

Realities of the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

A phenomenological pilot study of former participants

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Abstract

The Montgomery Bus Boycott is seen as a catalyst in the civil rights movement. The Jim Crow laws of the south segregated blacks from whites in their use of public facilities. The success of this 381-day boycott to integrate the city of Montgomery bus system, sparked continued protests by blacks wanting equal treatment in other areas. There are countless history books and studies that have examined the boycott within the confines of social movement theory. This study furthers the literature by conducting interviews with participants 50 years after the boycott. The study finds many similarities in the experiences of the participants and that most valued, and almost treasured their involvement in the movement.

Introduction

On December 1, 1955, black residents in Montgomery began a journey that would change history. Many have heard the story of Rosa Parks, who on that fateful day refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white man. Her action violated the city's bus segregation laws and was subsequently arrested for disorderly conduct (Hare, 2005). The 42-year-old Ms. Parks was seen as an upstanding woman in the Black community and area blacks were outraged with her arrest (Wilson, 2005). Blacks then engaged in a 381-day boycott of the bus system and on November 13, 1955 segregation on the city's bus system was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Browder v. Gayle, 1956*). This study explored how participants viewed their involvement in the boycott more than a half century later.

Literature Review

Social Movement

The term "social movement" was originally developed by sociologist Lorenzo Von Stein in his book, the "History of the Social Movement in France, 1789-1850" (Stein, 1964). Social movements are based on collective actions (Jordan, 1995). Prior to the civil rights movements, scholars concluded that social movements were "spontaneous, non-rational, and unstructured" (Morris, 1999). "Movement participants are often portrayed as nonrational actors functioning outside of normative constraints and propelled by high levels of strain (Morris, 1981, p. 745). Wood and Jackson (1982) said that social movements were only successful if the participants "are seen to calculate their chances of victory and defeat and act accordingly" (p. 36). Morris said that creativity is crucial to social movements, it requires a development of a new way of doing things and

the people involved in the movements “must place themselves in learning situations where they can be taught to act creatively” (p. 523). According to Tarrow (1994) social protest “is more likely to occur if there exists a favorable political opportunity”. McAdam (1982) argued that this favorable opportunity came when blacks moved north and achieved political voting power. With America’s quest of becoming a super power, “wide scale black protest, therefore, stood a good chance of exposing the contradiction between racism and democracy” (Morris,1999, p. 522). According to Goldstone (1980) successful social movements occur during periods of crisis. Gamson (1975) said many factors such as tactics, the use of violence and organizational structure determine whether the movement is successful. In an analysis of Gamson, researchers (Frey, Dietz & Kalof, 1992) concluded that periods of crisis and organizational factors predict a group’s protest success. Andrews (1997) said there are several internal factors that contribute to social movements; leadership skills, organizational form and strength, informal networks of activists, and links among social movement organizations (p. 801). “This suggests that one of the ways that social movements generate social change is by producing local organizations and networks” (p. 813). Selby (2001) stated that social movement theory typically focuses on the structural and organizational demonstrations of collective action, but that the research on this theory is moving toward the role of discursive practices in movement formation. Klandermans (1992) argued that frames help to assert a social movement. “Social movements frame – that is, assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, garner bystander support and demobilize antagonists” (p. 80).

Social movement activists rest their cause on Marxist theory which says social injustice rests in the hands of the elite (Marx, 1983). "Evidently black liberation and feminism, as social movements unite around collective actions that combat their oppression or seek liberation" (Jordan, 1995, p. 682.) Jordan also stated that for blacks, the liberation movement was grounded in a plurality of beliefs, organization and oppression.

Segregation and Jim Crow laws

In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) the United States Supreme Court ruled that segregation was legal as long as the separate facilities were equal. As a result, Jim Crow laws were developed in the south. "Racial segregation was the linchpin of the Jim Crow, for the arrangement that set Blacks from the rest of humanity and labeled them an inferior race" (Morris, 1984, p. 2). Blacks were deprived politically, economically and financially, in addition to having their constitutional rights violated (Morris, 1999) According to Morris, in the south blacks were controlled politically because they were barred from the voting process. The Jim Crow laws put in place a system that forced a segment of society to feel inferior (Morris, 1999).

"Moreover, the fact that Blacks had to use separate toilets, attend separate schools, sit at the back of the buses and trains, address whites with respect while being addressed disrespectfully, be sworn in on different bibles in the courtroom, purchase clothes without first trying them on and pass by "white only" lunch counter seats after purchasing

food, and travel without sleep because hotels would not accommodate them – all these- resulted in serious psychological damage” (p. 518).

