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CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE-LEARNING
PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

VARSHA GHOSH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2021

Higher Education Program

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ABSTRACT

CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

December 2021

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Service-learning has become deeply embedded in higher education, as both a co-curricular and curricular tool to achieve learning outcomes, promote civic engagement and promote diversity. Yet it has also struggled with the critique that service-learning, unintentionally, reinforces deficit thinking by promoting a dominant narrative centered on the White middle-class perspective. This narrative excludes the experience of students and faculty who reflect the demographics of the community served or who are simultaneously from the community and the institution. This qualitative study seeks to challenge the traditional narrative to understand the service experience of students of color from low-income backgrounds at predominantly White institutions. The counterstories presented here illustrate a broader perspective on the experiences and the impact of community engagement

in higher education for those who do not identify as middle-class or White. Using a framework informed by theories of critical race theory, critical border pedagogy and transformational learning, this study explored the impact of a co-curricular service-learning program on academic choices, professional plans, civic identity, and understanding of social change. Community service-learning was found to be instrumental in students' navigating personal and academic experiences at their institutions. The findings document how community service-learning created an effective counterspace to support the development of a sense of belonging for students of color enrolled at predominantly White institutions and guide their intellectual and social development. Recommendations to create inclusive reflection spaces within co-curricular programs and classrooms, and for more research into civic identity development across identities, impact of community leaders on learning outcomes and the relationship between place and positionality in community engagement are provided.

DEDICATION

To my family and to the students who shared their stories.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Social unrest is not new to higher education but the current socio-political moment regarding racism, students of color and the expanding profile of civic engagement on campuses across the United States (Logan et al., 2017; Ndemanu, 2017) provide a backdrop for this study focused on the community service-learning experiences of students who identify as students of color and from a low-income background. While this study was conceived and designed, the United States entered a period of extreme political polarization (Scala & Johnson, 2017), witnessed increased nationwide protests over police brutality and systemic racism (Taylor, 2020), and experienced a rising number of hate crimes on and off higher education campuses (Balsamo, 2020). At the same time colleges, and universities across the country experienced increased civic engagement through activism from a more diverse student body calling for changes in curriculum, removing the names of controversial figures on buildings and removal of leadership felt to be indifferent to acts of racism (Dickey, 2016; Stolzenberg et al., 2019). This political unrest has raised fears that democracy, itself, has been undermined based on the intensity of the social and economic divides in the general population (Lovit, 2020).

These tensions regarding equity on campus have been brought to the forefront at a time when there is greater diversity of students who hold identities from an array of socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds on campuses (<https://nces.ed.gov/>, 2021), greater tensions around equity and inclusion (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Johnson et al., 2014; Stebleton et al., 2014) with increased opportunities to participate in service-learning (Johnson, 2015; Zlotowski, 2015). These fears have resulted in colleges and universities increasingly looking to community engagement through service-learning, volunteerism and engaged scholarship to bolster the public purpose role of higher education to produce empathetic, critical-thinking, civic-minded graduates and address critical social issues through research and teaching. One example is the increased investment in community engagement by elite and well-resourced institutions. Over the last decade, Duke University (2017), Cornell University (2014) and Harvard University (2015) have collectively invested \$200 million dollars in community engagement through volunteering, service-learning and engaged research.

Since the literature and history of service-learning is the foundation for community engagement in higher education, which runs the gamut of credit-based service-learning classes, community service volunteer programs and engaged scholarships, study grounds itself in the scholarship of service-learning that has explored the assumptions and tensions within the field. My study focuses and centers the experience of students who reflect the demographics of the communities, in some cases are from those communities but are also part of the community within the institution of higher education.

Problem Statement

Over the last thirty years, service-learning has become a strong presence in higher education due to increased pressure on institutions to integrate community engagement (Johnson, 2015, 2017; Knepfelkamp, 2008; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2017) into the teaching, learning, and research mission of the university (Furco, 1996; Furco et al., 2016). The foundations of service-learning, where students learn through instruction, reflection, and direct service with community-based agencies to address social issues (Eyler & Giles, 1999), has influenced higher education to integrate community engagement in- and outside of the classroom. Service-learning is offered in credit-bearing courses and co-curricular community service programs to support the academic development and character and civic identity development of students (Furco et al., 2016). Whether in classes or co-curricular programs in volunteer or service programs, service-learning has been used to achieve learning outcomes related to learning to work across differences, learn about inequity, marginalized communities, or to engage in charity (Johnson, 2015). For institutions, service-learning in- and out of the classroom has been an effective tool for engagement and learning (Kuh et al., 2011; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2017; Zlotowski, 2015) but not without its critics. The existing criticism alleges that service-learning, used in either credit-bearing classes or community service programs, is at risk of becoming a pedagogy of whiteness (Bocci, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2012), unintentionally reinforcing deficit thinking by promoting a dominant narrative centered on the White middle-class perspective (Butin, 2005; Hickmon, 2015; Kiely, 2005; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Motoike, 2017; Santiago-Ortiz, 2018; Seider et al., 2013). More specifically, this White middle-class perspective often takes a colorblind perspective on inequity and makes tacit assumptions of the communities that are being served and those who

are providing services (Bocci, 2015; Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012). These assumptions are that the participants from the institution, be they students or faculty, have skills and solutions that are lacking in the communities that host service projects.

Additionally, this perspective does not advocate for social change. This narrative encourages an approach where the dominant group, White middle-class students and faculty, learns about social issues and identifies solutions to ameliorate but not challenge the circumstances that have produced the need. This narrative also excludes the experience of students and faculty who reflect the demographics of the community or who are simultaneously from the community and the institution.

This study seeks to challenge this traditional narrative to understand the service experience of students of color at predominantly white institutions, who may reflect the demographics of the communities they serve, by holding multiple marginalized identities, based on race, class, gender (Bringle, 2017; Crenshaw, 1990) and/or citizenship. This exclusion of the voices of “service learners of color” (Motoike, 2017, p. 140) questions whether space is created for the learning needs of students of color (Mitchell et al., 2012; Motoike, 2017). Counterstories may illustrate a broader perspective on the range of experiences and the impact of community engagement in higher education, particularly those who do not identify as middle-class or White.

The research questions for this study seek to privilege the experience of how students of color from low-income backgrounds experience community service-learning as full-time students at predominantly White institutions (PWI). Focusing on students of color enrolled at PWIs privileges their voices and disrupts the dominant narrative in service-learning generally centered on White, middle-class students (Butin, 2006). Institutions are labeled as a PWI if

their enrolled student population is identified as more than 50% White in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do students of color, use their co-curricular community service-learning experiences, on- and off-campus, to navigate the borders between the PWI campus in which they attend school and the community they serve?
 - a. How does involvement in community service-learning influence students' decisions about academic and professional options, specifically, course of study, majors, graduate school, careers?
 - b. How does the community service-learning experience shape students' understanding of their own role and actions in promoting equity and social justice, and ultimately their civic identity?

Students of color, particularly those who also identify as low-income and first-generation, who choose to do community service in communities of color, find themselves in a position unique from White classmates in service-learning programs (Dahan et al., 2019; Hickmon, 2015; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). Students of color straddle two worlds; that of being a student at college while also identifying with the community being served.

In a thought piece on the future of community service in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Gabrielle Hickmon (2015) reflected:

As a Black, female, second-generation college student who is the first in her family to attend an Ivy League Institution, I personally wonder if the scholarship about service-learning in higher education was written with myself and students like me in mind – much less by students like me. (p. 86)

Writing as a student of color at a PWI, Hickmon questioned the dominant narrative of the experience of a White middle-class student who leaves the predominantly White college environment to enter a new community of color where they are an “other” for the first time, in other words, a novelty. This study turns this narrative on its head.

The study presented here centers the voices of students of color to address the concern over the positionality of stakeholders in community engagement in higher education. Researchers and practitioners of service-learning state that reciprocity and mutual respect for the knowledge of community partners are essential to successful service-learning ventures (Miller-Young et al., 2015; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). However, scholars and practitioners (Butin, 2015; Santiago-Ortiz 2018; Siemers et al., 2015) have questioned the dynamics of power and privilege between faculty, students, and community members that are often informed by stereotypes (Mills, 2012) and implicit assumptions of who is being served and who is doing the serving (Mitchell et al., 2012). These tensions arise from the predominant narrative of middle-class White students and their often, White faculty or staff advisors going into communities of color (Bocci, 2015; Dahan et al., 2019) to address social issues. The perspective of a student of color who identifies with the community served and the institution is subsumed or muted in this narrative (Siemers et al., 2015). This study addresses the need to expand the narrative of service-learning to inform the complex dynamics between students, communities, and the institution and the need to better support the development of civic leadership of students of color. Given that service-learning has been identified as a high impact curricular and co-curricular practice for student engagement, it seems essential to have a broader understanding of the practice (Kuh et al., 2011) and address the tensions within the practice.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand and present counterstories of service-learning and community engagement of participants from predominantly White institutions, who identify with the communities in which they serve due to shared identities of race, ethnicity, income, and nationality. Unfortunately, the dominant narrative in service-learning, historically, has been that of middle-class, usually White students and faculty provide services to communities of color, that are usually low-income, as part of a service-learning program (Santiago-Ortiz, 2018). This narrative has persisted despite increasingly diverse campuses and a need for greater understanding of the experiences of diverse participants in service-learning and community engagement in higher education (Dahan, 2019; Johnson, 2015, 2017). This study seeks to explore the phenomena of students of color from low-income backgrounds and who serve and learn in communities of color as part of a co-curricular service-learning program at historically White campuses.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for scholars of civic engagement and community engagement professionals who use service-learning in community service or courses for the intellectual and social development of students or to promote civic engagement (Dunlap et al., 2007; Mariner et al., 2011; Stewart & Webster, 2011). By centering the voices of students of color, the study responds to a question posed by Dan Butin (2005)—“Service-learning is premised on fostering border crossing across categories of race, ethnicity, class, immigration, and (dis)ability. Yet what happens when the post-secondary population already occupies those identities?” (p. 482)—by providing a more inclusive narrative for the field. In response

to Butin’s question, this study addresses the criticisms directed at service-learning for faculty and practitioners who use service-learning.

Choice of Terms

The term “community service-learning” will be used throughout the study as it accurately reflects the use of service-learning pedagogy within a non-credit bearing community service program (Butin, 2005, 2008; Furco, 1996; Furco et al., 2016; Howard, 2003; Jacoby 2009, 2014, as cited in Dahan et al., 2019; Jones, 2009, 2014; Mitchell, 2017; Neururer & Rhoads, 1998, Richard et al., 2016; Stanlick & Zlotowski, 2016; Walker & Walker, 2018; Zlotowski, 1995). To design this study and select a study site, an understanding of the term “service-learning” was necessary as well as how and when it is used. Although, service-learning as a practice has been warmly embraced by the educational system, from kindergarten to graduate school (Bringle, 2017; Butin, 2006; Howard, 2003), this has led to wide variation in how institutions, practitioners and scholars define service-learning and determines what is and what is not “service-learning”. The debate has centered on whether the service-learning activity in question is only associated with a credit-bearing course (Furco, 1996; Howard, 2003) or a co-curricular program.

Furco (1996) delved into the debate about what constituted service-learning, relying on Sigmon’s (as cited in Furco, 1996) typology of service learning. Service-learning programs came in multiple forms depending upon what the goal of the program or course was, whether the learning goals or the service to the community on equal footing or was one more important than the other. Furco expanded upon this to offer definitions of volunteerism, community service, and service-learning. Volunteerism, where people provide a service for no remuneration purely for the good of the greater community was seen as primarily

benefitting the community, or the recipients of the service (Toole & Toole, 1992, as cited in Furco, 1996). Under the definition of “volunteerism”, participants performed a good deed but did not necessarily learn anything about the community nor the issues relevant to that community unless the volunteer work was sustained for an extended period. Community service, however, usually was marked by an extended time commitment during which participants explicitly, through formal or informal means, learned about the underlying circumstances that required this service to be provided to the community. Service-learning, on the other hand, focused equally on the necessity of the service provided as well as the students learning and is related to a course of study. Defining service-learning as an experiential component within a credit-bearing course is the standard definition for most professional educators (Bringle, 2017; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2005; Furco, 1996). The key difference between co-curricular service-learning programs and service-learning classes are the learning outcomes. In a co-curricular service-learning program, the primary learning goal is the civic and ethical development of the student, which was the focus of this study. In a service-learning class, the primary learning goals are academic, as well as civic development (Furco, 1996, p. 24).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on research on the intersection of service-learning, community engagement, civic identity, and students of color to set the context for a study that privileges the experience students of color have in community service. Overall, this literature review provides a foundation from which to understand the direction of this study which focuses on students who identify as low-income and as racialized students of color on historically White campuses participating in service-learning community service programs. It should be noted that the literature on service-learning featured in this chapter focuses on largely courses-based service-learning opportunities as there is less data or research on co-curricular community service-learning programs (Keen & Hall, 2009). Foundational studies such as Giles and Eyler's (1999) study of programs that integrated service into credit-based courses have noted that co-curricular programs that include a "reflective component and learning goals" (p. 5) have similar impact to academic service-learning. The term service-learning has also been used for both academic courses and community service or civic engagement programs since the mid-2000s (Giles, 2008; Hoy, 2006; Keen & Hall, 2009; Mitchell, 2017).

This literature review is divided into sections discussing research that has examined the experiences of students of color in service-learning classes and programs, taking into context what is known about campus racial climate; followed by scholarship that looks at

civic identity and motivations to participation in service for students of color. Overall, the studies presented here provide a picture of the tensions within service-learning and the participation of students of color. This first section contains scholarship on service-learning that has addressed the experiences of students of color, either directly or tangentially. These studies have chronicled the challenges and frustrations felt by students of color in service-learning opportunities, whether in credit-bearing courses or co-curricular opportunities, as well as documented when students of color had positive experiences in service-learning. As the research questions included the concept of civic identity and the experience of attending historically White institutions, the last section feature scholarship pertaining to the civic identity development through service-learning, particular for students of color, controversies over how the field has addressed issues of power and privilege and the influence of campus racial climate.

Students of Color and Service-Learning

Historically, the service-learning literature (Green, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2012), based on the reported demographics of the studies, infer that the participants were primarily White middle-class students at predominantly White campuses serving in low-income communities of color. However, institutional reports from 2013 to 2016 of the National Survey on Student Engagement that contain participation rates of students of color indicate that over half of those participating in service-learning courses are students of color. Scholars, Christensen et al. (2015) and Pelco et al. (2014) found that interest in service-learning is higher amongst students of color and shown increased benefits in outcomes such as retention and persistence, as compared to White students. Both studies included higher numbers of students of color, as well as disaggregated data to highlight the impact on students of color and the need for

further scholarship. There are qualitative studies with smaller samples which focused on (Coles, 1999; Gilbride-Brown, 2005; Green, 2003; Shaddock-Hernandez, 2005) on the experience of students of color in service-learning courses. These smaller studies brought attention to the experiences of students of color, highlighting the challenges faced but also how service-learning was enhanced and affirmed the knowledge and cultural capital of students of color (Gilbride-Brown, 2005; Shaddock-Hernandez, 2005). These studies were able to identify how the positive effects depended on the racial balance of the service-learning class or co-curricular program, and quality of reflection opportunities (Dahan et al., 2019; Seider et al., 2013).

