

Routes to Social Change?
College Pathway Programs and Multiple
Conceptions of Social Justice

by

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At the Democratic National Convention on August 27, 2008, Barack Obama said, “Michelle and I are here only because we were given a chance at an education. I will not settle for an America where some kids don’t have that chance.”

Obama’s words reflect the widely held understanding of the potential impact that education can have on an individual’s future. In the United States, it is also widely understood that the quality of public school education varies widely. As a result, those who are at a cultural or socioeconomic disadvantage are often denied quality education, decreasing their likelihood of pursuing higher education.

These systemic inequalities are being noticed and addressed via college pathway programs, which work to help underserved students get on the college-bound track. The programs often do not aim to correct the systemic flaws which prevent a majority of students of limited means from going on to higher education, but they endeavor to put such students on par with more advantaged students. Such programs try to work to develop the students’ academic and personal skills, helping them fill their educational gaps and qualify for acceptance into a college. Popular college pathway programs often work with students before they reach high school in order to enroll them in a college preparatory school. Some popular college pathway programs include Prep for Prep, Upward Bound, the Oliver Scholars program, and A Better Chance, which was studied by Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1991) in their book, *Blacks in the White Establishment*.

A Better Chance (ABC) was founded by 16 independent secondary schools during the height of the civil rights movement in order to allow minority students to perform better in their own schools. The ultimate goal was for the students to enroll in private high schools and top colleges and eventually enter into the middle class. Focusing on the role of race and class in

education and in the country at large during the 1960s, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff examined the multiple transitions that the students of ABC underwent as the students entered the program, progressed through the program, and left the program, generally experiencing social mobility in the process. The scholars did not account for the program's impacts on a societal basis beyond the individual level, which is the most significant way my study will be different from theirs. I will interrogate the impacts a different college pathway program (referred to under the pseudonym Stepping Stone) makes at not only at the individual level, but on the level of the family and of society. My analysis will keep in mind Stepping Stone's overarching goal relating to social justice. Stepping Stone's primary objective, however, is to inspire and prepare its students to enter and thrive in academically rigorous high school and four-year colleges by making "the best educational opportunities available to students with limited resources" ("Welcome to Stepping Stone").

I interned at Stepping Stone as a teacher during the summer of 2012. I worked with a professional teacher to construct an English class curriculum for eighth graders. I also taught a nutrition co-curricular class to ninth graders and a mixed grade jewelry-making elective class. I got to know many of the students very well, and I was able to partake in many Stepping Stone activities. Throughout my time, I was aware that the program was working towards specific aims of bettering the lives of individuals, but the program's overall effect on society seemed worthy of further inquiry. There was much talk about social justice, a phrase that seemed to be thrown around quite frequently, but what exactly did that mean? How did the program understand the concept of social justice? How did the program see itself as working towards that concept of social justice, and would its work be effective in terms of its direct programmatic goals? This project is how I investigated my thoughts during my summer experience.

Higher education is an exclusive source of credentials and, in Bourdieu's terms, cultural capital. It can be a mechanism for social mobility for some, a mechanism of reinforcement of class status for others. In light of the role higher education plays in maintaining the stratification of society, I consider how Stepping Stone, in its promotion of college-bound trajectories for its students, could effectively champion for social justice. I identify three main goals of the Stepping Stone program that not only have direct benefits to the individual students, but also have the potential to create a more socially just society. These goals include: family involvement in the program, both to support the students and to allow the families to gain from the program; development of the students' leadership abilities; and setting students up to be able to decide among several choices as they make life transitions. Each goal speaks to several of the pluralistic conceptions of social justice—conceptions which will, the program hopes, be realized in the future, after the students leave the program, thus relying on the individual to “pay it forward” in order to enable social change to expand outward to a larger population.

After providing some background on Stepping Stone as a program, I situate my argument within the scholarly literature that surrounds the roles of higher education as a catalyst for social change as well as a preserver of class inequalities. In particular, I focus on how college pathway programs make higher education more accessible. I then elaborate on pluralistic conceptions of social justice and explain where Stepping Stone's understanding of social justice fits in relation to such pluralistic conceptions. The rest of my essay examines how different pieces of the program result in certain achievements of specific conceptions of social justice in various ways. In the first section, I demonstrate the role of families in helping their Stepping Stone student succeed and how the families might benefit from their students' future. In the second section, I explain how Stepping Stone builds its students as leaders. Finally, I discuss how Stepping Stone

positions its students to make choices from a wide array of options when they are making transitions in their lives, implicating them in the struggle for social justice as well.

I argue that Stepping Stone struggles to achieve a particular understanding of social justice, itself a point of scholarly contention, in an unequal society in which quality education is not a right, but a market good. The program promotes social justice by attempting to provide “equal opportunities to access an unequal reward structure” (Furlong and Cartmel 2009: 3), and it represents a microcosm of higher education’s exclusivity functioning under goals of inclusivity and accessibility.

Background

Stepping Stone was established in 1978 by the founding head and two faculty members of City College High School, an elite private college preparatory high school in a high income neighborhood of a mid-sized city, which will remain nameless in order to protect the privacy of the program. The founders of Stepping Stone envisioned a program that could use the resources of City College High School to benefit the wider city area. To this day, Stepping Stone is still run out of City College High School and its programs take place on the school campus. The city in which Stepping Stone is located is home to public schools, parochial schools, charter schools, and independent private schools; Stepping Stone students hail from 30 middle schools of various types. This city has a unified school district, resulting in fierce competition and lengthy application processes for entry into any high school, since students from any part of the city may attend any city high school.

Stepping Stone’s goals are two-fold. The first goal is to prepare middle school students for academically rigorous high schools so that they may be prepared and on the track for college. The second goal is to grant high school and college students the opportunity to teach at the

program. While my essay will touch upon the latter of the two goals, I will focus on the first goal as a point of reference. Stepping Stone works with middle school students who are, as the organization labels them, “motivated and talented” as well as “underserved” (“Welcome to Stepping Stone”). Stepping Stone accepts 30 to 35 new sixth grade students from across the city’s metro area. Those students represent diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds: 90 percent are students of color. Stepping Stone is tuition-free, and so most of its students are from working class and low income families. Stepping Stone’s students must be self-directed and dedicated to their learning. They also must have the goal of attending college (“Apply to Stepping Stone”). Over 100 sixth graders apply to Stepping Stone each year, and 36 are admitted. According to Lisa Randall (a pseudonym), Director of Community Programs and Relations, the students and their families learn about the program through their teachers and public school administrators, from the directors visiting their schools, by word of mouth, and from the Stepping Stone website (Randall 2012).

Stepping Stone claims to “transform” the lives of its students (“Welcome to Stepping Stone”). The program demonstrates its effectiveness through the testimonials on its website and on its application booklet from satisfied students. On the website, one former Stepping Stone student is quoted, “if it weren’t for my involvement in the program... I would not be where I am today” (“Welcome to Stepping Stone”). Other student accomplishments include meeting new people, expanding their minds, learning life skills, and improving their grades and study habits.