If blacks did try to stand up for their beliefs, there was always the fear of such groups as the Ku Klux Klan and White Camelia. John Hope Franklin (1967) said these groups “used intimidation, force, ostracism in business and society, bribery at the polls, arson and even murder to accomplish their deeds” (p. 327).

There were efforts to fight for equal treatment before the bus boycott, most notably in 1941. Morris (1999) stated that Black leaders were planning a large march at the Washington Monument to target racial discrimination in the military. Black leaders felt that this march would embarrass the United States and then President Roosevelt. One day before the march was supposed to begin, on June 12, 1941, Roosevelt issued an executive order “that banned racial discrimination in the nation’s defense industries” (p. 521).

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

There had been two other black women who were arrested for violating the city’s segregation laws before Ms. Rosa Parks. Fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin was arrested March 2, 1955 for violating the bus segregation laws and on October 21, 18-year-old Mary Louise Smith was arrested for disobeying an order to move (Hare, 2005, Wilson 2005). “After refusing to give up her seat to a white man, Colvin was handcuffed, arrested and forcibly removed from the bus, as she screamed that her Constitutional rights were being violated (www.tolerance.org)”. Colvin was charged with violating the state segregation law, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest (Burns, 1997), but instead of being exonerated, she was convicted and placed on indefinite probation (Burns, 1997).

Black leaders were going to use Colvin's case to stage a boycott, but rescinded that decision after civil rights activist E.D. Nixon discovered that Colvin was pregnant (www.tolerance.org). A few months later, Mary Louise Smith was arrested (Hare, 2005). Smith did not violate the segregation laws because she was sitting in the "colored" section but refused to move when asked by the bus driver so a white woman could sit down (Burns, 1997). According to Burns, Smith was charged with failing to obey an officer and fined nine dollars. Both Smith and Colvin were teenagers at the time of their refusals, but when Ms. Parks was arrested, she was the secretary of the NAACP, and she didn't have a police record. "Contrary to popular misconception, Mrs. Parks was not sitting in the white section, she had taken a seat in the first row of the Black section: but when all the seats in the white section had been filled and a white man was left standing, the bus driver ordered her and two others to get up and let the white man sit" (Stewart, 1996). Parks is quoted as saying the reason she was used to initiate the boycott was because "I wasn't pregnant with an illegitimate child. The white people couldn't point to me and say that there was anything I had done to deserve such treatment except being born black" (Parks, 2001, p. 65). Montgomery's black leaders and the black press insisted that Park was a devout Christian woman, "mild-mannered and soft-spoken, retiring and perfectly poised. She was, they argued a lady who adhered to the best ideals of middle-class respectability" (Wilson, 2005, p.301). Therefore, Montgomery's black leaders felt using Parks to challenge segregation would be more effective than if they used Colvin and Smith (Wilson). "The African American community needed a citizen whose character was unimpeachable, a 'pillar of the community'" (www.tolerance.org).

Alabama State College instructor JoAnn Robinson and the Women's Political Council (WPC) had been tracking the situation on the city's bus system for more than a year (Wilson, 2005). The WPC had met with the city of Montgomery's leadership one year before the boycott to discuss the mistreatment of black passengers but no improvements were made (Wilson, 2005). As a result, after Parks arrest and when she was set to go to trial on December 5, Robinson informed Nixon that the time was right for a boycott and with the help of a Alabama State colleague and two students, they created the following handbill;

This is for Monday, December 5, 1955.

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus and give it to a white person. It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped. Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother. This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day. If you work take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-up, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off all buses on Monday."

(Parks, 2001, p. 65-66)

They distributed 35,000 handbills to members of Montgomery's black community (Barnett, 1993). That one day boycott on December 5, was so successful that the protestors began an indefinite boycott. At a meeting that night at the Holt Street Baptist, thousands showed up and voted to continue to the boycott. "The executive committee decided that one day protest was insufficient; the boycott, which due to a 1921 state law had to be called a protest, should continue until the oppressive situation on the city buses was resolved (Wilson, 2005, p. 309). That day, the Montgomery Improvement Association, was officially developed and Dr. Martin Luther King was their spokesperson. The group's sole purpose was to improve the quality of life for Montgomery's black residents (Hare, 2001). E.D. Nixon, one of the leaders in the boycott is quoted as saying at that first Montgomery Improvement Association Mass meeting;

You who are afraid, you better get your hat and coat and go home. This going to be a long-drawn out affair. I wanted to tell you something: For years and years I've been talking about how I didn't want the children who came along behind me to suffer the indignities that I suffered all these years. Well, I've changed my mind – I want to enjoy some of that freedom myself (Parks, p. 70).