Research over the last five years (Dahan et al., 2019; Johnson 2015, 2017; Niehaus & Rivera, 2015) affirms earlier studies (Boyle-Baise & Lanford, 2004; Coles, 1999; Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Green, 2001, 2003; Mendel-Reyes & Mack, 2009; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Shaddock-Hernandez, 2005) regarding the discomfort of students of color in service-learning classes. The earlier studies (Coles, 1999; Green, 2001, 2003) are akin to action research, where a professor reports observation from their own experience teaching a course that integrates service-learning. Coles (1999) and Green (2001, 2003) are two examples of studies that have focused on the experience of students of color enrolled in service-learning programs. Both Coles (1999) and Green (2001, 2003) reported that students of color were dissatisfied with the classroom experience because of the difficulty in discussing race, privilege, and power within the context of community engagement. In some cases, some students of color resisted participating in service-learning courses because of a perception that such classes were more suited to White students who had no personal experience with issues of poverty and discrimination (Coles, 1999).

Exploring Differences in Service-Learning Experiences, 1999-2005

The research in this section contains smaller, qualitative studies that first explored the differences in experiences for students of color in service-learning courses. These studies highlight the discomfort students of color felt when discussing issues of equity with classmates who did not have a lived experience with social issues, like poverty, racism, or equity. Over three and a half years, Coles (1999) studied the registration patterns of students in her service-learning classes at Marquette University, a selective PWI. Based on the differences in enrollment, observational data, survey data, and informal conversations with students who chose not to enroll in service-learning classes, students of color were not interested in service-learning classes focusing on race for three reasons. Coles (1999) reported students of color perceived volunteering or service-learning as something White students did as a charitable endeavor. For some students of color who wanted to do something charitable, they felt that volunteering through campus affinity groups or churches met those needs and thus did not need to do so in conjunction with a class. In contrast, others preferred to focus on academic pursuits that would build their professional network. The final factor was that most students of color felt informed about the challenges of communities of color because of their personal experience. Thus, there was no reason to enroll in a class and volunteer in a community of color to learn about communities of color. Coles (1999) noted that participation in classes focused on race, which included service-learning, attracted fewer students of color versus classes focused on race which were not service-learning classes. For example, enrollment for students of color was higher for a class on “the Sociology of Families” versus “Race and Families” (p.98). The former class title made no mention of race. Through her research, Coles found that this lower rate of participation was because students

of color were often frustrated by the unwillingness of their White classmates to recognize issues of race and prejudice, never mind having in-depth discussions about the issue.

Like Coles (1999), Green's (2003) study on her own class illustrated the criticism of the traditional color-blind approach in service-learning. In *Difficult stories: Service-learning, race, class, and whiteness*, Green (2003) sought to understand how the service experience is different for students of color enrolled in her service-learning course at her private, Jesuit, PWI. Writing about the scholarship around service-learning, she argued that the field must begin to look at the complexity of the relationship between a class, its students, and its host site. Green argued that new theories are needed to understand how the service experience is different from students from different demographics. Intersectionality of race, gender, class, sexuality creates a unique service experience, but also a distinct impact on the community. In particular, she asserted that service-learning often "takes place with mostly White students at PWIs" serving "poor people of color in urban settings" (p. 277). Green highlighted the experience of the only two African American participants in the class, both of whom only completed one of the two required semesters. One noted the surprise they felt at the assumptions of their White classmates, about her and of the community and her sense of isolation on campus (p. 281). Both Coles (1999) and Green (2001, 2003) were early to highlight these differences in experience between service-learning participants. The research that followed these studies and is presented here provides an emerging picture of how students of color can be affected by service-learning programs.

Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) conducted a case study of an alternative spring break trip, that was part of a six-week service-learning course. During spring break, the students served as group leaders for a school program serving a low-income community.

Students worked at the afterschool program and met with the camp director as well as other community members. A social justice education curriculum framed discussion to address structural causes of poverty and to explore the impact of individuals. The research methods included document analysis from the assignments required for the course. These included three reflection papers and a capstone paper focusing on a social issue presented at the service site.

Boyle-Baise and Langford's (2004) study involved eight students: five white women, two African American women, and one male international student from South Korea. The study's findings indicated how students' intersectionality in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and class influenced the alternative spring break trip. Renee, one of the African American women, was a non-traditional student as a 26-year-old parent of a child. She had also grown up in poverty. At the same time, Renee was challenged by the social justice concepts taught in class. Although she was upset at the deficit orientation of her classmates, she pushed back against the understanding that poverty was caused by structural inequality by citing the poor choices made by her sister. Throughout the program, both Renee and Sheila, the other African American woman, both struggled with their views on poverty and the reflections of their classmates.

The program included tours of other low-income neighborhoods to expose participants to a broader range of communities. The tours had an unintended consequence for the students of color who felt the tours took deficit-oriented approach to understanding inequity and were disrespectful to the communities by treating them like tourist attractions, which is what it felt like when riding around in a bus to just look at a neighborhood. Relations between the students became strained, and cliques formed along racial lines.

Overall, Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) both found that a course guided by a social justice curriculum was better for facilitating conversations about race and poverty than courses that did not. However, it was not enough to bridge a racial divide between student participants who identified as White or as students of color. Other doctoral studies (Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Shaddock-Hernandez, 2005) have indicated that students of color who volunteer in communities of color have a better experience when reflecting with other students of color, as opposed to a racially mixed reflection group.

Increasing Focus on Students of Color in Service-Learning Classes, 2005-2010

Janna Shaddock-Hernandez (2005) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Jennifer Gilbride-Brown (2008) of Ohio State both explored the experiences of service learners of color working in communities of color in their respective doctoral dissertations. Both found that the service-learning experience had positive outcomes for social and intellectual development. Using critical ethnography, Shaddock-Hernandez (2005) studied ten first-generation college students who volunteered through a service-learning course at a local youth center in Amherst, Massachusetts, serving Vietnamese and Cambodian youth. The college student volunteers, and youth shared the same cultural and social background as the communities they served. The researcher, Shaddock-Hernandez, sought to understand how college students made meaning from serving at a site that reflected their backgrounds using interviews and document analysis. For college students, serving at a site that mirrored their backgrounds, and participating in a project mentoring of the younger youth of color challenged their assumptions and beliefs and affirmed their identities. It should be noted that as all the students in the program were of color, the issues that were raised in classes with White students in the other studies were not present (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Coles,

1999; Green, 2003). The classroom experience was affirmative, as the students were able to apply their own cultural and linguistic knowledge and had the space to process their own experience. The mental and emotional energy students of color would have needed to rebut the deficit-oriented thinking or misconceptions of the community from White classmates could now be focused on themselves. Appropriately, the photographic exhibit curated by the youth and their college-age mentors as part of the class was called, “Here I am now!” as if to positively assert their presence. For the students in this program, the experience affirmed their own identity and knowledge.

Gilbride-Brown (2008) used instrumental case study methodology, critical race theory and Foucauldian discourse analyses to challenge the notion that service-learning pedagogy is a transformative experience for students of color, particularly those from a predominantly White campus. The research here countered earlier research that framed the impact of service-learning as a disruptive pedagogy which challenged perspectives and beliefs. Instead, Gilbride-Brown found that the impact of service-learning was affirming of these student’s individual experiences and confirmed the tensions that are in most classrooms on a PWI campus. Her study involved five students of color in a class on theories on mentoring, at a small Midwestern liberal arts college that was majority White. Two of the students identified as bi-racial with no further details; two were African American and one was Latina. The students mentored 15 teenagers, all of whom identified as African American. These college students of color repudiated the charitable inclinations that often-characterized motivations for service-learning; noting a preference for service-learning programming that collaborated with communities to promote equity and social change. Students reported that as people of color working in a community of color, the experience allowed them to persist in

the PWI environment. Moreover, the community was a respite from feelings of displacement on campus. In the community, students were not a visible other, and their presence was welcomed by community members. On their PWI campus, the students of color keenly felt their visibility as an “other” and felt that their admission to the university was questioned by classmates due to misperceptions of affirmative action policies. The constant feeling of being an outsider within an institution of which they were a member made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Gilbride-Brown was critical of service-learning as facilitating a sense of *noblesse-oblige*, but in this context, service-learning had become an inclusive, reflective space for college students of color. The class offered a chance to rejuvenate themselves to thrive on a campus where they felt excluded.

As a point of comparison, the experience of students from low-income backgrounds serving in low-income communities have indicated that it often results in a positive appreciation of their identity living in a privileged setting (Lee, 2005). Studies which do not specifically focus on service-learning agreed that for students of color on PWI campuses, involvement in off-campus opportunities in communities that reflected their race or ethnicity was a source of stability during college (Nuñez, 2009; Villalpando, 2003). Further support for the challenges for students of color enrolled at PWIs was found in Mitchell and Donahue’s (2009) analysis of interviews and writing assignments with 10 students of color in a service-learning course at a small public university.

The scholars used a conceptual framework informed by DuBois’s idea of double-consciousness (DuBois, 1903/1982, as cited in Mitchell & Donahue, 2009) and King’s dysconsciousness (King, 1991, as cited in Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). The concept of double consciousness was used to explain how students of colors saw the world with two

lenses, their own and that of their White classmates. The concept of dysconsciousness was used to illuminate the lack of awareness of race by White students in class and at the community site, in contrast to the acute understanding of the students of color. The scholars highlighted the context of the predominantly White classroom environment which took a color-blind and problem-focused approach to understanding and working with communities of color.

Mitchell and Donahue (2009) discovered specific tensions for students of color in service-learning programs. First, reactions to working in communities where the students of color reflected the demographic vacillated between “empowerment” and “resistance” (pp. 176-177). The tensions were a byproduct of perceptions by students of color of how White students saw these communities of color—as places in need of help. There was irritation at comments made by White students regarding the state of the infrastructure of the community and remarks about safety. For students who had lived in a similar community prior to college or even were from the community; the service could be a source of comfort or aggravation. It was aggravating when it felt like regressing back to high school. Students who reflected the racial demographics of the community but were from a wealthier background had other concerns. Specifically, there were worries that the community would question their identity or that their White classmates would ascribe deficit notions of the community to themselves. For all the students, regardless of background, they felt a sense of responsibility to the community in and out of the class. Students of color felt compelled to address, in class, negative comments about the community. These tensions in the service-learning experience of students of color were not understood by either professors or their White classmates.

The traditional pedagogical approach of service-learning, where the learning is geared towards students who are learning about a new community created a final tension. Specifically, students of color felt they became responsible for their own learning in class. Perhaps the biggest complaint was that they felt that the real service they provided was teaching their White classmates what life was like for people of color. This notably influenced the title of this article, “I Do More Service in This Class Than I Ever Do at My Site: Paying Attention to the Reflections of Students of Color in Service-Learning.” The scholars used these interviews to further assert that practitioners of service-learning needed to broaden understanding of the range of student experiences with this practice. Other studies, such as the ones described below support the persistence of challenges even when race, privilege and power was explicitly introduced into the class discussions.

Mendel-Reyes and Mack (2009) of Berea College, for example, created a service-learning program that integrated dialogue about race, privilege, and power. As part of an action research study, these professors sought to understand the differences in how White and African American students processed their service experiences during a class held over a shorter January term. In particular, the researchers sought to understand how “racialized perceptions of need have characterized and limited the responses of those volunteers motivated solely to serve” (p. 135). Berea College was founded as a free, integrated liberal arts institution for the low-income, rural community of Appalachia (Retrieved from <https://www.berea.edu/about/>). The mission of Berea College offered the opportunity to observe college students who may not racially reflect a community but share the socio-economic characteristics with the community. According to the most recent data on Berea College from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

(<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>), 52% of the student population at Berea College is identified as White and 88% of its students receive Pell Grants.

Mendel-Reyes and Mack each led a class, that offered a service experience in a predominantly African American community and both classes integrated the issues of race in the pre-service training and class materials. Using journals completed by the students from the coursework, the researchers realized that during community-based work, the salience of race was present on three levels: between students and community, between students, and notably between the students and professors. To clarify, in the context of student-faculty interactions, some White students had never had a professor of another race who was of a higher socioeconomic status. Professor Mendel-Reyes is identified as a White-Jewish woman, and Professor Mack is identified as African American.

The class led by Mendel-Reyes was focused on the rebuilding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Eight White students and five African American students were enrolled in the class. The professors found notable differences in journal responses between African American and White students. Specifically, where the White students saw individuals who were poor and making bad choices, the Black students saw structural inequalities and communities of families and individuals with values (p. 140). The African American students saw themselves in the communities they served and felt any racism conveyed to the community by the volunteers very keenly (p. 141). Open and honest discussion of race between the students proved to be difficult even though the professor had introduced the topic in the class materials. These students of color tended to serve from an asset-based understanding of the community, a perspective that the White students and the professor (a White-Jewish woman) found difficult to recognize. One African American student recounted

how the professor used the example of a family who used their stove to heat their house as a sign of poverty; implying that the family was somehow deficient. The student's own family often had to use this strategy to stay warm and wished that the professor understood that there was no shame in poor families working with what they had.

This study by Mendel-Reyes and Mack (2009) is an indication that conversations of racism are just as difficult at Berea College where the students were socioeconomically similar to the community and each other but not racially or ethnically. The use of a social justice curriculum or faculty prepared to facilitate sensitive discussions did little to alter this dynamic. The practice of reflection through discussions and journals was not the source of personal change for students of color. The discussions in a mixed group were frustrating, but the experience with the community was an effective learning experience.

The African American students in the study recognized how the residents of the community organized themselves to leverage resources as a collective. In the journals for the course, an African American student lamented how other students assessed the residents of communities by the lack of material goods and resources, rather than what the residents of the community had managed to accomplish. This student felt that the idea of inferiority tended to accompany assistance provided by others from outside the community as opposed to recognition of the capacity of the community to help itself. During one classroom discussion in Professor Mack's class, a White student stated that an incident of violence on her family by young African-Americans allowed her to understand the violence inflicted on African American activists during the Civil Rights movement. This prompted the professor, an African American male, to explain that her personal example was not analogous to the structural injustices and violence faced by people of color. In this class, the professor was

able to provide an appropriate response, so that a student of color would not have had to explain this to the White student. This is the type of experience that students of color had sought to avoid in earlier research (Green, 2001, 2003).