The program runs in the academic year and in the summer in order to prepare students for rigorous academics. This type of preparation is key in enabling students from underrepresented groups to qualify for college (Furlong and Cartmel 2009:28).

Students must commit to three consecutive summers of a six week, full-time academic enrichment program that runs Monday through Friday, in which they take classes in language arts, social studies, science, and math, as well as two nonacademic elective classes, ranging from drama and art to computer programming and sports, plus two co-curricular classes such as social justice, nutrition, and debate. The high school and college students who tutor during the academic year and teach classes during the summer program of Stepping Stone are intended to act as role models for the students. Professional teachers who work at area elementary and middle schools advise the high school and college students involved with the program, and they teach their own enrichment classes to the Stepping Stone students during the academic year. Overall, Stepping Stone's "student teaching students" system casts the teachers as models for the middle school students. The middle school students should emulate and strive for what the high school and college teachers represent: being enrolled in college or at least college bound, with a passion for learning, and a penchant for leadership. Because the high school and college students who are involved with the program are trained to educate, advise, and mentor the Stepping Stone students, they are fundamental in forming values within the students' minds; they have, it is implied, achieved the sort of success that Stepping Stone wants for its students. The student-teachers and tutors set the tone for the Stepping Stone students.

In the summer, Stepping Stone students are assigned at least two hours of coursework per night. Instead of receiving grades, students receive extensive written feedback on each assignment and evaluations at the end of the summer. The students also take part in field trips and activities such as College and Career Day, in which the students visit local professional offices and colleges, the Olympics, which is essentially a field day, and a Talent Show. Such activities are fun for the students and show the relevance of learning outside the classroom.

Stepping Stone creates spirit and an energetic environment during their summer program that carries on during the academic year by focusing on “warmth, compassion, inclusiveness, and sense of family” (“Summer Program”) through skits, meetings, celebrations of special days and accomplishments, and the presentation of the spirit stick, a symbol of select students showing leadership and acting admirably.

During the academic year, students spend at least one afternoon per week in after-school English and math enrichment classes. There is also after-school tutoring by Stepping Stone-trained high school students offered Monday through Thursday, which is only required for those who earn lower than a B- in a core subject. Eighth graders take a class to prepare for the SSAT, the standardized exam for entry into private high schools, and, with their families, receive advice about the high school application process. Indeed, support and engagement from families is emphasized as a key factor in the students’ success. Stepping Stone provides about two workshops per year for parents of Stepping Stone students. The program continues to work with the students after they leave middle school and enter high school by providing academic and extracurricular support.

Stepping Stone uses a data-driven model to track students’ academic progress. The students periodically take diagnostic assessments to mark where they are excelling and where their needs are. Based on the results, the program directors can adjust their goals and plans accordingly. Sean Lively (a pseudonym), the Director of Academics, said the use of data is a “concrete, established, and reliable” way to know where the students’ skills levels are (Lively 2012). In tandem with a focus on academic learning and skill-building is a focus on social-emotional learning within overall program, manifesting specifically in the co-curricular, nonacademic classes the students take in the summer, such as debate, nutrition, and public

speaking. Sean and Lisa emphasized that the social-emotional learning is about empowerment, developing a sense of respect and responsibility, valuing individuality, and fostering the students' growth mindset and locus of control.

The learner profile, a tool Stepping Stone developed, helps to keep track of both academic and social-emotional learning so as to facilitate whole-child development. On the profile are six attributes inspired by the International Baccalaureate learner profile, including critical thinking, curiosity, risk-taking, communication, open-mindedness, and reflectiveness (learner profile 2012). The attributes on the learner profile are skills, behaviors, and attitudes characteristic of what Stepping Stone believes to be successful college students. Jack Pines (a pseudonym), the Dean of Community Programs at City College High School, describes the profile as inclusive of "21st Century skills that really any student needs to have" and demonstrates the program's commitment to "academic and whole-child support" (Pines 2012).

Programs like Stepping Stone "provide a lifeline to those students who have the potential but aren't getting served as serious contenders" (Swail and Perna 2002: 32), allowing them to be exposed to the skills, processes, and awareness necessary to be able to apply for college. Since the start of Stepping Stone, over 1,200 middle school students have gone through the program. According to the program, 95 percent of students have enrolled in academically rigorous college preparatory high schools and 90 percent of students have matriculated at four-year colleges ("Welcome to Stepping Stone").

For more students to be able to go through Stepping Stone and to keep it running efficiently in the long term, financial stability is essential. According to Lisa, in kind donations from City College High School, such as use of the space in the building without rent, copiers and paper, and electricity, cover some of the costs of the program (Randall 2012). Trustees of City

College High School set up an endowment to which they add ten thousand dollars per year in order to contribute to the program they had started, and members of the City College High School community donate to the annual fund. In total, funds covered by associations to City College High School make up about half of the yearly operating budget—about \$200,000. Stepping Stone is responsible for covering the rest of the costs, which is acquired through grants, fundraising, and corporate sponsors. For a tuition-free program, finding ways to maintain financial sustainability is an imperative.

Literature Review

Scholars often credit the increasing accessibility of higher education in creating a more socially just society. Stepping Stone sees itself as contributing to the struggle for social justice by putting students on the path to college. That objective makes obvious the program's ideology, which bridges the gap between the individual attainment of higher education and society's attainment of social justice. However, there are multiple conceptions of social justice, and therefore, several models of social change. Scholars' perspectives on higher education's potential (or lack thereof) to spark such social change rely on their own notions of social justice. In other words, whether or not a socially just society can be made possible through a college pathway program's work of making higher education more accessible depends on how social justice is conceived.

This essay examines Stepping Stone's conception of social justice within a framework of social justice in multiple forms. Of the forms, two main models are essential to understanding the literature regarding higher education's ability to create social change: an individualist conception of social justice as "equality of opportunity" and a structural conception of social justice as manifested in an egalitarian society.

Cribb and Gerwartz (2003) categorize social justice in three ways.¹ The first is cultural justice, which mandates recognition, equality, and respect of cultural groups. The second is distributive justice, which entails fair allocation of resources as well as cultural and economic capital. The third is associational justice, which involves traditionally subordinated groups participating in decision-making processes in which the decisions made will affect them. Associational justice as a practice has the potential to lead to the realization of cultural and distributive justice as well (Cribb and Gerwartz 2003:19).

The two main models of social justice differently conceptualize what constitutes a socially just society. Cribb and Gerwartz's categories of associational, cultural, and distributive justice map onto both the "equality of opportunity" model and the egalitarian society model. The categories can represent the outcomes of either model or serve as strategies in achieving either model. It is possible to envision social change in the form associational, cultural, or distributive justice occurring on a small scale, on the level of the individual or groups, so that people can compete with one another on an even playing field. On the other hand, it is also possible to view these models as being implemented on a large scale throughout society so that institutions are altered to reflect equality for everyone, amounting to an egalitarian society.