Dr. Martin Luther King said that 42,000 Blacks participated in the boycott (Hare, 2001). For a little more than one year, Blacks walked to work, carpoled, or took taxis to work. The boycott was a crisis for business and commerce in the south (Morris 1999). The city bus system was losing money and as well as downtown shops and businesses (Stewart, 1996). For one year Blacks walked, carpoled or took taxis to work. The Montgomery Improvement Association was instrumental in assisting people with rides to work. "About 30,000 people were transported to and from work everyday" (Parks, p. 72), and the services would run from 5:30a.m. until

12:30a.m. Their elaborate transportation consisted of 32 pick-up and transfer sites with the use of 20 private cars and 14 station wagons (Parks, 2001).

On November 13, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled segregation on the Montgomery buses illegal (*Browder v. Gayle, 1956*) and when the high court's enforcement order was served on December 20, 1956 blacks voted to end the boycott. The three-judge panel ruled that the segregation codes in Montgomery "deny and deprive plaintiffs and other Negro citizens similarly situated of the equal protection of the laws and due process of law secured by the Fourteenth Amendment." (www.tolerance.org). The year long Montgomery Bus Boycott "revealed that large number of Blacks – indeed the entire community could be mobilized to protest racial segregation" (Morris, 1999, p. 524). Morris stated that it was the boycott method that shifted power to the black masses and their non-violent philosophy was crucial to their success. The non-violent action, "robbed the white power structure of the ability to openly crush the movement without serious repercussions" (p. 525). Coleman, Nee & Rubinowitz (2005) tributed the success of the boycott to synergy of the boycott itself and legal litigation. They said the two entities worked hand and hand, and one without the other would not have provided the successful end to segregation on the city's buses.

Other Relevant Literature

Killian (1984), analyzed the differences between the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott and 1956 bus boycott in Tallahassee, Florida. According to the researcher, the Tallahassee boycott started with two Florida A&M students who were told to move after initially sitting by a white woman on the bus. The two students never became activists in the movement and eventually returned to their homes, "much relieved to get out of

Tallahassee and the glare of publicity” (p. 772). However, Ms. Rosa Parks is credited with starting the bus boycott in Montgomery and was heavily involved in the movement.

Wilson (2005) analyzed how King’s speeches were used to uplift the crowd and encourage them to continue in the fight to end racial segregation on the city’s buses.

Selby (2001) stated that King often compared their struggle to the struggles in the Bible.

“King persistently represented their struggle for racial justice as the enactment of modern-day Exodus, a rhetorical strategy that addressed the formidable challenges Montgomery’s Black citizens faced during their attempts to develop and sustain a campaign against segregation on the city’s buses” (p.70).

Barnett (1993) described the role that Black women played in the civil rights movement and how they were often extremely instrumental but not recognized as leaders of the movement. Women participated in the movement despite reparation from whites in the form of lost jobs and income. Many people lost their jobs because of their involvement in the boycott, including Ms. Parks who was employed as a seamstress.

Black ministers became the natural leaders because they did not have to depend on white employers. Andrews (1997) analyzed black electoral politics in Mississippi and found that “in certain circumstances, repression escalates protest” (p. 815).

This research project sought to find the shared meaning of the boycott to the participants. The literature thoroughly explained the details of the boycott and the sacrifices of the people who participated in it. This project also advances the literature because it has been more than 50 years since the culmination of the boycott and this living history, through the participants provides an important perspective. How do they perceive their actions more than a half century later?

RQ: What was the meaning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to people who actively participated in the boycott?

Paradigmatic Perspective

As a qualitative researcher, the purpose of research is to understand that there are multiple realities. Multiple realities are the lived experiences of the participants. The qualitative paradigm derives data from people. The data are the participants lived realities and the expression of that consciousness. The researcher is looking at the participants' perspectives from their reality.

A paradigm "is simply a belief system or theory that guides the way we can do things" (<http://www.erm.ecs.soton.ac.uk>). Guba (1990) defined a paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guides action." Guba stated that a researcher's paradigmatic perspective serves as the "starting points or givens that determine what inquiry is and how it is to be practiced." According to Guba, paradigms can be characterized through their ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology refers to the reality of nature, epistemology is the relationship between the knower and the known, and methodology is how the researcher plans to on acquire the knowledge (Guba, 1990).

