##### [00:00:02.330] - Brian Shelton

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Today on Harper Talks, I'm excited to speak with Dr. Justin Harty. Justin is a graduate of Harper College and is currently an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. Dr. Harty credits Harper users Sean Noonan and John Garcia for igniting his passion for sociology and philosophy. Justin Harty joined me for Harper Talks over Zoom.

##### [00:00:35.200] - Brian Shelton

Thanks for being here, Justin. How are you?

##### [00:00:37.280] - Dr. Justin Harty

I'm good, how are you?

##### [00:00:38.520] - Brian Shelton

I am wonderful. Beautiful spring day here in Chicago land. You are in Arizona, where it is warm all the time. And you were just telling me before we started the podcast that you're tired of it being warm all the time already. You've only been there for a year?

##### [00:00:52.400] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yes, born and raised in Chicago. I grew up playing hockey, still play Bear League hockey. And I miss the cold. I miss the not always sunny days and the temperature changes.

##### [00:01:06.810] - Brian Shelton

Well, I hope to one day miss that myself, but for right now, I would take what you have. You graduated from Harper College back in 2008, right before kind of a worldwide economic meltdown. And I was thinking about that when I was looking at your information. How did that play into your role, into what you did after Harper College? Did that affect you at all?

##### [00:01:33.870] - Dr. Justin Harty

I don't think it did. I put off college long enough that there was really nothing that was going to stop me from continuing on and being in college. So I graduated Harper and I transferred to the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. I was in school when that happened. I was renting, so it didn't affect me all that much.

##### [00:02:03.240] - Brian Shelton

Tell me about your time at Harper College. You were here in the early Aughts, as we refer to them now. What was Harper like at that time? What was it like for you?

##### [00:02:12.880] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah. Well, I was very familiar with Harper because my parents met at Harper, and so my mom was really adamant that I at least go to a two year university. And Harper was always I didn't have the finances to go to a traditional four year university. So originally my thoughts around Harper was it was a place kind of where you can get like, a solid foundational education for a fair price. And so back then, my thoughts of Harper were just that, it was a place where I would go to kind of sort out what I wanted to do in life, and I put it off for about six years. My thoughts of Harper then were it was an exciting place. I didn't understand it that people called it a commuter college, but it was that. I would go there for school, and then I was able to go back to work. And oftentimes, sometimes I would take exams on my lunch break. And so it was a place that was kind of like it was home, school, and work.

##### [00:03:40.470] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Hey, while you were here, you worked with Sean Noonan and John Garcia. I know you've mentioned them as being pretty instrumental in your academic life. Can you tell me about those guys a little bit?

##### [00:03:50.810] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, for sure. Well, I started out at Harper in fire science. I wanted to be a firefighter, and I had to knock out some gen ed courses. And the first two gen ed courses I took were philosophy and sociology. And so there were my very first two Harper professors that I had. And yeah, both of them were absolutely fundamental. I don't think there's a time in my academic track that I don't think of them. There were two professors that were really cool that I looked at and thought, man, I really want to be like them one day. And between, I have a deep love of reggae. Sean Noonan, the first time I met with him, during office hours, he was playing reggae in his office, and we were debating about Jamaican politics. And he was able to help me understand how Jamaican politics was a lot like US. Politics and how much the US. Was doing harm in Jamaica and was kind of fundamental. How the US was imperialistic and was really critical of that. You bonded over that. John Garcia, at the time, was sharing how he would do stand up comedy. He was just funny, and I never really thought that a philosophy professor would be funny.

##### [00:05:34.630] - Dr. Justin Harty

He was hysterical, and he brought a lot of humor and humility and grounding to philosophy that just totally resonated with me.

##### [00:05:45.040] - Brian Shelton

I never really got a chance to work with Sean, but I work with John Garcia all the time, and I told him I was going to be talking to you, and he wanted me to tell you hello, and then he wished you well. But, yeah, John's a great guy. He's got a really dry wit. You have to be listening and paying attention to catch that.

##### [00:06:02.950] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, exactly. Or you'll miss it.

##### [00:06:05.210] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. Does their teaching style is that seeped into how you teach and how you interact with students.