I. Social Justice as Opportunity of Equality

The "equality of opportunity" conception of social justice is the dominant paradigm among scholars and within U.S. society more generally. This conception envisions a socially just society as what Sandel (1982:68) terms a "fair meritocracy," in which all individuals, no

¹ Cribb and Gerwartz's categories of recognition and distributive justice are equivalent to Nancy Fraser's (1995) distinction between recognition and redistribution justice. However, Cribb and Gerwartz's addition of associational justice is an important component that advances Fraser's ideas and considers another dimension of social justice.

matter their socioeconomic class, might have an equal start. In this model, the struggle for social justice would be the effort to even the playing field by recognizing and rectifying those situations in which individuals were at a disadvantage in the competition. An even playing field, in other words, would mitigate social and cultural disadvantages and allow individuals to compete on more equal footing. The “equality of opportunity” conception emphasizes individualism and maintains individual responsibility, as, at least in theory, opportunity is allocated based on merit and hard work. Such factors, then, would result in stratification as some individuals experienced upward mobility and others did not. Some consider socially just this form of stratification in which all have the opportunity to experience social mobility.

Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum (2008) use the metaphor of a sieve, an idea of higher education as a tool for sorting and separating individuals in society as well as allocating jobs and resources; they argue that education attainment regulates the mobility of individuals and groups in society. Alternately, Carnevale and Strohl (2010: 72) argue that the attainment of higher education “has become the most preferred and effective economic leveler, serving as an engine for mobility.” How can the exclusivity of the sieve and the engine for mobility be reconciled? Recognizing that higher education itself is an advantage and confers other advantages to those who attain it, all individuals, regardless of background, should ideally have the opportunity to access the sieve of higher education, and those who are able to pass through will access the rewards associated with it—for some, that means experiencing social mobility. In practical terms, students from less advantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups should be able to access higher education (McPherson and Schapiro 2006; Furlong and Cartmel 2009; Carnevale and Strohl 2010).

First, those students from less advantaged backgrounds must access and pass through the sieve. Kahlenberg uses the term “strivers” to refer to students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education who have overcome obstacles to do well academically by working hard despite disadvantages and obstacles they may have faced (2010: 10). The obstacles that Kahlenberg refers to stem from the strivers’ socioeconomic origins, the most influential factor relating to whether or not students are admitted to top colleges and go on to fill elite roles in society (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006). Carnevale and Strohl observe that advantaged students—those with educated parents, who are disproportionately white, and attend schools with plentiful resources—are more likely to apply for college in the first place than more disadvantaged students, those from low-income households, with parents who do not have college degrees, and who attend schools with limited resources (2010: 173). Therefore, if strivers have the opportunity to make their way into higher education, they are accessing a resource widely enjoyed by the advantaged. With access to that resource of higher education and all the other resources it entails comes the opportunity for further advancement in society, fulfilling principles of both associational and distributive justice. College pathway programs may allow strivers to have better chances at attaining higher education, given that those strivers ordinarily might not have the means or access to the kind of elite preparations available to more affluent students.

In order for there to be upward mobility for some, downward mobility for others also must occur. Therefore, mobility, as in the shifting of socioeconomic classes, guarantees inequality, but Carnevale and Strohl (2010) admit that Americans are generally comfortable with inequality as long as there exists the prospect of individuals socially advancing, thus implementing the “equality of opportunity” paradigm.

II. Social Justice through Diversification of the Elite

Those who subscribe to the conception of social justice as “equality of opportunity” view improving opportunities for select individuals as a route to broader social change in the long term, beyond the upward social mobility of those select individuals. According to Furlong and Cartmel (2009: 109), an educated population is more likely to be a civically engaged one, and a process of educating subsequent generations will ensue.

McPherson and Schapiro (2006), who served as former presidents of Macalester College and Williams College, respectively, understand how socioeconomic background affects students’ opportunities to attend college and advocate for the enrollment of those from underrepresented groups, not only in the hopes that those students may experience upward mobility, but also that they may contribute to the diversification of higher education and the elite class.

The widely accepted idea that the underrepresented join the power elite by passing through the same channels of exclusive schools—or sieves—as those traditionally associated with the power elite in order to create change, as college pathway programs attempt to do, is in line with most the thought of most education reformers. It is assumed that diversity in the power elite will transfer power to underrepresented groups, such as those to which students participating in college pathway programs belong, and that the fresh perspectives would bring greater openness to society, or undermine the dominant viewpoints (Furlong and Cartmel 2009: 116). Such a view is indicative of a “pay it forward” mentality in which, at some point in the future, individuals will be able to pass down their benefits in order to better society as a whole, a view shared by many college pathway programs, including Stepping Stone. In this model, diversification of colleges and subsequently, the elite class, would result in associational justice by putting those from traditionally underrepresented groups in decision-making and leadership

positions. As Cribb and Gerwitz (2003) contend, associational justice can make possible cultural and distributive justice just as well. Diversifying the elite class, in this view, has the potential to lead to social changes enacted on a larger scale.

An alternate perspective rejects this optimistic view. For example, in their 2006 study of the group that C. Wright Mills termed the “power elite”, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff debunk the idea that diversifying the power elite would be a mechanism for top-down social change.

Although they focus on diversity related to identities, such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and gender, their arguments can also be applied to people from lower socioeconomic classes, as those from lower income backgrounds are not often represented in powerful groups.

Zweigenhaft and Domhoff argue that those who represent diversity and are new to the power elite tend to adopt the dominant viewpoints of those traditionally associated with the power elite: white Christian males from privileged backgrounds (2006:6).

From this perspective, the diversification of the elite functions not to promote social justice, but rather to maintain the legitimacy and authority of elite dominance, and thereby to maintain the status quo. Institutions of higher education, representative of the power elite, originally called for the diversification of admissions because of the historical pressures placed upon people in power by the civil rights movement (2006: 247). The initiative did not come from within the power elite themselves, although diversification of colleges and the elite is, as Carnevale and Strohl write, “crucial to ensuring the legitimacy of the nation’s institutional leadership” (2010: 152), which benefits and maintains the existence of the power elite. Such legitimation militates against the possibility of substantial changes in the processes of institutional leadership. Surely when individuals from underrepresented groups rise to join the power elite, those individuals benefit, but the phenomenon may undermine the intention of

extended social change by perpetuating a “pay it forward” mentality. The faces of diversity in the power elite may lend themselves to tokenism and to the belief that the system of higher education (or any other elite-run institution) is fair and gives an equal opportunity for every individual with enough hard work (2006: 245-246). In this way, diversity in the power elite can make the system of higher education seem as though it is based on merit and individualism, which undercuts the need for institutional change.