The researcher approached this project from the constructivism paradigm. "The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Guba stated that relativism is the key to openness and that "realities are multiple, and they exist in people's minds" (Guba, p. 26). Epistemologically, a subjectivist position is taken, whereas "the inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single entity" and the "findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two" (Guba, p. 27). Haley and Cunningham (2003) acknowledge that epistemologically, knowledge

is co-created between the researcher and the participant. Methodologically, a hermeneutic/dialectic approach was used for this project. "The hermeneutic aspect consists in depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible, while the dialectic aspect consists of comparing and contrasting these individual constructions so that each respondent must confront the construction of others and come to terms with them" (Guba, p. 27).

Constructivism embodies phenomenological assumptions. Phenomenology is the philosophy of what the human world is. Initially developed by Edmund Husserl, it is a movement that promotes an understanding of the relationship between states of individual consciousness and social life (www.iep.utm.edu). Phenomenology is the study of the life world. The life world is the combination of a person's sociohistorical world and personal biography (Gurwitsch, 1974). In this case, the phenomenon is the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Ontologically, in the phenomenological perspective there are many assumptions, such as multiple realities and life world experience (Guba, 1990). The goal of the researcher is to uncover multiple realities of the phenomenon as understood by participants. The life world is the experience of the participant. The life world is important to study because it is the point where realities are created (Gurwitsch, 1974). "The world of our common-sense experience and daily life is an interpreted world, having sense and meaning for us....." (p. 123). These realities are multiple and socially constructed. "Phenomenological researchers create contexts in which participants are encouraged to reflect retrospectively on an experience they have already lived through and describe this experience in as much detail as possible to the interviewer," (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 56). This particular course of study is different from the natural

scientist because natural sciences study objects and social scientist study human beings, their “biographical situations” and “stocks of knowledge at hand” (Gurwitsch, 1974). A Biographical situations and stocks of knowledge refer to a person’s whole life history. “These actors have ‘biographical situations’ and ‘stocks of knowledge at hand’; they pursue interests, have goals, motives, and the like, they have a certain conception of the world they life in, and of themselves as living in that world.....” (p. 129). The researcher used an emic philosophy of inquiry, which focused on an understanding from within and the usage of the participants’ own words to describe themes and concepts.

Design

In order to find the meanings of the boycott, in-depth long interviews were conducted with people who actively participated in the boycott. The long interview was used because it allowed the researcher to “step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). This interview method also gave the researcher access to stocks of knowledge and biographical situations (Gurwitsch, 1974). This method related to the researcher’s paradigmatic perspective because of the assumption that there were multiple realities and the individual interviews may elicit different realities regarding the Montgomery bus boycott. An emergent design was utilized to generate theory from the interview data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By emergent design, the theory is derived from the data. The criteria for good research within the phenomenological is research that provides illustrations to the themes discovered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). “In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept” (p. 23).

To acquire the participants, contact was made with an associate of Alabama State University who agreed to provide the researcher with some contact names and information. The researcher's family is from Montgomery and family members also assisted with locating former bus boycotters. Initial contact was made to determine if the individual fit the definition of participant. The definition of a participant was a person who actively did not ride the buses during the boycott. The researcher traveled to Montgomery to conduct the interviews in a natural setting. It was important that the interviews were conducted in a natural setting so the data would flow freely (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this natural setting, the participants were assured that their views were respected and accurately recorded. Each participant was advised that he/she was the expert. According to Taylor (1994) conducting qualitative interviews in a natural setting is important because the researcher is attempting to "understand the meaning that things have in varying contexts, qualitative researchers conduct their investigations in natural setting such as homes, lounges, club meetings, offices, bars, libraries, theaters, video arcades, street corners, neighborhood markets – in short, wherever the behavior being studied occurs naturally" (p. 267). There is evidence in other research that interviews conducted in a natural setting elicit rich data from the participants. In Treise, Taylor & Wells' (1994) study of recovering alcoholics they gave participants the option of being interviewed at their treatment program sites or at a university conference room to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the setting.

The researcher created a discussion guide containing open-ended questions (see Appendix B). According to McCracken (1988), the discussion guide "protects the larger structure" but also gives the interviewer flexibility. "Within each of the questions, the

opportunity for exploratory, unstructured responses remains" (McCracken, p. 25). In Haley (1996) the discussion guide helped to acquire a richer and more descriptive analysis.