Continuing Challenges in Service-Learning Co-Curricular Programs and Courses, 2010-Present

Research from the last decade revealed that the challenges of credit-bearing service-learning courses seemed to spill over into co-curricular programs, like alternative spring breaks which used service-learning pedagogy but also revealed how the experience was useful and supportive. Jones et al. (2011) used a narrative case study with five students from a large mid-Atlantic research university on an alternative spring break trip to discern how a service experience supports students of color in their understanding of social issues and integration of the experience into their own professional and personal plans. The site was a health center whose patients were mostly African Americans with AIDS. Two of the participants were of color (African American and Kenyan, respectively), one identified as White and queer and the other two were identified as White. During the interviews, the three White students expressed an appreciation for stepping out of the “bubble” (p. 33) of campus life to interact with people different than them and to cross racial and economic barriers. The student from Kenya noted that because America was not her home, every day she experienced being in an unfamiliar environment. The African American woman reported that the service experience was not significantly different from her college experience, and she felt at ease on the trip because she reflected the demographics of the community served. This study concurred with the findings from the dissertations cited earlier Gilbride-Brown (2008)

and Shaddock-Hernandez (2005). For students of color, the service experience did not disrupt the campus experience or view of the world but added nuance.

Niehaus and Rivera (2015) looked at alternative spring break trips to understand the influence of service-learning on racial understanding for White students and students of color. In particular, the researchers sought to understand if there was a difference for students who mirrored the demographics of the service site. This was a quantitative study, using data from the multi-institutional and longitudinal 2011 National Survey of Alternative Breaks, students were surveyed before their trips and a year later in 2012. A total of 558 students from 84 institutions participated in the pre and post surveys. All but one of the institutions were four-year colleges.

Niehaus and Rivera (2015) found that students of color serving in communities of color deepened and strengthened their own identity development. Significantly, students of color reported a nuanced learning experience about themselves, vis a vis race and ethnicity. For students of color, volunteering presented an opportunity to understand their own identity by working with others in a new community with whom they identified. In this study, the students serving in communities of color benefitted by not being the *other* in new communities. The researchers observed that the White students may not have had the same experience because White racial identity is not widely recognized. White students (at least in America) are not taught to consider their own racial identity but are encouraged to consider other racial identities. There may be significant personal development for White students gaining greater cross-racial understanding depending on whether they identify as a “dominant or target” group (p.212), but the traditional narrative of service-learning generally assumes that White students are part of a dominant social group. The scholars conclude that

these results add to the criticism that service-learning curricula and processes are too focused on participants learning about others, and should also address self-development (Delve et al., 1990).

Tilton's (2017) study focused on the impact on student's self-development in the context of how service-learning affected perceptions of race, class, and citizenship about those who were incarcerated and the external agents who interacted with the prison system. This qualitative study began in 2011 and collected data via interviews. As part of a course offered through the Race and Ethnic Studies Program at University of Redlands, fifteen students were placed with a community-based program, the Read Empower Attain Create Hope (REACH) as writing tutors. This study focused closely on how the concept of colorblindness, as promoted in cultures where Whiteness is the norm, affects participants of different backgrounds. Like previous studies, the difference in tensions for students of color, versus White students was notable. REACH partnered with a local juvenile corrections facility to provide an opportunity for volunteers to witness racial disparities and, to challenge the color-blind impulses of participants. As an example, Tilton compares the racial statistics of her institution with the facility that hosts the volunteers. The college is: 3% Black, 22% Latino and 53% are White; the juvenile facility is 47% Latino, 35% Black and 17% White.

The carceral setting was chosen because of the role mass incarceration has played in influencing racialized images and contemporary stereotyping (Alexander, 2012). Specifically, prisons and the justice system, in general, promote this idea that people in prison have made choices that resulted in them being incarcerated. People who are or have been in prison, are perceived to look and dress a certain way. The overwhelming presence of people of color in prison creates a heightened racialized environment in which to explore an

understanding of race. To illustrate this, Tilton opens the article with an anecdote from one of the interviews from the study. A young White woman and Black man, both college student volunteers, entered the facility without their prison volunteer identification. The young woman was not questioned but the young man's status as a volunteer was questioned by the guards. Eventually the prison guards requested that the Black male student, dress differently to the juveniles who have been remanded to the facility. Apparently, young college students do not dress like the young people in prison. Although one could argue, whatever the college student was wearing is how a college student dresses. There were other disparities between the White students and student of color.

Tilton, as the faculty advisor, noted that the attrition rates were higher for students of color than other volunteers. White student volunteers tended to leave their shift reporting feeling energized and optimistic about their volunteer work. Students of color described the complexity of emotions that were stirred up as draining. The result was striking differences in experiences between White students and students of color. One participant of color stated that he left each experience at the detention facility feeling overwhelmed. Despite his personal circumstances of family, socio-economic class and social support from teachers, coaches and mentors which placed him in college; he identified with the young male prisoners because he was still subject to the routine harassment from law enforcement to which all Black men are subject. For students of color who identified with the detainees, due to shared language or culture; it was disheartening to realize they felt more at home with the prisoners than with some classmates on their predominantly White campus.

The experience of the volunteers of color was significantly more stressful than the White volunteers, and their analyses of the prison system were more nuanced. This was in

part because students of color identified with many of the inmates on multiple levels. Sharing a race, gender or ethnic identity was one, but some were from similar neighborhoods as the inmates. The volunteer experience resulted in a lot of soul searching as to what made their lives turn out so differently, beyond luck. Student volunteers' expectations of prison depended heavily on the student's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background. Students of color tended to be able to articulate all the myriad reasons (beyond making poor choices or being in bad schools) why one young person could wind up in prison and another in college. Tilton concludes that programs need to be prepared to facilitate the experiences of students of color who volunteer in communities of color. Facilitation may include separating students into groups along affinity groups in order for volunteers to address how race and class of volunteers affect the experience.

Tensions for participants who reflected the demographics of the service site were also highlighted in a phenomenological study of twenty-one students at Rutgers University-Camden. Dahan and their colleagues (2019) explored the service-learning experience in classes as well as community service programs for students attending Rutgers University-Camden who were also from the city of Camden. In particular, the study sought to understand how students of color who identified themselves being from the city of Camden prior to enrolling at Rutgers University-Camden impacted their service experience. The researchers chose Rutgers University-Camden as a site because it is located in an urban community with nearly 50% of its population either Latinx or African American. Rutgers University-Camden, prides itself on its engagement with the local community, having earned the Carnegie classification of being a community engaged university. The impetus for this study was based on the lack of discussion in service-learning of the development of

participants who identify with both host communities of color, and large institutions which host service-learning programs.

Being from the university and the City of Camden created a sense of “double consciousness” (p.11) because of the students’ status as residents of Camden and students at the institution. They were conscious of the deficit views of Camden held by many of their classmates and faculty; and their own firsthand experiences which gave them a more balanced perspective of the city. For example, the resident-students had all experienced violence in Camden, but the city was also home; with parks in which they played and schools which prepared them to be at Rutgers. During their participation in service-learning classes and community service programs, the resident-students found themselves in two distinct positions. On the one hand, they felt a need to address the dominant and deficit-oriented narrative of low-income, inner-city communities to both their classmates and faculty and on the other hand, explain the narrative of resentment at the institution within their communities in Camden.

The duality of their positions as resident-students became motivation to function as a bridge for university and community to take advantage of each other’s respective strengths and opportunities. For students who hesitated to claim Camden as home because of its perception at the university as a place of violence and poverty; entering Camden as a volunteer from Rutgers University helped to change their own perspective. As a Rutgers University student, they were able to meet community-based leaders who were responsible for improving the quality of life in the city and meet the people from the university who were supporting that work. The experience of being both from Rutgers and from Camden allowed them to gain greater appreciation for both identities.

Overall, the research on students of color and their experience in service-learning classes concurs with the foundational research on service-learning that there is a positive effect on personal and social identity development (Abes & Jones, 2004; Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 2006; Avalos et al., 1999; Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Youniss et al., 1997) but not for the same reasons as for White students. Jones and Abes (2004) noted that for students of color, the service-learning experience is transformative because it is an experience that complements their current understanding of the world. Overall, students of color seem to benefit developmentally, in terms of confidence in their identity and experiences, from the time spent in the community that feels familiar. This complements much of the literature on racial climate in higher education. Although campuses are more diverse than ever, students of color continue to feel isolation and anxiety at PWIs (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2009; Jack, 2014; Kiang, 1992). Their presence on campus can be undermined by hostility, stereotyping and common misperceptions about their academic ability and life circumstances (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Harper, 2009; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Rendon, 1996; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Service-Learning and Community Engagement: Issues of Race, Ethnicity, Privilege, and Power

A key criticism of the literature on service-learning (Butin 2003, 2006; Mitchell, 2008), is that there has been a lack of depth on addressing race, privilege, and political power and structural inequality. Unfortunately, this apolitical approach presents a challenge if service-learning is to be effective at motivating service-learning participants to adopt civic identities that are committed to social change and understand the complexities of social issues (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Mitchell, 2008). As a result, the practice has historically

presented an approach that is blind to race, ethnicity, class and supports a discourse that make tacit assumptions of the communities that are being served and those who are providing services (Bocci, 2015; Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012).

Even where service-learning uses critical pedagogy, research indicates (Butin, 2005; Mendel-Reyes & Mack, 2009; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009) that students who participate in service-learning and community engagement are privileged, specifically, middle class and White, and the communities in which they serve are of color. One example of this dominant narrative is demonstrated by a photo analysis study conducted by Donahue et al. (2012) to understand how photographs are used in websites for service-learning in higher education to promote programs. The researchers recruited fourteen college students from a class at Mills College, *Social Change Leadership Seminar: Theory and Practice*, to do a content analysis of 834 photographs from the web pages of service-learning programs at 63 four-year institutions. Photos from websites promoting an institution's service-learning programs were selected because, like advertisements, the pictures illustrate what service-learning is, who is involved, and why it is a positive experience. The fourteen students noted the photos tended to feature White students in communities of color and the practice of service-learning being a pleasant conduit of bringing people together. The students noted that there were few pictures of events where service-learning participants were advocating for structural change; most of the photos featured students providing services to communities of color. Other examples of the dominant narrative are apparent in the studies in which service-learning is credited with helping students to appreciate diversity and work across difference (Dunlap et al., 2007; Mariner et al., 2011; Stewart & Webster, 2011; Wetzel et al., 2011). Where diversity and difference are the main learning outcomes, the perspective is that of White students who did

not reflect the demographics of the communities served. Moreover, the act of students leaving their familiar environments to enter a new community, literally crossing the border of campus, is a critical component of the learning process in service-learning (Hayes & Cuban, 1997). Indeed, this image of going beyond boundaries is an image evoked by many researchers on service-learning (Hayes & Cuban, 1997; Kiely, 2005; Mitchell, 2008).

Border Imagery in Service-Learning

The term “border crossing” has been used (Hayes & Cuban, 1997; Kiely, 2005; Mitchell, 2008) to describe the learning that asks the participant to step mentally and physically out of their usual environment where they are not seen as an “other”. This perspective assumes that the students *are* a visible other within the host communities. Furthermore, the classroom discussion almost always centers on the idea that students are learning something new about themselves by being in an unfamiliar environment (Seider et al., 2013). Scholars have noted that there is a lack of recognition that, for a student of color, being familiar with the community or just not being a visible other, is the catalyst for learning within service-learning (Gilbride-Brown, 2005; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Winans-Solis, 2014). Specifically, students of color may be familiar with the underlying issues of racism and classism that perpetuate the social issues service-learning programs teach. However, traditional service-learning pedagogy does not address this issue (Butin, 2005). Scholars who have criticized (Butin, 2005; Mitchell, 2008) the politically neutral stance of “traditional” or “charity” model of service-learning (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996) have asserted that this approach fails to teach students to think critically and may serve to normalize racism (Harden, 2009). Where service-learning pedagogy is conventionally used, students have been asked to observe, reflect, and engage in dialogue to come to their own

conclusions rather than be taught explicitly about policies and practices that facilitate poverty or injustice.

Some researchers (Green, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2012) have suggested that these challenges of representation in service-learning could be is a natural byproduct of being historically practiced in predominantly White institutions, with White students and usually White professors working in low-income, and usually communities of color. The reputation has become one where middle-class volunteers come in to “help” and “learn from” a low-income community, usually made up of people of color (Mendel-Reyes, & Mack, 1998; Mitchell, 2008; Vaccaro, 2009). As a result, service-learning has been criticized for promoting a sense of *noblesse oblige* (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996) and has been challenged to change this orientation (Mitchell, 2008).

Charity vs. Social Change Mindset

Researchers and practitioners (Butin 2005, 2006; Evans et al., 2009; Green, 2001, 2003; Seider et al., 2013) in the field had stressed that the field of service-learning needs to change this reputation of being a charitable endeavor for middle-class students to go and help low-income communities. This shift in the narrative is crucial if service-learning is to be used to address and teach effectively about critical social issues and support the development of a civic identity. Mitchell, (2008) has called for taking a more critical approach that teaches about structural obstacles to equity as opposed to normalizing color-blind approaches to race and minimizing structural causes of poverty and inequity in discussions and educational materials. However, other studies that examine the experiences of students of color in a service-learning program which take a critical approach indicate that challenges persist

despite the integration of critical service-learning due to poor facilitation of discussions about race and equity.

For service-learning opportunities to take a more critical approach, discussion of race and identity need to be better facilitated. Where discussions of race and identity are incorporated into service-learning curricula (Cress & Donahue, 2011; Evans et al., 2009; Green, 2003), students of color in a predominantly White setting reported frustration with the classroom experience (Evans et al., 2009; Green, 2003; Seider et al., 2013). Echoing literature on campus racial climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Tatum, 1992), in a predominantly White setting, students of color often find themselves having to represent the experience of a racial/ethnic “minority” group. Students of color reported discomfort at challenging the racism of their White classmates and professors who were ill-equipped to manage sensitive topics on race (Mendel-Reyes & Mack, 1998). To relieve students of color of this burden of teaching their classmates, practitioners and scholars need be able to teach all students to interrogate how personal identities and experiences influence understanding of structural inequality and how to develop a civic identity that guides participation in the social change process.