III. Social Justice as an Egalitarian Society

Can a socially just society still be unequal? Is it possible for a capitalist society, which necessitates inequality, to be socially just? Proponents of “equality of opportunity” would argue that it is. However, Furlong and Cartmel examine these questions in light of private sectors, such as prep schools, upheld alongside public sectors, such as public schools, writing that “an education system that provides the preconditions for equality of opportunity has to be built on structures that restrain those who would seek to use education as a mechanism for which socioeconomic advantages can be protected” (2009: 5). If capitalism and the private sector, which function in part due to exclusivity and inequality, undermine and perhaps completely prevent the reality of a socially just society as Furlong and Cartmel define it, then restructuring, not reformation, of the economic and educational systems would have to take place through avenues separate from those entangled with the current oppressive system.

Although Furlong and Cartmel identify this conception of social justice as one of “equality of opportunity”, they go on to say that social justice relates to “the principle that every effort should be made to ensure that individuals and groups all enjoy fair access to rewards” (2009: 3). Therefore, the conception of social justice they describe is, more aptly, one that advocates for institutional change so that all individuals not only have access to the *opportunity*

to gain rewards and resources, but equal *access* to those rewards and resources. Those who subscribe to this model of social justice as egalitarianism object to systems that produce and are based on inequality.

Aligning with Furlong and Cartmel's views, Rikowski (2000) offers a Marxist critique, arguing that social justice cannot be achieved in a capitalist society. In fact, in a capitalist system, any efforts to create a more socially just society are inherent attempts to move away from capitalism as a system, since capitalism guarantees the existence of societal inequities. Rikowski equates social justice with equality and pushes for an egalitarian society, achieved through ensuring the access of rewards for everyone by implementing distributive justice at the institutional level. However, in a society in which social justice cannot be realized, Rikowski circuitously argues that the *struggle* for social justice constitutes social justice, as the struggle itself is against the system of capitalism. In that light, Stepping Stone's efforts to create a socially just society, no matter how the program conceives of social justice, can be deemed as social justice.

Although Stepping Stone works to make higher education accessible for a number of students who may not have been college-bound, it retains the understanding that part of the value and esteem of higher education comes from the fact that it is scarce; not everyone can attain it (Carnevale and Strohl 2010: 117). In any case, the fact that higher education is accessible to some more so than others maintains a society of haves and have-nots, highlighting inequalities between those who have and have not attained higher education, and even between those who have attained it at different levels of prestige (Marsh 2011; Carnevale and Strohl 2010).

Having higher education is an advantage, and it is also a resource easily accessible to the already-advantaged. Higher education provides the credentials needed for well-paying jobs, all

the while providing connections, training, and cultural capital—necessary for some to experience social mobility, but also necessary for the already-advantaged to maintain their position in society. Here, it is relevant to again inspect Stevens et al.’s metaphor for higher education as a sieve. If only the already-advantaged make it through the sieve, and most others do not, then higher education has a role of reproducing class inequality. Even when individuals from underrepresented backgrounds pass through the sieve and experience upward mobility, they join the ranks of those already of a higher socioeconomic status and maintain the hierarchy. Thus, higher education plays a significant role in stratifying society.

Why then is attainment of higher education so frequently touted as a way to transform the present society into one that is more socially just? Carnevale and Strohl admit that Americans prefer the attainment of “education over welfare for balancing the equality implicit in citizenship and the inequality implicit in markets” (2010: 83), which, as previously discussed, demonstrates an endorsement of the “opportunity of equality” model that emphasizes individualism and access to resources based on merit. Marsh, subscribing to Rikowski’s Marxist conception of social justice, responds to Carnevale and Strohl by moving beyond the question of whether higher education *should* serve low-income students and those from traditionally underrepresented groups to the question of whether or not it *does* (2011: 9). He rejects the notion that education in any form can help build a more socially just society.

Marsh (2011) argues that the attainment of education is often a matter of socioeconomic class, which is a matter of economic rights. Those economic rights trump educational rights while also making educational rights more accessible:

“The right to a good education does not enable the right to a decent and remunerative job. Rather, your parents’ right to a decent and remunerative job may enable your right to education.” (Marsh 2011: 211)

Marsh elucidates a problem that Stepping Stone and other college pathway programs strive to change. However, they still function within the mindset that education is a means of changing institutional systems through changing the paths of a number of individuals. In Marsh's view, granting those individuals increased access to higher education cannot create a socially just society. Education cannot, he argues, eliminate poverty or improve the quality of individuals' lives enough to result in societal transformation because education has little influence over economic inequality (2011: 201-202). Thus, trickle down or "pay it forward" mechanisms to make broader social change would not be viable.

Marsh advocates for mobilization of the underclass in order to collectively bargain with and pressure the upper class so that social change resulting in socioeconomic equality and an egalitarian society can occur. Such social change would, theoretically, give rise to cultural, distributive, and associational justice.

Marsh's emphasis on collective bargaining and change from below instead of from above underscores the principles of his Marxist argument, but his strategy may be undermined by the previously discussed diversification of higher education. The diversification of higher education lends itself to maintaining the status quo by incorporating into the power elite those from groups that, as Marsh might argue, have the potential to reckon with said elite. Those who represent diversity and might be part of the underclass would be incorporated into the same system that has both created the power elite and subordinated the underclass (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006). Those who were incorporated from the elite class but were formerly part of the underclass may serve as pacifiers to those attempting to change the system on an institutional basis.

IV. Synthesis

Across the board, literature regarding higher education as a societal institution addresses higher education's potential to improve the lives of individuals, benefit the whole of society, spur structural change, or reproduce and maintain class inequalities. Accounting for the conflicting ideas previously discussed, I will consider Stepping Stone as a college pathway program in light of the following questions of: what is the explicit and/or implicit model(s) of social change and social justice that underlies Stepping Stone as a program? What are the roles of the program in the instigation and implementation of social change and the creation of a more socially just society? To what extent can institutional change occur through this college pathway program? Or is the program's function rooted in capitalism and dependent upon the dominant system? What are the goals of this college pathway program, and how effective is the program at meeting its goals both in the long term and short term? What are the implications of those goals for higher education as a structure?

Methods

I sought to answer my research questions by investigating sources that show how Stepping Stone creates its image through written material it generates, including promotional content, its website, the program application for potential students, and educational profiles. I also interviewed six people who are associated with Stepping Stone: three former students of the program, the two directors of the program, and an associate director who works at City College High School, from which Stepping Stone is run. All names and locations are pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality and to protect the privacy of my subjects and the program itself.

At the time of this interview, the former students were all nineteen years old and sophomores at three different private colleges scattered across the country. Luke Nguyen is an Asian-American student who attended a parochial middle school and an independent high school.

Elena Martinez is a Latina first generation college student whose brother, two years younger, also went through the Stepping Stone program. She attended an alternative public middle school and went on to enroll at City College High School. Mark Mamut also attended City College High School from a low-funded public middle school. His parents are Russian immigrants who received their college educations in Russia. I was able to contact all three alumni because each had worked as a teacher at Stepping Stone's summer program for at least one summer.

