to take responsibility *together*—a move that would be more comprehensive and thus increase the potential for systemic change. By revising and expanding these materials, it becomes possible to create relevant and sustainable conversations about social and economic class levels in the diverse U.S. context.

More specifically, a critical reading of the aha! materials reveals answers to my initial research questions: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced in the aha! materials? (2) What do subjects' status positions and relationships that emerge in the aha! texts reveal about levels of agency? and, (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the aha! texts? First, an analysis of the materials reveals a number of ways in which class subjectivities are produced and consumed. Language operates in a way that not only normalizes the middle class, but also subjugates individuals who fall short of the economic and performative standards attached to this class label. The texts produce positive images of people in the middle class as educated and achievement-oriented, while perpetuating negative representations of people in poverty as lazy

criminals. Readers of these texts are interpellated into these discourses and subjectivities incorporate these understandings.

Second, this analysis reveals subject positioning that reinforces a class hierarchy, which serves to valorize the middle class and subjugate lower and working classes. Perpetuation of discourses that success follows hard work is intricately linked to expectations of agency for people in poverty. The texts describe people in poverty as fully agentic subjects, who should be able to create their own change. A “blame the victim” discourse assumes that individuals in poverty are in such circumstances because of their own choices and actions alone.

Third, several broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the aha! texts. These include: (1) education and resources create power, (2) individuals have the ability to choose their paths in life and, (3) hard work equals success. These discourses emerged through intertextual chains that link public policy and larger societal ideologies to the training materials. These discourses reinforce social practices that encourage an acontextual view of individual agency, which assumes change occurs through individual will and hard work.

Such an analysis not only demonstrates the need for further analysis of non-profit programs, workshops and training texts, but also encourages more partnerships between academics and non-profit organizations to develop assessments and recommendations. These partnerships can expand the potential for work to enhance the contextual validity, relevance to lived experiences, and sustainability of training materials and initiatives to move individuals out of poverty. Such moves can increase the overall resource pool, knowledge base and mechanisms to create/change/resist existing policies and norms,

needed to create long term improvements in individuals' lives. Further, such moves strengthen academic efforts to build a collective critical consciousness about U.S. social systems and structures.

CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Conducting these interviews was very surreal for me. In a way, I was confronting my own demons and looking into my own past. With each interview, I thought more deeply about my own progress and the pride that I took in becoming my own (middle class) person. I related to these individuals on a very deep level; but because of where I am now, I don't think they really related to me. There was one interviewee who got the connection that we had to one another. He felt the unusual bond that I was hoping for with the other people in poverty that I interviewed. After the interview he asked me how I "did it." I was taken aback by this question and didn't know how to answer. Here I am, interviewing people who are involved in a training that supposedly teaches them how to "do it," or how to move into the middle class, yet, I cannot explain how I got to where I am. Is it because I was exposed to critical thinking? Is it because I had relationships with people who told me I could? Was it pure motivation? Somewhere along the line, I was empowered. I was not only told that I could do it, but I was encouraged to think about how I can do it on my own, how I can maneuver around the social system(s) that kept the rest of my family in place, and how I can "fake it until I make it." This moved beyond the innate desire to change my own circumstances. How do I explain that to people who haven't been exposed to the same critical discourse?

In this chapter I use Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis to analyze interview texts. Interviews were analyzed to answer my three research questions about class and related subjectivities, contextualized status positions and relationships revealing levels of agency, and implicated discourses and ideologies. Fifty-seven participants were interviewed. Interviews were conducted at six different TPP sites across the country, two regional conferences, and one national conference. Amongst the participants, 24 were individuals in poverty and the remaining participants identified as middle class. These participants included 8 African Americans, 1 Latin@, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander, 13 Whites, and one mixed-race individual. Of these, 21 were female. Additionally, 33 interviewees were middle-class "allies." Of the allies, 31 were White and 2 were Latin@. Of these, 26 were female.

Individuals in poverty and middle-class allies have different roles and status positioning, and went through different training programs. These differing characteristics create, in many cases, a stark contrast between the two groups. Because of this, I analyze each group separately first, as a means of comparing/contrasting the views from the two groups of participants. Below I also note broad patterns and identify specific differences that emerged between and among participants at some sites in order to highlight the importance of context and status differences.

Analysis

In line with Fairclough's (1992) approach to discourse analysis, and as demonstrated in the previous chapter, an in-depth descriptive analysis of the text precedes interpretations and links to wider societal ideologies. This step in interpretation enables an analysis of the ideational, interpersonal, and identity functions of language.

Language functions to produce understandings of identities, subjectivities, and representations of social groups in text (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough argues that social identities are "reproduced, contested, [and] restructured" through texts, and thus offer the possibility for social change through redefinition and reconstitution of subjectivities (p. 137). In other words, an understanding of texts can lead to questioning representations and subject positions, making a move toward increased agency. In this chapter I focus on *subjectivities* to capture the (re)constitution of identities through interview texts. These subjectivities are based on self and other representations of various class groups and the TPP discourses (i.e. training materials, meeting discussions, and overall curricular approaches) surrounding social class. This (re)constitution emerges from the transcripts

through the use of class labels, descriptions of identities, comparisons of class groups, and other linguistic references.

Descriptive Analysis: Interpersonal, Identity, and Ideational Functions of Language

Interview texts from people in poverty.

TPP participants demonstrated in the interviews that they recognize they are being positioned into subjectivities by the training text language. As described in chapter 4, the training workbooks use the labels “poverty,” “middle class,” and “wealth.” When asked if these labels rang true to the participants, all of them affirmed the labels and the characteristics they represented as applicable to them, despite later also acknowledging stereotypes based on these descriptions that were apparent in the workbooks. In expressing her agreement with the workbook categories, one person in poverty stated, “You need stereotypes. When you’re talking about any kind of abstract ideas you need to have a framework to begin.” However, she later claimed, “I personally don’t fit into those stereotypes.” Similarly, many participants in poverty affirmed the labels and examples that supplemented the categories in the training materials, but positioned themselves as outside of those boxes. When asked to describe their economic status, about half of the people in poverty identified themselves with the category of poverty, yet other participants chose to identify as “low income,” “struggling,” “poverty to lower middle class” and even “the transitioning stage.” The individuals’ decisions to affirm the categories, but place themselves in some ways outside of the categories, points to ways in which class identities are simultaneously reproduced and contested. Moreover, these responses affirm the very notion of subjectivity as a concept that marks individuals’ own

dynamic understandings of themselves as well as the ways in which others position them (Hall, 2004). Individuals in poverty claimed that they found the training text useful; yet their extensions of the workbook content point to ways in which it was problematic as well. In other words, the avowed identities of people in poverty were often more complex than those identities that are ascribed through the workbook representations and other TPP participants' perspectives. Thus, in order to understand the subjectivities of people in poverty, it is necessary to look at both avowed and ascribed identities.

Despite the widespread reaffirming of the label “poverty,” several participants in poverty took issue with the term. When asked about the usefulness of the term and the examples that were used to explore positions of poverty, one participant noted, “It's descriptive, I think you have to pretty much use them [the examples] but when I talk to other people I don't talk about people in poverty. I talk about people not having enough resources to thrive, because I don't want to offend anyone.” Other people in poverty claimed that the term is “offensive” and “derogatory” and could be replaced with “low income,” “working class,” or “struggling families.” Another participant explained that the label and examples provided for what poverty looks like are not only offensive, but positioned him in a way that was negative. He stated,

To be stereotyped like that—like what are they trying to do, like recruit me into the middle class? Like are you saying that I'm wrong for being in poverty? There was a lot of good things that came from my struggles. Like I'm not a fake person I have a strong drive to succeed. If I had everything handed to me I don't think I would be like that.

Similarly, another person in poverty expressed concern with the ways in which people were placed into precise categories after recalling a story where an ally misread her class background. She explained,

I can remember at one of the first meetings one of the allies said something to me, like, how she was so surprised that I was struggling financially because I present as somebody middle class. I said, ‘I try not to have assumptions about the allies, and I would hope that you would try to do the same.’

Additionally, this quotation demonstrates that there is not a unified language/image for all people in poverty. Despite the push for *Getting Ahead* and *Bridges Out of Poverty* to divide classes into “casual” and “formal” registers, this person in poverty indicates that there is not a particular sound or look associated with each class.

Another participant expressed dissatisfaction with the examples claiming, “One ally really believed the stereotypes that poor people act like this and talk like that.” These examples demonstrate the ways in which people in poverty took issue with the overgeneralized examples of poverty that did not ring true or represent their experiences. Moreover, these comments show that the overgeneralizations made in the training materials lead others, such as middle class allies, to inaccurately position them into class categories based on stereotypes.

Thus, the avowed, or self-proclaimed identities of the program participants do not match those that are ascribed or assigned. This is problematic because the representations offered in the training materials are often used as an apex or goal for the people in poverty who are striving for change. The participants are not only being asked to change their economic circumstances, but their sense of self is also being challenged through this

process of ascription. In other words, the training materials dictate how people in poverty should behave and what identities they should leave behind. Thus, their subjectivities, which are multilayered, varied, and complex because of multiple intersectionalities, histories, and contexts, become homogenized through interaction with middle-class allies and staff. The multivocal, intersecting identifications and representations taken up by people in poverty emerge, in contrast to the singular portrayals of a “culture of poverty.”

As evidenced in the previous chapter, language also functions to produce particular understandings about social relations (Fairclough, 1992); the interpersonal level of analysis interrogates interpersonal relationships that emerge in texts. This was most evident through the existing status hierarchies that are reinforced amongst TPP participants. The ways in which people in poverty discuss “the middle class” perpetuates the notion that a class hierarchy is beneficial and leads to success for those who educate themselves about the hidden rules. People in poverty portrayed the middle class as “knowledgeable” and “professional.” While many of the participants described their middle-class ally as a “friend,” most were looking to gain “social networks,” “skill sets,” “or knowledge about financial resources from their allies. Many participants explained that they want to learn from their middle-class allies, but when asked what they have to offer or teach their allies, none of the participants in poverty could offer an example. Despite calling their relationship a “mutual friendship,” one person in poverty, similar to many others, explained that allies are, “people who empower me.”

This notion of middle-class allies being the ones who *do* the “empowering” emerged several times throughout the interview texts. There was no mention of people in poverty expanding their own critical consciousness of the systems that keep poverty in

place. While systems barriers are discussed, many of the sites use a top-down model of education that is reminiscent of what Freire (1970) calls “banking.” Furthermore, the reverence paid to the middle class as the ones who have the ability to “empower” others reinforces class hierarchical positioning and precludes more equitable dialogue and alliance building.

Class-based status hierarchies also emerged in the sentiments that described clear separations between class groups. The terms “we,” “us,” and “them” were frequently used to describe specific social class groups and to separate people living in poverty from those in other social classes and from staff and volunteer TPP participants. One participant remarked about people in poverty and middle class volunteers that while, “we’re all just the same,” money separates different groups. When discussing the representations of middle class allies in the TPP workbooks, this participant claimed, “they have better lives, that their styles are...they live just better...” A reinforcement of class-based status hierarchies works to serve the function of the relationship between people in poverty and middle-class allies. The higher status group is able to offer resources to the lower status group. However, the reinforcement of an “us” versus “them” separation ultimately works to subjugate the lower-status group (in this case, the people in poverty). When social hierarchies become status hierarchies, consequences for how people are positioned in relation to each other arise. Members of subjugated groups may be treated as “less than” in a relationship with a perceived power difference. This can also be reinforced in other social settings such as the workforce, social service agencies, and banks.

For the people in poverty, class was defined in terms of economic means. When asked, “How will you know when you reach middle class?” one participant replied, “ I know when I’ve reached middle class when I can find a job--to have a job to help support some of my bills—to pay some of the bills I have.” Rather than address communication codes, personal/social networks, educational achievement, or any other middle-class characteristic that the TPP training teaches, the participants continued to refer to economic capital—a common measurement of class in terms of the U.S. class hierarchical system.

Finally, because language functions ideationally to produce social constructions of reality (Fairclough, 1992), the language that emerged in the interview texts points to specific belief systems about the way(s) in which individuals come to understand their lived realities about poverty, success, and responsibility for change. In the interview texts, language functioned on the ideational level in a variety of ways. Transcripts revealed that people in poverty developed beliefs that had been shaped by their TPP training. The interviewees’ ability, willingness, and excitement to list different “skills” that they had learned came through in their verbal responses. Several participants remarked about the changes they experienced because of the training. One interviewee mentioned, “[TPP] put answers to me. I knew about poverty but I never really knew about it ‘til they talked so much about it in our class. And then that’s what really made me change.” Similarly, another participant claimed, “*Getting Ahead* put things in perspective for me,” and “Now I know how to approach the middle and the upper class!” These responses mark a shift in worldviews that emerged from TPP texts—despite knowing about poverty and living the material consequences, these participants claimed

that they were not able to talk about such experiences with different classes without the new language that *Getting Ahead* provided. While these responses imply that change is predicated on learning new information, these responses suggest that new “answers” to questions that have already been asked is what matters. More importantly, these answers demonstrate “for whom” the answers matter—the importance of communication and negotiating with the middle class.

The interview texts demonstrate that in many ways, TPP training reinforced stereotypical understandings about social class and other identities. Many people in poverty claimed that the way class is talked about in the training “pretty much distinguishes how society looks at the different classes today.” This quotation from a person in poverty marks a pattern of overgeneralizing that becomes most apparent with regards to race. At sites in the Midwest and Southwest, many of the people in poverty interviewed are white. When asked if race is an important issue to discuss when learning about social class, many of these white respondents said that race is important, but not in their community. However, in the transcripts from people of color at these predominantly white sites, race was a very real and material factor in their experiences. Many of these participants expressed anger or disappointment in the lack of racial issues being discussed at weekly meetings. One participant who identified as Latina explained, “I just wonder why I might be the only Spanish one in the whole group, including the allies.” Similarly, another who identified as Black claimed, “The workbook just skimmed through [race]. It’s there. It’s an issue. I mean, and then I seem to be the only one who would have that issue.” Another participant expressed concern about the workbook’s overemphasis on economic class by stating, “So class trumps everything? I don’t think so. It’s a

combination.” The absence of problematizing race and discussing it in the training and in weekly discussions marginalizes the experiences of people of color in the group, and subsequently reinforces racial stereotypes related to class. The latter is further exemplified in comments such as, “The workbook makes it seem like people that are rich are all white. The whole book is, like, white.” This comment, made by a Black participant, suggests that the examples given for casual forms of communication, that are most often used in poverty, resemble a Black vernacular; this lies in juxtaposition to middle-class talk, which is more proper and sounds “white” as the respondent suggests. Such responses affirm that the training produces social realities that valorize colorblindness, rather than color consciousness—a move that leaves certain voices out of equitable dialogue about poverty.

Interview texts with middle-class allies.

Language used by the middle-class partners in the interview transcripts functioned to construct particular understandings of self and subjectivities for themselves, as well as people in poverty. Middle-class partners overwhelmingly used language to construct themselves as competent and skillful experts who were qualified for the role of “ally.” When asked why these individuals decided to become allies, responses included, “I have been in the system counseling and teaching and coaching [for many years],” “I spent time in a third world country,” or “because I’ve been working with poverty populations my whole life.” Middle-class allies often interjected comments about their “many assets,” “skill sets,” and “training.” Moreover, middle-class allies often identified how their specializations and skill sets were useful to the people in poverty with whom they worked and how these skill sets were something to “offer” and could “help” those in poverty.

Many of the allies were affiliated with “helping professions” such as counseling, education, and social services. Due to their professional backgrounds, many of the allies were interested in the TPP program and wanted to “help.” This desire to help others was also connected to a larger “moral call” for some allies, who identified as Christian or “spiritual.” Moreover, some allies were just interested in what they called “giving back” to the community.

These examples show how middle-class allies frame themselves as knowledgeable and authoritative figures. Their language use also acted to construct people in poverty as somewhat docile individuals who need to learn how to be middle class. One middle-class ally mentioned that a good person in poverty to work with is one who is “open and teachable.” Several middle-class allies also discussed what they had been able to “offer” or teach the people in poverty. When asked why they agreed to participate in the program one ally remarked, “I guess a selfish perspective of it would be that, uh, we’re trying to get people to quit trying to use my money—the tax payer.” This comment identifies the ally as a person who has money because s/he earns it—as opposed to the people in poverty who undeservingly use taxpayers’ money. Together, these examples reinforce an understanding of middle-class individuals as knowledgeable and normal and reinforce stereotypes of people in poverty as needing help to manage on their own.

This positioning of middle-class allies as experts also functions at the interpersonal level to position people in poverty as inferior to their middle-class allies. First, several middle-class allies used language that positioned themselves as separate from and different from people in poverty. This was clearly evident in “us” versus

“them” uses of language. For example, when commenting on the difficulties of building cross-class relationships, one ally stated, “I come from middle class right now. I think the way we look at things versus the way other people might look at things is different.” In extrapolating differences in talk between social classes, another ally mentioned grammatical errors, “they said ‘me’ instead of ‘I,’ and I mean ‘I’.”

Middle-class allies continuously differentiated themselves from people in poverty by suggesting that the training materials were useful in helping them to understand class-group differences. One ally suggested, “[the training materials] were helpful to understand what people in poverty are and how they think, and then to put that along side the middle class thinking and rich people was helpful.” This quotation was similar to other responses about how the training material is beneficial in creating distinct guidelines between social classes. Each response reveals an assumption that the middle-class was a central and normative class group to which all others are compared. This line of thinking reinforces hierarchical positioning that places people in poverty at the bottom of a social ladder and the middle class toward the top. These responses point to the way that dominance emerges between the person in poverty and the middle-class ally; influence is distributed unequally and follows typical U.S. class structures. This demonstrates ways in which people in poverty are positioned into class systems and subsequently in subordinated positions rather than equitable relationships with middle-class allies.

Second, middle-class allies expressed ambivalence when defining their relationships as ones in which there was more equity—a friendship. While several allies did use the word friendship to define their role and/or relationship with people in poverty

with whom they worked, additional probing complicated the notion of “friendship.” When pushed to define “friendship,” allies offered the following definitions: (1) “an authentic relationship with the family but at the same time, the capacity to give input and feedback and share a point of view with the family,” (2) “a mutually enriching relationship because I usually learn a lot from the people that I help,” (3) “we are here as friends but it’s frustrating from an ally’s perspective to not come into this with all of the information necessary to be successful,” (4) “Allies are supposed to be a friend to [the person in poverty]. [But what really happens is...] What are we gonna do? How can I get you fixed up? What do you need?” (5) “When I say friendship, it’s more like a casual interaction,” (6) “[TPP] is a different type of friendship,” a friend that “holds [people in poverty] responsible for what they are supposed to do.”

These explanations of friendship demonstrate that middle-class allies have difficulty balancing their position of status and access to resources in relation to people in poverty, with a perceived responsibility to teach and mentor the person in poverty. Indeed, one middle-class ally claimed that “in a situation with a *real* friend” the relationship would look quite different. This further indicates a schism in the way that relationships between middle-class allies and people in poverty are defined versus the way the relationships are actually carried out. Varying definitions of the relationship between ally and person in poverty make it difficult to interpret whether the goals of TPP are being met. Moreover, this difference in definition may further perpetuate inequity in a relationship where one person perceives himself or herself as mentor (knowledgeable and able to teach) and the other perceives him/herself as a friend (seeking mutual support).