Higher Education: Civic Identity and Students of Color

An early purpose of higher education was to create a foundation for sustaining democracy by producing graduates with a sense of civic identity, a call that persists to this day (Saltmarsh et al., 2015) and is often a catalyst for the use of service-learning in higher education. In an essay on civic identity, Lee Knefelkamp (2008) wrote about the need to recognize the development as an “ethical civic identity” (p. 1) as a goal for higher education and presented a definition of a mature civic identity. This concept of civic identity was

important in this study because service-learning is often cited as a tool that develops participants' understanding of self, equity, privilege, and social change (Mitchell, 2015). Knefelkamp (2008) identified the “mature ethical civic identity” as one that seeks an understanding of the world around them, of moral dilemmas and social inequities. For the students in this study, Knefelkamp’s definition had resonance for the students in this study as the experience of being part of a PWI and identifying with communities of color off campus led them to gain perspective on their own experiences, privileges and complexities and contradictions in social inequity. Knefelkamp asserted that individuals with well-developed civic identities made conscious choices to figure out how best to work with others to improve society. As the author describes it, the mature civic identity is “both idealistic and realistic, patient and persistent, committed to thoughtful engagement and aware that others may engage differently. They see their role in life as contributing to the long-term greater good. Moreover, perhaps most importantly, they have the courage to act” (pp. 4-5). In this way, developing a civic identity is more of an active choice in how a person contributes to society.

Intersection of Service-Learning and Civic Identity Development

In Knefelkamp’s (2008) understanding of civic identity development an individual encounters circumstances that challenge their perceptions and understanding. A mature civic identity is a critical thinker; able to process contradictory circumstances, apply empathy, and discern understanding in a way so that the individual can find a way to address social challenges. This pre-condition of the service-learning participant being in an unfamiliar environment precludes the issue of racial or ethnic identity on the part of participants (Johnson, 2015) since the assumption is that the participant was previously unaware of discrimination and inequity (Stanlick, 2015). In this dominant narrative, the lives and

perspectives of middle-class White students are changed by a heightened awareness of issues of social justice. Nothing else changes for these White students. They entered college with the privilege and status of being White and middle class; they will graduate with those privileges but ostensibly with an awareness of race and equity gained through service-learning. However, for students of color from low-income backgrounds who have lived with poverty, racism, and marginalization, they graduate with a degree that, hopefully, will bring them the privileges and status of being middle class. Unlike White students, however, who will still retain the privileges of being White, students of color will still be subject to racism and bias (Bell, 2018). The complexity of civic identity development and racial identity development has been explored in more recent studies on activism and civic engagement inspired by experiences with racism by youth of color or service-learning (Bañales et al., 2019; Hope & Jager, 2014; Johnson, 2015/2017; Linder et al., 2019).

Matthew Johnson (2015/2017) explored civic identity development in two studies with interesting conclusions for students of color. Both studies highlight how personal and intellectual transformation through service-learning may be different for students of color. In “Developing College Students’ Civic Identity: The Role of Social Perspective Taking and Sociocultural Issues Discussions” (2015), Johnson used the 2009 Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership with a sample of 45,271 in a quantitative study to understand the dynamic between discussions where perspectives and opinions are shared and debates and how that dynamic can affect the production of a civic identity. In the study, Johnson expressly referred to inter-group dialogues and the reflection component within service-learning to encourage social perspective-taking. These two types of activities were targeted for study because of the power of interactional diversity on civic identity development, where participants engaged in

dialogue about ideas and concepts on socio-cultural discussions (Hurtado, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004, King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, as cited in Johnson, 2015). Approximately 27% of the sample were students of color.

The structural equation modeling used in this study indicated that the discussions, like reflection sessions, on socio-cultural issues were of limited impact on students of color, as compared to White students. For White students, the service-learning program was instrumental in challenging perspectives and encouraging them to act to address a social issue. For students of color, Johnson noted that they, in general, had more experience with issues of social justice, equity and power than the White students. Given the dominance of Whiteness in society, students of color are continuously exposed to other perspectives and engage in dialogue about race, class, gender, power, and privilege more frequently more frequently than White students. Quite simply, confronting inequity or talking about it, is not a new experience for many students of color, especially for African American students. Furthermore, if the ability to take the perspective of another social group is key to informing one's civic identity, service-learning programming had a more significant effect on the development of civic identity for the student of color, compared to White students (Johnson, 2015).

For students of color, the service-learning programming, in combination with their lived experiences, created a more significant opportunity for a learning experience that truly transformed how students would choose to engage in social change. Like the women of color in the Jones, Robbins, and LePeau (2011) study, the participants emerged from the service-learning experience with concrete academic or professional plans that would help them integrate social action into their lives.

Recognizing that a developmental theory of civic identity does not exist, in comparison to other identity theories such as race or gender, Johnson (2017) used grounded theory to examine civic identity development in undergraduates. He interviewed nineteen students; three Black students, ten White students, three biracial students, and two students who identified as Latinx. Through his analysis, Johnson found that pivotal experiences at specific points in their development contributed to civic identity development. Pivotal experiences spanned before and after college, including but not limited to exposure through family or friends about civic participation (i.e., attending protests or voting with parents), engaging through coursework or volunteerism, and participation in informal and formal discussions about equity and civic issues. In an echo of Knepfelkamp (2008), Johnson describes a process where the college student graduates to become a mature individual with a strong civic identity, able to think critically process contradictory circumstances, apply empathy and discern understanding in a way to find a way to address social challenges.

Johnson (2015) found that holding multiple marginalized identities such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1990) contribute to civic identity development. In Johnson's (2015) study, participants spoke of early influences on how and why they became more engaged in service-learning and community engagement, and the cumulative effect of daily experiences with bias on their development of a civic identity. More recent studies (Bañales et al., 2019; Hope & Jager, 2014; Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017) explore the concept of civic identity development through the lens of *sociopolitical development* which describes the personal evolution of critical consciousness through lived experience with bias which influences involvement in political activity. Political activity is defined by voting or actions like protests, boycotts, and other civil actions

that contribute to changes in policies and practices to increase equity (Watts et al., 2003). Research that used the lens of sociopolitical development seems to confirm Johnson's (2015) conclusion that, for students of color, the decision to develop a civic identity is a consequence of a lived experience with racism and bias. Similar to the concept of civic identity, sociopolitical development focuses on how experiences with institutional and structural barriers to equity resulted in a sense of political efficacy and development of civic identity as a politically engaged person, whether through voting or activism. The findings of the studies below had special significance for this study because of the focus on how poor racial climate on campuses was a catalyst for civic identity development.

Campus Racial Climate and Service-Learning

When the campus experiences of students of color and White students are studied, students of color consistently report a worse racial climate (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Museus, 2014; Mwangi, 2018). Students of color report feeling that their presence on campus is considered fraudulent by White students. There is a fear of stereotype threat and a general sense of unease and lack of a sense of belonging (Quaye et al., 2009). This sense of unease is referred to by Gusa (2010) as "White institutional presence". These campuses follow norms of Whiteness, specifically notions of color-blindness, meritocracy, individuality and minimizing acts of racism (Harper, 2012) and value epistemologies which under-emphasize how power and privilege define what is taught and how it is learned. Much like how traditional service-learning assumes a politically neutral stance, the traditional educational theory is divorced from the political dynamics that determine what is to be taught to students (Giroux, 1983a). Given a sensitive racial climate, colleges and universities need to understand how campus-sponsored service-learning opportunities in and out of the

classroom, can be ways in which students can have a greater sense of intellectual and personal connection while at university (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Harper, 2012; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Torres et al., 2009) and contribute to their own resiliency on a PWI campus.

Campus Racial Climate and Civic Identity Development

The literature on the racial climate on predominately White institutions challenges how students of color adapt to higher education and succeed academically and socially (Cabrera et al., 1999; Harwood et al., 2012; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2000; Villalpando, 2003). Leath and Chavous (2017) note how higher education has been roiled by students of color protesting racially discriminatory treatment in society and micro-aggressions endured on their own campuses (Ndemanu, 2017). The adverse racial climate on campus can negate the sense of belonging a student of color may feel on campus but also may motivate students of color to force changes and use activism, or community engagement to mitigate that sense of isolation on campus (Hope & Jager, 2014; Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Villalpando, 2003).

Hope and Jager (2014) asked whether an understanding or experience with inequity and discrimination motivated young Black or African American youth to become civically engaged. Using data from the Black Youth Project-Youth Culture Survey, a national survey of interviews conducted by telephone to 634 Black youth aged 15 to 25 years old, the researchers measured political cynicism, perception of structural inequality, political efficacy, mother's education, civic education through high school classes on government, and civic engagement through community service or political engagement in protests, boycotts or campaign work. Using quantitative analysis, the study determined that civic engagement was positively affected by civic education, a sense of political efficacy, and perceptions of

structural inequality. Similarly, Leath and Chavous (2017) examined the influence of campus racial climate, sociopolitical development, and political efficacy on the civic engagement of Black college students enrolled at PWIs. Online surveys about the academic and social climate on campus, impressions of the racial climate on campus, and sociopolitical beliefs about racism, equity, and social justice were administered in the fall and spring of the same academic year to 322 men and women of traditional college-age first year students at public universities located in the Midwest. The researchers used hierarchical regression analysis to conclude that for both men and women, experiencing racial bias in and out of classrooms, getting involved in on-campus activism and a sense of political efficacy all contributed to inspiring Black students to get civically engaged to create social change.

Hope and their co-researchers (2018) explored whether students of color at predominantly White institutions engaged in political activity as an act of resilience to respond to a negative racial climate. Political activism in this study was defined as participating in protests, boycotts, donating time or money to political action groups, or working on a political campaign. Using data from the Minority College Cohort Study, focusing on Black and Latinx, this quantitative study looked at how feelings of anxiety and depression were affected by political activism. The findings indicated that responding to the mental stressors of microaggressions and general racial campus climate with increased political activism was helpful for Latinx male and female students, and Black female students but not for Black male students. In other words, for Black males, increased political activism in response to mental stressors from racial climate also led to increased feelings of stress and anxiety.

Overall, the extant research seems to indicate that the lived experiences with bias and discrimination can be a strong influence on becoming civically engaged, whether through community service or political activities. For students of color enrolled at predominantly White institutions, getting involved in community service-learning programs seem to be more closely affected by personal experiences with discrimination and a way to increase their resiliency against the daily encounters with micro- and macroaggressions.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

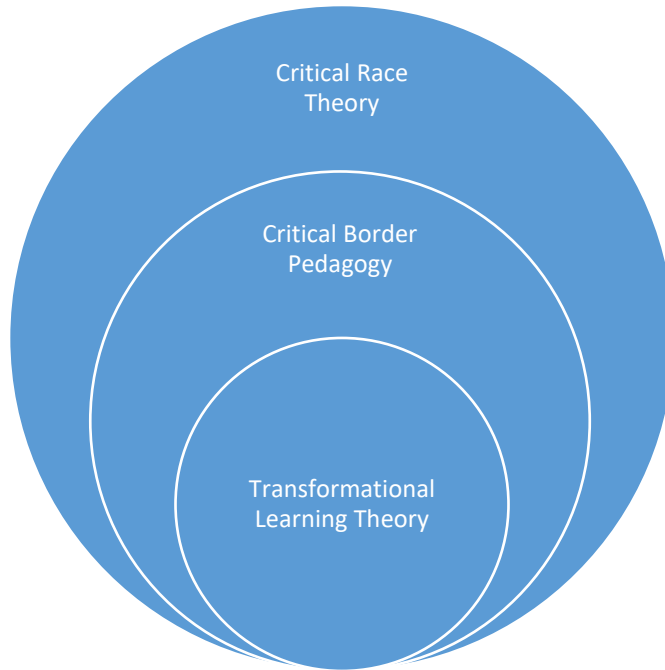
The conceptual framework for this study used critical theories which centered the tensions shaped by firsthand experiences within systems and structures of oppression. The framework of critical race theory, critical border pedagogy, and transformational learning theory illustrate the contextual and progressive nature of learning, in which issues of race, power, history, space, language, and privilege play a key role in the educational experiences of people of color (Giroux, 1988; Kiely, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As a framework, these theories provided a holistic lens to analyze and understand the experience of students of color who commuted between the more racially and ethnically diverse service-learning program setting and their PWI. The conceptual framework was used to answer the research questions and to analyze and interpret the findings on how community-service-learning impacted their academic and social experiences in college and civic identity development.

This framework created an opportunity to understand how participants in this study used the lens of their intersecting identities and experiences to learn from their service-learning experiences and apply that knowledge to making personal choices, navigate new environments; and understand their civic identity. Figure 1 illustrates how the

transformational learning is nested within critical border pedagogy and critical race theory to produce the counterstories from this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: Nested Network of Critical Theories



Critical race theory and critical border pedagogy highlight how race and power has created structures in society that sustain a system of inequity experience that students of color experience on and off campus. Critical border pedagogy articulates how identities intersect to create a critical consciousness to understand how to contribute to the social good as an individual or develop a civic identity in a world complicated by issues of power.

Transformational theory specifies how service-learning affects their values, beliefs, and actions. The conceptual framework is grounded in the understanding that in service-learning, experience and dialogue are part of the learning, particularly in the context of developing a

civic identity, and guided by a process of discovery and revelation of how issues of race, power, history, space, language, and privilege play a significant role (Bañales et al., 2019; Hope & Jager, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017).

The use of these theories supported a constructivist epistemological approach centered on the perspectives of the participants and highlighted the dynamics of power and privilege, which impacted both their service and campus experiences. Just as service-learning as a pedagogy required participants to learn through reflecting on their own experiences; this study asked participants to interpret their service-learning experiences and interactions on their PWI campuses and within the communities they serve. Overall, this approach helped to capture a dynamic social and intellectual learning process; the experience of students of color enrolled at PWIs who are also intensely engaged in service-learning.

Critical Race Theory

Developed by legal scholars as a method of analysis to understand the insidious influence of race and America's racial history on law and policy, critical race theory has since been found to be a useful tool to understand the pervasive experience of racism in multiple contexts, including education (Bell et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical race theory was used to highlight the role of race, power, and privilege, and the nuances of intersecting identities (Delgado & Stefanovic, 2012) which otherwise is invisible to those who do not have to live with oppression daily (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013). Critical race theory was used to situate the racialized context of the students experiences on a historically White campus.

For this study, the tenets of critical race theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) identified the salience of racism and class on students of color at predominantly White institutions.

Specifically, three of the core tenets of critical race theory had resonance in this study: the principles of the permanence of racism, intersectionality, and the centrality of personal experience to develop counterstories to understand the service-learning experience for students of color enrolled at PWIs who serve in communities of color (Bell et al., 1995). As a group of theories, critical race theory directly challenged the traditional value and colorblind approach of service-learning and community engagement.

Permanence of Racism

The permanence of racism at PWIs has been well established by a bevy of research over the last thirty years (Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2009; Jack, 2014; Kiang, 1992; Museus, 2014; Mwangi, 2018; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Rendon, 1996). Gusa (2010) perhaps had the most accurate description of the racial climate on PWIs, by describing it as “White institutional presence.” This presence is dominated by notions of color-blindness, meritocracy, individuality, and little emphasis on how power and privilege define the teaching and learning systems on a campus (Harper, 2012). The permanence of racism can be seen in how students of color continue to experience microaggressions (Franklin, 2016) and are motivated to be more politically active because of a poor racial climate on campus (Leath & Chavous, 2017). This central tenet was a primary reason to choose CRT to influence the analyses of this study. For the students of color in this study, though they held multiple marginalized identities of class, nationality, sexual orientation and ethnicity and were on campuses that were actually very diverse, the persistence of Whiteness (Gusa, 2010) on their historically White campuses prevented a feeling of belonging on campus and fueled their motivation to support social change.