Qualitative research uses different standards to evaluate its studies. As opposed to quantitative research where reliability and validity are used as standards in evaluating studies, qualitative research utilizes trustworthiness and redundancy are used. Trustworthiness is a way to ensure that the comments provided by the participant are accurate (Taylor, 1994). "One check on the accuracy of a researcher's interpretations is to present them to the research participants to see if they agree" (p. 268). To insure trustworthiness each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. Redundancy is the point when clear patterns emerge from the interviews and no new information comes out of the interviews (Taylor, 1994). In Haley's (1996) study of consumer advertising, "the number of interviews conducted was expanded until clear patterns in the participants' constructions of organizational sponsorship of advocacy messages had emerged and been confirmed" (p. 26).

The researcher used an emic analysis by looking for themes and labels using the respondent's word, to generate an understanding from within. By using the participants' words, this also helped to ensure trustworthiness in the project. Using analytic induction and comparison analysis the researcher read each interview transcript line-by-line looking for themes. "Analytic induction and comparative analysis involve reading the data line-by-line for themes and categories, developing a working schema from examination of initial cases, then modifying and refining the schema, based on subsequent cases" (Haley & Cunningham, 2003, p. 178). Patton (2002) described inductive analysis as a method of

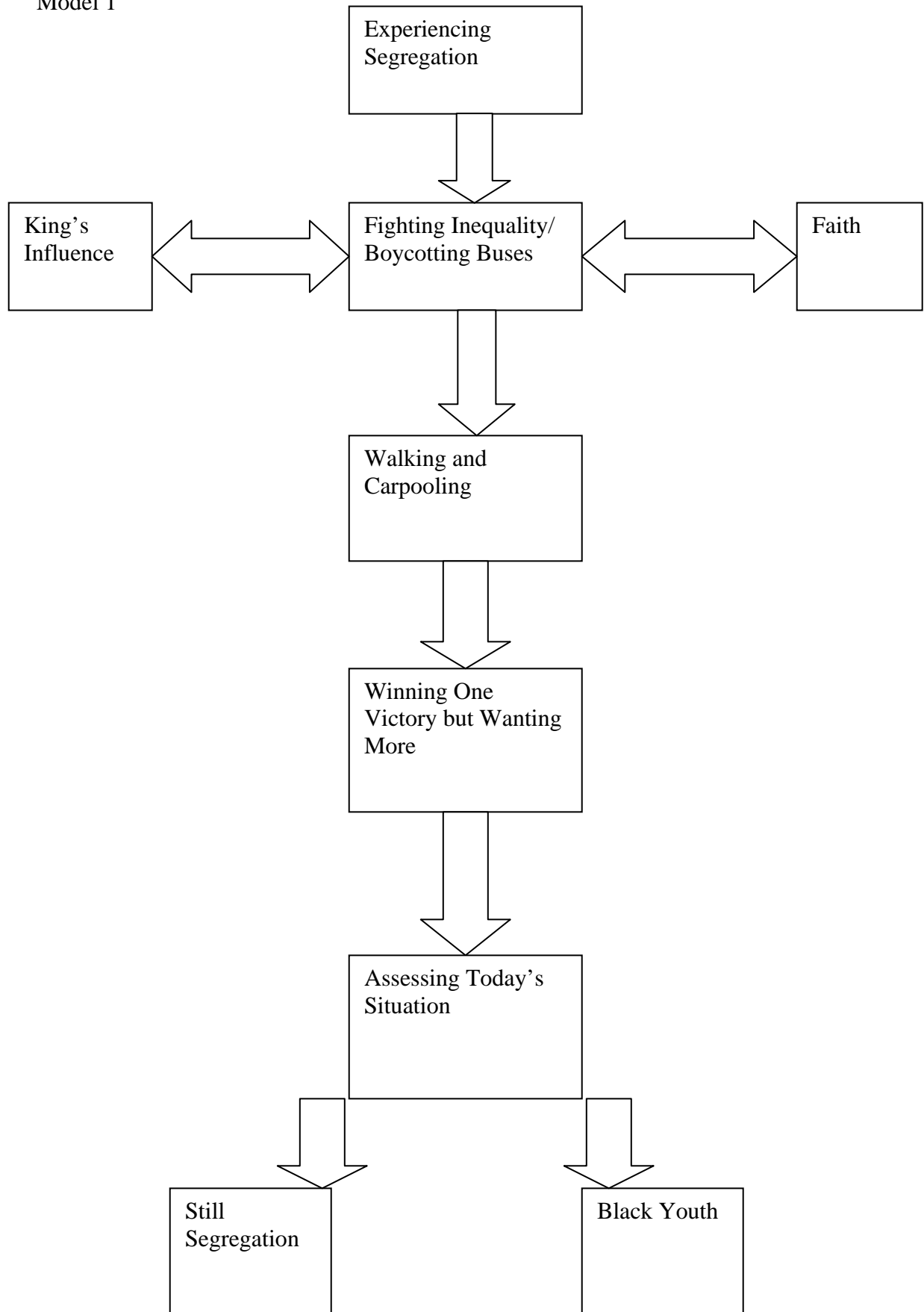
developing the patterns, themes and categories that come out of the data. The units of analysis were the categories and themes that emerged from the data. Again, interviews continued until they reached a point a redundancy (McCracken, 1988). In Haley and Cunningham (2003), the researchers stated that redundancy refers to the point when “constructions of a phenomenon are repeated” (p. 178). In Haley’s (1996) study of consumers understanding of advocacy advertising, redundancy was reached when certain patterns were continuing to emerge in the interviews.