At the ideational level, language functions in the interview texts to produce understandings of social class categories. The middle-class allies varied in their understandings of social-class categories. Respondents in this role overwhelmingly suggested that the training materials (see Chapter 4) were useful, appropriate, and correct. Allies suggested, “The *Bridges Out of Poverty* training was great! I wish there was more of it,” and “Almost everything I read by Ruby Payne is useful.” When asked if the examples used in the *BOP* training “rang true,” almost every respondent responded affirmatively. One person claimed to “hate stereotypes” but agreed that the *BOP* training was useful because “90% of the *BOP* examples are accurate most of the time.”

When asked if they would make any changes, however, some of the allies were able to offer their own critiques of the *BOP* training materials. One ally remarked, “*Bridges Out of Poverty* training doesn’t touch on some of the real issues that we face with our [people in poverty] and some of those issues are legal issues, drug use, other dependencies...So those are real life day-to-day issues that our [people in poverty] are facing.” Another described the *BOP* training as painting the picture of an “ideal world.” She further stated, “we are not talking about the real life of [people in poverty].” Finally, one middle-class ally suggested,

One thing that I feel, those lists in *Bridges* do is break people into poverty, middle class, and wealthy, where, in reality, you can have people where one person might fall into poverty and another person into middle class. But if they’re close to the line between the two they are much closer to each other than someone who’s maybe at the other end of poverty or the other end of middle class. So I don’t

think you can necessarily say these categories, if you fall between this point and this point that that means that X, Y, & Z are true for you.

Similarly, another ally challenged the distinctions between middle class and wealthy in the *BOP* materials by stating,

Skills are not really confined by cement barriers as to you can only have these skills and you can never have any of these [skills]. And so again, I would say the only place that I thought was kind of fuzzy is, you know, who describes themselves as wealthy, versus upper-middle class because you can always find somebody in America who's richer than you, and I don't know whether that causes people to perceive themselves as in the middle versus wealthy.

This response exemplifies other allies' expressed willingness to question the training material descriptions that there are three stringent classes that meet a predetermined list of criteria. Rather than sticking to the three class groups outlined by *BOP*, several, more complex labels were used to define and construct different class groups including: "lower middle class," "lower income class," "upper middle class," "stability," "working middle class," "the poverty class," "low socio-economic class," "working poor," and "destitute." In several instances, middle-class allies expressed dissatisfaction with the term "poverty," stating that it was derogatory or carried negative connotations, but did not know what term could replace it. Still, their complication of the labeling system used in *BOP* demonstrates a willingness to construct new worldviews related to class categorization and hierarchical positioning by bringing in their own, more complex categorizations. While not explicitly offering words that might replace the category of "poverty," many allies critiqued the overly simplistic categorizations offered by *BOP*.

At the ideational level of analysis, the language used in the interview texts further suggests that worldviews about class organization were influenced/perpetuated by the *BOP* training, and in some instances, were changed based on experiences in their relationships with people in poverty. Despite some people in poverty claiming that they had “nothing to offer” their middle-class allies, several allies claimed that their relationships with people in poverty had helped them to change their understandings about poverty. When reflecting on what she learned from the person in poverty that she worked with, one middle-class ally explained,

Allies are actually building relationships with people in poverty and understanding in a much more realistic level how complicated the issues of poverty are. And I do definitely, 100%, agree that significant change will not occur until more people are in a relationship with people who are in poverty.

Several other middle-class allies shared the same sentiments, commenting on their changed conception of separate class groups due to the relationships that they had built with people in poverty. One ally suggested, “I have a better understanding of how complicated the issue [of poverty] is. Before I would just look at their choices made and say ‘I couldn’t fathom it.’ Another claimed, “you can’t go in with assumptions, you start classifying people, grouping people and you are judging instead of accepting them as an individual.” These responses suggest that due to TPP influence, some middle-class allies were able to move beyond the monolithic understandings of poverty put forth by the *BOP* materials and engage in a relationship that helped to reconstitute social realities related to class groups. Specifically, the interview texts indicate that the relationships built between people in poverty and their middle-class allies enabled the allies to not only critique the

training text but also to better understand the experiences of people in poverty, the complexities of what poverty is and the challenges of changing systems. Through the TPP program, allies have created new ideational beliefs about what poverty is—a move that ultimately raises questions about dominant ideologies surrounding poverty and challenges the status quo.

Discursive Practices: Production and Consumption

The second stage of Fairclough's (1992) CDA approach is a contextual analysis, which identifies the circumstances under which the text was produced and consumed. For interview texts, this stage of analysis takes into consideration the individual experiences and positionalities of the interviewees—the simultaneous producers and consumers of the texts. Moreover, the context of each specific site is important to analyze since the context changes the production and consumption of TPP training materials.

Evidenced by the interviews, the production of the interview texts was greatly influenced by the ways in which the TPP training process occurred and materials were disseminated. First, training time varied for both the people in poverty and the middle-class allies. When asked how long their training lasted, people in poverty at some sites got as much as sixteen weeks of training, and others received fourteen weeks. Training time varied much more for middle-class allies; some got a condensed 1 hour individual training session while others had a full day group training session. All of the people in poverty made it clear that they used the *aha!* training materials described in chapter 4. While many of the middle-class allies noted using the *BOP* training materials described in chapter 4, two allies claimed to only be exposed to a training PowerPoint, rather than written materials.

Of those allies who used the *BOP* materials, several mentioned moving too quickly through the training. One ally offered, “I can’t say I’ve sat down and read [the *BOP* book] from start to finish...” She also mentioned, “We didn’t go through the whole thing.” People in poverty at one site in particular noted that they skipped the last training module on community assessments. It is clear from the interview transcripts that emphasis on certain components of training and the amount of time spent disseminating the information varied dramatically across sites and may have shifted the consumption of the texts.

When the participants were asked what skills from the training they found useful, middle-class allies were able to point to a variety of concepts. Overall, the allies discussed seven different concepts that emerged from the *BOP* training materials including *hidden rules*, *generational poverty*, *situational poverty*, *tyranny of the moment*, *casual register*, *formal register*, and *parent voice*. People in poverty were able to list a total of three different concepts from the *GA* workbook, two of which came from the same individual who has moved into a leadership role within his local initiative. Their examples included *hidden rules*, *generational poverty*, and *casual register*. Many other people in poverty, when asked, attempted to list concepts from the *GA* materials, but went “blank” or offered a term like “registrations” rather than “register.” For both the individuals in poverty and the middle-class allies, many confessed that it was difficult to apply these concepts to their day-to-day experiences or offer examples of how they have been useful. When pushed to provide these examples, individuals in poverty explained, “We don’t open our books. I haven’t looked at my book since I got out of the *Getting Ahead* training” and “I don’t use that language anymore. I don’t refer to the book.” One

person in poverty pointed out *the hidden rules* was a concept that was useful on a daily basis. When asked to explain how it had helped him he responded, “Actually, I still don’t know what a hidden rule technically is.” When I brought the same concept up to another individual in poverty, she stated, “refresh my memory on some of this stuff. What was hidden rules?”

Middle-class allies were better able to describe and define concepts, but struggled to explain how the concepts applied to their daily lives. One ally exemplified this in listing a term, *tyranny of the moment* and stated, “We love that term, but what does that mean?” When asked how the *BOP* concepts have proven useful, most middle-class allies could only offer that the framework has provided them with a new worldview or perspective. One ally suggested that she utilized the framework for a better understanding in her field of social work. Beyond a new framework of understanding, specific examples of how the skills had been useful in their relationship with the individuals in poverty were lacking. This points to a limited consumption of the texts that does not move beyond an abstract and general description level.

Consumption of the overall training experience also differed based on the site preferences. At two of the sites, it was quite evident that larger structural issues were an important focus of the training and weekly meetings. Almost every participant mentioned “systems barriers,” “structural issues,” and “community engagement” as important components to consider in efforts to end poverty. When asked how we can end poverty, one person in poverty claimed, “we need to revamp the whole social system.” Another argued that there must be a “collective responsibility.”

Such structural macro-components were absent from interview transcripts at the remaining three sites. At these sites there was emphasis on individual relationships and what individuals in poverty needed to do to move themselves out of poverty. This difference may be due to the demographic differences across the sites. One of the two sites that emphasized macro issues had several college graduates (some with post-baccalaureate degrees) who were experiencing situational poverty (short-term poverty, as opposed to multi-generational circumstance). This level of education was unmatched at other sites. Additionally, participants at the two sites emphasized that these issues were brought up at weekly meetings. Indeed, at one site, people in poverty were encouraged to participate in smaller teams that focused their dialogue and actions on larger systems issues. People in poverty at these two sites frequently discussed concepts like “the cliff effect,” a concept that critiques larger social structures for failing to recognize the problems that arise from taking away all of a person’s benefits when they start to receive an income, rather than gradually decreasing the benefits. This observation suggests that the existence of situational versus generational poverty, levels of education of participants, and interests and goals of facilitators, all play a role in shaping the production of the TPP training activities, and also contribute to the nature of consumption.

The production of what was taught and discussed, and consumption and interpretation of training texts and activities, were also highly influenced by the historical and sociocultural contexts of the sites at which individuals were interviewed. At sites in the Deep South, for example, the racial divide that began during slavery was described as continuing. While it was clearly uncomfortable to broach the subject, evident by

participants' segregated seating arrangements (i.e. Black people in poverty seated separately from the White allies) and lack of eye contact by many of the participants when asked about race, they admitted that the examples in the workbook did not necessarily ring true to their experiences. Earlier examples about their views of race speak to this point. Their questions ultimately affected the ways in which the materials were read and interpreted. Participants who do not find their own experiences in the workbook may be more likely to disregard the text or find that it lacks utility. This possibility is exemplified in some of the comments listed above by Latin@ and Black participants in poverty who questioned who the book was written for.

Social Practices: Identifying Underpinning Ideologies, Hierarchies, and Agency

Finally, Fairclough's (1992) approach moves to a more abstract level of interpretation by linking the aforementioned analysis to sociocultural practices. At this level of analysis, identification of discourses points to undergirding ideologies and hegemonic structures. These wider societal ideologies link the functions of the interview texts to social and cultural practices. Here, I distinguish discourses between people in poverty and middle-class allies because the overlap and divergence shows multiple worldviews that emerge from TPP participants. The discourses I identified in the interview texts with people in poverty include: (1) we need class categories for comparison and understanding, (2) we can learn how to change from our middle-class friends, (3) the social networks we develop are useful investments in our futures, and (4) success is earned and is therefore our responsibility. Discourses that emerged from the interview texts with middle-class allies include: (1) class groups are fundamentally different, (2) in the context of TPP class groupings and stereotypes are useful for our

work with people in poverty, and (3) we have a responsibility to help others with less resources.

First, one emergent discourse across responses from people in poverty was the idea that class categories are necessary for understanding others' and their own conduct. As described in the analysis of interview texts, many individuals in poverty were quick to critique the labels used in TPP (i.e. poverty, middle class, and wealth); however, they did not advocate for the complete elimination of such labels. In several interviews, individuals in poverty initially supported the three labels that reoccur throughout TPP texts and later critiqued the categories as stereotypical. Several individuals noted that they had been erroneously stereotyped and many also talked about the degrading nature of the word "poverty." When asked what solutions they had in mind for this perceived problem, individuals in poverty either suggested new terms to replace those that they did not approve of (e.g. "struggling," "lower class," or "working class"), or they reaffirmed the necessity of such labels. One individual claimed, "It's descriptive, I think you have to pretty much use them," when referring to the labels. This example is typical of other comments, which suggested the terms are offensive, but necessary for understanding how class works and how people are positioned. Thus, the social practice of referring to individuals with low-income as people in "poverty," and describing their allies and other individuals who are financially stable as "middle class," remains a norm at TPP meetings, in press releases, and in everyday conversations. Such a widely accepted social practice reinforces a U.S. class status hierarchy that places high-income earners above those earning less, simply because of their income. This approach ignores social and cultural subject positioning and emphasizes a capitalist agenda. Recall that the *Getting Ahead*

workbook also emphasizes the use of economic class as a structural determinant of success, claiming, “[the book] is not about social class. Social class is about judgment, comparison, and snobbery—and takes place in all economic classes” (p. 1). The emphasis placed on social *capital* in the training materials, was also reaffirmed in the interview responses. Thus, the discourse reproduces the assumptions that investment in social networking and relational support produces increased capital, and these lead to socioeconomic success.

The understanding that increased economic capital is attainable for all class levels perpetuates an ideology of The American Dream: the understanding that hard work or leads to success in the U.S. (Fisher, 1973; Lucas, 2011; Winn, 2003). Lucas explains that The American Dream ideology produces “rags-to-riches tales of unequivocal success” steeped in class mobility (p. 78). In order for the dream to work, there must be a social-class hierarchy, with a small upper class, a large middle class, and a small lower class. Indeed, these positions are often described as a ladder that one can climb. She argues that the American Dream frames a middle-class subject position as comfortable, making class mobility look most desirable. Thus, the American Dream normalizes the middle class, and reinforces the need for class categories and a subsequent hierarchy. The TPP participants’ common discourse of embracing class categorizations perpetuates this understanding that people need to see where they are and where they are going in order to “move up.”

The emphasis placed on economic class is not unique to TPP or the public texts that it uses. Similar discourses are apparent in wider U.S. discussions of public policy, goals, and the ideology of the American Dream. In recent Republican primary election

speeches, for example, presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, claimed, “I’m in this race because I care about Americans. I’m not concerned about the very poor” (Grant, 2012). This quotation demonstrates that popular discourses frame the poor as separate from “Americans”—the middle and upper classes are the true Americans. In addition, popular news sources have linked a thriving middle class to the survival of democracy (Mwuara, 2012). Discourses like these continue to reassert the dominance and normalization of the middle (and upper) classes in the United States—an issue that is reinforced in discourses emerging from interviews with people in poverty.

Second, a number of people in poverty noted that their relationships with their allies are “friendships.” Many participants went on to say their allies are like family members. The exception to this was individuals living in poverty who had either just been paired with their allies, or those who were waiting for the matching process to take place. Even so, these participants expressed their “hope” for a relationship that could develop into a friendship. The overwhelming description of allies as a friend is linked to other TPP texts such as pamphlets and training materials that describe an ally as “an intentional friendship.” The addition of the word “intentional” qualifies the relationship as one that is not a typical or traditional friendship. Instead, individuals are purposefully placed together for mutual benefit and a friendship is encouraged. When asked what the most important factor in moving people out of poverty is, individuals living in poverty most often identified these relationships as a key factor.

In addition to listing allies as the most important factor in ending poverty, individuals in poverty frequently related their relationship with allies to “empowerment.” One individual noted that allies are “people who empower me.” Another stated, “my ally

really empowers me to make changes.” The TPP website also has a section to sign up for more information, which reads, “I want to empower people and re-build this country” above the name and address boxes. This idea that allies *do* the empowering takes away from the mutuality of a “friendship” and begins to illuminate the reinforcement of a normative social positioning—those in the middle class have power and those in poverty do not. If people in poverty become friends with a person in the middle class, then they can receive some of that power and use it to become successful.

This underlying ideology of “middle-class power” reifies a class hierarchy and produces social practices within TPP that encourage people in poverty to remain subjugated in their relationships with their allies. This becomes apparent in the people in poverty’s description of their allies as “more professional” and “having a skill set.” People in poverty are quick to point out the success of their allies, rather than talking about the mutually enriching relationship that they have. This discursive practice works to produce social practices of subjugation and reinforce normative social class positioning. This conception of power links resources to socioeconomic and status mobility, and connotes that power is something that individuals “have” as opposed to something that circulates and is dynamically negotiated in relationships (Foucault, 1972).

A third discourse that was repeated among individuals in poverty was the idea that developing social networks is a useful investment for the future. TPP continually reinforces that idea of social networking. This is not to say that economic or cultural capital are not described. However, the TPP website and representatives also claim that an emphasis on social capital is what sets them apart from other nonprofit organizations trying to end poverty. The TPP website claims, “Rather than targeting a surface need of

at-risk communities such as housing or food provision, [TPP] seeks to expand social capital by fostering relationships across race and economic lines.” This description is also reinforced by TPP staff on news segments, in introductory meetings, and in conversations with participants. These discourses are additionally taken up in the interview transcripts of people in poverty.

Many of the individuals interviewed asserted the need for social networks in their lives. This is related to the previous discussion about relationships between allies and people in poverty, but also extends into the wider community. People in poverty noted that the TPP program generally, and their allies specifically, could link them with “opportunities in the community.” One person in poverty claimed, “It’s about social capital and I think the initiative is really on the [person in poverty].” This individual explained that her understanding of social capital was supplemented by master’s coursework that she had taken previously. However, other individuals in poverty described the value of the services that allies could provide. One woman claimed that her ally could do things that she could not. “I don’t know any of those folks who can make a call for me and get me an interview. And so, I just felt like it would be a really nice place to make some new connections.” Another stated,

[TPP] has allowed me to expand my network across class lines. I already had friendships and relationships across race lines but all my friends, everyone that I networked with grew up with me. Those were the people I bonded with those are the people that I opened up to. But now with [TPP] I have friends that are professors and lawyers and business owners. They are my friends not like just people that I use for certain things like associates.

These are a few examples of how TPP discourses about social capital were taken up by people in poverty and asserted as a move toward success. Additionally, in some instances, individuals in poverty noted that they had to get rid of their old friends—a concept that came out the *Getting Ahead* training materials. Underlying these discourses is the cliché belief that “it’s not what you know but who you know.” In other words, building relationships with normatively successful individuals was constructed as resulting in individual success. This line of thinking was very influential for people in poverty who were making new connections and building supportive relationships that were not present in their day-to-day lives before TPP. However, the emphasis given to middle-class relationships over other factors that affect poverty such as public policies, local business practices, and stereotypes, may result in change on a micro level, while ultimately ignoring the need to change structures that contribute to the continuation of poverty. This, reinforces an ideology of social mobility due to individual effort. Social mobility, or the ability to change classes is predicated on the belief that there are distinguishable class groupings. Lucas (2011) claims that U.S. discourses have produced “a highly reified social class structure based on socioeconomic bounded categories” (p. 78). This class structure not only distinguishes between class categories, but also assigns value to each group. This assignment of value is implicated in the assessment of the middle-class TPP participants by people in poverty.

Fourth, a strong belief that success is earned and is therefore the responsibility of the individual in poverty also emerged as a discourse in the interview texts. This was evidenced by an intertextual chain that links broader discourses about class such as individual meritocracy and the Horatio Alger myth, which valorizes individuals being

responsible for their own circumstances, to the discourses in the training materials, and finally to the communication practices of the TPP participants. This view became most evident in the discussion of “graduation.” Most people in poverty who were interviewed had just completed the TPP training and had “graduated” from the training program. Although middle class allies had completed their own training program, they did not graduate or celebrate the completion. The term *graduation* is almost always associated with educational accomplishments and is certainly related to class status. When individuals graduate, they have reached a certain level of achievement that garners recognition. Many of the participants noted that they were participating in G.E.D. programs—meaning that they had neither completed high school, nor had they experienced a graduation ceremony. Indeed, the pride they expressed regarding their graduation, and the explicit use of the term, suggest success is earned and rewarded based on individual effort. This can be linked back to discourses about class that were used in the training materials. For example, the *GA* workbook claims that education is “crucial for climbing success ladder and making money” (DeVol, 2006, p. 48). This is further supported in the *GA* materials start at the start of each chapter, where there is a visual image of a ladder. This link to climbing the “social ladder” also indicates an emphasis on “moving up” in order to succeed. These links show how the fundamental assumptions related to individual meritocracy become reinforced by TPP texts and are taken up by participants.