##### [00:06:13.460] - Dr. Justin Harty

Oh, for sure. Before I answer that, I just want to say that, you know, when I went to.... The way that they captured the world is how I see the world. And so it's not just how I interact with students, it's how I view ethics, morality. It's how I view all these kinds of background processes that go on in the world. And in terms of teaching, for sure. I think I bring Sean's fierceness and just absolute drive for inquiry, to better understand inequality. It's something that I really push for my students. I think with John Garcia's ability to turn anything into an ethical argument that you need to defend, and this is, I think, is the critical part that I think I do with my students. In John's classes, it wasn't sufficient for you to know your argument. You had to know the opposing argument even better than yours. And that's something that I think in social work is something as a virtue that's been lost and something that absolutely I gained from John that I really try to get my students to understand as well.

##### [00:07:58.860] - Brian Shelton

That's great. I was looking you get a really impressive academic CV. You've got Harper College, BA at the University of Illinois, master of Social Work at U of I Chicago, and then a PhD at the University of Chicago. I mean, this is a pretty impressive academic CV. But what I'm really kind of interested in, I've noticed that you worked in the foster care system in Chicago, and what was that like? That had to be tough. I'm just thinking about what an interesting time in your life that must have been.

##### [00:08:35.590] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, it was, I think, also unique. So growing up, I spent a portion of my childhood in the child welfare system. It was more of a ....My father was abusive, and so. He left our family, and so my mom and my sisters were kind of left to fend for ourselves. And my mom did a lot of great work and really kind of kept our family together. Coming out of that, I never wanted to be a social worker. And when I was at Harper, I went there to do fire science. And after taking Sean's sociology courses and John's philosophy courses, when I left and went to and transferred to the University of Illinois, I double majored in both in philosophy and sociology. But both of them, philosophy taught me how the world ought to be. Sociology taught me how the world was. And there was something missing there, and it was social work, because social work kind of bridged the two together. I would do work that I felt would make the world be how I thought it ought to be. And being a child welfare case worker was my first kind of career job that merged the two, and it really highlighted a lot of what I learned in those classes. I learned a lot about how in the US inequality creates circumstances in which families have to face a lot when it comes to parenting, and sometimes it leads to maltreatment.

##### [00:10:38.730] - Dr. Justin Harty

But with that, in the skills I gain in philosophy, around ethics, morality, these were ethical families. These were moral families that were in rough situations. And so it was my first kind of real world, okay, this is what I learned in philosophy and sociology, but this is what it looks like on the ground. And it was hard, it was difficult, it was challenging, it was stressful. I saw the worst of people. I saw the best of people. And for me, it was instrumental because I really learned that what would ultimately become my future research was that the child welfare system wasn't doing a lot for fathers. And so that really kind of led me to leave practice and enter in academia.

##### [00:11:39.190] - Brian Shelton

That's very interesting. Tell me about Dads matter.

##### [00:11:41.900] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, so Dad's Matter is an evaluation study that I'm on that looks at existing home visiting services that are focused on moms and looks at what we can do to tailor services for fathers. And so in the child welfare system, in kind of human services systems, generally, we talk about family, but really what we're talking about are mom and children. Fathers are often left out of that equation. And so Dad's Matter is an intervention to infuse existing mother child serving agencies and programming to include fathers. And so I started on there as a research assistant early in my doctoral program, and I'm I'm still on it, and it's it's exciting. You know, being a doctoral student, I became immersed in fatherhood research through the Dad's Matter study. But now I'm at a point in my career where I'm going to be taking the Dad's Matter study and focusing it on the child welfare system. So right now, it's only home visiting, and I'll be integrating a version of that for the child welfare system.

##### [00:13:05.360] - Brian Shelton

What's the outside of academia? What's the end goal of that? What happens with that? What's the hope?

##### [00:13:10.400] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, for the hope of that is that we can train case workers to be inclusive of fathers, I think is the most simplest way to put it. And we have a wide array of services for mothers who have children in the foster care system, but very few for fathers. And so this would be a way to better create services for fathers ultimately, so fathers can either be better engaged in their family or to strengthen their engagement in family.

##### [00:13:50.480] - Brian Shelton

That's great. Tell me about your role at Arizona State. What are you doing there?

##### [00:13:54.410] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, so here I'm an assistant professor, which is another thing that I never thought I would be. I struggled in high school. I struggled. I got poor grades. I was expelled from high school after I graduated high school, I put off Harper for about six years and never thought that academia would be something I would enter. But here I am, and I love it, and it's great. So I'm an assistant professor. I literally just wrapped up my first year. And it's been exciting. It's been a train wreck. It's been difficult. It's been exciting. And I have a few months off for the summer to kind of regroup and focus on year two. But here I teach courses in child welfare and diversity. I'm getting ready, starting to develop my own history courses. I want to do some courses that focus on the philosophy of social work, ethics of social work. And so I do a mix of things. So I do service work. I'm on committees that aim to kind of improve the classes that we teach. Here. I'm on a diversity committee where we're really looking at justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. How we can better integrate that in Arizona State.