This research project involved people explaining their experiences of participating in the boycott with a thick description and rich detail. In the interviews with the participants, the researcher attempted to capture the reality of the meaning of the Montgomery bus boycott for each person. It was possible that each participant had a different reality, which is acceptable within the paradigmatic assumptions.

Analysis

Several themes emerged from the data; Experiencing segregation, Fighting inequality/Boycotting Buses, King’s Influence, Faith, Walking and Carpooling, Winning One Victory but Wanting More, and Assessing Today’s Situation (see Model 1).

Model 1



Experiencing Segregation

As the participants described life in the Jim Crow South, experiencing segregation was one commonality. Whether they grew up in Montgomery, Alabama or other nearby southern communities, segregation was the norm. Blacks were treated differently in every aspect of life from shopping to medical attention. Experiencing segregation for the first time and segregation in general were moments the participants remembered vividly.

I just headed to the door and a man said, "the white owner I assume he was, he said you can't use that restroom. And I was very demanding. I said, 'why not, I got to go to the restroom'. And he said, 'you can't use it' and the other little girl punched me in the back and she says come on, come on, let's go. That was the first time I experienced it. It was actually being away from home.

Ms. Annie Lovett

You go to ride the bus, you had to give the man your money here and go back here in and get on the bus, you know what I mean? And all that, you couldn't drink out of fountains, if you go to places get something you had to wait at a window to get it, and all like that. You know I didn't come up a slave but I come up in segregation times, you know.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

We used to have to go to the back, what was it, like businesses that sell food? We had to go to the window, you know, we couldn't go on the inside.

Ms. Mary Rollins

Participants said the effects of segregation made them feel inferior.

Well, it made us feel that us, that they was, well, like was a a little less than, not as, not as important, not as privileged because a lot of things that they had that we didn't have, we weren't cherished to have and we were made to feel inferior to those people because of the way that we was brought up.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

They saw your skin was black that you were nasty, you was unfit to be with them, unfit to sit down, but you could work in the house and cook for them and cook the food, take care of the children and everything

Ms. Ethel Robinson

Fighting Inequality-Boycotting Buses

The abuses and mistreatment endured during segregation, gave the participants a will to fight for equality. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for a white man, the black community galvanized and the Montgomery Bus Boycott began.

Once the bus boycott started we was involved, everybody was getting involved a little, some a little more than others because of their own participation in it, everybody got involved, every black got involved.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

One participant, who was only 8-years-old during the boycott, but had six older siblings said he remembered his parents telling them not to ride the bus. His mother, who worked as a domestic, would say, "whatever you do, don't get on the bus."

Because basically we had a radio, and you could hear about it, and you could hear the people in the neighborhood were talking about it. They were saying, 'nobody gets on the bus

Mr. Thomas McGhee

Well, the reason I didn't get on the bus during the boycott because I know it was segregated and on the bus, and Rosa Parks had started to, make a life, another life us to to go by, so I decided I said, nobody, city bus, I don't know what I'm a get on.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

Walking and Carpooling

Not riding the buses put a transportation strain on the boycotters. They still had to reach their places of employment, which meant either walking to work or catching a ride. The Montgomery Improvement Association developed a carpooling system and often boycotters would wait for rides.

But at every bus stop, if you sat there long enough, there was going to be a station wagon with drivers to pick you up and give you a ride, and then the cabs would participate too, they picked you up and give you a ride.