Individual meritocracy is a long withstanding ideology that bolsters the American Dream. McNamee and Miller (2009) explain that meritocracy “refers to a social system as a whole in which individuals get ahead and earn rewards in direct proportion to their

individual efforts and abilities” (p. 2). These authors explain that while individuals frequently oppose a system of rewards, claiming that we move up for other reasons like social networking or inheritance, most U.S. Americans still consent to the “myth” that individuals move up based on individual effort. Johnson (2001) also notes that often those who speak from privileged positions attribute their own success to personal hard work and attribute others’ success to networking, or inherited resources. Johnson’s and McNamee and Miller’s analyses point out a hegemonic system that positions individuals into a class status hierarchy, yet produces complicity for actors in that social system. The tenants of this ideology are so ingrained in multiple popular discourses that U.S. Americans “enthusiastically subscribe to them” (McNamee & Miller, 2009, p. 2). This is reproduced in TPP interview texts, as participants in poverty frequently point to accomplishments and successes (like graduation) as key in moving out of poverty and becoming middle class.

People living in poverty both praised and problematized “moving up” the economic ladder. These participants expressed a desire to move up in class and improve their situations, citing TPP as a way to accomplish that. One individual in poverty claimed, “Circles gives the average person that is in poverty all of the tools and the safety net in which to start climbing that ladder.” When commenting on being chosen to participate in the program, one participant stated, “I felt great because I knew that this would be a step towards something better. It was just getting forward, a step, and there was more to come.” This participant also remarked that she was moving toward becoming middle class.

However, the pride in “moving up” was not shared by all participants. One person in poverty did not wish to avow higher status. She remarked, “Up? Up...probably I don’t wanna say that out loud you know?” Rather than expressing an interest in the label of “middle class” or moving up the class ladder, this participant did not want to showcase her desire to move up above others in her community who may not be moving. This comment is similar to others that indicate that the individuals in poverty are not comfortable with the stereotypical change that is expected of them—striving to be “better” causes them to question whom they are better than. This difference marks a diversion from the workbook and its links to an ideology of individual meritocracy and demonstrates that various social contexts influence the reinforcement of *and* resistance to broader ideologies.

Out of all the participants, only a few challenged the idea that success is earned. This (re)conceptualization was characterized in the following comments from a person in poverty describing middle class life:

That they have better lives, that their styles are, they just gotta... they live just better. I mean I was livin’ in the...I can’t really say...They just feel better than we do. Sometimes, you see, you want that same lifestyle; but you know you can’t get it cuz you can’t get it. And you feel like you want to work for what they have.

And you know that’s what some of them did. And that’s what they want. I want to get where they are.

The interviewee appeared uncomfortable describing her own circumstances. Her comments reinforce the hegemonic understandings that middle class is a destination and individuals can arrive there after hard work. In other words, her discomfort points to a

general lack of questioning of the status quo. When dominant systems are not questioned, related ideologies are subsequently embraced, and participants begin to reproduce the promises of the program (i.e. this program will make you successful if you create individual change), then it becomes clear that there is a hegemonic structure in place (Althusser, 1977).

In addition to the discourses identified in interview texts from people in poverty, three discourses emerged in the interview texts from middle-class allies. First, several allies perpetuated the discourse that class groups are fundamentally different, which ultimately influences the relationships between the allies and people in poverty. This discourse was constructed in a variety of ways. First, middle-class allies often found ways to position themselves as knowledgeable professionals—a qualification for being able to help people in poverty. Their “assets,” “training,” and “skill sets” were marked as something unique to the middle class, and as something to offer to the people in poverty they will work with. In marking these skill sets, the allies also positioned themselves as separate from the people in poverty who were participating in the program. The language of the interview texts revealed again and again that allies would use the terms “us” or “we” when talking about people in the middle class (including other allies, professionals that they know, staff members, or community members) and the terms “they” or “them” when talking about people in poverty. Two allies commented on how the training materials helped to foster an understanding of how “they think,” indicating that people in poverty undergo different cognitive processes. Another ally indicated that it is useful to have a description of “them” to “put along side middle-class thinking.” Despite later

explanations of the allies' desire for a mutually beneficial friendship, the nuances of their language suggest a clear demarcation between class groups.

Second, interview texts from allies reinforced the idea that class groupings and stereotypes are necessary for understanding the experiences of people in poverty. Like the responses from people in poverty, allies reaffirmed the necessity for social class categories. Every ally interviewed upheld the three categories used in the training materials (poverty, middle class, and wealth), describing the categories as “correct” and “accurate.” When one ally did disagree with the ways in which classes are characterized, recognizing that such labels “create stereotypes,” she still reaffirmed the need for such labels as a “starting place for understanding,” claiming that *BOP* materials are accurate *most* of the time. This was a common trend amongst middle-class allies—to mark that the training materials contained stereotypes, yet support them for their accuracy. Interestingly enough, middle-class allies were able to critique the training materials for not having enough real life examples, but always supported the training materials as a whole. Like the people in poverty whom I interviewed, none of the allies advocated for elimination of these “stereotypical” labels, claiming that they foster understanding.

In addition, the allies' general reinforcement of the value of knowing “the hidden rules of class” demonstrates that discourses about social categories are intertextually linked to the training materials, which describe specific behaviors and practices related to different class groups. These training materials are subsequently linked to broader U.S. discourses about class groups and their common practices. This shared practice of reinforcing class categories in order to *know* what people in poverty are like ultimately reinforces wider U.S. discourses that describe a “culture of poverty.” Such discourses

homogenize the experience of poverty, claiming that there is one type of poverty that is experienced in one way. Although one ally did point out that poverty looks different in different communities, this critique was not expanded to include individual experiences of poverty that are influenced by subjectivities that are made up of differences based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, physical ability, and other representations and identifications in addition to economic class. The reinforcement of a heavily critiqued anthropological theory (“culture of poverty”) limits participants of TPP in their ability to think broadly about the experience of poverty as a site of struggle that is constructed by media representations, public policies, discrimination, and individual subjectivities.

Finally, the belief that allies have a responsibility to help others with less resources arose as a third discourse in the interview texts from allies. Allies overwhelmingly addressed the need to “give back” to their communities. This was done in a variety of ways. Whereas some allies felt a “moral calling” to participate in TPP, others noted that they “felt the need to help.” When describing this desire to give back, several of the allies noted that they were giving back because they had been “blessed” or they had worked hard to “learn how to be successful.” In many ways, the description of what the allies could “offer” related to their middle class “experience,” “upbringing,” and “skill sets.” In describing their desire to help, allies also described *how* they were middle class. In other words, for the allies, their ability to participate in TPP rested on the fact that they were positioned as middle class. This reaffirming of middle-class status was apparent in almost all of the ally interviews. Again, these discourses reinforce a class hierarchy by linking philanthropy to the middle class. Despite the fact that many of the

people in poverty give back to their communities in various ways through TPP, the allies do not mention this.

Together, these discourses indicate an acontextual view of agency with regard to people in poverty. Within TPP, agency must be analyzed as intricately connected to power relations (both within the organization and on a broader social level) and context. First, participants living in poverty at three of the sites did not discuss (and may not have been aware of) social systems and structures that function to keep them in poverty. Interviews with these participants indicated that discussions of larger social issues had not been broached in their weekly discussions. Despite this lack of awareness, training texts and interview texts position people in poverty as having high agency to change their own circumstances. These texts offer “easy” steps such as changing ways of talking, setting personal goals, and achieving said goals in order to become middle class. I argue that the expectations/positioning of people in poverty as highly agentic is an example of how people in poverty are interpellated into broader discourses about economic mobility and the desirability of middle class status. At the same time, their agency is constrained by the transmissional, memory-banking style of education that they receive, and the constraints of larger social systems that might include classism, racism, and other forms of oppression. This illustrates the importance of both awareness and enactment within contextual structures as steps in the process of exerting agency. It is important to note that awareness is not in and of itself a form of agency. Even if motivated to learn more and do more to create change, individuals in poverty are nevertheless also constrained by social systems and policies such as the cliff effect, a lack of jobs, and the economic recession.

Critical consciousness of social systems and structures can be a motivating first step toward beginning to enact individual and social change.

Very little questioning of the status quo occurred. At one site in particular, where situational poverty was the norm, participants were encouraged to think more about social structures that produce positions of poverty. One participant in poverty explained that social systems such as welfare often inadvertently keep people in poverty, limiting successful strides. She explained,

Things like food stamps and housing support, and all those kinds of supports that folks who are poor can access, are a big mess. And I think one of the problems is this cliff effect where folks are going along and they're getting all the help that they need and their needs are being met. And then they start to be able to breathe a little, and they say, "Okay, now I'm kind of ready to go out and get a better job or get a new job." And then they do that, and then all those supports fall away, and then they're worse off than they were before.

By bringing up "the cliff effect" or the loss of benefits due to an increase in wages, this individual notes that poverty is wrapped up in a political context that blockades the path to success that TPP pushes. The training materials reinforce the idea that individuals can become "middle class" and individual behavior modification is the path toward success. The two individuals above recognize the disconnect between the promises in the texts and training talk and their embodied experiences of the social systems and structures that discourage people from moving out of poverty. Implied success does not occur from individual effort alone.

The TPP program is set up to address some issues of community and social change. The *GA* workbook does offer one module on community and the larger TPP program claims to address larger social issues once per month. However, these larger concerns were more strongly addressed at some sites than others. Indeed, most of the participants noted that they did not complete the entire TPP workbook nor the chapter on community. One participant said that she had to complete the book “in my own secret time...because [the facilitators] were just like jotting through certain stuff and it was like, a rush rush.” When asked about community resources that were available to them, participants struggled to list examples. Moreover, most individuals in poverty expressed that their relationship with middle class allies, and their own willingness to change the way that they talk and carry themselves, was more important in ending poverty, than getting businesses and the community to change factors that influence poverty. When asked what factors are important in ending poverty (and given a list of examples that included changing language, learning about job resources, social support from allies, and getting businesses to change) almost all of the individuals in poverty listed social support from allies as a top priority. Some participants said that all factors were important, but stressed the relationship with allies.

These collective responses point to an emphasis in the TPP program on individual changes rather than a recognition of the influence of social structures and institutions such as loan companies, welfare offices, and unemployment agencies. Only two people living in poverty listed specific example of outside structures that influence poverty. One participant offered McDonald’s as an example of unfair influence by claiming, “the way they do things and the way they do about—they have—like I can’t say...It’s the pay

rates, money wise, and the hours being cut. You know you need these hours and your check is cut, but you know you need these hours. Nobody pays enough.” Moreover, only a handful of people in poverty who were interviewed mentioned a system of oppression that functions to keep people in poverty.

A problematic understanding of individual agency, therefore, emerges from multiple discourses in the transcript texts. When asked whose responsibility it is to end poverty, about half of the people in poverty who were interviewed claimed that it was their responsibility to end poverty. The other half claimed that it is “everyone’s” responsibility. This understanding of responsibility was clearly influenced by the context of the individual sites. Two sites’ participants overwhelmingly claimed that it was the person in poverty’s responsibility to end poverty, while the other sites’ participants primarily suggested that it was everyone’s responsibility. At sites where everyone was deemed responsible, people in poverty also often mentioned the role of the community in TPP and issues of poverty at large.

At sites where individuals felt they were solely responsible for ending poverty, no mention was made of community or systems barriers. At these sites, generational poverty was strong and racial differences were historically rooted and continued to shape the social relations in the community. At sites that had more frequent discussion of systems barriers, many of the participants in poverty grew up in the middle class, most of them were white, and some had post-baccalaureate degrees. Higher education was a prominent feature in these communities.

Indeed, there is a clear delineation between sites that teach people in poverty that they need to “make conscious decisions” and have “the commitment and the desire and

the goal yourself to make it work...to change their lives,” versus sites that emphasize “systems barriers and social structures.” These explanations of the role of people in poverty come from a few middle-class allies—a pattern that once again marks allies as more knowledgeable and critically conscious. The interview texts showed a trend of allies being taught about systematic barriers in their training, while people in poverty often focused on individual responsibility without making the connection to broader structural issues. This difference in training privileges one group of learners over the other and limits access to information that may be motivating. Freire (1970) argues that social change from the top down, as opposed to a grassroots effort, perpetuates a system of oppression that seeks to keep subjugated groups in place. This lies in contrast to the goals of TPP, which are to create individual and social change.

An underlying ideology of “individual responsibility” is clearly linked to the TPP texts, which frequently suggest that if people in poverty change their behaviors then they will end their own impoverished circumstances. The *Getting Ahead* language that describes “self-sufficiency,” (p. 48) and images of a social ladder are linked to people in poverty who claim, “It’s my responsibility to end poverty,” or “An individual has to be responsible for his or her own life.” This intertextual link between the training materials and wider ideologies about individual meritocracy and a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” mentality presumes that people in poverty inherently have agency to change their material conditions.

Individuals’ levels of agency vary based on context, structures, institutional barriers, and enabling forces (Althusser, 1977; Foucault, 1972). My posthumanist approach to agency asserts that individuals can never be outside discourse, but

individuals can enact resistance only if they first actively become aware of social structures and systems (following Cloud, Macek, & Aune, 2006). Here, responses from individuals that mention the need to work on “systems barriers,” “social structures,” and “community engagement” suggest that the conversations that develop between trainers, people in poverty, and allies can move beyond the training texts to include various levels of individual agency. In other words, TPP participants can work beyond creating change on an individual level and begin to participate in a larger effort to create change in their communities.

When explicitly asked for feedback, the participants in poverty overwhelmingly suggested that the program did not need any. Some responses indicated they were concerned that they lacked the credibility required to comment about the workbooks. One participant claimed, “I can’t say what I would add cuz I don’t know what to add. I don’t know about writing a book.” This discomfort can be contrasted with the overwhelming willingness of the middle-class allies to offer feedback. Middle-class allies suggested that the length of the ally training be extended, the word “poverty” be changed to “low-income,” the teaching style of the training facilitators be less lecture-like, the food served at weekly meetings be healthier, the process of matching allies and people in poverty be more thought out, and the ways in which TPP advertises be expanded. Some of these suggestions were repeated, making the list of ally suggestions quite lengthy in comparison to those offered by people in poverty.

After interviews at the first two sites, I began to recognize the participants’ lack of comfort in offering their own views. Therefore, I began to use a critical pedagogical approach to soliciting their evaluations of the TPP program. This interview technique

follows Freire's (1970) problem posing model—a way to engage critical consciousness and foster grassroots agency. I asked several of the participants who were living in poverty to imagine that they were the authors of the texts. I asked, “If you were the author of the next workbook, what would you change and what would you add?” In the earlier site visits, there was significant lack of response to questions of evaluation and change; the participants expressed appreciation about how the program had helped them through a difficult period in life. They exclaimed that it offered, “hope,” “comfort,” and “support.” Yet, participants in poverty were wary about offering suggestions for improvements until encouraged and asked specifically to suggest what they liked and disliked.

In later interviews, however, most were willing and able to offer their own opinions with a different probe. Their concerns in revising the program were connected to social structures, individual experiences, and hope for future participants. For example, one participant noted the emphasis in the workbook on becoming middle class. They expressed, “I mean the people in poverty aren't really gettin' no attention and that's what I didn't like about the book...I'm sayin' like when you have all that money and more money then all that attention comes on them.” Similarly, another participant offered, “I would add a part where it talks about different people's experiences. I would just put out people that was really in poverty to let someone else know you can get out of this...like show some people's stories. Like some people if they can't see it for themselves they be like, ok, this just another routine.” These responses indicate both confidence in offering opinions and the recognition for the need of personal experiences and more diverse representations of people living in poverty.

Within a conversation about the role of community in the process of transforming poverty, one individual was surprised that I was asking about their opinions. She asked, “Get my voice heard?” This participant seized the opportunity by explaining how McDonald’s treated their employees unfairly and paid them a low wage. After offering the opinion that some company standards need to be changed and that “some voices need to be heard” in regards to larger social issues, she immediately apologized as if she had done something wrong. The discomfort that this participant (among others) felt, demonstrates unexamined or developing expectations that influence when and how individuals enact agency. This uncertainty limits people in poverty from offering critical feedback and strengthening the TPP program. Moreover, it stalls Freire’s (1970) process of *conscientizacao*, or coming to a critical consciousness, by limiting individual critical thinking skills.

Conclusions

The analysis of the interview texts challenges previous anthropologically based views of a “culture” of poverty. The interview responses offer some indication of how academics exploring class subjectivities might move beyond overgeneralized relationships between culture and poverty. Due to the competing nature of avowed and ascribed identities that become clear in people in poverty’s struggle to accommodate the TPP discourses, this analysis reveals that the relationship between culture and poverty is necessarily more complex than those scholars who advocate for a “culture of poverty,” a view that essentializes the experience of people in poverty by claiming values, beliefs, practices, language, and behaviors are culturally transmitted to individuals living in poverty. In returning to my definition of culture as a contested and fluid site of meaning

where economic, political, social, institutional, and interpersonal contexts enable and/or constrain the production of individual and group identities and subjectivities, I offer conclusions about the interview texts below.

First, poverty is a contested and fluid site of meaning. Each individual experience presented here, offers a different view of what it means to live in poverty and how such experiences have influenced day-to-day interactions. For some, poverty is a temporary living space that is the result of losing a job. For others, poverty is a way of life that started with previous generations. Moreover, poverty is understood differently based on one's subject position. The participants who were living in poverty offered very different understandings of their cultural experiences than the middle-class allies or those represented in the TPP training texts. Whereas people positioned as living in poverty pointed out stereotypes in the workbooks in addition to embracing much of the material, most of the middle-class allies insisted that the representations were accurate and "made a lot of sense." Thus, middle class allies were more likely to describe a "culture of poverty" than those living in poverty. Furthermore, subject positions based on racial categories also generated different views and experiences of the TPP program. Some, but not other, participants in poverty questioned why racial difference and disabilities, for instance, were ignored in the TPP setting.

Poverty is influenced by economic, political, social, institutional, and interpersonal contexts. These contexts vary based on the TPP site. Economic contexts are particularly relevant when describing what poverty looks like in each of these communities. Both groups interviewed (people in poverty and middle-class allies) foregrounded an economic definition of poverty and social class. In other words, a

person's monetary savings and income, personal assets, amount of debt, and ability to effectively manage all of these defined poverty. Despite the prominence of economic standing in the participants' responses, other factors such as political, social, and institutional factors, greatly influenced poverty in each community. As demonstrated by the interviews, the absence of acknowledging the role of surrounding institutions and structures at multiple sites, points to the way that people in poverty have been positioned into a broken system. The stereotypical representations used in the workbooks, the inability to find jobs, and the racial divide in some areas, contribute to an understanding of what poverty is and how it functions on a day-to-day basis. In other words, texts that perpetuate negative stereotypes interpellate people in poverty into a discourse not of their own making—one in which they are viewed as lazy, less educated, and fundamentally different from people in the middle class. It is clear in the interview transcripts that each site's social and political contexts are integral in describing poverty for their community. Currently, across the sites, it appears as though the white middle-class allies are the expert saviors who have the best chance at enabling those in poverty to move up.