##### [00:15:37.470] - Dr. Justin Harty

Social work, and I teach and I do research.

##### [00:15:44.190] - Brian Shelton

That's cool. What's been the best thing about that first year? What was really cool for you or what surprised you?

##### [00:15:51.040] - Dr. Justin Harty

I think the coolest part was not being a doctoral student anymore, being a student for so long, you get used to doing stuff for free. You're always on either you're researching for your dissertation, you're writing your dissertation, you're taking coursework, you're filling your TA-ships, you're doing all this stuff. This year I got to just settle down and do me and do my stuff. And I think this year it was certainly a year of reflection. Like I said, I never thought I'd be a professor, and I thought about Harper a lot. I mean, that was where I started. That's where I kind of gained my research skills, my inquiry skills, my passion for education, for better helping people. And that all started at Harper for this year. I really did a lot of reflecting, and that part was also really cool for me.

##### [00:16:57.590] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. What shocked you the most or set you back or made you think maybe this wasn't a good idea? Was there anything?

##### [00:17:03.000] - Dr. Justin Harty

Oh, yeah, there's 100 pages. I think it's a grind. Being a TA and teaching classes as a doctoral student. It was challenging. But when you do it on your own as an assistant professor, where the student matrix count into your tenure and promotion package, that's a whole other ballgame. So I thought a lot about Sean and John. How would have they structured syllabi? How would they have engaged students that are difficult to engage? How would they react in these circumstances in which I'm very passionate about a topic, but students in the class may not be? And so there is a lot to me, that was the most surprising aspect of it.

##### [00:18:02.410] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. And it is a grind. And I don't mean that necessarily in a negative way, but I don't think a lot of people outside of it understand that not only are you prepping and researching and developing things for your classes and then physically teaching, the classes and physically doing the grading, evaluation, interacting with the students. But you're doing committee work, and you're going to meetings and you're still working on your academic research and all the other things that you have to keep doing. And while it's different than from when you were in your doctoral program, because now you're just really focused on you right. Really focused on making it happen for your career. It is a grind. Not to depress you, but it doesn't ever get any easier.

##### [00:18:45.930] - Dr. Justin Harty

(laughs) That's what I've heard. And I've got friends who have just gotten tenure, and now they're off to the new stressors and things that they've got to do. But one thing that I have to also state is that I'm married and I've got three young daughters. And so managing that with my personal life, which for the last seven years as a doctoral student, I've had to kind of forefront my work. It's been a time where I also now have to give back to my family and contribute to my family in stronger ways than I did as a doctoral student. And that is also a challenge, I think. I've also learned a true work life balance, and that in the grand scheme of things, this is something that it's something that I've wanted to do for a long time and that I've done. But I don't define myself as an academic. I define myself as a husband and as a father and as a friend first. All the other stuff comes second. But it's very easy to forget that in this mix.

##### [00:20:02.200] - Brian Shelton

Yeah, it really is. But it does help when your family is a partner in this career. Right? Because when you are an academic, everybody's kind of involved in it. Everybody's a part of it. There's not a whole lot of separation. Your kids see you grading papers, they see you writing papers, they see you doing research. In my case, my kid comes to campus all the time. Right. So they're a part of that life, and it's great to be able to integrate them into it, but it's also great to have separation and as you said, balance. And that balance is hard to find sometimes.

##### [00:20:38.110] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, and it's fun. Like you said, I bring my daughters to campus sometimes. They get to see my office, they get to check out the campus life. For me, I really want to set the tone that education is important. And my expectation for them is that they same expectation that my mom had at a minimum two year university. If you want to enter a trade, that's cool. If not, you want to continue on, you absolutely can. And one of the nice things about being in a system professor, is that it comes with fantastic perks for my children to continue on their education. So when I think about Harper, I think about how it kind of set this journey for me forward in a way that now my children get to reap the benefits of something that I started by just walking into the door of Harper, saying what I wanted to do, picking out some classes and kind of continuing on that path. Now my children get to go to college for barely nothing. And that is kind of for someone that didn't grow up with generational wealth. It's a generational contribution that I get to make to my family that at a time where I didn't see the value of education, that Harper really helped me see.