Mr. Thomas McGhee

Two participants, who both worked as domestics, said the boycott meant walking miles or receiving rides through the Montgomery Improvement Association's elaborate carpooling system.

Whole lot of times I would ride with some people, they would come down and we'll wait down at the end of the street and people go down there and they would, a lot of cars, people volunteering and bus and everything they would drive you to work, so a lot of times when it was raining or bad I would wait, you know, and any other times I just walk because I was young then and had a lot of pep.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

Yeah, I was walking because we didn't have any cars, you know, so we had to walk for miles.....and they had the Ku Klux Klan riding their horses, you know, when people were walking and stuff like that.

Ms. Mary Rollins

Faith

Despite the presence of the Klan, the boycotters were persistent and one reason for this determination was their faith. Mass meetings were held in Montgomery and other cities in Alabama. The purpose of the mass meetings was to inform the black community of the status of the boycott, but most importantly, it encouraged the boycotters to continue their fight for equality. During the meetings it was stressed that one of the reasons for boycotting was to make the world a better place for the next generation.

Dr. King, Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, some of those people would be there to give speeches and give, uh, let you know what was up, what was happening and what the plans was for the boycott to continue but more than that it was motivational speeches that they gave so people be able to continue with the benefits of the marches and stuff.... it motivated you to become a better person strive to be more, strive to let you know that you're God's people just as well, and we supposed and your right is the same as everybody else's rights.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

One participant, who attended the mass meetings held in Lowndes County, said the purpose was to pray and support Montgomery's black community.

And they would sing songs, like religious songs and one they used to sing so much is "We Shall Overcome". I said 'Lord whatever it means, will we ever overcome', because I heard it constantly, constantly heard that some. And they prayed a lot, I mean, it went around. Not just one person would say a prayer, it was several who prayed for a very long time...that would give you inner strength.

Ms. Annie Lovett

These prayers would encourage the participants to continue to trust God and believe that through their faith, God would bring them through the boycott. Their faith made them courageous.

Black people stood...knowing that they were standing up for their rights and during that time standing up for their rights was, was uh, was actually a big thing, it was a scary thing because so many people had their lives taken for trying to stand up for their or how people during that time you would hear about black people getting lynched, black people just getting murdered down because they are trying to stand up for their rights.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

Faith was very important because, and that's what King's speeches and Abernathy's speeches and other ministers were speaking. And their whole thing was based around, like when they'd say, 'you have to believe', that's faith. You have to believe, okay, you're going to make it through this. If you did not have the faith that you could make it through this danger, then you wouldn't do it.

Mr. Thomas McGhee

Ms. Robinson admitted that there were many times during the boycott that she was afraid, but her faith gave her courage.

I've been afraid a lot of times, but I just ask God to go before me, as a lead lamb, behind his protective angels that's all you go to do cause God is going to do it. With you and him and he and you and you going go do what he say he do, he's going take care of you.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

King's Influence

Dr. Martin Luther King's influence also affected the participants during the boycott. They described King as a highly educated man and a charismatic leader.

Dr. King I would say if my father had to say it, he was highly intelligent and he would always think before he spoke. When you see him on television he was so, looked like, high you know he just, but actually he was a man of thought. He was a man of dignity. He was a man of pride. He was just a great person, I'll never forget him.

Ms. Annie Lovett

We had a leader that was abdicating good things about our rights and standing up for our rights.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

During the threat of violent, King's non-violent strategies helped the boycotters remain calm.

King would tell us, don't be vicious, don't fight back, be humble.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

At one mass meeting King was preaching when news arrived that his house had been bombed and there was also a disturbance outside of the meeting. His reaction helped the boycotters stay consistent with the non-violent philosophy.

He didn't stop preaching, he didn't stop telling the people what to do and they were turning people's cars upside down, setting them on fire and everything like that, and an old lady was down there, she said my son was in the army, and he got a gun shoots thirty-two times, said I'm going home to get it for yall'. King said don't get no guns, don't get nothing but God.

Ms. Ethel Robinson

Winning one victory, but wanting more

After 381 days of boycotting the buses, the Supreme Court ruled segregation on Montgomery City buses unconstitutional. One participant said she heard the news on the radio and the next weekend she experienced riding on an integrated bus.

My daddy said, I want you all to have first-hand experience, I'm going to take you, so you can ride the bus and be able to sit anywhere."

Ms. Annie Lovett

That boycott was a change in the humanity, it was a change in everybody's lives because it got people to see that we're all children of God, and that boycott gave black people strength, gave people the courage to go on and live productive lives.