Finally, the organizational structure of TPP enables and constrains the production of individual and group identities and subjectivities. This analysis revealed a number of identifications and representations about people in poverty and people in the middle class. For example, people in poverty in some ways are portrayed as unmotivated, consequently needing support from allies to make necessary changes in their lives. Middle-class allies are represented in written materials and often presented themselves as knowledgeable experts through references to their credibility (e.g. skill-sets or career) throughout the interviews. People in poverty also recognize their middle-class allies as

individuals who should know about resources and are capable of offering motivation. More broadly, all participants perpetuate an understanding of the middle class as normal and successful, so much so that many people in poverty express eagerness to change the way they talk and dress in order to achieve middle-class status. As many individuals involved in TPP praise its teachings and promote its categorization of individuals into poverty, middle class, and wealth, it also produces stereotypical understandings about class positionings and the experiences that should follow. Following Althusser's (1977) concept of interpellation, the categories used in the TPP texts are highly influential in the way that both groups consumed the texts, identified themselves and represented each other. The participants' use of TPP discourse to identify themselves was linked to broader discourse surrounding U.S. class status hierarchy. This use of language makes it clear that individuals are never outside of discourse. Rather, individuals are more apt to define themselves and others in relation to the texts and produce each other into particular social positions that are then reproduced by the interview texts. Despite some counter-discourses that attempt to challenge conceptions of poverty (such as shared perceptions of the cliff effect and corporate practices), by their willingness to participate in this program, both people in poverty and their middle-class allies have been hailed by the TPP training texts, making it difficult to escape its homogenizing discourses.

A critical analysis of interview transcripts from TPP participants reveals several answers to my initial research questions: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced in the interview texts? (2) What do subjects' status positions and relationships that emerge in the interview texts reveal about levels of agency? and, (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the interview texts? First, normalized

conceptions of class and related subjectivities are both reproduced and resisted in the interview transcripts. Both people in poverty and middle-class allies noted that the labels used to position different class groups in TPP materials and conversations are not representative of social class systems in the U.S. Although both groups challenged this class-labeling system, participants were not willing to leave the labeling system behind. Participants from both groups explained that the group labels create a starting place, or a framework for understanding differences. Even so, several individuals in poverty were quick to resist this process of interpellation, claiming, “I don’t fit that stereotype.”

Related subjectivities were most often normalized by the interview texts. When race, sexuality, gender, and religion (among other social categories) were discussed, many TPP participants claimed that those differences are “important,” but did not discuss how such differences could be addressed and incorporated into the TPP program. People of color were the only individuals to point out the marginalization that comes with the colorblind approach that TPP often takes. One African American participant noted that TPP language is “like talking white,” and a Latin@ participant stated, “I just wonder why I might be the only Spanish one in the whole group.” Subjugated religions and sexualities were not brought to the surface in a similar fashion. Interview texts demonstrated that in many ways TPP participants have the same homogenizing, monolithic approach to understanding poverty as the training materials, which ultimately reinforces a view of the normalized subject as white and middle class.

Second, status positions and relationships that emerge in the interview texts reveal an acontextual view of agency. Although the program is set up to create equitable relationships across “class and race lines,” interview texts revealed status differences and

a reinforcement of class hierarchies within individual and group relationships. This was demonstrated through varying definitions of friendship, descriptions of roles within the relationship, and the use of “us” versus “them” language. This type of language positions people in the middle-class as those who “empower” the people in poverty, which ultimately limits the perceived agentic abilities of people in poverty. This is coupled with a verbalized understanding that if the individuals in poverty take the advice and skills offered from their middle-class partners, then they can create individual change. Thus, an acontextual view of agency is reinforced through the cross-class relationships, ultimately ignoring larger social structures and reinforcing the current status-based class hierarchy.

Third, broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the interview texts. Discourses that emerged from interviews with people in poverty include: (1) we need class categories for comparison and understanding, (2) we can learn how to change from our middle-class friends, (3) the social networks we develop are useful investments in our futures, and (4) success is earned and is therefore our responsibility. Discourses that emerged from the interview texts with middle-class allies include: (1) class groups are fundamentally different, (2) in the context of TPP class groupings and stereotypes are useful for our work with people in poverty, and (3) we have a responsibility to help others with less resources. These discourses work together to reinforce ideologies such as individual meritocracy and the American Dream. Such ideologies subsequently perpetuate a hegemonic understanding of U.S. class hierarchies that is often reproduced by TPP participants and ultimately at a larger societal level.

CHAPTER 6

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PERFORMATIVE TEXTS

As I sat down with each interviewee I was hyper aware of my own performance(s) of social class. I had to make conscious choices about wearing clothing that falls in-between class lines; I could wear kakis and a nice blouse, or nice pants and a sweater, but not both. Interestingly enough, in a focus group one person thanked me for dressing casually because it made them feel like I was not trying to be better than them. I honestly thought that I had dressed “up” that night, but was read as dressing “down.” This mention of my class performance made me rethink what I would wear for future interviews. Similarly, in some interviews I could feel (and later hear) myself slipping into a rural drawl. This was not intentional. However, I became much more conscious of this “slippage” after the interviews...when I was still drawling. I was very uncomfortable in what might be called a casual register. I wanted to write it off as communication accommodation—a way to make the interview participants feel comfortable—but this slippage marked my class history. I continued to point it out to myself and those around me as a way to mark consciousness of my class liminality.

It was also uncomfortable to be read as middle class on two occasions. I had planned to open each interview with an explanation of why I was doing this type of research; this explanation included a description of my own class background. The one time that I forgot to announce this, an interview participant said, “Well, you’re middle class, so can I ask what you think about that?” I quickly responded, “No. I don’t identify as middle class. I grew up in poverty too and actually I feel like I am somewhere in between.” I couldn’t help feeling defensive, which made me more reflective about how I typically identify and why. Similarly, in an interview with a married couple, one participant mentioned that he was changing the way he talked to me since I am “from the middle class.” I had hoped that the individuals I was interviewing would read me as “one of them” and feel comfortable casually communicating to me. As I reflect on these instances now, I more fully realize that while I am capable of traversing class boundaries, I am more often steeped in a middle- to upper-class environment that shapes the way I perform my own class background. And yet, it is this same type of juggling or walking-the-line that became most salient in the interviewees performances as well...

In the previous two chapters, my analysis has covered what Taylor (2003) would refer to as *the archive*—a series of texts that have been codified and can easily be read as a way to document the happenings of TPP. Taylor argues that the archive has traditionally been seen as trusted evidence because of its tangibility and reported nature, subsequently leaving out an equally important set of knowledge referred to as the *repertoire*. Taylor describes the repertoire as a set of knowledge(s) that exists outside of

written/documentated texts. The repertoire includes bodily performances and physical experiences. Following Taylor, this chapter focuses its attention on the repertoire in an effort to mark the importance of the body as a site of knowledge production. Some intertextuality has already been identified through analyzing texts from the training materials and the interviews. The multiple performances that occur in TPP are a third set of texts that can be analyzed to answer my research questions about constructed identities and subjectivities, conceptions of agency, and dominant discourses and ideologies. Performance texts in TPP are evident in the individual embodied discourses of TPP participants and the various rituals that TPP participants learn and execute. The body is a text that can be read and marks the consumption of other texts through embodiment and performance of everyday experiences; this extends Fairclough's (1992) understanding of a text as written or spoken.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the participants' bodies were choreographed in a way that suggests they were trying on a different version of themselves. Participants living in poverty frequently commented on skills that they had learned from their training, including ways of speaking, middle-class mannerisms, dress, and vocabulary. Here, I analyze *embodied discourses*—the relationship between the body as text and larger social practices—by extending Fairclough's approach and linking each step of critical discourse analysis to performance theory. Additionally, I look at the interactive *rituals* apparent in my observations of TPP. Bial (2004) defines ritual as those “performances that provide structure and continuity to our lives...rituals exemplify and reinforce the values and beliefs of the group that performs them” (p. 77). Furthermore, Turner (1969) argues that the *ritual subject*, or ritual participant, is positioned into social

systems and communities by ritual. He argues that in order to be a part of a community the ritual subject is “expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents [sic] of social position in a system of such positions” (p. 79). Thus, the concept of ritual is helpful for understanding how individual practices are governed by social expectations. An analysis of performance rituals are useful in identifying how performance sustains a structure for TPP meetings and “governs” those who participate.

Applying Fairclough’s first step of descriptive analysis, I analyze *class realization*—or the cognitive processes associated with embodied discourses—as ideationally bound. I also look at how individual performances function on an interpersonal level to shape how relationships are formed and maintained. For the second step, I link production and consumption to the performative concepts of *class actualization*, *surrogation*, and *affect*. Finally, for analysis of sociocultural practices, I discuss how various *rituals* enacted in TPP reinforce wider societal ideologies. This analysis stems from field notes that detail my own observations and personal interactions with various TPP participants.

Analysis

Descriptive Analysis: Interpersonal, Identity, and Ideational Functions of Language

In my interactions with participants in the TPP program, both people in poverty and middle-class allies change their understanding of social class and their positionalities as class subjects, over the course of their experiences in the TPP program. Here, I specifically point out everyday performances that mark a process of *class realization* for

TPP participants. I argue that this process serves an ideational function of language under Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis.

Class realization is a process of coming to understand the ways in which social class guides worldviews, behaviors, and social interaction. I previously described this process as emergent in confrontation with class difference. In other words, we begin to realize more about our own class positioning when we are confronted with individuals who are different from us. Class realization is a cognitive process of understanding one's class positionality in addition to actualizing and performing the socialized expectations associated with this position. Interaction with class difference makes class performances more visible and begins to change an individual's understandings about him/herself and the larger social structures surrounding that create and enforce class hierarchies. These simultaneous, ontological processes influence individual performance and consumption of discourses. In many ways, the *Getting Ahead* program, used by TPP, is a process of class realization.

All individuals who were interviewed were asked to describe the goals of *Getting Ahead*. Some responses to this question from people in poverty included, "education about the middle class," "an introduction to a lifestyle change," and "to improve people that are in poverty." These responses are indicative of a larger pattern that demonstrates a goal of not only learning skills like budgeting or balancing a checkbook, but also educating oneself on middle-class norms. Many people in poverty explained that they did not know they were in poverty, or how far away from the middle class they were, until starting the *Getting Ahead* training program. One person explained, "I didn't know I was in poverty. I would have said, 'I'm strugglin' or I'm makin' it.'" Another person

commented, “People in the middle class look at us different because they are on the outside looking in.” Another commented, “[TPP] showed me how to act. It opened my eyes to stuff that was right there and we didn’t know...the things we should be doing in an interview, the things we take for granted like firmer hand shake and eye contact and stuff like that.” These examples demonstrate the process that people in poverty undergo in the *Getting Ahead* training—one that opens their eyes to their own class positioning based on an awareness of the normative middle-class model and the steps it takes to get there. This process of class realization functions on an ideational level of meaning because it creates new understandings of class positions, expectations, and worldviews. In other words, the language of the *Getting Ahead* program is utilized by the TPP participants as a way to understand societal expectations of how social class can and should be performed.

Class realization also became apparent in participants’ concerns about their interview performance. At one site in particular, almost every participant living in poverty ended the interview by questioning and evaluating his or her performance. These participants asked, “how did we do?” (with seriously inquisitive expressions), apologized for not giving me what they thought I wanted by suggesting, “my story was awful, just awful,” or stated that s/he was nervous, suggesting that their performance of middle-classedness was unsuccessful.

Even though I continually emphasized that I was looking for individual experiences and personal opinions, the participants’ comments suggested that they knew they were being evaluated and that their embodied presence should show the skills that they learned in the TPP training. In other words, they marked the fact that performance is

done *for an audience*; in this case, the immediate audience was me. In addition, the participants may have known that their performance and knowledge would reflect on the staff of each site. Though not present in the conversation between each participant and me, the staff can be seen as an additional audience, for whom performance is judged and interpreted. I understood participants' comments as a sort of concern that they had not properly learned to perform the social expectations constructed by TPP texts. Their performances not only suggest that the individuals being interviewed were uncomfortable with their class performances, but they also point to the possibility of coaching from the local site facilitators related to the interviews. My speculation about this additional coaching provides an example for the process of class realization and the expectations that are set for the group as a whole. The individuals' feelings about an unsatisfactory performance illuminate a set of expectations that they failed to perform.

Embodied discourses also served an interpersonal function. Group identities and relationships were influenced by the observed social boundaries of class and race groups at some of the TPP sites. At one site in the South, difference became very apparent in the placement of bodies within the space of group meetings. At one meeting in particular almost all of the middle-class (white) partners were sitting together, as were the (Black) people in poverty. This indicated that the groups felt separate, distant, and different. Foster (2003) argues that the placement of bodies within space communicates about more than just the physicality of the space. In addition, the choreography of bodies can signify relationships, identity, connection, and routine. Here, I argue that the use of space is continued evidence for a process of class realization that literally separated the class differences that existed between these two semi-homogenous groups. This process of

realization clearly stems beyond social class to incorporate race. In other words, different bodies influenced the way that potential relationships were perceived and formed—some bodies could comfortably integrate and others could not. At sites where this seeming segregation was less of an issue, allies and people in poverty were more likely to identify their relationships between each other as a friendship. Moreover, at sites where relationships between allies and people in poverty had long been established, cross-class interaction occurred more often, in addition to observable contact between those with different sexualities, abilities, and religions. At the site in which the observation of social separation was apparent, allies were also described as “advisors” and “mentors.” Thus, the separation of cultural groups seems to be related to subject positioning, where hierarchies are often reinforced through the use of space and the placement of bodies. Status differences became very clear when homogenous groups were visible, especially in those sites where the relationship between allies and people in poverty were constructed in interview texts as more distinctly hierarchical.

The interpersonal function of language was notably evident in a particular one-on-one conversation I was able to observe between a person in poverty and her middle-class ally. Before observing this communication event, I also had the opportunity to interview each of the two individuals separately. Both individuals described their relationship as a “friendship.” The person in poverty went as far as describing her ally as “family.” Similarly, in the interview, the middle-class ally described her role and the relationship as follows:

I think, to be her friend and to, you know, to be an ally—to be somebody she could rely on at different times and not to be judgmental of her. She now calls me

her second mother, and she and her mother do not have a good relationship. So I just do a lot of listening with her and I think that's what she needs really is somebody who would just honestly listen to her without being judgmental or telling her what to do.

Later in the interview, this ally also referred to her role as “mentor.” These descriptions followed the same discourse that was more widely circulating about the type of relationships that allies and people in poverty should have. Especially at this site, TPP participants were taught to build friendships, rather than having the ally offer “help” to the person in poverty. In the interviews, these women’s description of their relationship produced an image of equality and working toward eliminating the middle-class versus lower-class hierarchy that might challenge the relationships built in TPP. However, their performance in a one-on-one meeting differed from their description.

The embodied discourses that were evident when these women met individually differed in that there was a clear hierarchy communicated by the individuals in both their verbal and nonverbal communication. Both of the women were knitting while they had their weekly check-in. The middle-class ally was sitting tall and leaned in to her partner when trying to elicit a response. The person in poverty, in this particular conversation, was hunched over and made little eye contact with her partner. Instead, she maintained focus on her needlework. The ally asked a list of questions—a checklist of sorts—about tasks the person in poverty should have accomplished over the past week. A portion of the conversation sounded like this:

Ally: “Have you gotten [name of child’s] schooling taken care of?”

Partner: “Not yet. It’s a lot of work, but I was thinking about going in there tomorrow.”

Ally: “The sooner you take care of it, the sooner it will be off your plate.”

Partner: “Yeah. I should do that tomorrow.”

Though this is only a short portion of their conversation, it is representative of the larger performance, where the middle-class ally asked if the person in poverty had accomplished each task, reinforced the importance of the task, and moved to inquire about progress on another task. In these interactions, the ally takes the role of primary interlocutor—one who is able to ask questions and guide the conversation as s/he sees fit. The person in poverty is subjugated in the sense that s/he cannot fill this primary role; people in poverty are not able to ask their allies, “Have you paid the mortgage this month?” or “What is your plan for your monthly budget?” Thus, the importance of looking at subject positioning of those in poverty in relationship to their allies, once again becomes apparent through performance. A class hierarchy is reinforced, placing the middle-class ally at a higher subject position than the person in poverty. This positioning affords a particular level of privilege to the ally, which allows allies to play the role of primary interlocutor. Despite TPP’s efforts to equalize the relationships between middle-class allies and people in poverty by defining the relationship as a “friendship,” this performance indicates that the relationships between class groups ultimately reinforce a class hierarchy.

This performance is particularly interesting when placed within a broader context. When I asked this person in poverty if she incorporates the hidden rules of middle class into conversations with her ally (e.g. by being more budget conscious, dressing up, using

more middle-class language, etc.), she said, “No. We’re just us. I’ve never really even thought about that question.” This response indicates that despite the pressure to learn hidden rules of middle class as a means to develop relationships with middle-class allies, this skill was not consciously applied in the relationship. The performance did not indicate whether explicit moves to perform middle-class expectations were made. On the contrary, a class hierarchy was reinforced when the ally took control of the conversation. This disconnect between what was discussed in the training materials and what was enacted in the meeting between the ally and the person in poverty implies that the archive (written texts) demonstrates one set of discourses, while the repertoire (performance) says something else. Additionally, interview transcripts placed importance on building an equitable relationship with the ally. The performance differed in that there was a clear imbalance in who controlled the conversation topics. This illuminates the importance of looking at both the archive and the repertoire in order to reveal competing discourses and consumption of texts.

The verbal and nonverbal communication in this conversation demonstrated a discrepancy between the way each of these individuals classified the relationship and what actually occurs in their day-to-day performances. Their one-on-one conversation reinforces a class hierarchy, illustrated by the leadership taken on by the more “knowledgeable” middle-class ally over the person in poverty. This everyday performance functions on an interpersonal level to define the relationship between an ally and a person in poverty as guided by social hierarchies. This kind of relationship became observable in group interviews with allies as well, when their comments included many examples, offered in quick succession, about giving advice, reminding individuals in

poverty of earlier goals, repeating deadlines, questioning lack of promptness or missing meetings, and listing reasons for doing certain things.

Discursive Practices: Production and Consumption

Fairclough's (1992) second level of analysis, which looks at the production and consumption of texts, is best understood here through an analysis of *class actualization*. Class actualization, or the visible ways in which class is performed in and through the body, becomes apparent in this analysis when looking at the consumption of TPP texts. Here, I argue that various levels and forms of consumption (which can also be read as a failure to meet expectations for intended consumption of the texts) become evident in the class performances of people in poverty. Moreover, it becomes clear through their performances that middle-class actualization is an overarching goal for the TPP program and its participants.

Across various sites, it was common for people in poverty to incorrectly recite TPP terminology (such as *casual register*, *formal register*, *hidden rules*, and *generational poverty*). For example, when describing the goals of the TPP program, one participant struggled to produce the language that s/he was expected to have consumed. The participant said, "they want us to be so- so- soph- sophisticated?" Two other participants described the "casual registration" as a skill that they learned, instead of "casual register." The determination to use language from the training, but the failure to do so correctly, may show a "front" that the participants are trying to perform.