Intersectionality

While critical race theory explicitly addresses systemic racism, the theory also recognizes that racism is not experienced in isolation from other forms of prejudice and exclusion, for example ethnic or national origin, class, sexuality, gender identity, citizenship, and gender. As Crenshaw (1990) noted, racism is affected by other identities which people hold. The design of this study considered that the participants would hold multiple identities; and intersectionality would influence their interaction with institutions and structures on and off campus.

Centrality of Experience

For students of color, an important part of the intellectual development within service-learning (Astin et al., 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Mabry, 1998) and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) is recognition of their firsthand experiences as a person of color in a racist world (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Torres et al. (2009) defined identity as used in higher education as “socially constructed” (p. 577), based on context and positionality. Yep (2015) describes a “thicker” (p. 86) definition of intersectionality that integrates race, gender, class, ability, nation, status as a student at a college that “come together simultaneously to produce social identities and experiences in the social world, from privilege to oppression” (p. 86). For students in service-learning programs, these lived realities come together to make up a worldview and a distinct narrative that receives little focus in the service-learning literature (Mitchell, 2008). The use of critical race theory served as a link to service-learning and civic identity development because of the emphasis on the centrality of personal experience in how students of color recognize how race, power and

privilege influence their interactions with the communities, organizations and institutions encountered as part of service-learning (Mitchell, 2008).

Counterstorytelling methodology supported the goal of expanding upon the impact of service-learning on students of color and reframing how higher education engages with communities. Delgado (1989, as cited in DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013). As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) stated, “critical race methodology offers a space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color” (p. 23). A counterstory has a unique purpose in critical race theory methodology: to present highly contextual data that echoes the complexities that time, place, historical and socio-political factors that have an impact on policies and practices. The counter-narrative method serves as a valuable tool to demonstrate the impact of multiple identities in how identities of race, class, and gender connect to affect individual experiences and implementation of practices and policies (Berry & Cook, 2018).

The research questions were based on an underlying assumption that students sought understanding through the lens of their individual and collective identities. This view had been raised earlier by Butin (2006) in his conceptual study on the potential of service-learning and community engagement. He asks: if the learning in service-learning is predicated on students being dissimilar from the host community, what is the experience if the student is representative of the host community and the university. Student who are of color, low-income or first-generation on predominantly White campuses who spend large parts of their time in low-income communities of color are in a unique position. On-campus, these students manage multiple identities of class, gender, race, and sexuality in a predominantly White, higher income, and cis-gender heterosexual environment. Off-campus,

while volunteering in the community, these identities are augmented by an additional identity as a representative of their predominantly White institution.

In this study, the examination of learning and civic identity development in service-learning is filtered through the lived realities of the participant. This study seeks to improve the praxis of service-learning by putting a spotlight on the lived experiences of students who share the race or ethnicity of the host community, are low-income and first-generation at predominantly White institutions. In summary, critical race theory was used in this study to articulate the racialized environments in which students of color live on and off-campus. The use of critical race theory created a frame for critical border pedagogy to facilitate learning through the lens of place, identity, language, and history, resulting in the behavioral and convictional and psychological transformations described in transformational learning theory.

Critical Border Pedagogy

As a post-modern theory, critical border pedagogy provides a concept for service-learning to convey learning about social change is an unsettling process that “underscores the odious contradictions between how the social world is *represented* and how it is actually ordered and *experienced*” (Giroux, 2006, p. xi). Like critical race theory, critical border pedagogy asserts that inequity and imbalances of power is pervasive in education; in that those who have power are the ones to determine what is taught and what is learned (Giroux, 2020; Lauzon, 1999). Giroux’s (1991) critical border pedagogy encourages those whose identities are not part of the power structure that determines what is knowledge to be empowered to be intermediaries in creating new knowledge or highlighting other perspectives and understanding. Service-learning as a practice encourages participants to

seek out experiences to challenge or confirm understanding. Critical border pedagogy supports the learner's ability to make sense of the contradictions and tensions in society (McLaren, 2017) similar to Knefelkamp (2008) definition of a civic identity that is able to process contradictory circumstances. As researchers (Butin, 2003, 2007; Cipolle, 2004; Mitchell, 2008) have stated before, service-learning is a pedagogy in a unique position to challenge students' understanding of inequities in society. Within service-learning, students mediate their learning by carefully examining and questioning their perspectives as their roles shift from student to being in the community or as they traverse the borderlands of knowledge and understanding between their campus, home, and community (Giroux, 1991). Giroux's border pedagogy encourages learner to question and contrast knowledge mediated by the privileges of the academy with the worldviews and understanding from their lived experiences.

In this study, critical border pedagogy was used as a lens to understand how students of color navigate the concurrent crossing of physical, cultural, intellectual, and social borders as a student of color at a PWI while also engaged in a community of color off-campus. Critical border pedagogy is in equal parts theory of education and a movement that recognizes that teaching nor learning, nor personal development are politically or value-neutral. As a theory, critical border pedagogy used the idea of space, both mental and physical (Morgan, 2000), to question the influence of power and privilege due to race, gender, religion and income, and other social indicators on an individual's worldview. In this definition of border pedagogy, Giroux (1988) referenced the metaphor of borders to describe how a learner moves between frames of mind: Within this discourse, the student must engage knowledge as a border-crosser, as a person moving in and out of borders constructed around

coordinates of difference and power. These are not only physical borders, but cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable identities, individual capacities, and social forms. In this case, students cross over into borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations, and values that are increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations which organize them become destabilized and reshaped.

Critical border pedagogy encourages the learner to develop a critical consciousness of how society is warped by power and privilege to work with others to counter those forces (McLaren, 2017). Where traditional service-learning does not interrogate the role of power, race, or other oppressions, critical border pedagogy requires the learner to do so. Critical border theorists cast doubt on the approach of traditional pedagogy which emphasizes knowledge grounded in objectivity by highlighting how knowledge is subjective and diffuse, influenced by multiple factors grounded in context, culture, history, and place (Darder, Torres & Baltodano, 2017). One of the key criticisms from critical border theorists, echoing the criticism of the dominant narrative in service-learning, is that traditional pedagogy reinforces a dominant narrative at the risk of perpetuating a narrow view of the world that perpetuates social injustices (Giroux, 1983).

Use of “Borders” in Service-Learning

Critical border pedagogy is also crucial as the analogy of “borders” or “boundaries” is used in the literature on service-learning and community engagement (Butin 2003, 2005; Kiely, 2005; King, 2004; Winans-Solis, 2014). Wallace (2020) observed how the structure, assumptions, history, and culture of higher education created boundaries with outsiders who also hold knowledge. He cites the boundaries of discipline, ontology and epistemology as

challenges to the full integration of community engagement, whether through service or scholarship, in higher education. For example, concepts normalized in higher education, such as positivism, could be exclusionary by those external to the academy. Critical border pedagogy takes a social constructive and dialectical approach to creating knowledge and to interrogate that which may be accepted as normal. For institutions that use community engagement via service-learning, critical border pedagogy presents an opportunity for higher education to formally challenge dominant narratives by encouraging stakeholders like students, faculty, staff, and community partners to push the boundaries of perspective and ways of knowing.

The term “border crossing” has been used in service-learning literature to explain how participants in service-learning programs can assess their perspectives and beliefs due to “border crossings” that can be physical, social, cultural, and intellectual (Butin, 2003, p. 1683). The use of critical border pedagogy is used as much for the visual aid provided by the word “border” as the relevance of the word “critical” to understand how participants in service-learning programs develop a consciousness about the influence of power and privilege as they develop a civic identity. Development of a civic identity is predicated on being able to understand the nuances and complexities of social change (Knefelkamp, 2008). For example, a student could come from a frame of mind that sees themselves as a provider of services, without recognizing the support and training received from the very community being “served” (Butin, 2003; Cipolle, 2004; King, 2004; Mitchell, 2008). In this way, critical border pedagogy served to name how people use established ways of knowing and understanding the world to interpret new experiences.

Elements of critical border pedagogy have appeared in a limited number of empirical studies in service-learning. It has been more frequently used in conceptual papers exploring the relevance and uses of service-learning as a pedagogy (Butin, 2003; King, 2004) or to promote social responsibility (Wallace, 2020). In one of the earliest applications of Giroux's border pedagogy, Hayes and Cuban (1997) created a narrative study of the students enrolled in a class on adult literacy at a large public university. These researchers adopted the literal definition of crossing borders to describe how the physical act of leaving campus and entering spaces that would otherwise be unknown to them and forming relationships that would otherwise go unformed. For Hayes and Cuban (1997), border pedagogy was appropriate for classes that often-exposed students to ambiguity and often raised more questions than it could answer.

The course content required students to tutor low-literacy adults' off-campus. The students in the class went in with expectations for their roles as tutors, only to have to modify and adjust as they began to gain a greater understanding of the gap between their lives and that of the adult learners. For example, one student grew frustrated at the frequent absences of the adult learners, only to realize the challenges of coordinating childcare schedules and public transportation. The student still felt frustrated, but now it was a combination of understanding the adult learner's predicament and being unable to do anything about it.

Jones et al. (2005) used what they termed "a critical development lens" to understand how students had a transformational learning experience in a class on leadership theories that integrated service-learning and community engagement. The "critical development lens" was created out of a conceptual framework comprised of the cognitive-developmental theory of self-authorship and critical whiteness, which integrated elements of Giroux's critical border

pedagogy. Although the participants in this study were predominantly White, the researchers found that the transformational learning took place because White students were in an unfamiliar environment that called on them to re-evaluate their identities, as they related to power and privilege. As the researchers put it, transformational experiences occurred in the “borderlands” (p. 5).

Transformational Learning Theory

Mezirow’s transformational learning theory was used to name how service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Feinstein, 2004; Kiely 2004, 2005) has influenced traditional college-aged adults to different ways of thinking, being and behaving. Transformational learning theory focuses on three dimensions of learning (Mezirow, 1991): changes in the understanding of the self, revision of beliefs and values, and behavioral changes in lifestyle. Mezirow (1991) developed his theory, in part, in a national study with 133 women who had reentered college after leaving for personal reasons and the administrators of these programs. Transformational learning occurs when the opportunities to challenge personal views and the ability and opportunity to reflect are provided, similar to how service-learning and community engagement disrupt established perspectives (Butin, 2005; Deeley, 2010; Eyler & Giles, 1999) and worldviews. Transformational learning theory identified an iterative process that accompanies learning: an event that disturbs one’s worldview followed by self-reflection and questioning of one’s epistemological and ontological understanding, renegotiation of beliefs followed by changes in frames of mind and behaviors (Feinstein, 2004; Kiely, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). The use of transformational learning theory provided the language of changes in self, values, and actions to name how participation in a community service-

learning program influenced choice of classes, professional plans and beliefs and values regarding social justice

The combination of the three theories allowed for a nuanced analysis of the lived experiences of these participants, who found themselves juggling contradictory experiences as full-time students of color from low-income backgrounds at historically White, middle-class institutions. The students struggled with having stable housing and food while their families struggled or wondering why they had received support to further their education when many do not or why they felt comfortable with being part of a privileged campus community and with the low-income families and youth with whom they worked. The three theories provided a language and framework with which to interpret the contradictions and complexities of the students' lived experiences as individuals who wanted to create social change.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

This chapter presents the research approach and rationale for choosing counterstory methodology for the research design. Interviews and artifacts were analyzed through a framework of critical race theory, critical border pedagogy and transformational learning theory to focus on the lived experiences of participants of color participating in community service-learning in communities of color attending predominantly White institutions (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2014). This qualitative study, as designed, centers the voices of students of color at PWIs to highlight the personal and intellectual development of students of color who participate in service-learning programs. The method relies on the concept of a “counterstory”, a narrative research method that comes from critical race theory. In critical race theory, storytelling or counter storytelling is used to counter the majoritarian understanding of a lived experience through privileging the voices, knowledge, and experience with racism and oppression of people of color (Fernandez, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Methodology: Counterstory

The counterstory methodology, a CRT-specific method, was chosen to elevate and focus on the voices of students of color, not as a comparison to other voices but perspectives that matter on their own and not in relation to Whiteness. These narratives put a human face

to the struggles born by students of color in an educational institution that can perpetuate racism through its own mission of research, teaching, and learning (Huber, 2008; Mitchell, 2017). As both Butin (2006) and Mitchell et al. (2012) have asserted, without integrating the experiences of service learners of color into the pedagogy and practice of service-learning, the field is at risk of representing only the experience of white middle-class participants. For this study, capturing the stories of the service experiences of students of color can provide a more nuanced understanding of service-learning as a practice and pedagogy that is inclusive of identity and community engagement (Parker & Lynne, 2002).

According to Creswell (2014) and Fernandez (2002), one of the hallmarks of narrative research, such as critical race theory's counterstory methodology, are the stories shared between researcher and participants via qualitative methods such as interviews, document analysis, observation, and pictures. The methodology was developed to follow the contours of how learning within community service-learning takes place to produce counterstories. Specifically, the impact from service-learning occurs over a prolonged time where the learner/student is immersed within an experience (Sax et al., 1999) engaging in dialogue or reflection with others to construct a personal understanding of social issues (Mitchell, 2015). Understanding the service-learning experience needs to include the context of the students' lived experiences and interactions throughout the service-learning experience. In the case of students of color at PWIs, for example, this study posits that race and class cannot be removed from how students of color construct meaning of their experiences. Furthermore, practitioners of service-learning need to understand the diverse perspectives of learning to use service-learning effectively for all students as a practice or a pedagogy in higher education.

The counterstory as a methodology recognizes the role of oppression in the lives of students of color as they navigate an environment as people who have identities of race, gender, ethnicity, and class on a campus that can be described as a PWI and dominated by middle class to wealthy students and in the community of color where they volunteer (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of counterstories as a method in education research is supported by the work of Solórzano and Yosso (2001). The use of critical race methodology in education is identified as a tool of analyses and research methodology to highlight how policies and practices have subordinated the needs or perspectives of students of color. Additionally, critical race theory as a methodology integrates a trans-disciplinary approach that allows for the individual's personal experience with respect to racism, its intersections with classism, sexism, and nationalism (Bell, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described the counterstory as a powerful tool that could identify how educational practices that disregard the influence of the intersectionality of race, class and gender to limit learning but also how the experience of multiple identities was valuable in an educational setting. In the case of service-learning, the dominant narrative focuses on the power of students having a disruptive encounter because of their "otherness" in the community of color; but this would only apply to White students, not students of color (Butin, 2005). The counterstory method disrupts this dominant narrative, to add a more layered understanding of the power of service-learning as a practice and pedagogy.