Additionally, I interviewed Sean Lively, the Director of Academics at Stepping Stone. Sean has been involved with Stepping Stone since the fall of 2009. He oversees the curriculum of the program, advises students in their high school application process, and hires teachers and students in high school and college to work at the program. I also interviewed Lisa Randall, Director of Programs and Community Relations. At Stepping Stone, Lisa coordinates the admissions process and works with the families whose students are in the program. Lisa's son and daughter were both students in the program as early as 2005, so she had been involved with the program as a volunteer. She applied and was hired as an assistant director in the summer of 2006. Lastly, I interviewed Jack Pines, who, as the Dean of Community Programs at City College High School, has been involved with Stepping Stone in order to provide support for Lisa and Sean and to strengthen the partnership between City College High School and Stepping Stone. As a dean, Jack works in three additional areas at the high school, including the diversity programs, the community service programs, and the City College High School co-curricular program.

At the time of my experience teaching at Stepping Stone, I did not know that the program would become the subject of my project. However, I draw upon my experience in order to enrich my analysis. I provide anecdotes and examples to substantiate claims that my interview

subjects make. My observations are useful to shed light on what might not be apparent based on my interviews and written source research alone. Throughout my essay, I will make it clear when I am referencing a piece of information made available to me through my experience with the understanding that my perspective, while having the potential to be informative, is limited.

There are restrictions to my method in terms of the limited number of the people I interviewed. Due to the scope of this project, I was not able to send surveys to multiple alumni of Stepping Stone in order to see how they might have taken different paths in life since the program; nor was I able to complete a longitudinal study in order to track how attitudes about the program and perceptions of goals have changed as students in the program have progressed over time. However, through my research and interviews, I was able to get a sense of the general attitudes, and perceptions of the goals, impacts, and functions of Stepping Stone as a program from those who are directly involved with it. My interviewees came from diverse backgrounds, and their histories of involvement Stepping Stone vary, so their perspectives serve as an indication of multiple understandings of the program. Places where their perspectives intersect and diverge provide areas to scrutinize.

A Family Affair

Family has much to do with the path that the students imagine themselves taking in the future. Each of the program alumni interviewed foresaw attending college in their future regardless of their background or family history. Not all students at Stepping Stone consider college as a given in their lives, however. The students that enroll in Stepping Stone are universally described, officially and unofficially, as “underserved” and academically motivated, but often are not on the path to college. Sean conceived underserved students as students whose “needs are not being met on an individual and customized basis” (Lively 2012). Whereas

affluent parents often expect and demand that schools customize their programs to meet the individual needs of their children, lower income parents rely on institutions, such as schools, to attend to the needs of their children in the belief that it is the institution's job to do so (Lareau 2011). Additionally, Jack mentioned family, community, school, financial, structural and demographic obstacles or challenges in the students' lives that get in the way of their education and prevent them from getting support (Pines 2012). Despite those challenges, the students show academic promise, but they may be, as Mark said, "stuck in a school that does not have the resources to let them go in-depth into their studies" (Mamut 2012).

This description fit Mark as a new student in the program years ago, as he asserted how bored he was in school. Over the course of the years since he's been in the program, Mark has felt that the type of student Stepping Stone works with has changed:

[Now] more attention is paid on student family income and resources... it seems that the new type of student Stepping Stone serves is one who has many academic strengths with a couple weaknesses, without the resources to get a tutor, but with enough motivation to want to improve. The type of student that filled the program when I was there - the one for whom the regular middle school curriculum is slow and uninteresting, who needs to be pushed ahead and go further into the subjects – now makes up a minority. (Mamut 2012)

Indeed, the conception of the "underserved" student that Stepping Stone caters to is dynamic: according to Jack, "has meant different things at different times" (Pines 2012). Sean acknowledged that some students are in need of being academically challenged while others need remedial work in order to catch up to grade level and get them on a "more academic and scholarly trajectory than what they're getting right now" (Lively 2012), a sentiment Lisa shared. The class-based affirmative action allows the program to consider the students who may not be as academically strong as their peers, but who might have fewer resources available to them. Perhaps the change in the demographics of students from Mark's era to the present can be

attributed to the understanding that if some students had adult intervention in their education, then they might perform at the level of their peers who were already academically strong. In fact, parents of middle class students are found to intervene in the educational lives of their children more than parents of students from low-income backgrounds (Sacks 2007, Lareau 2011).

The program directors have found that parental involvement and community connections play a significant role in the students' success in the program in terms of motivation and stressing values outside of the program. The program's application not only has a section for the students, but also has an extensive section for the parents to fill out (application 2011), including a contract to sign in order to pledge their commitment and support. Stepping Stone establishes that parents can expect to be involved in the program and in their child's academic life. The program is also able to take into account what kinds of support structures the students have available as well as evaluate the students' background, home lives, and parents' education, all of which factor into the admission decisions.

In her 2011 longitudinal study of the lives of children from various class backgrounds, Lareau found that "schools encourage and reward parental involvement" (289). Similarly, Lisa said that some type of sponsor is necessary for a student to apply and be accepted into the program, whether a parent, grandparent, an aunt or uncle, or a mentor (Randall 2012). Some students' sponsors are involved in their education before the program, like Elena, who credited her academic success to her parents' encouragement, saying that her "mother was extremely active in [her] education from the start" (Martinez 2012). For example, when Elena was assigned to the lowest performing elementary school in her city, her mother pushed to have her moved to a different school. Lareau recognizes such parental involvement as an intervention in Elena's life, making sure that she was on a parentally-sanctioned educational path.

Some sponsors are not as active in their middle-schooler's education as Elena's mother, and so the Stepping Stone Family Association provides a way for the sponsors to become involved, teaching them how to intervene in their students' educational lives. The Association is run like a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) in order to allow the sponsors and families to build connections with each other. They take part in workshops about communicating with teachers, applying to high schools, and applying for financial aid, as well as high school advising meetings with the directors in order to allow the families to advocate for themselves in the future. Informing families about such topics is an important step in moving families towards self-advocacy because "parents who have more information and who presume that they should intervene in schooling are able to transmit important advantages to their children" (Lareau 2011: 287). Access to this information can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital. Gaining cultural capital has the potential to contribute to social mobility; in this case, the social mobility might come from educational attainment made possible by the knowledge of how to be involved in students' academic lives. Therefore, the program seeks to equip parents as well as students with the cultural capital needed to advance the children's academic interests and navigate admissions processes, skills that affluent parents have for the most part already mastered.

Stepping Stone as a program intervenes in the educational pathways of its students, as well, oftentimes in order to resolve conflicts. Luke recounted the time during his eighth grade year in which he applied to four high schools and was put on the wait list at each one. The Stepping Stone director at that time endorsed him through letters to those schools, and in about a week's time, he received calls alerting him that he had been accepted off the wait lists (Nguyen 2012). Luke's story makes apparent the partnership between Stepping Stone and the student:

Luke put in the effort to be a qualified applicant and Stepping Stone was there to bolster his efforts by flexing its muscle of influence, using, in Bourdieu's terms, its social and cultural capital that Luke's own parents lacked. This mechanism speaks to the "equality of opportunity" conception of social justice, in which the students and families—the select few involved with Stepping Stone—are able to make up for their disadvantages through the program so that they may be more viable to compete with others.