Goffman (1959) describes this presentation of self as wearing a mask. He contends that this performance is "the conception we have formed for ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—the mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be" (p.

19). This front is also indicative of a larger process of class actualization, in which participants attempt to perform class expectations, but are still in the process of achieving actualization. As previously described, class actualization can be difficult to accomplish, much like Maslow's (1943) apex of self actualization in his hierarchy of needs. Here, participants often strived for actualization, but did not properly produce the middle-class behaviors and expectations outlined in the TPP texts.

Because participants were quick to describe that they had learned new skills, I inquired about whether or not they were using the skills on an everyday basis. All participants but one (who said she was "working on it") claimed to do so; yet when pushed further, not one could offer concrete examples of when s/he had utilized the skills. However, one individual was prompted to explain that he was indeed changing his language for me. He stated, "Right cuz if you are professional, and I come to you, like, 'hey wassup?' then it is going to be a negative attention. And if I know how to talk, that is going to get your attention. And that's my purpose, to get your attention, not negatively but positively, *the way you talk*, and [get] a way to manage my money." In this example, the participant might have read my body as a text (e.g. clothing, posture, academic language) and made the assumption that I am middle class. His (and others') willingness to *show* me his skills was evident in his modeling and demonstrated consumption and production of TPP texts. Furthermore, when asked when she uses the TPP skills, one participant admitted, "I'm using them right now." I describe these performances as a process of class actualization because of the participants' assumptions that middle-class performance should be used during interviews. The identification of me as middle class sparked a Goffmanic performance of acting into a new class situation.

As a process of consumption, *surrogation* becomes a salient concept to discuss. Roach (1996) describes surrogation as a process of bodying a (cultural) role forward. In other words, individuals passively assimilate into cultural roles that are necessary for the social fabric to continue. Individuals cannot perfectly surrogate roles; thus, gaps and failures are bound to occur. Roach also suggests that the process of surrogation is aided by the *effigy*—a signifier that helps to breathe realism into the role. An effigy could be an item, or a title, for example. When an individual walks into a restaurant, s/he knows that the person who is supposed to take his/her order is the one with an apron and a note pad. These items turn an ordinary person into a role-bearer: waitress. Without these effigies, the person performing the role may not be believable or *recognizable*. An example more relatable to TPP is that of a graduate. This role is bodied forward when an ordinary person puts on a graduation gown and a mortarboard with a tassel. The effigy is evidence of the importance of audience in performance. In order to be believable and recognized in a particular role, effigies connote particular meanings to be interpreted by an audience. Class positionalities can be surrogated and have a number of effigies that help this process. This is evident in the performative texts of TPP.

Individuals in poverty who participate in TPP are in many ways being asked to surrogate middle-class roles. This class positioning is a U.S. American expectation. Those who do not fit into the model middle-class lifestyle, tear the social fabric of what is expected. Thus, TPP has many processes in place to help each individual in poverty understand the role of a middle-class person. They are taught a particular script and are expected to perform that role when in the company of other middle-class folks. These scripts are evident in the teaching of the hidden rules—particular ways of speaking and

acting that identify social class background. As previously described, the hidden rules are broken down into lists (i.e. here is what people in poverty say/do versus what people in the middle class say/do). In a way, these are meant to be read as what to do and what not to do in order to successfully perform the middle class. At one site, the use of a middle-class script went beyond these written discourses by offering makeovers for individuals who have demonstrated that they are truly committed to the TPP process. Those individuals who have made an effort to be more professional (read: more middle class) are rewarded by “having the outside match the inside,” according to one site staff member. In these makeovers, TPP participants are given professional clothing, a haircut, and makeup—all effigies that help to body a middle class role forward. Those who have not necessarily demonstrated a desire to become middle class do not receive the outside makeover.

Once an individual has mastered the hidden rules and the formal register, and has received a professional makeover, the TPP participants have created a persona that they are expected to bring with them into particular contexts. When these ways of talk and dress are not followed, however, the fissures and gaps that Roach (1996) describes are likely to be evident to outsiders. This was most evident in the lapses in recitation of TPP language described above. This also became evident in a few of the interviews that I conducted.

In four of the interviews I conducted with people in poverty, I noted moments at which the participants presumably felt more comfortable speaking with me and free to talk less “on point.” In other words, there were clearly moments when several of the people interviewed slipped into a more “casual register” and moved further away from a

more professional, middle-class way of speaking. At the beginning of these interviews, individuals sounded and looked stiff. They made sure to enunciate the words that they were using (e.g. “I was going there” instead of “I was goin’ there”) and they held a high posture. As the interview continued, this pattern was not upheld. In one interview in particular, I noticed that when the individual got into a story, the formal register disappeared. His pace of talk sped up, his dialect began to incorporate a drawl, and he began to drop the “g” at the end of many verbs. However, when I asked this individual a new question, he started all over in the formal register. The longer he held the floor and spoke, the more likely the casual register was to emerge. When asked if his use of the various TPP ways of talking was conscious, he said,

Sometimes I feel like it happens automatically, there's been times when I've been in business settings and I've wanted to share my story in casual register and it's very hard to just be real about it and do it. Formal just kicks in automatically sometimes and vice versa; it does it the other way too.

Other TPP members claimed that it was difficult to switch to formal register after they have been home with their family. One person claimed, “When I’m home with my family, it’s just talkin’, but when I’m at [TPP] I do become more conscious of the way I’m talking.” Other participants commented that their families struggled with the changes that they made based on TPP training. One participant explained, “They think I think I’m better than them. It took a long time for them to support me.” Another individual stated that if he was away from TPP for too long, “cuss words will slip back out of my mouth.” Finally, an individual who has moved out of poverty appeared able to use the formal

register in his general responses, but also used informal slang, grammatical slips and “ain’t” when describing his experience with others in poverty.

Together, these comments demonstrate the slippages, gaps, and fissures that Roach (1996) warns about when surrogating a role. Although TPP sets expectations about how to act, and provides a script for the middle-class role, others outside of TPP voice their questions about the changes being made. Indeed, successful surrogation is a goal for TPP. Those who achieve surrogation by changing the way they talk or landing a job are often used as examples in TPP advertising or on their website. Surrogation in the TPP setting is not an overnight process. The length of TPP training, which can last from 18 months to two years, and the amount of time that individuals in poverty spend working with their middle-class allies, point to the awareness by TPP staff that this is a longer-term process.

Affect also becomes relevant in an analysis of bodily consumption of TPP class expectations. Affect refers to the body as an ontological space—one in which non-cognitive responses become important and indicative of larger ways of knowing (Gould, 2007). Affect is a kinesthetic agent that moves us to do something (often action that is political). Here, affect becomes useful in linking class realization and class actualization. In other words, it is a link between cognitive thought processes and bodily ways of performing one’s subjectivity. Affect is useful in describing ontological moves that TPP individuals make to meet expectations of TPP and consume/perform the texts in an acceptable way.

Affect is also useful in explaining why some individuals in TPP refuse to believe that their lower class performances are “wrong” or “weird.” This resistance to

ethnocentric discourses in the TPP texts that normalize and literally centralize the middle-class experience is notable, but rare. In visual images and charts that compare poverty, middle-class, and wealth, the experiences/descriptions assigned to the middle-class are cast in a normative light and are framed as goals for the TPP participants. Anything that exists outside of that category is “weird” or “wrong” as described by most TPP participants in their interview responses. These expressions point to a kinesthetic experience of negative affect—knowing that something does not *feel* right. In other words, the individuals I spoke with could not necessarily explain why they were uncomfortable with some of their TPP experiences, but knew that their previous day-to-day performances had been ruptured in a meaningful way.

When one individual in poverty questioned why the TPP program wanted to “make [him] middle class,” this could have been coupled with a pre-cognitive response that urged him to maintain a class performance that was more comfortable and appropriate for him. The discomfort that other interviewees felt when “going blank” or performing poorly in the interview may also be linked to affective responses about improperly performing/consuming TPP texts. Thus, accurate performances (based on their interpretation of TPP expectations) are based on affective moves toward class actualization. Affect may also account for attrition in the TPP population (the numbers aren’t quite clear, but in conversations with TPP leadership, as many as half of the participants do not complete *Getting Ahead*). In other words, the discomfort felt in being pushed toward a new class subjectivity that ignores history, context, race, and gender, may be a motivating force to stop the process of class realization and actualization in TPP.

Many of the people in poverty also described positive affective responses related to participation in TPP. This was observed specifically at the beginning and end of each interview session. Most individuals entered the interview space with a smile and positive demeanor. After asking the initial question, “Why did you decide to get involved with TPP?” many individuals’ faces lit up as they described the desire to make changes in their lives. Many individuals used the word “hope” to describe the feeling they got when entering the program. Others explained that TPP gave them a sense of “confidence.” One person claimed, “I just want to say that this program does good things and changes the way you feel about life.” These descriptions paired with the outward expression of thankfulness and sincerity point to the positive and motivating reactions linked to affective experiences. Furthermore, this demonstrates the potential for individual and social change to occur when participants embody motivation and desire.

Sociocultural Practices: Identifying Underpinning Ideologies

When performance nodes are repeated, shared, and carry social force, I identify such moves as performative discourses. These discourses include: (1) performing a middle-class script improves one’s social class and (2) positive thinking leads to successful economic change.

First, the performances that I observed centered on middle-class scripts. These scripts included expectations about how to talk, how to dress, and what mannerisms to use. The scripts are communicated via training texts, weekly meetings, and ally behavior. The examples provided in the training materials are reinforced by allies’ use of the hidden rules and in weekly discussions about how to get out of poverty. Following these social practices, people in poverty clearly tried to surrogate the middle-class role as a way

to bring about their own success. As previously described, several participants living in poverty tried to incorporate a discussion of *the hidden rules, casual and formal registers*, and *generational poverty* into their interview answers. This attempt often resulted in a slippage, where the words were mispronounced or improperly used in the conversation we were having.

In addition to incorporation of TPP language into the interviews, people in poverty tried to surrogate the middle-class role by acting more professional during our interview. In observing weekly meetings, I noticed that many people in poverty were better able to “let loose” when interacting with other participants in poverty, than when interacting with staff, allies, or myself. Their talk became much more relaxed, they laughed, and they talked about recent day-to-day experiences. When the meetings officially began and these members were expected to interact with other race and class groups, their communication became much more structured. Once the meeting began, they were in a middle-class setting; different expectations for behavior existed within the context of a weekly meeting. Similarly, in interviews, participants in poverty tried to maintain strong posture, make eye contact, and “say the right thing.” The several apologies that I received for “going blank” or “not doing it right” indicate that the participants felt they had not performed the middle class role in the time and space in which this type of role was expected. This was reinforced when one person in poverty asserted that they were using the “formal register” because I am middle class. His identification of me as middle class and his confession of communication accommodation demonstrate his understanding of social class performance and how a middle-class surrogation might lead to success.

A second discourse of positive thinking leading to successful economic change was highlighted throughout these performances. This embodied discourse is best demonstrated through the variety of rituals that take place in TPP training and weekly meetings. Rituals, also referred to as cultural performances, are often evidence of “a far larger body of cultural manifestations” (Carlson, 1996). Indeed, rituals often signify the passage of individuals from one social period/setting to another. Rituals can take the form of formal ceremonies, or can be identified through simple repetition of a performance. The shared participation in rituals represents a larger shared set of meanings, often associated with norms, mores, ideologies, and hegemonic practices. Three rituals in particular are useful for analysis here.

The discourse about positive thinking emerged primarily out of the “new and good” ritual, a shared practice at almost all TPP events. At the beginning of every TPP meeting, participants are asked to “do new and goods.” In this ritual all participants are asked to tell the rest of the group one thing that is new and/or good in their lives (since the last meeting). The ritual occurs in a circle setting, where each individual offers a “new and good,” and then the person sitting next to him/her does the same. The ritual continues until each person in the group has spoken.

By sharing in the “new and good” ritual, participants (both people in poverty and allies) are asked to put away their trials and tribulations in light of something positive that has recently become a part of their life. At the various meetings that I attended, this process was described as a way to “focus on the positive” and move beyond the “negative complaints” that often fill daily conversations. Many participants struggle with this. If a person in poverty had a bad week, s/he often mentioned that before moving into

something “new and good” that happened to them. When this happens, staff members interjected and realigned the activity, pointing the participant into a more positive direction. Experienced participants are able to plan something to share before the meeting begins; they anticipate their contribution to the ritual. This shared practice of focusing on the positive is described as a way to focus on goal setting and success.

At the close of each TPP event/meeting, a second ritual called “appreciations” occurs. This ritual also occurs with each participant sitting in a circle. The coach, or leader of the meeting, asks for a volunteer (or sometimes volunteers him/herself) to go first. The first person to speak turns to the person next to him/her and describes one reason why that person is appreciated. The person receiving the appreciation thanks the offering participant and then turns to the person next to him/her to repeat the ritual. Appreciations, then, are not exchanged between two people, but passed along clockwise until each person has received an appreciation from one person and given one to another person. In some instances, the person giving appreciations will step outside of the rules to offer multiple appreciations or appreciations to more than one person. I also observed individuals purposefully sitting next to somebody, explaining that they wanted to “appreciate” that person on that occasion.

A third ritual, called “graduation” occurs at the end of the *Getting Ahead* training. At the end of the 16-week training period, participants in poverty are asked to invite their families to a ceremonial convocation that symbolizes their completion of the *Getting Ahead* text. Middle-class allies are also invited to attend, though in most cases they have not been assigned to a person in poverty for the next step of the program. Graduation is often held in a hall, a church, or a school—spaces that take the TPP participants out of

their weekly meeting space—in order to create a specialized feeling for the participants. At most sites, graduating participants are invited to provide input regarding what the ceremony itself will look like. At some sites, those graduating wear graduation robes and hats. In some instances, participants opt for formal attire. At other sites, only the designated speakers dress in professional attire.

At the ceremony itself, a stage is set up with rows of chairs and a lectern. This configuration is reminiscent of traditional graduation ceremonies, where participants are on display for the audience. Often, several speakers take center stage and address the audience with prepared speeches. Both participants and staff members are given opportunities to address the audience. At some sites there are certificates that are rolled and tied with a ribbon reminiscent of academic diplomas. Staff members present “graduates” with a “Certificate of Achievement,” (although at one site, the presenter, in an apparent verbal slip, referred to the certificate as a diploma).

There is often a celebration that follows the formal graduation ceremony. Food and decorations mark the event as a celebration of what has been achieved. Family members attend the event and applaud for their family member. TPP participants talk about graduation as a goal, something to work toward, and something that is surely an accomplishment. For many TPP participants in poverty, this is the first graduation ceremony that they have participated in, because they have not received high school diplomas or college degrees. The graduation ceremony follows that structure of traditional convocations that mark the completion of high school, community college, university, etc. As such, the participants voice pride in being able to say that they

“graduated” from *Getting Ahead* and after the ceremony they are congratulated by family members and visitors.

By looking across these embodied discourses, a clear link between middle-class performances and success becomes apparent. These rituals are linked to broader sociocultural practices that mark advancement of individuals on the track to becoming contributing members of U.S. society. As well, by ignoring or erasing negativity and focusing on what is positive in “new and goods” and “appreciations,” the rituals take on normative force to emphasize hope for individual advancement. They also reinforce the value of relationships, which is a cornerstone of TPP. All three rituals, but especially graduation, are indicative of larger understandings of such ideologies as individual meritocracy and the Protestant work ethic.

Individuals who participate in the rituals are asked to set aside their hardships, disadvantages, and subjugated positions, and replace them with proactive, positive life choices. This “power of positive thinking” discourse has been quite popular in the mainstream media in recent years, with the success of books like *The Secret*, a 2006 publication in which Rhonda Byrne argues that thinking positively leads to infinite possibilities. At least 1.75 million copies of the book have been sold worldwide, it was turned into an equally successful movie, and it has been backed by Oprah Winfrey (Adler, 2007). *The Secret*, and other books like it, claims that if we visualize something hard enough, it will come to us—erasing the enabling and constraining nature of larger social systems, hierarchies, and structures. Like this popular discourse, TPP’s “new and good” and graduation rituals may work to erase histories, contexts, and larger social structures like public policy, that constrain people in poverty and keep them in a situation

that is only partially controlled by their own drive. This particular conception of unlimited agency, referred to by Gunn & Cloud (2010) as *magical voluntarism*, has been critiqued for its overly simplistic view of agency and its lack of recognition of context. In other words, agency always emerges in contexts and relationships, which can be enabling and/or constraining. When TPP rituals frame change as solely an individual process, such performative discourses ignore relational and contextual aspects that enable and constrain individuals as well.

The graduation ceremony in particular is linked to wider societal ideologies of individual meritocracy. Graduation marks a point of achievement in education, which is often linked to a middle-class practice (Perrucci & Wysong, 2007). Recently, The *Washington Post* reported that President Obama proposed a standard that every U.S. American should be able to get at least one year of higher education. This comment might seem general and unsurprising, if it were not for presidential candidate Rick Santorum, who took issue with the statement, remarking, “What a snob!” (McGregor, 2012). The *Washington Post* article went on to say that college is part of the American Dream. Such current popular discourses continue to link education to the middle-class. This class-status is taken up in TPP graduation rituals when traditional ceremonial features such as invitations, a stage with a podium, “student” speakers, and diploma-like certificates are included in the TPP ceremony. When names are called and each participant on stage collects his or her certificate, the ceremony models the achievement that can occur when one performs the middle-class role.

The idea that “if you work hard enough then you can achieve,” is encapsulated in the TPP graduation ceremony—a ritual designed for individuals in poverty to have

something to work toward, or something that marks their achievement. When people in poverty discussed graduation, they described it as something that they “earned” and an accomplishment that they should be “proud of.” When I asked individuals how long they had been a part of TPP, they often used graduation as a reference point by stating, “I just graduated last week!” or “After graduation, I have been coming to meetings for four weeks...” When middle-class allies mentioned graduation, their feelings about the ceremony were mixed. Some noted that it was a nice way to celebrate their new relationships. One ally stated, “After I went to the graduation, I was really happy for the [people in poverty]. It showed me that they were going to put the effort into changing.” However, another ally felt conflicted about the graduation ceremony. He claimed, “Some of us have a problem with the word *graduation*. It means that there is an end, when really that’s actually the beginning of [TPP].” Comments from staff members also critiqued graduation as implying that participants had “finished” their training and been given what they needed. Dropout rates for those finishing *Getting Ahead* and not continuing in the program, not being matched with middle class allies, and not attending weekly meetings, point to the merit of this critique.

Together, these comments indicate that graduation marks a successful pinnacle—one that is reached through hard work and dedication. These worldviews are indicative of larger socio-cultural patterns that paint the picture of the quintessential American Dream (Lucas, 2011). This is related to a wider ideology that individuals are responsible for change in their lives. In other words, if the TPP participants work hard enough, similar to the views reflected in the Puritan work ethic or the Horatio Alger myth, then achievement should naturally follow (Lucas, 2011). This also implicates individual meritocracy in that

individual hard work will earn the individual merits in the form of socioeconomic mobility (McNamee & Miller, 2009).