Counterstory methodology was also selected because it captures the nuances and complexities of participants' evolving understanding of themselves and the world through the student's involvement in a service-learning program. As Flick (2014) noted, participants in narrative interviews are asked questions about an experience and asked to provide their own

understanding of the impact of these experiences. Narrative methods of study, like counterstories, facilitate the discovery of “new ways of thinking” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) particularly to capture the intellectual journey that takes place within an educational experience (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have used narrative research as a holistic approach to present the human dimension of historical, sociological, or anthropological work (Berry & Cook, 2019). Counterstories, however, differ from other narrative approaches in how they highlight individual, often unique, struggles and successes in resisting racist policies and practices prevalent in a culture, such as the culture within an institution (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and make it publicly known (Fernandez, 2002). In the field of education, counterstories allow learners to use their own experiences and personal identities to inform pedagogy and practice. The goal was to produce counterstories of service-learning that served as additional narratives for practitioners and scholars. The reality is that when service-learning is effective; it is because the participant can process what they are seeing through the lens of their own experience and are able to interrogate that interpretation over time; in order to challenge their perspective. The counterstory supports the understanding that there is more than one narrative in service-learning, especially within a predominantly White educational environment (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Role of the Researcher

A decade of experience as a practitioner in service-learning brought some risks and rewards for the researcher. Professional experience with this subject of students of color serving in communities of color accorded a unique understanding of the experience being studied (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Insight into the experiences of the participants in this study

was facilitated by personal experience as an undergraduate of color at a PWI, who dealt with subtle racism and learned to navigate a predominantly White world as a non-Christian, woman of color provided. As a student at a PWI, there was a sense of unease throughout my four years, although, at the time, it was difficult to name the discomfort. After college graduation, an opportunity to volunteer in my own community with domestic violence agency which, at the time, was newly founded and served the South Asian community became available. This experience was an alternative to the dominant narrative where a volunteer enters an unfamiliar community which does not reflect their race or ethnicity. In this volunteer experience, the site was in a community that reflected my demographics as a South Asian American immigrant in the United States. Like the counterstories produced by this study, the experience expanded an understanding of equity, access and increased confidence in my own identity and experiences. Although this experience occurred after college, it was significant as it created a transformation in values, beliefs and actions with regard to civic identity when other service-learning experiences had not.

For the purposes of the study, these personal and professional experiences were important factors in building trust between me, as the researcher and the participants (Fernandez, 2002) when conducting the interviews and analyzing the data. For the same reasons, this personal familiarity also required extra caution when drawing conclusions when analyzing the data. While familiarity with the research area provided insight into the experience, care had to be taken to avoid misinterpretation of the participant's experience or projecting subjective experiences on to the participant or purely analyze to suit a need to affirm the research problem or questions.

Qualitative researchers (Bhattacharya, 2009; Denzin & Smith, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2008) have noted the risks of the power imbalance between researcher and researched. The risks are grounded in the reality that the processes for conducting and interpreting research on oppressed groups are often defined by concepts that have been developed by a dominant group. For example, two of the three theories which form the conceptual framework were developed by White men (Giroux, 1988; Mezirow, 1991). Bhattacharya (2009) has noted the challenge of being an “other while conducting research on/with the “Other” (p. 108) and then interpreting the research to present to a dominant audience. There is the risk of subjugating the ways of knowing of the research participant to the researchers who will eventually be reading about the study. To counter this risk, aspects of both narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) counterstory methodology (Fernandez, 2002) and portraiture (Chapman, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) were used to produce counterstories that reflected the tenets of critical race theory in honoring the lived encounters of people of color. Narrative inquiry highlights the people and places that create notable experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and portraiture illustrates, in writing, the complexities of place, context and relationships that influence learning experiences (Chapman, 2007).

Site Selection

For this study, the site of the study is a co-curricular community service-learning program, the Leland Community Scholars Program, based at a residential predominantly White institution in a mid-sized city in the Northeast. The site, the Community Scholars Program was chosen because it meets the definition of a service-learning program due to its focus on the civic and ethical development of the student and integration of regular reflection

and community engagement and its participants are all from a low-income background. This program reflects Eyler and Giles' (1999) principles of "a connection, continuity, context, challenge and coaching" (pp. 183-185) and components that emphasized both student learning and meeting community needs.

A primary consideration in choosing a site for this study was how closely the service-learning experiences reflected best practices such as an engagement for a sustained period and a required reflection component (Furco, 1996). Co-curricular community service opportunities such as alternative spring breaks and community service programming have been shown to have similar high impact as learning opportunities for students when those programs also integrate the pedagogy of service-learning (Butin, 2013; Finley & McNair, 2013; Hoy et al., 2012; Keen & Keen, 2002; Kuh et al., 2010; Jacoby, 2015; Neihaus & Rivera, 2015; Richard et al., 2016). A review of the quantitative and qualitative research comparing effectiveness of course-based service-learning programs and co-curricular service programs indicated that the inclusion of structured reflections sessions was a key influence on quality and impact on participants (Walker & Walker, 2018).

As a co-curricular program, The Community Scholars Program reflects the hallmarks of high-quality design such as requiring yearlong commitment that includes the academic year and summer (Butin, 2013; Keen & Keen, 2002) and structured reflection sessions by educators (Walker & Walker, 2018). It is a work-study program, in that students agree to eight to ten hours of service per week over the course of an academic year, plus a minimum of 25 hours over six weeks during the summer; participation in training, retreats, and reflections throughout the course of their involvement in the program (Butin, 2008; Hoy et al., 2012; Keen & Hall, 2008; Richard et al., 2016) in exchange for an hourly wage. The sites

or communities in which the student volunteers year-round must be consistent, in terms of geography, population or issue based. For example, if a student chooses to work in a particular community, they must volunteer in that community for the time that they are part of the Community Scholars Program. If the program chooses an issue, such as homelessness, the student must volunteer with organizations that address that issue. The students are referred to non-profit services in the community or are welcome to identify their own placements. Students are not obligated to stay with the same site throughout their participation in the program. They can volunteer for more than one community-based partner organization and are expected to take on expanded leadership roles on campus or with their community partners (Richard et al., 2016). During the academic term, Community Scholars participate in four full group meetings, two individual meetings, write two reflection essays, participate in eight hours of leadership development training, and attend two annual events celebrating public service. Students can be part of the program during the entirety of their undergraduate career or less. Community Scholars sought to provide a supportive environment in which to develop social justice leadership skills while at college with the long-term goal of developing a lifetime commitment to service. This program, although administered through Leland College, is open to students participating from other institutions allowing me to maximize variation of PWIs. Verification that the institutions represented in this study qualified as predominantly White institutions was obtained by using the self-reported enrollment data in the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System.

The Community Scholars Program follows a familiar model of programs across the country (Butin, 2008; Hoy et al., 2012; Keen & Hall, 2008; Richard et al., 2016) that seek to support the participation of low-income undergraduate students in service-learning programs.

The program provides service positions, reflection and skill development opportunities, mentorship by staff and community leaders and financial assistance to support undergraduates who otherwise may not choose to participate in community service programs over a paid opportunity. As this is not a credit-bearing course, all workshops and reflection sessions occur in the evening and weekends.

Participant Selection

This research study required that all participants meet the following criteria: self-identify as students of color who come from low-income backgrounds; be between the ages of 18 to 24; enrolled at residential PWIs, public or private. Additionally, all participants of color had to be involved in service in communities of color regularly over an extended period, at least a year. For this reason, purposeful, criterion sampling was used. Given the specificity of the sample, participants were identified by the Community Scholars program staff who collect information regarding race and ethnicity, as well as institutional affiliation through the hiring process and knew the racial and ethnic demographics of the neighborhoods in the students were volunteering.

Participants were required to be enrolled at a residential, predominantly White institutional setting because students of color who spend most of their college experience on a predominantly White campus and then enter a community of color is not a focus in the dominant narrative in service-learning. In addition, identifying as students of color, the students in this study occupy multiple intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, citizenship and class and it is their experience which is the focus of this study. As volunteers, these students enter communities where they shared these identities. The students leave an environment where they are in a demographic minority to one in which they are not. This

allowed the study to produce counterstories for the community service experience. It should be noted that while not all the students who participate in the Community Scholars Program identify as of color, all do identify as low-income, as determined by eligibility for work study funds, Pell Grants, or full financial aid from their institution. The requirement to be from a low-income background helped to identify students whose backgrounds met both criteria to be low-income and identify as being a person of color. One of the advantages of this site was the requirement of a one-year commitment. Ultimately, the sample included students who had been involved with the service-learning program for anywhere from one to three years.

Due to the purposeful criterion sampling, it was a challenge to get a larger sample, although a qualitative research design such as this is not dependent on large sample sizes. Unlike quantitative studies, a smaller sample size is appropriate if it yields a depth of information to inform the specific phenomenon explored in the study (Creswell, 2014; Griffith, 2013). At the time of this study, only seven of the eleven participants of the Community Scholars Program who met the criteria agreed to make themselves available for the interviews required as part of the study. The other nineteen students in the Community Scholars Program either did not attend a residential, predominantly White institution, or did not want to take part in this study. While this was a small sample size, an advantage to the small sample size was that it allowed me to get to a level of depth of understanding of the specific experience of students of color at PWI's, who are serving in communities of color (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

For clarification, the following terms were used to identify the race and ethnicity of students in the study: Black/African American, Afro Caribbean, Latino or Latinx, White, Asian American, Chinese, and Vietnamese. In the case of a participant identifying strongly

with their country of origin, references to their national identity were used. For example, three of the participants identified (respectively) as Dominican, El Salvadorian, and Nigerian.

To maintain the confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms were applied to all the institutions attended by the participants in this study. The names of the individual programs, as well as the communities or volunteer sites were masked as well. In order to maintain the anonymity of the institution and the program, certain unique identifying features of the Community Scholars Program were changed.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through the following methods: a questionnaire completed by the participants; a series of interviews with each of the participants; and document analysis of student essays written as part of the Community Scholars Program. With the cooperation of the Director of the Community Scholars Program, participants who met the criteria received invitations to take part in the study. Prospective participants were provided with a consent form to make an informed decision about participating in the study and to allow access to the essays written for the Community Scholars Program.

Questionnaires and Interviews

Prior to the start of the interviews, data collection began with a short questionnaire asking for demographic information to establish background information. The short questionnaire asked about their parents' educational level, asked participants to identify their race, ethnicity, and gender, hometowns, perceived socioeconomic status, institutional affiliation and asked how far they were in their undergraduate career. Following the questionnaires, three semi-structured interviews took place between January and October 2018. The interviews were scheduled six to eight weeks apart. The cadence of the interviews

fit the availability of the participants, but also allowed for enough time between interviews for the students to build up experiences and reflections to share. In one case, nearly three months lapsed between interviews because of breaks in the academic calendar or employment commitments. The rationale for scheduling the interviews at these intervals was to allow for the researcher to learn from participants as their experience was occurring.

The interview process was based on Lilia Fernández's (2002) research project on Latino/Latina youth culture and schooling in Chicago. Fernández (2002) began her interviews with an overview of the purpose of her study and personal interest in the topic to provide a starting point for the conversation between her and the participant. She would begin by asking about their life in Chicago and experience in Chicago schools, building affinity with sharing her own upbringing in Chicago. Her interviews were deliberately unstructured, Fernandez followed up on significant questions or issues in subsequent meetings. Like Dr. Fernandez, the interviews began with questions about their background and life before university, followed by some open-ended questions about their experience on their respective campuses and as volunteers in their respective neighborhoods. The interview questions, used to form the counterstories, focused the lives of the participants before college, particularly any service-learning experiences, motivation to participate in service-learning programs, experiences on a predominantly White campus and at the volunteer site in a community of color, understanding of issues like equity and social justice, changes in understanding of themselves, their choice of classes and plans for college and any changes in those decisions during the course of their involvement in the Community Scholars Program

Dr. Fernandez (2002) noted that all stories or narratives are a product of the interaction between the teller and listener. In the case of this study, the interactions between

the participants and researcher were mediated by multiple shared interests and experiences. There was a shared interest in community service and desire to challenge the narrative of community service; in addition to my familiarity with their campuses and the programs and neighborhoods in which they served. Thus, the counter-narrative, which resulted was a product of the relationship and rhythms of conversation created during the interviews. The researcher's familiarity with service-learning from personal experiences as a student at a PWI, and professional experiences of working closely with students of color at PWIs for nearly twenty years created instances where non-verbal facial expressions or gestures used by the participants were interpreted and understood. These interpretations were verbally clarified, whenever possible, to accurately reflect their experience.

The same set of questions guided each interview, but each took a different path based on the individual experiences of the participant. The interviews were as unique as the participants. To a substantial extent, students' interest in the topic and their desire for their voices to be heard propelled the interviews. Each participant was interviewed three times. Each interview took anywhere from 45 to 75 minutes. Students were interviewed wherever they felt comfortable, including local cafes and the campus centers on their individual campuses. The interviews themselves were a form of reflection for the participants and required that the researcher, participate in a dialogue with the students. In other words, although the researcher and participant did explore their experience together through dialogue about their experiences with the researcher saying little or just asking question for clarification.

Document Analysis of Essays

The Community Scholars Program required participants to write reflection essays on their service experiences. The prompts for these papers that students responded to in these papers were straightforward, asking as participants to reflection the impact of their participation in the Community Scholars Program on their understanding of social justice and motivations. The essays for the programs focused on changes in their own understanding of social justice, and changes in their perceptions of their own role as agents of social change due to their community service experiences in the programs. These reflection papers were filled with anecdotes of interactions with youth, families and community leaders encountered during their service experiences. The essays contained information that was often the same as or like those shared during the interviews. These interactions often highlighted how the process of social change was a lot more complex than expected; or challenged their understanding of inequality or how the service experience deepened their commitment to social change.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted to understand, reflect, and present the counterstories produced by the students' experiences as part of marginalized groups and the methods of resistance and resilience used to navigate their PWI and community service experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The analysis for this study was conducted manually, without the use of any data analysis software, to reach a greater depth of understanding of the participants' experiences and to accurately reflect their voices as was requested by the participants. Manual analysis adhered to the principles of analysis found in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) that includes understanding drawn from repeated

interrogation of verbal and non-verbal communication captured over a period. The recordings of the interviews, the transcripts of the interviews, the field notes all contributed to identifying themes and forming the findings.

Analysis of a series of interviews produced an understanding of the evolution of the student's perspectives and the importance of people, places, and significant points that make the entire experience notable (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The counterstories that emerged focused on the influence of multiple identities of race, class, and ethnicity at their volunteer site and on campus on their beliefs, values, and actions and experience on a predominantly White campus.