The families of the students have just as much at stake in terms of the program's impacts as the students do. Lisa said Stepping Stone's long term goal is "to primarily, absolutely shift the trajectory of not just the students, but of an entire family...oftentimes moving [a family] out of poverty" (Randall 2012) through the educational success of the student. Educational success, as Sean defines, is means that students enroll in and graduate from a four year college (Lively 2012). Such a depiction of the change that may occur through the individual's educational path demonstrates Stepping Stone's conception of social justice as beginning with the individual and extending outward. In this case, the process takes the form of the potential for a family to experience social mobility through the increased cultural capital, and perhaps eventually economic capital, of the student. Such a process aligns with Laureu's idea that working class and poor young people often transfer resources, economic and otherwise, to their parents, while middle class parents transfer their resources to their children (2011). Such a transfer of resources from child to parent demonstrates the practice of paying it forward, or giving back so that change beyond the individual student may be realized.

Leadership Potential and Diversification

Stepping Stone strives to enable its students to gain leadership abilities and confidence, which are measured, in part, by the previously discussed learner profile. Students are able to

practice exercising their power and leadership abilities during the Stepping Stone summer program especially. Mark (2012) described how, during his time as a Stepping Stone student, he would tell a teacher what he wanted to learn about, and the teacher would make it happen, practicing what Lareau (2011) calls customization.

During my experience, I observed the students organizing skits to perform at all-school meetings, teaching their classmates cheers, and partaking in drill team, which they requested be available as an optional activity. The ways in which the students take part in forming their environment serve to develop their capabilities and allow them to see how their own agency might take effect outside the program and in the future. All students have opportunities to get directly involved with an aspect of the program and have the support to do so. Encouraging the students to step up and work for what they want may be interpreted as promoting a sense of entitlement in the students. However, the students practice their leadership skills when they advocate for themselves and work to make changes in the community as they see fit. Eventually, such leadership skills may allow the students to become part of—and thus diversify—the elite class, as Zweigenhaft and Domhoff have studied.

Prior to Stepping Stone, Elena was a reserved student who said she “did not enter the classroom feeling completely confident with [her] abilities” (Martinez 2012). She would wait for others to give an answer to a question in order to judge the teacher’s opinion before sharing her own answer. Mark and Luke also state their shyness as a weakness before they began the program. Luke said that he was very quiet and didn’t have many friends in middle school and spent most of his time alone, much like Mark, who said he was silent during class and had a hard time meeting new people (Mamut 2012).

According to the directors of the program, leadership development is just as significant as academic improvement as a goal of the program. Lisa explained that her intention is for the students to be leaders in their high schools after Stepping Stone:

We can play a much bigger role in SB by helping them to define and understand what leadership looks like, and how they become that official leader, president of the school or class, or that unofficial leader. (Randall 2012)

Sean emphasized that the palpable presence and leadership of current Stepping Stone students in high schools will ease the transition for new generations of Stepping Stone students who will matriculate at the same high schools. Indeed, the positive environment that Stepping Stone fosters—described by Stepping Stone to be “energetic”, “exciting”, “creative”, “innovative”, “interactive”, “diverse”, “full of spirit”, “warm, compassionate, and inclusive” (“Welcome to Stepping Stone”)—seems to allow students to feel capable and supported by their peers. The environment is conducive to celebrations of athletic, academic, and artistic achievement, but such achievement in a program with demanding expectations necessitates the participation of the students to make it that way. Mark (2012) cites feeling as though he belonged to a community as the reason that he felt motivated and comfortable with public speaking and stepping out of his comfort zone in general.

The hope is for the Stepping Stone effect, as Jack (2012) called it, to be carried with the students wherever they go. He emphasized that Stepping Stone students do very well in high school, which seemed to mean, based on interviews with the program alumni, that they were well-prepared academically. Mark, however, stated that he “took a step back” (Mamut 2012) in his shyness because of the cliquy social scene, and he was discouraged due to his realization that he was no longer the only person at the top of the class—he now found himself in the middle. Elena attributed her difficult transition to high school to the social divisions based on class and

race in her grade, saying that she was “not prepared for the stigmas and stereotypes that come with being a minority, lower middle class student in a wealthy upper middle class high school” (Martinez 2012).

The shyness or discomfort in the transition to high school, although a reality to the alumni I interviewed, is not universal and does not always correlate to students’ backgrounds. In any case, the clash in expectations and reality when entering high school can be mitigated, the directors say, by the students knowing that they have the capability to be leaders. Lisa expressed her hope for the students’ leadership potential in terms of the students being able to step up:

When a leadership opportunity comes and they’re the only student of color or they’re the only girl or they’re the only boy in that situation, or if they identify as both or something different, then they can stand up and lead. (Randall 2012)

Developing the student’s leadership potential is one way that the students’ identities can be affirmed, which is a facet of both cultural and associational justice. Sean (2012) underscored this idea, emphasizing that Stepping Stone encourages the students to speak out and share their narratives of where they’ve come from and who they are with any community they may enter. Leadership skills enable the students to speak out in the present, and the directors identify that helping the students to build their voices is crucial to ensuring that the students are able to speak out in future situations where the stakes are higher—situations in which students might occupy formal leadership roles in which their voices have a greater impact. Leadership roles would potentially allow former students to make decisions regarding resource allocation, thus contributing to distributive justice.

Bourdieu writes that a “sense of one’s place leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places, and so forth from which one is excluded” (1984: 471). The noticeable presence of students from underrepresented groups in predominantly white, middle to upper class schools

is vital to ensure that those schools become places where students from underrepresented groups feel that they can, to an extent, belong. Additionally the created voice and inclination to take the lead points to significant impacts in terms of striving towards cultural and associational justice, especially when it comes to the students who hail from low-income and diverse ethnic backgrounds being planted in high schools and colleges which have, historically or culturally, excluded such students. The diversification of colleges can be part of the struggle to create associational and cultural justice, although, as I will discuss at a further point, such diversification does not always have the intended effects of social change.

Keeping Options Open

Beyond attending and finishing college, putting the students in a position to have options associated with education and beyond education are what the directors and alumni consider to be successful outcomes of the program, another way in which Stepping Stone endorses the “equality of opportunity” conception of social justice. Sean described the program as enabling students to make choices about their present and future (Lively 2012). The emphasis on choice during the students’ time in the program highlights the agency that students have as they make decisions about their own academic needs, which also serves as practice for making choices once they leave the program. As soon as the students enroll in the program, they are able to begin making choices regarding how they will progress: during the academic year, the students may elect to enroll in enrichment or remedial tutoring, and during the summer portion of the program, the students choose from a range of elective classes, including theater, art, and computer programming, to create their own customized course of study.