These ideologies are both enabling and constraining. On the upside, the individuals who take part in this activity are motivated by the success that they can find in their lives. They described getting excited about making change and setting aside obstacles. The practice in itself bonds the community in a way that opens up communication about potentially taboo topics. Nonetheless, assuming that individuals have complete control over their circumstances ignores macro structures that subjugate individuals in poverty and keep them in a marginalized position. In other words, when one attributes change to individual responsibility alone, s/he ignores corporate practices, welfare policies, and institutional racism, among other factors, which influence whether or not a person can move out of poverty. Moreover, McNamee and Miller (2009) argue that embracing an ideology of individual meritocracy reinforces the “culture of poverty” discourse by claiming, “If everyone can succeed, and people in poverty have not succeeded, then there must be something inherently different (or wrong) with people in poverty.” Support for individual meritocracy as a guiding U.S. American principle, thus perpetuates a blame-the-victim approach to ending poverty.

I find it important to note that in addition to my critiques, these rituals do serve a motivating function. Participants in TPP like participating in the rituals for two reasons. First, the rituals are a concrete example of where equalizing between class groups takes place. At the meetings, every participant including middle class allies, people in poverty, and staff members take part in the “new and good” and the “appreciations” rituals. In the rituals that I observed, this resulted in communication that crossed role boundaries and

facilitated dialogue across class groups. In addition to this sense of equalizing, these rituals create in-group membership and foster a sense of community for participants and staff. The rituals feel good to the participants because within the context of TPP, these rituals evidence norms of belonging. Participants begin to think, “this is what we do at TPP; this is who we are.” In other words, when these rituals are repeated, the social circle of TPP reinforces a norm and subsequently reinforces participants’ abilities to have a sense of belonging and fit within a community. Turner (1969) explains this sense of belonging in claiming that rituals create and maintain *communitas*—a community in which participants feel a sense of equality, togetherness, and solidarity. In this sense, rituals like “new and good” produce positive affect, a kinesthetic experience that motivates individuals to build relationships and create change on an individual level. The driving nature of TPP, though, is the community itself. These experiences may not carry to other communities and settings outside of the TPP setting, where the rituals are not reinforced. In other words, the nature of “positive thinking” that has been introduced by these rituals is not necessarily prevalent in other social situations where these rituals are not shared. This presents a problem when facing larger social structures like the welfare system, community colleges, or healthcare systems, which present a new level of challenges facing individuals in poverty.

Conclusions

Here, I analyzed a body of performative texts that add to the traditional set of texts created and used by TPP. By looking at bodies and rituals that emerge in my research with TPP, I was able to supplement the knowledge I have about the identities and subjectivities created and maintained by TPP discourses. This was particularly useful

in identifying how the program's participants consumed the training materials used by TPP. The extent to which participants were able to consume the texts and surrogate the roles is an indication of what ideologies were used successfully, how individuals are being interpellated into broad societal discourses, and how successful TPP is in achieving their goals of ending poverty through their current strategies.

It is evident that the variety of performative texts found in TPP produce similar outcomes to the ideas that emerged in the interviews. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that everyday performances and interactive rituals create new worldviews, build conceptions of the self, and create/maintain relationships. Moreover, bodies become evidence for consumption of texts—something that is more difficult to analyze if the researcher is looking solely at a verbal or written text alone. Following Taylor (2003), the archive must be supplemented with the repertoire. Thus, performance analysis has implications for improving the method of CDA in order to analyze intertextuality in multi-textual analyses.

The combination of class realization, actualization, surrogation, and affect creates a framework by which researchers using critical discourse analysis can better understand the process of production and consumption. When studying a singular text, such as one of the training manuals, it is difficult to analyze how the text was consumed. With a performative approach the researcher takes the opportunity to observe consumption on multiple levels.

The demonstration of class actualization through individual performances also points to important implications for this work. At the actualization level, one of two things can happen. First, an individual may actualize normative social expectations. In

the case of TPP, the expectation is to become middle class. Participants wanting to meet these expectations may begin to take the advice of the TPP training materials, by changing the way that they talk, dressing differently, and following more middle class rules. This route of class actualization results in a reinforcement of the traditional U.S. class hierarchy. The examples presented above demonstrate that most of the TPP participants attempted to actualize middle-class norms and behaviors, as expected by TPP. However, individuals may follow a different path of class actualization that requires a critical class consciousness. Once individuals become more aware of their social positioning and the systems that maintain a class hierarchy, there is a possibility for the enactment of resistance. Individuals in poverty who participate in TPP can enact varying levels of agency by resisting the homogenizing discourses that ask them to change their identity performances. Thus, when a person says, “I don’t want to change the way that I talk. I can still be successful in the casual register,” they are resisting dominant discourses that claim success follows individuals who speak grammatically correct English—the same discourses that are reinforced by TPP. A limited number of TPP participants were critically conscious of their social class positioning. I would argue, at this time, that a critical class consciousness is not fostered in the TPP program. The performances described above are evidence of this absence in the program.

These performances point to the need for wider discourses about social class and social positioning. TPP training materials and staff conversations could foster a sense of critical class consciousness that helps individuals in poverty to realize their subject positioning and enact some level of agency regarding their class performances. By interpellating TPP participants into a normative set of discourses that equates middle

class with success, participants are not encouraged to think about the social systems that inform their subjectivities. Indeed, fostering a sense of individuality opens up a space where social justice can occur at an individual and a community level. The more individuals understand about the social structures that keep them in place, the more likely they are to enact resistance and influence social change on a broader level.

A critical analysis of performance texts from TPP participants reveals several answers to my initial research questions: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced and performed in the performance texts? (2) What do subjects' status positions and relationships that emerge in the performance texts reveal about levels of agency? and, (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the performance texts?

First, class and related subjectivities were once again produced in the performance texts as a byproduct of consumption of the TPP training materials. Social class performances attempted to mirror the expectations that are outlined in TPP materials. Moves to utilize middle-class language became evident in the miscommunication of TPP terms and concepts. Nevertheless, individuals in poverty underwent a process of class realization in which expectations of a normalized social class were made evident through a comparison between their everyday performances and those described for the middle class. TPP participants also went through a process of class actualization, by which the middle-class expectations were surrogated and performed. Related subjectivities, particularly racial subjectivities, are wrapped up in this process as many of the "normal" social expectations are aligned with white styles of communication. In a process of class actualization, related subjectivities are ignored in order to focus on surrogating a middle-class (white) role.

Second, status positions and relationships that emerge in the performance texts reveal three understandings about discourse. The first is a reinforcement of class-status hierarchies, which valorizes the middle class and subjugates the experiences of lower- and working-class individuals. The domination of communication by middle-class allies demonstrates the inequitable relationships that are held between people in poverty and their allies. These relationships may operate in a way that perpetuates an understanding of the oppressed as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970). Subsequently, the middle-class allies are perceived to be more powerful, enabling them to “empower” their impoverished partners. This performance of subject positioning produces an understanding of agency that blames the victim, or puts the onus of responsibility on the individual in poverty. In other words, if individuals are working hard enough and have the desire to learn from their middle-class mentors, then they should be able to create change. This reflection of the individual meritocracy ideology serves to “legitimize class inequalities” and reinforce what seems like a “naturally ordained” class hierarchy (Perrucci & Wysong, 2007).

A second view of agency emerges from the performative texts. In the process of class actualization, an individual could become more fully aware of the ways in which they are positioned into class systems and interpellated into broader discourses about poverty, class, and race. This act of awareness can be the first step toward enacting agency. This move resists the dominant view of agency that assumes individuals alone have the capacity to create change. When an individual in poverty decides not to enact middle-class expectations in their relationships with allies or staff, (by deciding to speak in the casual register, for example), he/she begins to enact agency and resist dominant

ideologies. If this process is conscious (rather than a “slip” into a more comfortable form of communication), then this demonstrates a move toward critical class consciousness—a cognitive and embodied process by which an individual becomes aware of his/her status positioning, participation in hegemonic practices, and the larger oppressive systems that keep such positions/practices in place.

Third, broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the performance texts. These discourses include: (1) performing a middle-class script improves one’s social class and (2) positive thinking leads to successful economic change. These became evident through the multiple, shared attempts to reproduce the middle-class expectations that TPP describes. Moreover, the assumption about positive thinking as leading to individual change (in worldview, daily practices, or communication behaviors) is most prominently revealed in the various group interactions and rituals that TPP members participate in on a weekly basis. The repeated nature of these performances for an audience not only demonstrates the shared practices that emerge from this group, but also the reinforcement of wider societal ideologies that describe individual responsibility as a pathway to change.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As I finish this particular project, I begin to reflect on my experience in doing this study and how it will influence my future research endeavors. As an individual, this project impacted the way I understand my own subjectivity. My reflections on my discomfort point to a complicated intersection of lower- and middle-class identities. Throughout this project, my avowed (lower-class academic) identity was in conflict with my ascribed (middle-class) identity. I was challenged to think about my invisible and visible privilege(s) that enabled me to do this research. As a white, educated, professionally dressed woman, my body performed an identity that was contrary to how I wanted to be read. This was extremely difficult for me. I came into this project with a history that I wanted to express, and perhaps some desire to learn more about who I am. The latter did unfold, but not in the way that I had planned. I have learned to constantly strive for more consciousness of my whiteness and my middle-class subject positioning, even if my wider subjectivity is made up of multiple class experiences.

In doing this research, I also learned a great deal about how to move forward in building a relationship with nonprofit organizations. This was a unique relationship for an academic to build and maintain. Identifying as a critical researcher and yet, providing thoughtful feedback, is difficult to balance. I knew that there were so many benefits from this program. The success stories that I heard, the expressions of “hope,” and the willingness of cross-class groups to participate in the program are a testament to the kind of work that was going on in TPP. I did not want to take that away by bringing a critical edge to my research. And, at the same time, by bringing a critical edge, I thought that I could offer something to the organization that was useful and beneficial in the long run. I was worried throughout this entire process that I was overly critical. I hope that I was able to convey the importance and usefulness of this program in addition to those practices that I have critiqued. I must also say that this was made possible by a very open and thoughtful staff, particularly the CEO of TPP. This individual often joked that it was difficult to have conversations with my advisor and me (because of our critical implications). Yet, he kept coming back for more. In this chapter, I’ll describe some of the ways in which he and other staff members have already incorporated changes into the TPP curriculum and matching processes. Without this openness and willingness from the staff and myself, this research would not have been possible.

I do not plan to leave this nonprofit behind. I now identify as a researcher/practitioner and know that praxis has become more centralized through this work. When I look at the type of critical work that exists in communication today, I see a gap in what I refer to as “critical applied research.” This project has shown me that it is possible to use a critical theoretical and paradigmatic approach to research, while still focusing on relational dynamics, and offering recommendations to a public organization. I have seen value in this research. I have seen social change taking place. Critical applied research is a way for critical scholars to not only “talk the talk,” but also “walk the walk.”

History shapes and changes constructions of social class in a variety of ways. Media texts and academic publications alike perpetuate negative representations of lower class groups, which, in turn affect the relationship between social class and culture. For example, the recent revival of worldviews and research related to a “culture of poverty” further perpetuate a homogenized understanding of people in poverty as resourceful (read: sly and/or able to move out of poverty if they wanted to do so) but lazy creatures, who speak a common language and exist outside of the normative middle-class moral compass (Lewis, 1966). The incorporation of monolithic descriptors described earlier into training materials acts to exaggerate the value of the middle class and subjugate those who do not fit in. Such texts reinforce wider discourses about class groups, proper enactment of American citizenship, and success. This study attempted to uncover such discourses with the hope that such hegemonic practices can be made visible, countered and changed in order to promote equity and inclusion across class lines. In this chapter, I return to my research questions in order to summarize and interpret the findings of this dissertation. Next, I detail a list of recommendations that have been offered to the nonprofit and discuss implications for other nonprofit organizations. Third, I discuss the strengths of my theoretical framework and the limitations of this study. Finally, I offer some ideas for future research in this area of study.

Summary of Research

The purpose of this study was to uncover how discourses used in one U.S. nonprofit organization produce and maintain subjectivities, relationships, and conceptions of agency. I sought to understand how the TPP structures, such as training materials, procedures, norms, and practices might reproduce dominant ideologies. In doing so, I

attempted to uncover junctures at which the nonprofit organization can begin to dismantle wider societal ideologies and hegemonic practices. Three research questions guided my research: (1) How are class and related subjectivities produced and performed in training materials used by TPP, embodied texts, and interview texts? (2) What do subjects' status positions and relationships that emerge in TPP reveal about levels of agency? and (3) What broader discourses and ideologies are implicated by the TPP texts?

Summary of Theoretical Framework and Methods

In chapter 2, I built a conceptual/theoretical framework that brings together theories of critical intercultural communication, performance studies, and critical pedagogy. This framework allows individuals studying discourse to broaden their approach by understanding the body as discourse. Moreover, my attention to critical theory enabled me to differentiate between *identities* and *subjectivities*, extending scholars' understandings of how an individual forms his/her sense of self. Giving attention to subjectivities allowed me to understand how individuals create their own awareness of their multiple identifications and how they form class subjectivities in the context of the TPP program, while being shaped by societal discourses about who they should be and how they should behave. In addition, attention to both critical pedagogy and critical intercultural communication framed my view of agency as a dialectical tension between individual choice/change (Freire, 1970) and complete interpellation (Althusser, 1977). In other words, agency was used in this study as a way to understand a balance between complete autonomy and complete subject formation by societal discourses. Using this framework, I argue that individuals are never outside of discourse, but after becoming more aware of their subject positioning by various texts such as

training materials, descriptions used by other participants, and larger understandings of poverty that are described in mediated materials, they have the potential to resist such discourses and create social change. When individuals are encouraged to think critically about their lived experiences and are allowed to contemplate alternative/non-normative realities, then they can begin to challenge the status quo.

In order to apply my theoretical assumptions to answering my research questions, I utilized field research and critical discourse analysis methodologies. I visited seven program sites across the country including those in the Midwest, the South, and the Southwest. I also attended two regional conferences in the Midwest and Southwest. Approximately seven people at each site were interviewed, totaling 57 participants. Of these participants, 24 were individuals in poverty and 33 were middle-class allies. Interviews constituted one set of texts for analysis.

In addition, I analyzed two training texts including *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities (BOP)* by Ruby Payne, Philip DeVol, and Terie Smith and *Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting'-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life (GA)* by Philip DeVol. Both texts were created by a for-profit company called aha! Process, Inc. My third set of texts included field observations of individual and group performances from the TPP participants.

In chapter three, I expanded Fairclough's (1992) method of critical discourse analysis to make room for analysis of embodied texts. Fairclough's conception of text, as written or spoken, leaves out what Taylor (2003) calls the *repertoire*—embodied and experienced texts that are undocumented or *archived*. By analyzing three sets of texts, I have the opportunity to address intertextuality and interdiscursivity between the archive

and the repertoire, which illuminates discourses that are otherwise invisible by considering experiential knowledge in addition to codified or documented discourses. In utilizing this extended version of Fairclough's method, I identified ideational, relational and identity functions of language in each of these texts, looked for processes of contextually informed production and consumption, and finally, moved to a more abstract level of identifying wider sociocultural practices and ideologies. The ideologies become apparent through attending to interdiscursivity. This analytical framework and method were useful in connecting shared meanings, norms, and practices within the TPP community to wider sociocultural practices.

Interdiscursivity Across TPP Texts

In addition to the interdiscursivity that arose within each of these texts, such as the repeated belief that success is earned, I argue that it is important to look across the printed, interview and embodied texts in order to identify discursive formations and intertextual chains. When looking across the discourses presented here, a primary finding is the reinforcement of individual responsibility for change and success. When looking at the training materials, interviews, and performative texts, as well as larger popular and political representatives' discourses, there is an idea that individuals can become middle class—the opportunity is there if they are willing to seize it. These discourses foster a belief that individuals are fully agentic, and capable of changing their own futures. These discourses subsequently leave out attention to macro-structures and contexts that might limit an individual's ability to create change in their own lives and offer overwhelming reinforcement of ideologies related to individual meritocracy.

It is important to reference a competing discourse to those steeped in individual meritocracy, that of the need for a “big view” to poverty reduction. This arose only briefly in each of the texts analyzed here, but is instrumental to the overall goal of TPP. TPP texts such as fliers and websites, describe Big View as additional monthly meetings designed to tackle larger social/policy-oriented issues such as the cliff effect. Members of the Big View team, who sometimes include allies, people in poverty, or both, but are largely made up of staff and community members, are formed. They are asked to move beyond the idea that ending poverty begins and ends with the individuals, to incorporate an additional layer of responsibility. Each site has a Big View team to tackle a selected local policy issue. In addition, a national Big View team exists to support the work of the local Big View teams, and to design strategies to address poverty reduction at the regional and federal level.

The importance placed on the Big View level varies from site to site. Some allies who were interviewed claimed that Big View meetings were an “option” for them, but many steered away because it was an additional time commitment. Some people in poverty that I interviewed claimed that Big View was something they only heard about; they were not able to describe the goals of Big View or talk about social structures they wanted to target for change efforts. At sites such as these, people in poverty are often asked to join one committee, (choices include: Big View, community relations, and resources). This limits the participation of many of the people in poverty. At one site, one person in poverty expressed interest in the Big View team, claiming “Because of my social-work background, I wish there was a little more activism. I’ve heard of those Big

View meetings, and that's something that I'm definitely interested in doing." When asked why she was interested in Big View, the person in poverty explained,

I think there's a lot. So—so one of the things, I think, is this—this big mess of social service supports. Things like food stamps, and housing support, and all those kinds of supports that folks who are poor can access. And I think one of the problems is this cliff effect where folks are going along and they're getting all the help that they need, and their needs are being met. And then they start to be able to breathe a little, and they say, "Okay, now I'm kind of ready to out and get a better job or get a new job." And then they do that, and then all those supports fall away, and then they're worse off than they were before... So there has to be some sort of way in which these support systems are—are graduated, so that folks can just move up without having that crazy, scary, stressful feeling that everything is falling out from under you.

This woman's description of social structures that are problematic is an example of a counter discourse that became apparent in interviews. Hers was one of few descriptions of social structures that came up in interviews with individuals in poverty. Her description of how personal responsibility is no match for social structures challenges the more prominent discourses about individual meritocracy and hard work leading to success.

At this individual's site, I was able to observe a Big View meeting. There, the Big View team (staff members and allies) spoke to the larger group of people in poverty at the last meeting of the month. It was apparent that they had been working on "the cliff effect" as their site's prominent issue, for a long period of time. The people in poverty

had heard about this issue before. At the meeting, they were highly engaged in the discussion. Several were able to share stories of how the cliff effect had halted their progress/success. Some were interested in helping to change policies that cause the cliff effect and others were skeptical that such policies could ever be amended.

At another site, the Big View issue at hand was much more local, and more importantly, the idea for the group's issue came from the people in poverty themselves. First, they identified a problem in their community; they did not have affordable thrift stores with professional clothing for plus-sized women. They argued that this was a problem because these women were at a disadvantage during job interviews. So, together, the people in poverty found a location for their store, solicited donations (including racks and displays from a local department store), hired one of their own as a manager, and tackled the issue at hand. While these individuals could not articulate what "the Big View" was during their interviews, it was clear that the social practices associated with Big View had become a part of the circulating discourses at this site. Many individuals commented on their community project and articulated that they had seen some change and success at this micro-structural level. In this case, participants were able to address what change looks like at the community level and why it was important, but did not utilize the language associated with the Big View team, such as discussions of structures, social justice, and policy changes. Realizing the significance of social change, regardless of how the explanation is articulated, demonstrates individuals' capacity to become aware of structural constraints and the steps one can take to challenge them and work toward social change.