Thematic Analysis and Coding

Thematic analysis and coding drew from principles of qualitative research, with an emphasis on the narrative traditions of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007), counterstorytelling (Fernandez, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) Inductive reasoning, along with the conceptual framework informed the thematic analysis and coding (Creswell, 2013). The data analyses were an intensive process, where collection and analysis, at times, occurred simultaneously (Creswell, 2014). Although the interviews were recorded and transcribed professionally, for example, during the interviews, notes were taken on tone of voice or body language and additional notes were written while replaying the recording, appeared as part of the final write up. For this reason, the process included frequent reviews of the recorded interviews, my handwritten notes and written transcripts.

According to Creswell (2014), the accuracy of qualitative data is produced through an iterative process of initial reading and sorting of raw data. In this case, text in the form of

transcripts, journals and field notes and repeating the process for cross-checking, and perhaps re-coding. Each transcript and interview recording were reviewed at least four times. To verify the accuracy of the transcript, it was proofed by comparing to the original recording of the interview. The transcripts were produced by a professional transcription service. In preparation for the second and third interview, the transcript of the previous interview was reviewed. Finally, each transcript was reviewed with the recorded interviews to identify the elements that presented a challenge to the dominant narrative in service-learning, answered the research questions and reflected the theories which comprised the conceptual framework. This data analysis was also applied to the essays each participant had written as part of their participation in the Community Scholars Program.

Through multiple reviews of the interview transcripts, field notes and original recordings for the stories, key moments and characters that lead a participant to an epiphany or understanding about themselves or the world created the analysis and coding for this study. Using the research questions as a benchmark, the interview transcripts were read and marked by hand to identify patterns, frequently-used words or phrases used in describing their experiences within the context of the conceptual framework. For example, when reviewing the interview transcripts, words or phrases that inferred critical race theory tenets of the permanence of racism, intersectionality, and/or inferences regarding physical or emotional positionality per critical border pedagogy or changes in self, behavior and values as indicated in transformational learning theory were coded directly on the transcripts.

A key challenge in the analysis was to make sure the data collected was sufficient to answer the research questions, but also, to make sure the voice of the participants was preserved in the counterstories. In the interviews, participants were asked why they agreed to

be in the study. All the students responded that they wanted faculty and administrators in higher education to know about their experiences and make changes for other low-income, students of color. For this reason, one goal was to make sure the findings reflected their voice and experience accurately.

The coding represented salient points and narratives which articulated how the participants navigated predominantly White spaces on campus while also negotiating the relationships and spaces in a community of color. To maintain accuracy, all the interviews and essays provided, as well as the field notes were reviewed with attention paid to changes in participants' motivation, values, beliefs, identity, and actions. Overall, the interviews were coded and analyzed for responsiveness to research questions, the conceptual framework, and identifying recurrent themes. A sample of the coding is included in Appendix C.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged the challenge of safeguarding the trustworthiness of qualitative studies, where much of the data is socially constructed and difficult to verify independently. Among the ways of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study were to provide enough details in the field notes about the decisions made regarding the study, reflect on the research process with peers and reflexively within journals, as well as member-checking. The field notes included my notes as the data was collected during interviews, the coding process, and thick descriptions of the participants, communities, and sites. As part of the member-checking process, individual "stories" or summaries of the analysis based on the interviews were created for each participant. To assure trustworthiness of the findings, these summaries of the analysis for each participant were developed and

shared with each student for approval. These individual analyses of each of their experiences led to the findings in Chapter 5.

As a qualitative study, the intention was not to be generalizable (Creswell, 2014). Like Shenton (2004), the preferred term is “transferability” to avoid the implication of causality or correlation. This study provides a perspective from the view of students of color who may occupy positions of both privilege and oppression and who share identities with both the college and community sites. The confirmation of transferability would be up to the individual scholar-practitioner. It is up to the reader to determine the authenticity of the narratives and similarity between these stories and their own campuses. The focus was on creating a robust inquiry process that provides a rich body of information to create a strong story with a high degree of authenticity or transferability (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the counterstory, the experiences and knowledge of the individual were taken as authentic with confirmation through sensitivity to the theoretical framework (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The trustworthiness and veracity of the data can be found in the process in which the interviews were collected. The reflections essays provided, which were a required component of the Community Scholars Program served as an additional way to test the trustworthiness of the analysis of the interviews. For the participants to feel that their stories would be appropriately represented and not distorted, minimized, or sensationalized, the participants in the study chose their own pseudonyms for themselves, and their institutions, each had opportunities to review my analysis which informed the findings.

Limitations

Any limitations to this study are due to the small size of the sample, limited number of interviews and being based at a particular type of institution with a specific population; traditionally aged undergraduates aged 18 to 24 enrolled at residential historically White institutions.

It should be noted that this research should not be used to compare experiences of students with different identities as this study was designed to highlight a particular phenomenon. For scholars and practitioners who want to compare the service-learning experiences across different personal identities of age, class, gender, race, ethnicity or any other personal identity, larger studies with a wider cross-section of participants would be necessary.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of my study. It begins with an introduction to the participants of this study to provide a context for their counterstories and their responses to their service-learning experiences. Following the profiles are the findings from the study which reflect patterns encountered as a result of the community service-learning experience. The participants reported common experiences of increased connection to others on campus, off campus; greater clarity on how they wanted to use their skills and talents towards social good, changes in choices about course of study, patterns of increased resiliency, sense of belonging and purpose and improved understanding of social change were all raised during the study.

Profile of Participants

Participants of this study included three men and four women between the ages of 18 and 24 and who were enrolled full-time at residential four-year, predominantly White institutions near a mid-sized city in the northeast. These participants were chosen for the study because they identified as students of color from low-income backgrounds but by coincidence all the students were also first-generation immigrants and first to attend college here in the United States. The parents of two participants, “Tuan” and “Jessica,” had attended post-secondary school in their native countries, Vietnam, and Nigeria, respectively.

At the time of the interviews, all the students were in their second, third, and fourth years of college. Most of the participants had spent three of their four college years as participants in the Community Scholars Program. Two participants, Jessica and Teresa, were the only exceptions. Jessica joined the Community Scholars Program in her freshman year but stopped in her junior year because her class schedule could not accommodate time for volunteer work. Teresa was in her last year at Brooks University but had been part of the Community Scholars Program since she transferred from another PWI to Brooks in her sophomore year. Table 1 describes the basic demographic background of the students, class year at the time of the study, name of institution, description of service activity, name of neighborhood served, gender identity and race/ethnicity.

Table 1*Description of Participants*

Name	Class Year	Institution	Service Activity/ Neighborhood Served	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Diego	Junior/ Senior	Leland College	Teen mentoring/ Fairmount and Parker Hill	Male	Latinx/ Colombian
Jessica	Sophomore/ Junior	Eliot College	Mentoring/Tutoring - Elementary age children/Fairmount	Female	Black/African American, Nigerian
Marvin	Senior	Lafayette College	Mentoring/ Tutoring— teens/Parker Hill	Male	Black/African American, Latinx/ Dominican
José	Senior	Leland College	Tutoring elementary school children/ Parker Hill	Male	Latinx/ Guatemalan
Teresa	Senior	Brooks University/ St. Mary's University	Tutoring elementary school children/Port Arthur, Parker Hill, & Fairmount	Female	Latinx/El Salvadorian
Tuan	Junior	Leland College	Teen mentoring/tutoring elementary school/ Fairmount	Male	Asian American, Vietnamese
Valerie	Senior	Eliot College	Tutoring elementary school children/ Chinatown	Female	Asian American, Chinese

Diego was a senior at Leland College, a large research university, who majored in Social Studies and a minor in Economics. He grew up in New Jersey, having emigrated there from Colombia at the age of six with asylum status. His parents have been steadily employed as housekeepers, home health care aides and assistants in kindergarten classrooms; he reports that they are more comfortable speaking Spanish than English. Before university, Diego

attended an elite boarding school in Massachusetts. According to Diego, boarding school prepared him academically and socially for life at a predominantly White institution and was where he first became aware of issues of equity and access.

Jessica was a junior at Eliot College, a small liberal arts college, where she majored in Economics with a minor in Spanish. At the age of ten, Jessica and her family emigrated from Nigeria to New Jersey where she attended local public schools. In Nigeria, her parents owned pharmacies, but in the United States, they put their health care backgrounds to work as low-paid home health care aides while raising six children. Life in the United States was a significant departure from their middle-class lives in Nigeria. In Nigeria, they owned a larger home for their family of eight, but in the United States lived, until recently, in a small two-bedroom apartment in New Jersey.

José was a senior at Leland College with a major in Comparative Literature. Originally from Guatemala, his family emigrated to Florida without visas, although José's legal status to be in the United States was stabilized by receiving DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status. His younger brother, who has cerebral palsy, received a medical waiver, which gives modest legal protections to his mother, a home health care aide. His parents are separated. His family lives in Maryland although his father is homeless while he and his brother live with his mother.

Marvin was a senior at Lafayette College, a small liberal arts college who majored in Secondary Education and History and a minor in Political Science. Born in the Dominican Republic, he grew up in the Parker Hill neighborhood, the same community in which he served as part of the Community Scholars Program. His four siblings, mother who is a homemaker and his father who is a handyman for a property management company still live

in Parker Hill. Marvin had attended public schools until he earned admittance with a scholarship to private boarding high school in rural Maine. Similar to Diego, boarding school prepared Marvin academically and socially for college and boarding school was where he first began to gain a deeper understanding of issues of access and equity. As a volunteer, Marvin served in the same afterschool program that he had attended as a child.

Teresa was a senior at Brooks University, with a major in Human Services. Originally from El Salvador, her mother works as a teacher's aide in the local public schools, and her father is unemployed. Brooks University was the second PWI she attended, having transferred after attending St. Mary's, a private Catholic university located in neighboring state. St. Mary's was a challenging environment due to its politically conservative environment and transferred after a year. It was at St. Mary's where community service became a key strategy to become more comfortable on campus and find a sense of community, even if it was off campus.

Tuan was a junior at Leland College with a major in Neuroscience and minor in Human Rights. Originally from Vietnam, at the age of ten, Tuan moved to a working-class city in California. The transition from his middle-class life in Vietnam, where everyone was just like him, to a large public high school in the Los Angeles area was difficult as he encountered racist bullying behavior from his classmates. In high school, he participated in a service-learning program, which introduced him to concepts of intersectionality and the history of race in America. Arriving at college, he was dismayed to see that many of his classmates, who were predominantly White and Asian, bought into the myth of the model minority (Museus & Kiang, 2009), confirming the general invisibility of Asian Americans

when addressing issues of equity of access. As a result, he sought opportunities to work with Asian American communities.

Valerie was a senior at Eliot College with a major in Physics and Studio Art. A self-described “free spirit”, Valerie grew up in Chinatown. Like Marvin, Valerie attended the same program as a child in which she volunteered with the Community Scholars Program. She was inspired to attend Eliot College because of an Eliot College student who had been her mentor as a child. Attending Eliot as a first-generation, low-income student while returning to Chinatown as a volunteer forced Valerie to reconsider her beliefs about a meritocracy, equity and understanding of what it meant to be educated.

Major Themes

The purpose of this study was to understand narratives, that are inclusive of how the educational and social experiences of students of color at predominantly White institutions, are shaped by community service-learning. In the dominant narrative, the learning takes place because the unfamiliar environment sparks disorientation, which challenges perspectives and leads to changes in worldview (Butin, 2005; Keen & Hall, 2009). In other words, the intent of this study was to challenge the dominant narrative with a counterstory, but each of the experiences of the seven participants yielded multiple counterstories. The counterstories produced through these interviews indicate that for students of color at PWIs, the familiarity of a community of color was the impetus for transformative learning, changing their values and beliefs about their own civic identity and influencing their college experience, and choices about courses of study and their life beyond college. The narratives which emerged from this study relied on the experiences of the participants who generously shared their own stories.

An analysis of the data collected for this study from the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews and reflection essays written as a requirement of the Community Scholars Program informed the findings from this study. The interviews focused on pre-college experiences, experiences as part of the Community Scholars Program, in the community, and the experience on their home campus. The reflection essays written for the Community Scholars Program discussed their responses to their community service experience as a volunteer; often echoed their responses to the questions in the interviews and confirmed their experiences as told during the interviews.

There were six major themes that emerged from the data: (1) leaving the “bubble” of campus or artificial environment that inhibited learning and personal growth; (2) counterspaces represented by off-campus communities that supported participants’ (3) increasing resiliency, deeper learning, and the development of a sense of belonging on their home campus; (4) changes in action, beliefs and values as a result of this experience; (5) further development of a civic identity; and (6) how “working across difference” looks and feels for students who identify as being of color and low-income.

For the participants in this study, being a volunteer in communities of color, as part of a program with other volunteers of color was a transformative opportunity. These findings were notable because of a common thread, that the communities and the Community Scholars Program became psychologically safe counterspaces like student affinity groups, fraternities/sororities, multi-cultural centers, and ethnic studies classes (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Nuñez, 2011). As counterspaces, community service-learning facilitated a sense of belonging on campus and a deeper learning opportunity. For the students in this study, spending considerable time in an off-campus community of color provided a mental break

from being a visible other on the predominantly White campus and the reflection spaces within the Community Scholars Program became one of the few opportunities where their learning was centered. This was a stark contrast to the experience of being in classes or reflection spaces that included wealthier White students. In the Community Scholars Program, students of color in this study found they were able to deepen their own understanding of power and privilege. In other settings where social justice was discussed, much of their own energy would go to addressing misperceptions or managing any microaggressions of students who did not identify as low-income or part of a non-White racial or ethnic group. The combined effect resulted in a reassessment of academic and professional priorities.

The Bubble

As the interviews were analyzed, a set of patterns revealed how and why the community service-learning program became an opportunity for personal and intellectual development. The off-campus communities became a haven for reflection or a counterspace, on their intersecting identities, individual experiences resulting in increased understanding and confidence in navigating their college campuses personally and academically. Counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008) are spaces that affirm and validate marginalized identities and build resiliency against deficit-oriented narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 257). In particular, the word “bubble” was used in different ways. The phrase, “leaving the bubble” was used to describe what it meant to leave the rhythms of class and dorm life to go into communities of color. The phrase described both their frustration with being on campus and a recognition of the cocoon provided by campus life. Specifically, while on campus, students of color who were also

low-income and first-generation college students, led remarkably similar lives to their wealthier classmates. The predictability, shared experience and preoccupation with classes and residential life could be a comfort in its predictability, as well as a frustration since it also highlighted key differences between financially wealthy students and students from lower incomes. Participating in a community service-learning program like the Community Scholars Program provided a space out of the confines of campus for their own intellectual transformation. The word “bubble” was also used to describe the lack of awareness about issues of equity held by their wealthier classmates.