Enrolling in the program to begin with is a matter of choice for the students. The Stepping Stone application includes a statement of intent under which the students must provide

a dated signature, agreeing that they will be involved with the program in the fullest. The students pledge to maintain at least a B average in all core classes and participate in all of the advising activities the program has to offer. The students pledge to “commit [themselves] fully by bringing a positive attitude, respect for others, and the ability to work hard and make sacrifices” (application 2011), which sets the bar for what the expectations of Stepping Stone are. In signing, the students know that they must *meet* those expectations and take ownership of Stepping Stone’s goals.

During my internship, several students expressed disinterest in certain classes and general displeasure with having to attend classes in the summer and do the required work. The directors and teachers reminded the students that they had elected to be part of the program and that not all students their age had the chance to be part of Stepping Stone. Participating in Stepping Stone was a privilege, as were the privileges that came with participating: getting to make choices, getting extra academic help, getting to have individual attention from teachers. Motivating the students by emphasizing the uniqueness of their opportunity and selectivity of the program makes it clear that although Stepping Stone may function under the auspices of inclusivity, the program is underpinned by exclusivity. This is not to say inclusivity is not present: it manifests in Stepping Stone’s community climate as well as in its inclusion of students from underrepresented groups. However, since only a select number of students are admitted to the program, it remains exclusive. Such exclusivity is a point of pride and prestige for both the students and the program itself. Of course, giving students choices is also a matter of resources, and limits on resources, staff, and possible outreach restrict the number of students the program can enroll.

On the other hand, since the program is housed in City College High School, Stepping Stone students benefit from the same resources that the students who attend the elite high school have access to. Elena recounted how she'd never felt comfortable in science class until she performed experiments during a Stepping Stone summer (Martinez 2012) using the lab equipment that was available. Although the students who attend Stepping Stone would not normally have access to such resources, the fact that they are able to use them because of the program is a facet of the struggle for distributive justice, which Cribb and Gerwitz describe as needing a politics of redistribution in order to produce a more equal distribution of goods (2003: 18-19). By temporarily redistributing the resources of the private high school, Stepping Stone allows its students to reap the short and long term benefits associated with the use of those resources. With this logic in mind, the students will grow to be adult leaders who will be able make decisions to reallocate resources, educational and otherwise, based on their use of resources during the program.

Indeed, Sean emphasized students' abilities to make choices as an outcome of the program, allowing them to think about the future more broadly than they might otherwise:

The progress that our students make and the enrichment that we provide for them really have an overall social goal to help our underserved population of students have more choices as they move forward in their lives. (Lively 2012)

Choice as a prominent goal of the program shows how students who go through the program will be able to have the skills and confidence necessary in order to put themselves on a course towards a goal they themselves choose—specifically, however, the emphasis is on a college-bound trajectory. Positioning the students to make choices reflects the college-bound focus of the program. Elena confirms that Stepping Stone allowed her to feel as if she “truly could pursue any profession that [she] wanted” (Martinez 2012). Mark said that “the program showed that

there were options for where my life could go other than the public school route that I used to think was the only one” (Mamut 2012). The directors stressed the importance of the students being well-informed about high school options as well as academically prepared, so that the students may have their *choice* of high schools to attend—with an emphasis, however, on the private, independent schools that have a college-preparatory curriculum and a good reputation with colleges.

Such an emphasis on private schools shows that Stepping Stone is committed to the private sector, where only those who can afford to buy in reap the benefits, rather than the public sector, where all are, theoretically, beneficiaries (Furlong and Cartmel 2009). In other words, the private sector maintains dominance, by disadvantaging those who cannot buy in to the private system. Stepping Stone aims to ensure that its students are in a position to buy into the system— if with not economic capital, then with cultural capital. The emphasis on students having choice alludes to the neoliberal nature of participating in the educational market, meaning that with money and resources, a higher quality of education can be bought. Stepping Stone does not condone this unfair system, as the program is actively working to combat educational inequalities caused by the system, but the program does play into the system’s rules in order to benefit individual students.

Stepping Stone locates itself in opposition to the structural inequality caused by the educational market. The educational market is a result of the capitalist system, and by its nature that market prevents all students from obtaining educations of equal quality. Although Stepping Stone does not address the systemic flaws of the educational system in practice, it works to ensure that those often at a disadvantage within the system are able to compete at a similar a level as those who have the resources to invest in the educational market. Rikowski (2000)

would argue that Stepping Stone is doing its best to work towards social justice in a capitalist society, even though in a capitalist society, he argues it is *impossible* for social justice (as he conceives it) to be created because of the inequalities inherent in the system. But Stepping Stone's work focusing on the injustices created by the capitalist system does, he would argue, amount to a struggle *against* the capitalist system itself, even though the program does not focus on the root cause of the injustices, which is the system itself.

Future Social Change: Paying It Forward

The program directors hope to ensure that Stepping Stone students have leadership skills and are in a position to make choices, which would result in the students growing up and being put in a position that enables them to help improve society—a goal that speaks to reaching for associational, cultural, and distributive justice. Indeed, Jack states that the social justice aims of Stepping Stone manifest at the individual level by informing the students about social justice in their classes over the summer, but also by sparking action in line with Stepping Stone's core values (Pines 2012). Lisa believes that the program has a responsibility to educate students about issues like racism, classism, and sexism (Randall 2012), as well as to enable them to spark action that would ameliorate some of these issues. In my time at Stepping Stone, I observed students discussing such social issues. One ninth grade girl performed a slam poem about the pressure of trying to meet the standards of female beauty. It was evident that the students were beginning to become aware of social dynamics and the institutional structures in which they were implicated.

In that manner, the program's impetus for social justice seems to rest on a "pay it forward" model to create waves of social change on a larger scale in the future. The students themselves will initiate this social change by solving problems in their communities, making pro-

education policy decisions, and advocating for the youth since they have an understanding for those who came from backgrounds like themselves. Additionally, the students would “pay it forward” by transferring their resources to and advocating for their families, allowing them to benefit from the students’ projected social mobility as well.

The alumni I interviewed understand this goal and expressed ways they would like to mold their future careers around the pro-education mindset; the most widely cited was to become a teacher or work in an education-related field (in fact, as previously mentioned, all three alumni I interviewed had returned to Stepping Stone to teach at the summer program at least once). Luke expressed Stepping Stone’s hope in the most general terms when he said that Stepping Stone students will “have a higher chance of occupying a job that will impact our world” (Nguyen 2012). Ensuring that the students are in positions to make choices about what they will do with their lives allows them to have options regarding *how* they might choose to make a difference, and thus put the “pay it forward” mentality into practice. Being in an advantageous position would allow them to have greater power when making decisions that would affect others.

Not only does entrance to colleges, and more immediately, college-preparatory high schools, enable the diversification of the campuses—a step towards associational and cultural justice—but it also gives Stepping Stone students the opportunity to practice their leadership skills so that they will be comfortable implementing changes as they see fit and confident in creating their own environment. These skills are crucial for the students to develop because those who pass through the channels of universities assist in the creation of “the tip of the iceberg of a system of sorting the nation’s human capital, economic opportunity, and social status” (Carnevale and Strohl 2010: 152). Stepping Stone believes that its students who rise to the top of this system will be able to make decisions and allocate resources to the rest of society

in a manner that is beneficial to those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This conception of social justice as beginning with individuals and extending outward (via the action of “pay it forward”) may overlap with several other conceptions of social justice that may be realized in the long term, once the “pay it forward” action is carried out. In other words, through a “pay it forward” action, programs may compel students to work for social justice—however conceived—at a later point in their lives. Students may push for associational, cultural, or distributive justice as a means of creating an egalitarian society or, alternatively, work to ensure the “equality of opportunity,” in line with Stepping Stone’s work. The theory is that the alumni in positions of power will be able to use their power to enact change.