Mr. Earnest Luckie

The success of the Montgomery Bus boycott encouraged blacks to fight for other rights, such as the right to vote and equal employment opportunities. Young participants of the boycott later became very active in the struggle for voting rights, but still operating under King's non-violent philosophy.

I was going out to the rallies, when I was a teenager, then I had an idea what's going on. When they finished, King finished talking and Abernathy and all the people who gathered there, when the sermon and all that was over, they'd say, 'okay now we're going to march from Madison Street over to Hudson Street and when we'd get to Hudson Street, this is over. Now to get from Madison Street to Hudson Street, there are going to be some encounters because they didn't have a permit to march, they were not going to give them a permit to march, so when you're marching over there, the police are going to have the dogs and the horses and they're going to try to break it up. And that's when they're teaching you to cover up the young ladies, how to protect them and how to do this and the other.

Mr. Thomas McGhee

Assessing Today's Situation

It's been more than 50 years since the bus boycott, and legalized segregation no longer exists in Montgomery.

To me, everything about it has changed so much. I mean it's so many things that you can do in Montgomery. You can go now anyplace that you want to go, you know, if you had the money to do it, you really can, so it's just so different.

Ms. Annie Lovett

Although legalized segregation no longer exists on city buses, some participants said that there are still instances of segregation. They said current segregation exists through the use of income and "community genocide."

For instance, all the growth in Montgomery has gone east, they haven't built anything on the west side in years. It's basically collapsing on the west side because there is no participation and all the, and all the industries, all the stores are moving to the east, basically don't have any stores on the west side now, everything out east. If you want anything you have to go way out east to get it because it's still a genocide against people in this area.....

Mr. Earnest Luckie

One participant said that certain Montgomery businesses keep their organizations segregated through the use of exorbitant fees.

To me, they're not saying, we're not going to accept blacks, but once they put that number, they're telling me, 'Tom McGhee, you're not coming in.' Now and you know what, they're exactly true, because I'm not going to pay a thousand dollars a month to belong to the Montgomery County Club, I'm not going to do that.

Mr. Thomas McGhee

In addition to economic segregation, the participants felt that today's black youth don't understand their struggles and the importance of Dr. King's message of love and non-violence. They said drugs and crime have corrupted too many of them.

They will find any means of trying to make a quick dollar rather than going to school and getting an education to better their lives, and then you have some people who are highly educated and yet let drugs dominate their lives. I just, if Dr. King was living now he would say, you don't need to do that.

Ms. Annie Lovett

But right now, still we're abusing what Reverend King taught us. You know, how to live and how to treat one another..... We are murdering all like this, you know. This is not what he stood for, it's different. He taught us to love, walk hand-in-hand, but they're not doing that anymore.

Ms. Mary Rollins

You know, people don't count on nothing now and day, every night out there in that street, it be cars from down to the end of that road up to the way up on the top of that hill out there selling dope gambling, cursing, doing everything they want to do.....

Mr. Ethel Robinson

Discussion

The timing of the boycott was crucial. Before the bus boycott, the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) lawsuit had been decided, which required schools to integrate. Parts of the nation resisted school integration. A 1955 Gallup Poll asked Americans if they approved of the U.S. Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools. Fifty-six percent of the respondents said they approved, compared to 38% who said they did not approve and 6% who had no opinion (Gallup, 1972). After the Brown v. Board of Education court victory, and a poll of more than 50% of those who favored the decision, the timing was right for this type of protest. According to social movement theory, a movement is the collective action of a group of individuals (Jordan, 1995). The literature indicates the social protests occur when groups feel that they are unfairly treated and this was consistent with the current findings. Experiencing segregation was the fuel that ignited activism. The participants felt they were called to actively get involved in the boycott, for the purpose of "making it better for the next generation". This research shows that what sustained them during the 381 days of the boycott was faith and Dr. King's influence. Their victory with the bus boycott fueled a fight for further equality. Although segregation is no longer legally practiced, the participants believe that it still exists and that today's black youth do not understand the sacrifices made during bus boycott. The boycott affected each participant in different ways. For

participants who were of adult age during the boycott, it gave them a sense of accomplishment, they felt that had a role in changing society. Whereas, for the younger participants it ignited a passion to continue the struggle for equality in all areas of life. The results of this research are not generalizable but they do provide insight into the life stories of the boycott participants. Further research in this area would consist of interviewing Montgomery's white citizens to gather their perspective of the boycott and then conduct a comparison/contrast of the two realities.

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