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Social justice requires a critical, intersectional lens; individual transformation through a continual process of self-reflection, evaluation, and growth; and action toward systemic change. My commitment to social justice, including principles of equity and inclusion, is rooted in my early life. Growing up, my brothers and I experienced poverty, family and housing instability, violence, and parental substance abuse. This took a toll on every aspect of our well-being, yet the systems meant to help us were often misguided or inadequate. These experiences formed the foundation of my understanding of injustice and have scaffolded my philosophy and practice as a social welfare researcher, scholar, educator, advocate, and ally.

Commitment in Research and Scholarship

I am committed to addressing health inequities of marginalized youth. My research on youth gangs, for instance, stems from personal and practice experiences of the beneficial and harmful impacts of gang involvement for youth. Growing up I saw that gang involvement afforded my friends a social network that provided stability, protection, and identity, even as it heightened their exposure to physical and emotional harm. Despite this complexity, research on gang-involved youth has routinely focused on violence risk, gang desistance, and legal system intervention. My early practice experience working with youth echoed this pathologizing approach. As a case manager, I was tasked with implementing a manualized gang prevention program that was perceived as devaluing and misguided by the youth it sought to serve.

Through experiences like this I came to realize that research is a critical component for making large-scale systems change, given that so many practice interventions are based on research paradigms that fails to include a social justice perspective. I am privileged by my doctoral education, which has provided me with the tools I need to apply my critical, intersectional lens to questions about how marginalization and discrimination impact the health of young people. My dissertation, for instance, is grounded in an awareness that many gang-involved youth experience systemic oppression, multiple forms of marginalization, and persistent health disparities, and that they look to gangs for support in the face of this. From this perspective, I examine how marginalized identities and environmental factors inform variation in health decision-making among gang-involved youth. This research holds important implications for ensuring service approaches to improve health outcomes are relevant and responsive to lived experiences.

Commitment in Teaching and Mentorship

In teaching, I actively look for ways to benefit student learning around issues of social justice. I model critical reflexive practice in the classroom and actively identify and describe how my positionality influences my frameworks and actions. For example, I once received student feedback that my example for teaching students about dichotomous variables (0 = female, 1 = male) supported gender binarism and therefore did not align with more inclusive definitions and measurement approaches. In response, I developed a new dataset to use for examples and

articulated how my positionality as a cis woman limited my ability to see my contribution to the sustained exclusion of trans, non-binary, and gender fluid folks in research. Through this type of modeling, I create opportunities for critical conversation around how research can be used as both a tool for oppression and change, while demonstrating the importance of individual transformation for movement toward broader social change.

I am committed to fostering inclusive learning spaces and practices. As a white, able-bodied, cis woman, I recognize that my position as an instructor in a university classroom is a position of power and privilege. At the same time, it is not hard for me to recall the powerlessness I have felt along the path to this position. This awareness helps me identify and address power imbalances in the classroom, and mentor students in their own recognition of the power dynamics inherent in both researcher-participant and practitioner-client interactions. I honor diverse forms of knowledge and lived experience, and model power sharing strategies for how students can shift from a gatekeeper role toward more equitable partnerships with clients and research participants.

As a first-generation student, I struggled to build the social capital required for academic and professional success. The support I received from committed mentors and colleagues was instrumental to my growth and development as a researcher, scholar, and educator. I strive to bring this same dedication and commitment as I mentor my students, most of whom have come from underrepresented groups in academia (first generation, queer, students of color). I encourage students to pursue projects that attend to the social justice issues that brought them to the social work profession and leverage my capital in varied ways to ensure they get the tools and emotional support they need to do this work. As one student stated, *Asia went above and beyond to alleviate our extreme stress by always being present, by sharing helpful tips, by editing our papers, and by providing mental and emotional support... Asia helped us realize our love for research.*

Future Research and Career Commitment

Moving forward, I am committed to further enacting social justice principles and practices through research, teaching and service. My experiences and training have positioned me well to generate high-impact, generalizable research while remaining resolutely community-centered and aware of local contexts and needs. I am prepared to leverage my position to act as a bridge between the academic world and a host of communities and community settings, ready to apply a diverse set of scientific and interpersonal skills in partnership with those communities, and at times, with the institutions that may simultaneously serve and disempower them.

As I complete my dissertation and look toward a broader research trajectory, I am committed to ensuring that my work is driven by community identified objectives - in all the ways community is defined. This includes prioritizing youth voice and collaborating with impacted agencies and systems through the use of participatory approaches and translational strategies. This will ensure my research and scholarship holds authentic utility for practice while also driving broader systemic change. I will continue to teach and mentor using a critical pedagogical approach so that the next generation of social workers acquire the tools needed to practice competently and enact broader social change through their work. I will also seek opportunities to leverage my position as a white faculty member to promote and support the social work mission to address issues of power and privilege in the broader university and academic communities.