Together, these two examples point to a discourse that is counter to other prominent discourses that circulate in TPP. Whereas many texts continually reinforce the belief that individual change and responsibility lead to success and a middle class subject position, the work done to change social structures at both the community level and the state level simultaneously challenge this idea. The amount of time and attention paid to Big View varies from site to site, but nonetheless it is a prominent discourse that moves beyond those that homogenize these participants and position them into victims in a “culture of poverty.”

The above analysis shows intertextual chains—or the ways in which present discourses cite and are inextricably linked to previous discourses. The chain of ideas between academic studies of the “culture of poverty” in the 1960s, which set the scene for the implementation of public welfare reform in the 1990s, and the reproduction of both of these discourses in the for-profit training materials, interviews, and individual performances demonstrate how individuals in TPP are interpellated into particular positions by discourse(s) (Althusser, 1977). In TPP, this becomes evident in the perpetuation of ideologies such as the American Dream and individual meritocracy. Repeated support for class hierarchies in the workbook (visual examples that delineate between “poverty,” “middle class,” and “wealth”) and reinforcement of such ideas in interview texts (e.g. “my middle-class ally ‘empowers’ me”) and in performance texts (e.g. participation in graduation) demonstrate how ideologies about social mobility and hard work are reinforced and become hegemonic. This chain points not only to the creation/reinforcement of discourses, but also identifies the middle-class as a *preterminal regularity*, something that has become a norm through discursive practice (Foucault,

1972). Each overlapping discourse reinforces the regularity and desirability of the middle-class position and the practices associated with this class group (e.g. ways of talk and dress). Moreover, as Perrucci and Wysong (2007) argue, when organizations reinforce meritocratic ideals, classism (subjugation of people in poverty) becomes institutionalized and reinforced. Thus, the regularity and desirability of the middle class become indicators of its hegemonic force.

The interdiscursivity described above, not only influences how individuals participate in TPP, but it also demonstrates power relations, subject positioning, and assumptions about agency. For example, when discourses across texts normalize the middle class, these discursive formations also position other classes in relation to this norm. Thus, when discourses are reinforced, people in the middle class (within TPP) are perceived as having more resources, more knowledge, and more skills and are able to “empower” those who are not middle class, reproducing inequitable power relations. This subsequently limits the agentic potential of people in poverty, as they are expected to conform to middle-class expectations, rather than gain autonomy. Moreover, these discourses reflect and construct contexts and structures—this then relates to broader and institutional and public ideologies. These discourses draw upon deeply embedded ideologies about individual meritocracy and personal responsibility by restating the importance of individual choice, responsibility, and the power to create change. These ideologies are produced by structures, rules, policies, institutions, institutional practices and policies that help keep people in poverty, as well as use of texts like the training materials used by TPP that position people in poverty as victims that are to blame if they cannot change their own lives. This analysis of intertextuality (links between texts),

interdiscursivity (links between discourses), and ideologies (broader taken-for-granted beliefs perpetuated by society) begins to locate the crossroads at which discourses are passed on, sustained, and sometimes challenged. In doing so, interdiscursive analysis can reveal how such ideologies are also reproduced by people in poverty and middle-class allies (social practices that the interview and performance texts demonstrate). For instance, if similar discourses are reinforced by people in poverty and middle-class allies, and can also be found in training materials, then intertextual chains and predetermined regularities can be more easily discovered.

In addition to the reproduction of hegemonic discourses, this analysis also reveals the potential for social change and individual agency. The view of agency that many of the encircling discourses of TPP foster is one that sees the individual as fully capable of creating change. This analysis reveals a competing discourse that illuminates the enabling and constraining nature of social structures, and the need and possibility of changing them, as well. In understanding these discourses, an understanding of agency as an individual's capacity to create change within multiple contexts and under the constraints of social structure, must follow. Thus, an interdiscursive analysis points to the potential to envision a program in which individuals in poverty are motivated not only by the relationships that they build, and the potential that they see in themselves, but also at the level of critical consciousness. At this level, individuals move beyond individual change in order to become a part of something larger—in order to spawn activism and ultimately create change at a macro level (Freire, 1970). This understanding of agency sees the individual as never being outside of discourse (TPP draws upon many), but capable of

offering counter discourses in relation to discourses that maintain current status hierarchies and subjugate some individuals.

Summary of Analysis

In returning to my first research question, class-related subjectivities were informed by dominant discourses that were reinforced in the TPP training materials, weekly meetings, day-to-day conversations, individual performances, and group rituals. Each text that was analyzed reproduced an understanding of the allies' middle-class subject position as the norm, to which people in poverty were held. The middle-class role was glamorized by most of the texts associated with TPP. In addition, most participants, allies and those in poverty, performed a middle-class role during TPP events. The training materials and performances also perpetuated an understanding of the classed subject as raceless and desexualized most often, but sometimes depicted people in poverty as using vernacular associated with African Americans. The overall lack of discussion and training surrounding issues of identity reinforces a class subjectivity that mirrors Lewis' (1959) conception of "culture of poverty," that essentializes all those in poverty, and functions to ignore difference and perpetuate a color-blind mentality. This discourse of whiteness along with color blindness is also linked to wider ideologies about individual meritocracy. Several scholars argue that by maintaining the belief that success is merit-based, other components of a person's identity (such as race) are ignored in calculating achievement (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Simpson, 2010). Essentially, this ideology erroneously makes "equality" synonymous with "meritocracy" (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). In other words, U.S. discourses often ignore institutionalized racism and opt for explanations behind inequality that blame these individuals for not

trying hard enough. The framing of issues as a merit-based, “economic” imperative along with advancing a perspective featuring color-blindness, ignores unearned privilege based on race, as well as other social categories, and perpetuates a discourse of whiteness as the standard.

Subjectivities of allies and people in poverty differed greatly. Training materials continually compared individuals in poverty to the middle-class norm, ultimately subjugating individuals living in poverty. Descriptions of people in poverty as less motivated and uneducated lied in opposition to middle class subjects who were framed as educated, motivated, and willing to create change in their own lives. Moreover, the frequent referral to the skill sets that each ally brought to the relationship, and a lack of interest in what each person in poverty contributes to the relationship, created an inequitable relationship between these cross-class participants.

Moreover, people in poverty whose subjectivities included being people of color were different from those who were white. Most of these individuals noted different perspectives about the training materials that included discomfort, confusion, or frustration with the lack of attention to concerns of people of color and an overt expectation for language that closely aligns with white practices.

Other areas of intersectionality were difficult to analyze, do to lack of discussion surrounding these identifications. Women, for example, who are disproportionately affected by poverty and make up the bulk of TPP participants, did not discuss their sex as a reason for their class positioning or as a barrier for becoming middle class. Even when women were paired with male allies, their explanation of challenges in their relationship did not include extrapolation of sex-related issues. This is not to say that these women

would not identify challenges with their sex positions, yet, their focus seemed to be on class (and sometimes race) alone.

In answer to my second research question, agency is primarily framed in the printed materials as an untapped potential that each person in poverty needs to engage. Discourses across the texts reveal wider beliefs about individual meritocracy, The American Dream, and a rule in meetings and relationships for positive thinking. As evidenced in the training materials, interview texts, and performances, class hierarchies are strongly supported as a means for understanding and positioning groups in relation to each other. In addition, these texts demonstrate that success is earned through development of power as an individual choice and capacity, and praise for achievement-based rituals such as graduation. These examples reinforce several scholars' arguments about the ideological nature of individual merit and social mobility (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Lucas, 2011; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Perrucci & Wyszong, 2007; Simpson, 2010; Winn, 2003). While these representations seem to motivate people in poverty to reconsider their lifestyle and daily choices, plan for the future, and envision alternatives, these discourses position people in poverty as the sole agents of change. Meanwhile, allies are positioned as fully agentic individuals who are able to enlighten the people in poverty about accessing that untapped potential. These views, along with other forms of political, educational and religious discourse, reinforce the institutionalized nature of classism, and the belief that the values, worldviews, language, and social practices of the middle-class are better than those of lower- and working-class groups.

If not coupled with the counter discourses about social structures and macro change, people in poverty continue to be interpellated into a hegemonic system that

subjugates them, rather than creating opportunities for change. The relationships that emerge within TPP, while also motivating and powerful, reinforce these discourses. This is most evident in the performances that emerge in communication between middle-class allies and people in poverty, which demonstrate a top-down approach for relationship development rather than an alliance, which incorporates more equity in the relationship. Collier (1998a) argues that in a sustainable interpersonal/intercultural alliance, participants communicate about power relations and unearned privilege, recognize how histories and past experiences influence the subject positions of each party as well as the relationship, and have an orientation of affirmation toward each individual. If TPP allies were to follow these principles, it may be that these cross-class relationships could be more equitable and sustainable. However, inequitable relationships arise within these cross-class pairings, and are reinforced by social, political, and historical contexts that have framed middle-class as normal and poverty as subjugated to this standard.

Within the relationships formed in TPP, both individuals described some benefit from the cross-class interactions they encounter. People in poverty are encouraged to think about the types of sustainable changes they can make in their daily lives. Allies are encouraged to engage in conversation with individuals who have different worldviews, ultimately expanding their awareness of cultural and social issues and how these issues affect individuals differently. If the relationships formed in TPP follow the guidelines listed above (communicating about power/privilege, recognition of past experiences, and an orientation of affirmation), then each individual has the potential to walk away changed. This is evident in some of the relationships that I observed.

Finally, in response to the third research question guiding this study, discourses that reinforce a class hierarchy were evident in this analysis. When class hierarchies emerged in the texts, not only do they normalize the middle class, but they also tend to subjugate people in poverty. As a result, when a person in poverty does not quickly or effectively move up in class, pressure is put on the person to create change on an individual level. Training materials reinforce a wider “blame the victim” ideology by claiming that individuals have the power to create change in their own lives. Thus, if they work hard and change does not follow, they must be doing something wrong. This approach diverts attention away from larger social structural issues such as public policies and racial/gender discrimination that work to keep people in poverty. This ideology was also reinforced through interview responses from people in poverty that suggested that individuals are responsible for ending poverty, and ritual performance such as “new and goods” which foster a “positive thinking” model of change.

The organizational structure and wider discourses used by TPP to explain their mission, also implicate an ideology of individual meritocracy. The organization claims to be unique in that it helps individual families move out of poverty. This approach is productive in some ways, in that it is more manageable to use the relational model between people in poverty and middle-class allies when a handful of families/individuals are recruited at the beginning of each cycle. More attention is paid to the unique experiences of each individual in poverty and individual goals are discussed in depth. However, this model reinforces the understanding that the *individual* is responsible for ending poverty. Current retention rates, while not exact, show a high level of attrition. While I was not able to have access to the group of individuals who decided not to

continue with the TPP program, difficulties with retention indicate that attempting to reduce poverty one person at a time is not necessarily the best approach. The ideological nature of individual meritocracy is used as a way to organize the TPP process, and yet, lack of retention demonstrates the flaws in a merit-based (and consequently blame-the-victim) approach to ending poverty. In other words, high attrition calls these ideologies into question, and consequently calls the value of the program's approach into question.

Additionally, the lack of attention paid to diverse and intersectional identities reinforces a hegemonic practice of whiteness, making white identities the invisible, privileged center. The training materials are a primary example of this in that the formal (read: acceptable) communication patterns resemble "white" talk, causing some individuals who fall outside of this identity category to question its usefulness within their own daily practices.

Implications

This analysis reveals a number of contributions to the field of communication studies and for academic/practitioners who are doing critical applied research. First, this study carries implications for academics who are seeking to do critical applied work. Here, I have developed a framework that attends to individual positionalities and intersectional identities. I argue that the critical paradigm justifiably has a home in fieldwork because academics need to make better moves in creating multi-level social change.

This project seeks to engage and activate the concept of social justice by making recommendations back to the nonprofit organization that I evaluated—many of which were suggested by the participants who I interviewed. This work provides tangible

examples of how theoretical developments such as class realization and actualization, critical class consciousness, and discursive evaluation of performance texts can be used to evaluate and adapt organizational training materials and programs. Understanding the discourses that enable and constrain nonprofit organizations is fundamental for creating change on multiple levels (individual, local, and national) and accomplishing the organization's goal of building the social capacity of its participants.

For performance scholars, this work bridges the archive and the repertoire in a practical way. I know that practicality may be of little concern to theoretical performance scholars. However, the elusive repertoire brings nuance to an understanding of the archive. Access to and application of this body of texts is essential in applying theories of performance to field research. By linking discourse to performance, scholars can better understand the motivation behind such performances, the expectations attached to particular performances, and the shifts between multiple performances. Most importantly, this theoretical and methodological approach pushes performance studies scholars to contemplate the everyday nature of performance as it is related to discursive practice. This opens up space for performance intervention and community-based performances that attempt to resist dominant discourses and create systemic change. For example, field research that uses the approach outlined here can be used to create performance ethnographies that seek to (re)perform the repertoire of individuals being interviewed.

For critical discourse analysts, this study extends an understanding of what counts as discourse, what contributes to a worthy body of texts, and how researchers can determine consumption of texts by describing the body as a text that can be critically analyzed with traditionally "linguistic" tools. In extending critical discourse analysis to

include embodied texts, this study reveals that new discourses emerge when comparing the archive and the repertoire. Traditionally, critical discourse analysis has been used for media and public texts. The extension of this method to include embodied texts also opens up greater possibilities for using critical discourse analysis in field research. Greater attention can be paid to the production and consumption of texts, when one analyzes the text and then looks at how it is taken up and used in social practice by those who are interpellated by texts. In other words, this approach more fully analyzes the social practices of language and the ways in which discourses are produced, reinforced, and countered.

At the overlaps in discourse, researchers and practitioners can begin to envision change. Where one discourse dominates, other competing discourses can draw attention and challenge the status quo. This is where a critical pedagogical framework can become most useful. By changing some of the social practices within TPP, to include more discourses about macro structures, public policies, institutions, and other ideological influences, participants in the TPP program will have a broader repertoire of understanding. Their ability to articulate the factors that influence policy will move beyond a description of economic and social “capital,” and will begin to incorporate broader interpretations of systemic factors such as “the cliff effect,” “welfare reform,” and “predatory lending.”

It is important to note that this critical pedagogical approach should not solely implicate the people in poverty as agents of change. Instead, it should be more fully recognized by TPP leadership that it is everyone’s responsibility to work toward a critical consciousness and create social change. By using this approach with allies and staff as

well, the onus of responsibility is taken off of the person in poverty and broadened to be more inclusive of multiple lived experiences. In addition, critical consciousness for middle-class participants might aid in a more holistic understanding of an alliance—one where the onus of class realization is put on both parties in the relationships built at TPP. Thus, an over assumptive view of individuals as fully agentic is not reproduced and all TPP participants are encouraged to become critically conscious of their subject positioning. Moreover, when intersectionality is recognized, TPP leadership, staff, and participants, must also recognize that people in poverty have *different* subject positions. They do not come from equitable positions. When participants recognize that people in poverty are positioned differently by broader U.S. discourses and policies, they must also realize that one approach does not fit all. Thus, reflection on the current training materials and techniques must occur.

Grassroots awareness and activism that can come from creating change on multiple levels—individual, local, national, and/or global—is a way to move beyond the surface level of the fight against poverty, to a broader level that tackles *social* beliefs, practices, and behaviors. The organization as a whole is moving in this direction; I saw a glimpse of this at one site in particular, where individuals at all class levels were talking about social change. Even so, TPP has the capacity to expand this model and heighten its approach to social change in addition to its overarching emphasis on personal psychological and communicative change.

Summary of Recommendations

I had the great pleasure of working with staff members who have been very open to my recommendations. Throughout the overall evaluation project, which included wider

sets of interviews with staff and funders, Mary Jane Collier and I have been giving feedback to TPP. Our goals are for the leadership to continue to create circumstances under which participants and community members will be motivated to create change on individual, local, and national levels, and to enable them to design effective materials, procedures and practices. In our recommendations, strong views from staff and participants about what is not working, and long lists of recommendations, have been sincerely considered. We have already seen changes in the program's goals and curriculum, and have begun discussions about the need for changes in training people in poverty and allies, as well as community volunteers. The nonprofit organization has asked us to participate in development and implementation of new training materials. As well, we have agreed to write an article for academic/practitioner audiences showing how TPP moves beyond the critiques of aha! Process Inc. materials.

A new curriculum for training people in poverty was recently piloted in Albuquerque, which takes into consideration many of the recommendations listed below. Most of them came from TPP participants directly; they reflect critical class consciousness and desires to create change on the community level.

Recommendations for Training Materials

As noted, the training materials are undergoing an overhaul. The national leadership team acknowledges that changes need to be made that respond to scholars' calls to break down monolithic understandings of poverty that many people in the U.S. hold (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semington, 2008; Gorski, 2006, 2008a; Osei-Kofi, 2005). Specifically, there needs to be more attention paid to the social aspects of poverty, in addition to the economic dimensions.

I recommend that “social class” be usefully linked to economic class in order to represent how individuals in poverty are positioned in a more holistic and intersectional way. The materials’ current limited focus on economic class fails to recognize that class has been systematically constructed in terms of economics, social networks, and cultural contexts and ignores other identity categories such as race, nationality, and sexuality. In recognizing the multiple ways in which class subjectivity is produced, the text could be more informative and representative of the experiences that participants possess. At the least, participants could be encouraged to critique the descriptions of different classes based on their own experiences.

Second, the categorization of groups in the materials into three general groups, as “poverty,” “middle class,” and “wealth,” should be avoided. If possible, it is more useful to talk about what poverty looks like on an individual or community level. For instance, training materials could include a section that asks individuals in poverty to answer the question, “What does poverty look like in this community?” This activity can help to clarify whether individuals are experiencing generational or situational poverty, in addition to specific issues such as housing, minimum wage, and transportation that are particularly troublesome for community members. This helps to break down class hierarchies that normalize the middle class and subjugate other TPP participants. If class labels must be used, then these groups might be more accurately described as “low income,” “moderate income,” and “upper income.” As well there should be more examples that point to levels within each class such as lower middle class or upper middle class to indicate that class levels are complex.

Third, conceptions of communication competence and relationships should be broadened to include contemporary approaches to transactions, recognition of the dynamic and processual nature of relationships, along with the potential for cross-class alliances. As well, material on working with cultural difference in relationships and strategies for conflict management would be welcome additions. By recognizing how individuals in poverty and, for instance, their employers and co-workers, co-construct meanings, the materials could take into account a much more complex relationship between these individuals and the social systems they participate in. The range of relationships includes those between individuals in poverty and their employers, their instructors in community colleges, staff in social service agencies and in their families. This broader view moves focus from the individual to relationships in which meanings are co-constructed and allows for relationship negotiation and change over time. The materials could take such a model and put more emphasis on how to deal with disagreements and conflict in any of these relationships, or how all parties can work within their various relationships in order to distribute resources, solve problems, and collaborate for policy changes. Adding examples generated by past participants in training programs of communication strategies in job interviews, performance reviews, and other job-related contexts would be relevant and practical.