##### [00:22:03.020] - Brian Shelton

Yeah. That benefit is generational wealth for your children. That's so fantastic. And that will benefit to their children as well, eventually, if it comes to that. I have two more questions that I want to ask you. We're doing a lot of work at Harper on diversity, equity and inclusion. Right. That's a lot of what work we're doing at the college and it's a real focus for us. And I read something in your biography, and I think I'm quoting. It says that you are committed to dismantling racism and colonialism within the social work profession. Can you give me the easy I don't have a degree in social work. Simple explanation of what that means.

##### [00:22:50.680] - Dr. Justin Harty

Sure. So in social work, our history is very whitewashed. When you talk about social work history, you focus on kind of colonial social work, white social work in white communities. And then you talk about all these social work interventions that have been developed since. It glazes over the fact that social work as a profession has been pretty harmful in black and brown communities. I went to the Jane Addams College of Social Work from MSW program. The Jane Addams Hull house never served black clients. They had black social workers, but they never served black populations. In schools of social work you can go to programs that focused on eugenics. Back in the day, social work during segregation didn't serve black clients. And so social work has this really horrible past of harming black and brown communities that doesn't get discussed. And so part of my research is historical research on two things. One, the contributions of black and brown communities in their social welfare and in social work that often doesn't get discussed. And two, highlighting the harms and atrocities that the social work profession has committed against black and brown populations.

##### [00:24:34.930] - Dr. Justin Harty

And so research around this people have done this work far before I have. But I think my contribution now is helping folks understand that the social work profession cannot move forward unless we address the harms that the social profession has committed against black and brown communities. And two, highlight the contributions that black and brown communities have made to their selves, largely around things like self help and mutual aid to develop kind of parallel systems of social services to uplift themselves when white social workers weren't doing that. And so I think in a nutshell, that's my contribution to addressing those issues in social work today.

##### [00:25:29.880] - Brian Shelton

That's really fascinating to me. I'm going to follow up with you on this. I want to learn more about this. I'm very interested.

##### [00:25:39.070] - Dr. Justin Harty

For sure.

##### [00:25:39.430] - Brian Shelton

You went to Harper. It's done wonders for you. Obviously I don't do the big sell here. Right. It's done wonders for you. What advice might you have for someone who is currently a Harper student or someone who is thinking about coming to Harper?

##### [00:25:54.570] - Dr. Justin Harty

Yeah, I think one is understand that it can be hard and challenging at times, but there are services at Harper to help you do that for me. Like I said, I struggled in high school. I had to take a bunch of remedial courses at Harper that at first were difficult. I was going to have to come in and take a few math courses and not get credit for it, but I had to complete them in order to move on. And I remember being in these classes and thinking like, this makes no sense. I already don't like school, I don't like math, but then I have to take these classes that I don't get credit for. But for me, it was foundational. I had to do it. But now I use fancy mathematical statistical software. I use that and I didn't think I would use it. That was the first thing. Second thing was finances for me. I got through Harper on payment plans, otherwise I would not have been able to attend it. And there were also times where even with payment plans, I couldn't afford it and I wasn't able to come back. Sometimes I would skip semesters because I couldn't afford it, but I just stuck with it.

##### [00:27:29.890] - Dr. Justin Harty

So I think those are two, and the third one is having teachers at Harper. To me, they were the most passionate, the most down to earth professors that I've ever interacted with. And understand that while you're at Harper, having professors like that will likely be an anomaly, I think. Soak that up while you can. And I remember also in classes, I really enjoyed having a small student to teacher ratio. After I transferred to U of I when you're one of among 100 students in a class, it's easy to get lost and you don't always get that time and attention that I feel like I got it at Harper. So leverage that while you're there.

##### [00:28:26.200] - Brian Shelton

That's fantastic. Thanks so much for joining us today. I wish you all the best of luck in your career. And I'm going to catch up with you on what you're studying there because I'm very interested.

##### [00:28:37.160] - Dr. Justin Harty

Thank you. I appreciate the invitation.

##### [00:28:38.670] - Brian Shelton

Dr. Justin Hardy is a graduate of Harper College and is an assistant professor of social work at Arizona State University. If you're enjoying Harper Talks, please subscribe and while you're at it rate and review us so that others might find us. Harper talks is a coproduction of Harper College Alumni Relations and Harper Radio. Our show was produced by Shannon Hynes. This episode was edited by me, Brian Shelton. We need to do something about that! Our online content producer is Erica Berger. Our theme music was created by Aidan Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.