Indeed, the possibility of alumni having an impact on the world, or on society, or on a community, is a goal that may only be known to take shape in the long-term. Stepping Stone believes that the education of individuals has the potential to benefit society, endorsing a specific hope:

...education can contribute to a more productive economy and a more equitable sharing of its benefits and burdens, as well as a society in which all are maximally free to pursue their own ends unimpeded by prejudice, the lack of opportunity for learning, or material want. (Bowles and Gintis, 2001: 1)

Right now, however, the program is still in the midst of building its high school outreach in order to maintain contact with students after they complete the Stepping Stone program. Sean (2012) explained that the outreach efforts in terms of a programmatic module for working with high school students and Stepping Stone students after they leave the program are a work in progress, which currently is limited to “sending out call-outs in a general way through emails, reunion functions, and alum functions.” A programmatic outreach model would track the students after they leave the program in order to monitor the trajectory of their lives. Would the students continue on an academic route? Would they make their way down a new path? Would they

actually occupy jobs that have the potential impact society, and would their work make such impacts? Without the answers to these questions, it is unclear whether or not the program is on the way to reaching the goal of societal change.

If Zweigenhaft and Domhoff's study of the diversification of the elite class is any clue, then those who rise to the top are diverse in identities compared to what Zweigenhaft and Domhoff identify as the Christian white males who traditionally make up the core group of the power elite, but their mindsets and values are not very different (2006: 6). As students from underrepresented navigate the channels through which predominantly white, upper class people pass, they tend to adopt the attitudes and values of the dominant class, undergoing a process of what Zweigenhaft and Domhoff refer to as identity management. This results in the students being folded into the dominant class, rather than retaining the values they started with. Ultimately, the effect of the diversification of the elite class is its legitimization, in the sense that diversification appears to prove that entrance to the elite class is based on merit rather than cultural or socioeconomic privilege. Although this legitimization effect as an effect of Stepping Stone's work remains unknown because there is no mode of tracking the students beyond the program, the outcome predicted by Zweigenhaft and Domhoff is a likely result for the students from Stepping Stone as they advance beyond the program through elite high schools and colleges, thus undermining Stepping Stone's "pay it forward" model and its intention to bring about long-term social change.

Conclusion

The Stepping Stone model, from its structure to its application process, mirrors the model of a high quality school, allowing the students to experience what it might be like to attend such an institution. According to Mark, Stepping Stone "inspires people who feel bored and tired of

their education, showing them that they can take charge of their learning and accomplish what they put their minds to” (Mamut 2012). Indeed, beyond being a supplemental program and a model of how school could be, Stepping Stone is itself a very small school aiming to benefit its students and society at large through family involvement, leadership development, and creating opportunities to make choices so that the students may be in positions of advantage and alter their life trajectories.

Stepping Stone wants the students to get into the best schools they can, with a specific emphasis on private schools. Stepping Stone invests in and endorses the private educational sector because the program presumes the private high schools in the area to be, generally, of better quality than the public area schools (although the program directors did indeed state that public schools may be a good option for some students). This line of thinking suggests that the program is attempting to work in the given system to address a systematic problem. The alternative would be to revolutionize or remodel the system in order to eradicate the problems at their source. Furlong and Cartmel would argue that “the commitment to social justice is fundamentally undermined by structures, such as private schools, that facilitate the maintenance of advantage” (2009: 5), and indeed, the investment in the private sector seems incompatible with the greater goal of equal opportunities to education. Of course, when private schools are the best option at hand for individual students, then those individual students benefit. However, individualism and the decisions made in the name of individualism create trends:

It’s not the individual choices of particular families that create social divisions and inequalities; it is the aggregate, the pattern of choices, the hidden hand of class thinking, if you like, the repetition of certain decisions, views, perspectives, and actions. (Cribb and Gerwitz 2003: 46)

Again, Stepping Stone’s model of social change starts with changing the course of an individual’s trajectory rather than addressing systematic or instructional issues. Certainly,

Stepping Stone has been able to intervene in, and arguably improve, the lives of hundreds of individual students who have passed through the program. Stepping Stone advocates for the students and intervenes in their institutional lives, ensuring that they are on the right educational track and belong to a supportive community in which they can succeed academically. The program gives the students leadership skills and allows them to practice implementing those skills in a responsive environment. Additionally, Stepping Stone includes the students' families in their goals and activities in order to affect more than just the individual students. The individuals may get ahead in the short-term in the hope that they give back and create social change through policy, decisions, resource allocation, and good deeds in the long-term.

The struggle to make quality education available to those who ordinarily cannot access it is indeed a struggle for social justice, as it is a push against inequalities in society and, on the ideological level, the systems that perpetuate inequality, most notably capitalism. However, the outcomes of Stepping Stone's struggle do not advance social justice—meant here as the creation of an egalitarian society, which must occur at the institutional level—because Stepping Stone does not address the systemic problems perpetuating this inequality. Stepping Stone works within the system to make its students more viable to compete with others, thus emphasizing the success of the individual students over equality on a societal level.

Stepping Stone functions keeping in mind multiple conceptions of social justice, but its work does not result in the large-scale effects of social justice. Stepping Stone subscribes to the “equality of opportunity” social justice paradigm. On a small scale, Stepping Stone's work achieves the social justice conception of “equality of opportunity” for its students. That is to say that when the “equality of opportunity” conception of social justice is achieved on a small scale, it benefits the individuals who can then compete by gaining advantages over other students.

Simultaneously, however, its achievement on a small scale can also serve to create the illusion of complete meritocracy in systems that perpetuate inequality.

To bring about justice on a larger scale, at the societal level, Stepping Stone relies on associational, cultural, and distributive justice, as implemented by their students in the future. Stepping Stone has not yet found a mechanism to promote social justice as “equality of opportunity” on a societal scale in an immediate time frame. For “equality of opportunity” to be considered a pillar of social justice, it must extend to all of society so that all individuals, not just the few who participate in the program, can compete on equal footing with one another based on merit and not just on a basis of privilege, luck, or background. Even still, the “equality of opportunity” paradigm does not address structural problems inherent *in* the systems that *result in* inequality. Stepping Stone must undermine and reform those systems so as to benefit society while still working for the success of its individual students’ success in order to truly create lasting, far-reaching social justice. Effectively changing the systems that create inequality would then ensure social justice in its conception of an egalitarian society, extending to all members of society, ensuring not only “equality of opportunity,” but equality in general.

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