Fourth, adding material on assessing the differential impact of contextual structures and institutions and strategies for working with (and against) institutional systems in community initiatives would increase application value. A more pragmatic approach toward individual and community resources should be explored. For example, allies might become more critically conscious if they were to research community

resources such as job-placement agencies and food banks, in addition to requiring people in poverty to search for such resources. The materials do a good job of listing a range of different types of resources (i.e. spiritual, emotional, physical, financial, and social). People in poverty are given concrete examples of resources about which they may or may not know. However, the resources could be better linked to actions that can be taken with others to work on broader community issues, which vary across the U.S. More attention to how to develop and utilize community resources, and an approach that recognizes that the wider community and members of diverse classes are responsible for addressing strategies to end poverty would be more appropriate.

More attention to the joint responsibility and opportunities for working for change shared by those in middle and upper classes, and a discussion that better describes the roles of government agencies and community resources, could provide a more relevant picture of social change. Along these lines, giving attention to sustainability and follow-up support, which is virtually absent from the materials, is called for. Addressing this issue could be as simple as keeping track of participants who have decided to leave the program, or creating a structured “next step” for participants who reach the end of their TPP tenure.

The materials could easily add portrayals that are more complex and discussions of power that are more relevant by discussing how power emerges in dynamic processes in relationships, structures, and systems. For example, sections could outline more diverse strategies for differently located individuals in poverty to utilize as well as add more attention to the collaborative actions that middle- and upper-class individuals can take to change economic policies, institutional policies, legislative initiatives, and

community programs. More attention can be paid to describing communicative strategies that address intercultural communication, relationship development, and steps to create sustainable community change initiatives. Such additions would make a move to showcase systemic changes in addition to individual changes, and a more relevant and potentially useful view of communication competence and effectiveness.

Fifth, rather than arguing for colorblindness, a reflection at the end of each chapter that asks participants to consider how each module's topics might change based on differences across race, ethnicity, sex, region of the country, religious affiliation, etc. would be helpful in terms of broadening the scope of the materials and increasing the relevance of the material to individuals' lives and experiences. Ideologies like those surrounding the "American Dream" may act to reinforce national group cohesion and increase individuals' hope and motivation to take action to move out of poverty. An endorsement of this ideology needs to be problematized to a greater degree within the context of government policies, varying economic conditions across the U.S. and a discussion of educational transformation. The current state of the U.S. economy might be included in the materials in that, generally, those living with middle class status may carry more debt than expected, and live more frugally than perceived.

Sixth, TPP should give more attention to sex and gender differences related to poverty and poverty reduction. Most sites report having high numbers of female participants and note difficulty in recruiting men into the program. The high numbers of women in poverty needs to be addressed through additional research, attention to gender differences with regards to the experience of poverty, and intersectionality. More specifically, interviewing women who are positioned within multiple levels of oppression

(e.g. a woman who is a person of color and a mother, while living in poverty) may reveal important contextual constraints that women in poverty uniquely experience.

Finally, attention to religious diversity within the organization will be instrumental in defining the goals of the organization and where responsibility for accomplishing those goals lies. As a whole, religion is not discussed in the aha! training materials, save for one section that lists and describes “spirituality” as a resource in moving out of poverty. At each site, however, religion becomes an important factor in the recruitment process (many churches advertise TPP services), as well as a reason for participation. Many individuals (both allies and people in poverty) noted that they were driven to participate in TPP by a divine/spiritual calling. Allies who identified as Christian, in particular, felt like it was their responsibility to help people in need, making TPP an attractive philanthropic option. Despite the overt presence of the Christian community at many of the TPP sites, the relationship between the churches involved and TPP is not always clear. The extent to which discrimination of individuals who fall outside of the religious partner’s doctrines (e.g. gay, lesbian, agnostic, atheist, or transgendered, for example) is not clearly communicated. In addition, other types of religious institutions such as synagogues or mosques have not been as actively sought after for partnerships. Clear definitions regarding religious partnerships will help to improve the expectations for TPP participants at all levels.

Recommendations for Training Practices

My primary recommendation is to incorporate a critical pedagogical approach to learning throughout the TPP process (Freire, 1970). This approach is implied at junctures in the TPP texts, but is not fully utilized throughout the process. Such an approach

recognizes the individual experiences of participants and reframes the educational context from one where students are expected to digest information that is taught to them, to one where students become critically aware of the information they are given (Freire, 1970). To them, this level of consciousness has the potential to motivate individuals in poverty to recognize and rally their resources in an effort to create change (Ford & Yep, 2003). Such an approach transforms the levels of agency that people in poverty experience through the program from limited to engaged. To illustrate the benefits of this approach, I offer some of the specific recommendations made by the participants (both people in poverty and middle-class partners).

First, most of the individuals interviewed (in both roles) would like to see more (diverse) individual experiences represented in the workbooks and discussed in the workshops. Individuals who are living in poverty felt as though the experiences offered in the workbook were not representative of their day-to-day lives. Making the workbook more personalized to TPP by using the stories of their own participants could be useful in helping future participants feel as though they are represented accurately. In addition, the middle-class partners recognized the need for interactive sessions that involve bringing in people in poverty to share their experiences as part of the training. Currently, middle-class partners are brought into the TPP training to share their ideas about resources with people in poverty; yet, the reverse is not true. The middle-class allies felt as though they had time for small talk with the people they might be paired up with, but never had in-depth conversations that allowed them to understand subject positions other than their own. This move could increase the level of agency that people in poverty feel they have and work to dismantle negative stereotypes. Additionally, this approach could break

down the expert/vessel binary that has become apparent between the middle-class partners and individuals living in poverty in the TPP program.

Second, one participant asked that TPP begin to “think outside the box” in terms of social categories that place people in poverty, middle class, or wealth. This participant noted, “You have to think outside the box. If you have the mindset of staying in poverty then you gonna stay in poverty.” These sentiments point toward the need to reconsider how poverty is framed in the eyes of a program that has the potential to create change for individuals and the larger U.S. society. I argue that thinking outside of the box requires TPP to develop the unique quality that sets it apart from other nonprofit organizations—the attention to macro-structures. TPP thinks outside of the box by not only addressing the experiences of individuals living in poverty, but also engaging legislators, business persons, and local community members. This approach moves beyond the individual level and builds sustainable solutions for changing class systems and policies. One ally said, “TPP isn’t just a band-aid solution. It works below the surface.” Building on the Big-View approach, and incorporating TPP participants at *all* levels (i.e. people in poverty, allies, local and national staff, community members, business members, policy makers, etc.) will keep participants motivated, empowered, and critically conscious of their social positioning.

Third, TPP needs to clarify the role of allies’ relationships with people in poverty. The varied perceptions of the role (including friend, family, and/or mentor) create expectations for how the relationship should look and what type of information will be shared in the communication between allies and people in poverty. When these expectations are not met, disappointment, frustration, and conflict can occur. Better

clarification on what this relationship should look like and how individuals can work to develop such a relationship needs to occur. This may include a process in which both parties list and describe their own expectations for the relationship, later communicating such desires to each other. The idea that both parties in this cross-class relationship are learning from each other needs to be emphasized. This communication activity can also help to create equitable relationships where needs and concerns of both parties are described and met.

Strengths and Limitations

The theoretical framework used in this study possesses strengths that future research may benefit from. A primary strength of this work is the recognition of both the *archive* and the *repertoire*. By including both sets of texts, this study was able to illuminate a set of discourses that was not apparent from the interview transcripts alone. By including embodied discourses, individual subjectivities are more fully attended to. This approach is beneficial for scholars who are concerned with *subjectivities* in addition to individual *identities* that are used to identify group participation. The move to study discourse, or the social practices of language, requires a kinesthetic way of knowing. Bolstering intercultural communication theories with knowledge of performance theory allows scholars to more fully understand epistemologies and ontologies in their work.

Second, the use of critical pedagogy as a framework allows for tangible recommendations to be made with regard to agency. A fully Althusserian approach to agency leaves little room for affecting progress and social change. The inclusion of a theoretical framework that incorporates countering dominant discourses is useful for critical applied scholars in creating relevant best practices for organizations looking for

material change. This approach also fosters a grassroots orientation and sees individuals as active agents of change, rather than passive vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. This lens has the capacity to alter any educational components in nonprofit organizations, for example, to encourage critical thinking in lieu of a banking system of education.

While this study has its theoretical strengths, there are also limitations to point out. A primary concern for me, throughout the project, was getting diverse voices across sites and participants. My study did not include sites from the West coast and included only a few voices of the Latin@ and queer communities, among others. I have no doubt that there are sites with this type of diversity, but I was not able to obtain access to these communities. TPP sites are constantly changing, with a few initiatives that are unsuccessful and others continuing but changing their funding structures. During the research, coming into a new site was more difficult because the local staff had not built trusting relationships with the national staff, let alone the researchers. The selection of sites visited was also restricted to those that were willing to have evaluators conduct interviews and attend events. While this may have contributed to an overall positive response bias, the extent to which there were negative evaluations and recommendations for program changes suggests that this kind of bias was minimal.

Next, recruitment of respondents by local staff could have contributed to a positive feedback bias from people in poverty. Given sites' need for further support from the national TPP staff, participants may have felt as though they were *expected* to perform in a way that made the program look successful. This was indicated in some responses like, "Did I do OK?" Moreover, staff members had some opportunity to choose

who I interviewed, leading to some pre-selection of “ideal” candidates, or those who could articulate the benefits of the program. Interviewing individuals who tried out TPP and decided it was not for them would have been a beneficial addition to the study. However, the TPP staff has not yet developed a system for tracking attrition, and the contact information for these individuals was unavailable.

Finally, the scope of this study may have been limited. I chose to work with one U.S. nonprofit organization as a way to gain depth, rather than breadth. As described in the problem statement of this dissertation, there are dozens of local, national, and international nonprofit organizations that choose to focus on poverty as a social issue. Any of these organizations may have been suitable for exploration. In being introduced to the CEO of Transforming Poverty Partnerships, I had increased access to this organization and was able to visit multiple sites across the country. However, choosing to do so eliminated the possibility of looking at discursive practices in other U.S. nonprofit organizations, as well as those utilized in international organizations. These limitations point to possible research outlets in future studies.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is my goal to continue research with nonprofit organizations like TPP in ways that build relationships between academics and nonprofit leadership. Such a relationship has the potential to fill knowledge gaps about nonprofit organizations—groups that have the opportunity to work in social-justice-oriented missions. Working out an understanding of how relationships between participants function can ultimately be useful for designing programs to enhance equitable outcomes.

Future areas of research could utilize the extensions I have made to Fairclough's (1992) approach to critical discourse analysis. Field-research scholars examining lived experiences in conjunction with education or training materials could utilize embodied texts as part of their discursive analysis in order to produce more findings about the use of such texts in conjunction with archival knowledge. Further extensions that incorporate kinesthetic ways of knowing into discursive analyses will be beneficial to critical intercultural and performance scholars alike.

Likewise, further efforts to incorporate critical pedagogy into nonprofit organizational frameworks might be useful in creating change on multiple levels. In my own research, I plan on using the theoretical framework that I have outlined here to analyze and develop organizational curricula that pay due attention to individual lived experiences as well as larger social structures. I would like to work toward more practical approaches to critical research that engage the individual participants of nonprofit organizations in grassroots movements.

Further research within TPP will also be important. Specifically, I would like to work toward gaining access to individuals who did not finish *Getting Ahead* or decided that further participation in TPP was not desired. Conducting interviews with this group of individuals would highlight reasons for attrition that might include evidence for alternative approaches to ending poverty. Moreover, dissatisfaction with TPP approaches may point out the hegemonic nature of TPP materials.

Finally, further research regarding academic/practitioner relationships needs to be developed. This is especially true for critical academic researchers. The relationship between academics and community-based organizations is a unique one that needs to be

developed overtime. I found it difficult to package my academic writing for a non-academic audience. Moreover, I was often anxious about how I might give honest (and critical) feedback to the organization, knowing that it might make their process more frustrating and challenging. Creating a model for these critical applied relationships would be beneficial for academic practitioners who plan to pursue this type of work in the future.

Endnote

¹ This number is up from 14.3% in 2009 according to the 2011 report titled, “Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010.”

² This argument emerged from an editorial in *The New York Times* on August 30, 2011. The full title of the article is “The New Resentment of the Poor.”

³ Lewis first wrote *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* in 1959, but continued to use the phrase “culture of poverty” in most of his anthropological investigations of poverty.

⁴ See the report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Assistant Labor Secretary for Lyndon B. Johnson at <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>. This report uses a “culture of poverty” to describe the black experience of poverty.

⁵ “Latin@” signifies both Latina and Latino individuals.

⁶ A list of editorial responses to “‘Culture of Poverty,’ Long an Academic Slur, Makes a Comeback’ was published on October 25, 2010 in *The New York Times*.

⁷ Italics at the beginning of each chapter are used to indicate the author’s personal experiences/self reflection related to the analysis.

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Appendix A

The University of New Mexico Main Campus IRB Consent to Participate in Research Beneficial and Problematic Communication Practices: Evaluating Circles Initiatives

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Brandi Lawless and Mary Jane Collier, who is the Principal Investigator and, from the Department of Communication and Journalism. This research is studying your experiences in the Circles initiative and your views of training materials.

In this study we want to answer several questions: What is working well and can be improved in your Circles Initiative? What communication practices and messages are beneficial and which ones are not working as well? What's left out of the program? What changes are needed in communication, information, resources, and procedures in the Circles initiative? In this study we will analyze interviews with circle leaders, allies, coaches and coordinators to answer these questions.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are participating in a Circles Initiative. Approximately 70 people across the U.S. will participate in this study by being interviewed.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

You will be asked to meet with either Brandi Lawless, PhD. Student or Mary Jane Collier, Professor, from the University of New Mexico, for approximately 50-60 minutes in a comfortable location that is private. You will be asked a series of questions that relate to your experience in the Circles campaign. You will be encouraged to share personal stories and views. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded. When the interview is complete the researcher will provide you with an email address, phone or mail address in case you have follow up questions.

How long will I be in this study?

Participation in this study will take a total of 1 hour.

What are the risks of being in this study?

- There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks, ask one of the study investigators.

Also you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer, or may stop the interview at any time without any penalty whatsoever.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

There will be no personal benefit to you from participating in this study. However, you will have the opportunity to share your views and it is hoped that information gained from this study will have a wider effect on improving the quality of the Circles campaign to end poverty.

What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?

Interviews are conducted on a volunteer basis. Your alternative is to not participate in the study.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We will take measures to protect your privacy and the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Information contained in your study records is used by Brandi Lawless and Dr. Mary Jane Collier, in some cases it will be shared with the sponsor of the study. The University of New Mexico IRB that oversees human subject research, will be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. However, your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There are no costs incurred by participants in this study.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the study, such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participating in the research or new alternatives to participation that might change your mind about participating.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without affecting any services to which you are entitled.

Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Brandi Lawless, M.A., or his/her associates Dr. Mary Jane Collier will be glad to answer them at 505-277-5305 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1-2 PM. If you need to contact someone after business hours or on weekends, please call 505-277-5305 and ask for one of the researchers. If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team in regards to any complaints you have about the study, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml>

Appendix B

Interview Questions for TPP Middle Class Partners

- 1) How long have you been involved in TPP?
- 2) How did you find out about TPP?
- 3) How would you describe the goals of TPP?
- 4) Why did you decide to become a middle class partners?
- 5) In your view, what exactly are middle class partners supposed to do?
- 6) Please describe the goals of the “Bridges out of Poverty” training.
- 7) What was/is your experience like during this training?
- 8) Was/is there anything you didn’t like or that was missing?
- 9) Please describe the goals of the “Moving On Up” classes for people in poverty.
- 10) How do you feel about the books and training materials for Bridges and Moving On Up? Do you think the examples about people living in poverty and people with middle class status ring “true” in your experience?
- 11) What’s the best thing you learned from the trainings? What is the least helpful?
- 12) Please describe your first experience within a TPP partnership. What was your comfort level at this first meeting? Did it change over time? If yes, how?
- 13) How has your social/economic class changed in your lifetime? How would you define your economic class now? Do others define it differently than you do?
- 14) What are some examples of useful ideas or skills that you have learned from TPP? (for example, hidden rules, formal register talk)
- 15) What have you learned from the people in poverty you work with?
- 16) Have you applied any of these ways of communicating in your life outside of TPP? Please give a couple of examples.
- 17) Out of the following things, which of these is the most important in helping people in poverty move up in social/economic class, if at all?
 - a) changing the way they talk and using more middle class language

- b) coming up with a plan to manage their money
- c) learning about resources to help them find the right job
- d) getting social support from allies
- e) getting businesses and the community to change factors that cause poverty
- f) other...

18) Has being a middle class partner changed you in any way? (your ideas of social/economic class, poverty, understanding your own class status better, etc.)

19) Whose responsibility is it to end poverty in this community?

20) If you could change anything about TPP, what would it be?

21) What is your age?

22) How do you describe your ethnic background (for instance Asian American, African American, Latino, a combination of... etc.)

23) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience as a middle class partner?

Interview Questions for Circle Leaders

- 1) How long have you been involved in TPP?
- 2) How did you find out about TPP?
- 3) How would you describe the goals of TPP?
- 4) Why did you decide to become a Circle Leader?
- 5) Please describe the goals of the “Moving On Up” classes.
- 6) What was/is your experience like during “Moving On Up?”
- 7) Was/is there anything you didn’t like or that was missing?
- 8) How do you feel about the *Moving On Up* book and training materials? Do you think the examples about people living in poverty ring “true” in your experience?
- 9) What’s the best thing you learned from “Moving On Up?”
- 10) Please describe your first experience within a TPP partnership. What was your comfort level at this first meeting? Did it change over time? If yes, how?
- 11) How has your social/economic class changed in your lifetime? How would you define your economic class now? Do others define it differently than you do?
- 12) What are some examples of useful ideas or skills that you have learned from TPP? (for example, hidden rules, formal register talk)
- 13) Have you applied any of these ways of communicating in your life outside of TPP? Please give a couple of examples.
- 14) Out of the following things, how do you think each of these will help you move up in social/economic class, if at all?
 - a) changing the way you talk and using more middle class language
 - b) coming up with a plan to manage your money
 - c) learning about resources to help you find the right job
 - d) getting social support from allies
 - e) getting businesses and the community to change factors that cause poverty
 - f) other...
- 15) Have you experienced any personal changes (i.e. financial, physical, mental, ways of thinking about yourself) since you began TPP?

16) For any changes that you would say are “for the better,” do you feel as though you could have made these changes without TPP?

17) How do you think TPP might be improved? What are things that would be helpful for you that aren't being provided?

18) Who should assume the most responsibility for changing in order to help end poverty in this community? (individuals living in poverty who can build their skills to get and keep a job with a livable wage, local organizations like churches or non profit organizations who can provide resources, local businesses that can fund more jobs, government policies and programs that can provide resources, etc.)

19) What is your age range: 21-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, over 60?

20) How do you describe your ethnic background (for instance Asian American, African American, Latino, a combination of... etc.)

21) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience as a TPP participant?

Consent

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research subject.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Name of Adult Subject (print)

Date _____

Signature of Adult Subject

Date _____

I have explained the research to the subject or his/her legal representative and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Investigator/ Research Team Member (type or print)

(Signature of Investigator/ Research Team Member)

Date _____