The term, “bubble” itself was used by Diego, Jessica, José, Teresa, and Valerie. For all five, the term and concept of a “bubble” was used to describe the on-campus experience shared with their wealthier classmates, which masked the differences in which the participants in this study experienced bias and privilege. The term, “bubble” was also used by Teresa and Diego to refer to the world of their wealthier classmates who were unaware of social justice issues. At times, the “bubble” could be a respite from directly confronting social problems because of how life on campus masked differences between them and their classmates.

I think that we're oftentimes stuck in these bubbles, that we think that our problems are the biggest, when there's people who are dealing with homelessness, people who are dealing with tough family situations or ... exploitation of some sort.

In the quote above, Diego refers to his primary concerns and those of his classmates that revolved around themselves, classes, grades, and internships as opposed to people in the communities in which he had grown up or the world off-campus where poverty and

opportunity was limited. Diego also spoke, at length, about his experience at a private boarding school, where he first felt the strain of living in a “bubble”:

In boarding school, I hated being stuck in that bubble. I hated being in a really rich, white town and not seeing anyone, actually, like me. To get out of the bubble, I volunteered for a tutoring program for high school students in a neighboring city with a big Latinx population that was low-income. I really enjoyed that experience. I didn't want to always be in that bubble.

When I got to college, I already had the intention of getting out of the bubble, simply because I was tired of it. Leland was similar to my boarding school, and I think it's great that I can be at an elite place, but for me, that didn't reflect real life or the life for other people. One of the first things I did, as a freshman, was get a job off-campus as a receptionist for a local non-profit that worked with families involved with DCF [Department of Children & Families].

Part of why I was happy to get a job at the non-profit, was that I was just tired of being around so much wealth. It was like people were blind to a lot of issues, and I felt that by being with people or by helping other people who just actually needed the help, it would remind me of the real issues that are happening in this world.

For Diego, it was a comfort to escape campus to a world where others experienced the world as he had, life on a limited income and resources. When he entered college, he was already familiar with life in a predominantly White and privileged residential setting which prompted him to seek opportunities to be in a community of color.

Valerie, like Diego, used the word, “bubble” to describe the unrealistic environment of college. In her words,

When I first went back and forth [between Elliot College and her community service site], I was just very busy trying to learn everything. I think now, I think I've reached a mindset where I'm just like, my service is more about real life than Elliot is. Cause Elliot is not real. You're in this fake academic bubble where everyone kind of pretends to be knowledgeable about things. It doesn't reflect how real life works in a lot of ways.

For Valerie, moving between home in Chinatown and the Eliot campus highlighted how both places presented alternate realities or bubbles. On her campus, there was a veneer of intellectualism but also tangible policies and practices to address gender equity, including issues like transgender rights that were otherwise a challenge in the real world.

There are very good things about life at Elliot that aren't true in real life, like gender equality. As a women's college, Eliot has far more gender quality. Transgender equality is a problem on campus, but not like off campus, in the real world. When I go into the real world you realize how gendered the world is. That was something I'd realized going back to Chinatown. Until I returned to the neighborhood, as a college student, I didn't realize that part of this Asian culture was a hyper-gendered space.

Valerie was already familiar with Eliot College through a mentor and tutor she had as a participant in the afterschool program for which she now volunteered. This mentor was an Asian American student at Eliot who was quirky, fun, and smart and unlike other Asian adults she knew. Valerie anticipated that the campus may be uncomfortable because it was predominantly White, but the disturbing socio-economic disparities came as a surprise. As it turned out, Eliot College was host to a large Asian American, albeit wealthy student population. Valerie never considered herself "low-income" or "poor" until she went to

college or as she described it, “I’ve always described poverty as the shittiest surprise party that’s ever happened. It’s the worst surprise party. Just because you don’t really realize you’re poor until you leave.” When her classmates discovered her family lived nearby, they asked if she loved going home. Her response was, “No, I get reminded how little I have when I go home. At least here, we are all stuck in the same housing and eat the same food”.

As the daughter of Chinese immigrants, Valerie grew up in dense and low-income Chinatown in the city and then moved to an affordable housing development in nearby neighborhood. Prior to Eliot, she lived in a different kind of “bubble” in that she had always been surrounded by people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds who were all the same income level as her own family. While many of her classmates at Eliot, were Asian American, like herself, they tended to be much wealthier. Consequently, she found herself turning to activist spaces for first-generation low-income students and her volunteer work in Chinatown to make herself feel comfortable at college. It was through the friendships with other college students interested in the same issues as she cared about and through relationships formed through the Community Scholars Program that helped her navigate intellectually and socially at Eliot College.

For José, the term “bubble” was used to describe how different his life was on campus, compared to the life he experienced when he was not on campus. Describing himself as, “DACAmended” and having experienced both housing and food insecurity, noted that, at college, for the first time in his life, he did not worry about access to food, and he had his own room. This contrasted with the ongoing status of his parents; his father, who experienced chronic homelessness and his mother who remained undocumented and whose housing was still uncertain due to her low-income. Another key difference in José’s life was that he was

able to get legal assistance for his undocumented status from the college, whereas his undocumented parents had no access to legal services. He understood that college provided a temporary harbor, or bubble from the realities his family continued to deal with. For José, the narrative of the bubble was not frustrating but protective.

Teresa, who was currently a student at Brooks University after having transferred from St. Mary's University, both PWIs, used the term "bubble" differently than Diego and Valerie. Unlike the other participants, Teresa did not think she was in a bubble while on campus, but rather her classmates at her first college, St Mary's University, lived in a bubble. While at St. Mary's, Teresa served in an after-school program for a nearby low-income community. Teresa's classmates tended to be from wealthy communities, and often perplexed or surprised by the circumstances of the lives of the children in the tutoring program. Often her classmates would make assumptions of the families, and Teresa would correct them.

I kind of liked clarifying with them, like, "These parents aren't bad parents. You don't know the situations." It was interesting to hear because I think they had this bubble experience at home.

Teresa realized that her classmates at St. Mary's had little understanding of the stresses of being low-income and were highly critical about the parents of the children in the afterschool program. Her classmates seem to lack understanding of why the parents could not help their children with homework or why a child in the program didn't have space to study at home. Her classmates all came from homes where there was always someone to help them with their homework and they always had their own room.

The use and imagery of the term “bubble” illustrated how issues of equity and social justice could be obscured for the students in this study because while on campus, their lives were very similar to the lives of their wealthier, White classmates. All the participants found frustration in how the environment of the campus, while comforting at times, minimized their own struggles with race and class and left them feeling uneasy. Like Valerie’s observations about the surreal perceived equality of life on campus, Diego and Tuan also noted that life on campus was just an illusion of equality shattered when engaged in discussions about race, poverty, and injustice or when experiencing the subtle microaggressions that were a part of life on their residential campus. The feeling of unease was an impetus for these students to find spaces to counter the feelings of discomfort found on campus. For the participants in this study, these counterspaces were found through the Community Scholars Program, which provided an opportunity to go off campus to communities of color. The program also hosted reflection sessions that provided an opportunity to meet others who shared their individual experiences and to engage in dialogue that helped to cultivate a deeper understanding of equity and social justice.

Counterspaces in the Community and the Community Scholars Program

The Community Scholars Program offered structured reflection sessions with all the participants and offered an opportunity to be off campus for up to 10 hours a week in a community of color providing direct services. For the students in this study, leaving campus to go serve in these communities of color and the reflection opportunities with other college students, who shared their multiple identities, provided the opportunity to gain resiliency. To be specific about how the community and reflection sessions were counterspaces, White students on a predominantly White campus may not feel the sense of being an “other” on

campus but may in a community of color. In the dominant narrative of service-learning, it is this unfamiliar experience of being an “other” which provokes learning. For students of color, the campus is where they feel hyper-visible or othered. For the students that participated in this service-learning program, the combination of the reflection opportunities and the direct service off-campus supported transformational learning about themselves and the world.

The participants in this study were first-generation college students and immigrants and low-income; all of whom found themselves with a vague sense of unease when they arrived on their respective campuses. This was due to ways oppression accompanied their multiple identities as low-income, first-generation students of color intersected with each other. The unease was a product of the understanding that not only were they a visible minority on a predominantly White campus but also how their families were of much lower income status than the families of their classmates. As a counterspace, the communities in which the students volunteered served as alternate universes to their life on campus, where all the people around them looked more like them and lived the same financial realities. Similarly, the reflection sessions required by the program, provided a space for these students to explore their understanding with other students who were also low-income or of color.

While the participants in the Community Scholars Program were diverse, inclusive of all races, ethnicities and genders, all had one thing in common: they were all low-income. By design, only students from a low-income background were eligible for the Community Scholars Program. Thus, they were able to have discussions about power and privilege from a common viewpoint and go deeper into discussion about structural inequality. For the

students in this study, both the communities of color in which they served, and the Community Scholars program were sources of resilience and support.

Increasing Resiliency

Three of the participants, Jessica, José, and Marvin, described the tensions felt on campus and how the communities in which they volunteered were restorative spaces that made them intellectually and emotionally resilient. All described how the communities of color provided an opportunity to drop their guard and be themselves. For example, both Jessica and Marvin described the sense of relief felt when leaving campus to head to their service sites. Jessica, who grew up with her Nigerian family in a diverse small city in New Jersey, volunteered for a program in the Fairmount neighborhood, a neighborhood that was home to a large immigrant community, as well as African American and Latinx communities. Marvin returned to his own neighborhood, Parker Hill, a historically Black and Latinx neighborhood known for the presence of two large public housing developments to volunteer for an afterschool and mentoring program. Marvin left at the age of sixteen to attend a private boarding school on scholarship in rural Maine while his parents and younger siblings continued to live in Parker Hill. During the interviews, Marvin explained:

It makes me happy going into the city. Here on campus, you feel restricted in many ways. I don't have any problems with anyone specific, but I feel, periodically, my skin and my color, make people uncomfortable. I definitely avoid certain events and try to make people feel comfortable. I feel much freer when I'm in city. I feel like I can be more myself without any judgment, and I like to go back to a place, where I'm happy to see people and people are happy to see me.

For Marvin, leaving his suburban campus to the urban neighborhood in which he grew up was comforting because he could blend in and go unnoticed. During our interviews, Marvin made note of his size, he was, in his own words, “a big Black guy.” He shared stories of students in his dorm who had confederate flags and posters supporting Trump and students who drove expensive cars but said their families were just middle class. Going to back to Parker Hill was a respite. Similarly, Jessica, whose school was also in a predominantly White suburb, also described a similar sense of relief when traveling off campus to Fairmount, an urban community known for the large immigrant population.

Jessica emigrated to the United States at the age of ten, from Nigeria. In Nigeria, her parents owned pharmacies and led a middle-class existence but here in the United States, their healthcare backgrounds put to work as low-paid home health care aides while raising six children. Until recently, all eight members of the family lived in a small two-bedroom apartment in Plainfield, New Jersey. When she was accepted to Eliot College, she was pleased to be going off to a leafy residential campus, where even the “air was different”. While she did like being on campus, it was not without its challenges. When asked what it was like to leave campus to go her volunteer site, Jessica responded,

I feel more relaxed leaving Eliot to go to Fairmount for the mentoring program. It is a relief, usually at Eliot when I'm just walking around, I don't see a lot of people of color or Black people, and I'm just ... it's not a strong feeling of discomfort but I can feel the difference in when I'm walking in a more diverse city with people who look like me versus coming back to Eliot, feeling like I have to be this rigid person and be more conscious of what I am saying and how I am saying it

As an example of the difference between the suburb where Eliot was located, and Fairmount, Jessica described how conspicuous she felt when walking into the center of the town in which her college was located. To get from Eliot to the center of town, one exits the campus via the driveway from main gate, crosses a local road, and then walks onto a largely empty sidewalk to walk to town. Jessica sought a café to do some reading, but on the walk to the café and in the café itself, she felt glances her way. It was enough to deter her from going into town for a study space. Instead, she uses the on-campus spaces for studying. Another reason for appreciating her time in Fairmount, was how her identities as Black, Nigerian and immigrant were recognized away from the suburb in which her campus was located.

On campus, one of the challenges for Jessica, was being recognized as Nigerian, immigrant and Black/African American. Students who did not know Jessica would identify her as Black/African American without acknowledging her identification as an immigrant and a Nigerian. It should be noted that her real name is not as American sounding as Jessica, a pseudonym she picked for herself to be used in this study. According to Jessica, to others, physically and visually, she looked just like other Black students. During the interviews, Jessica alternated between saying she was Black or Nigerian, never in a hyphenated fashion. When Jessica was asked how she responded to questions asking for demographics, her response was, “Black/African American.” She nodded in affirmation when asked, “but you identify as Nigerian?” This identification as an immigrant American was what led her to choose a mentoring program that served other immigrant children. Being able to share her identity as an immigrant was far easier in Fairmount, where she could identify as both Black and Nigerian as that neighborhood was filled with people who held identities of race, ethnicity and nationality.

When asked why she selected the mentoring program in Fairmount, and the summer camp at which she volunteered over the summer; Jessica was quick to say, “they serve immigrants and I know about being an immigrant.” Jessica was the one participant to choose her volunteer site because the program served an immigrant population of color and she identified as an immigrant of color. Jessica was comfortable amongst a population that came from a different country and was trying to navigate to a new way of life, as she had done. She saw herself in the younger children who, like her, had to get used to a new childhood in a new language and culture and the multi-ethnic neighborhood where the program was located put her at ease as a Nigerian-born woman in America.

José was another student who spoke of how the community in which he volunteered was a source of comfort. Although, for José, his undocumented status and family’s precarious housing situation created a different kind of tension for him. All the students in this study were immigrants, and from low-income families. However, all the other students had families with legal status and steady, if low-paid, employment that secured basic needs of food and shelter. This was not the case for José, for whom the shadow of being undocumented and living in poverty, was a constant presence in his life. By his own admission, José’s grades and mental health suffered during his first semester at Leland because life at college was an alternate reality where unlike his family, he had stable housing and access to food. At the urging of classmates, he agreed to be a volunteer for an afterschool program serving children from public housing developments in the Parker Hill neighborhood. He instantly identified with the children and families in the program. Many of them were Latinx immigrants (his family was originally from Guatemala) and their families were low-

income. His fluency in Spanish, as well as his intimate understanding of the challenges in their lives. For José, leaving the campus was a return to the familiar.

During our interviews, José was asked what it was like being in Parker Hill, as a college student volunteer. He reported being mistaken for a dealer or approached as a buyer of drugs by strangers due to his unrestrained soft Afro-like hairstyle of curls, sneakers, baggy jeans, and t-shirt wardrobe and use of language and vernacular spoken by the youth. The racism that led strangers in Parker Hill to question whether he was really a student at Leland bothered him, but he appreciated the fact that the families of the youth in his program who knew him well understood how José could be both a smart college student at a selective institution and be part of their community. Nevertheless, Parker Hill allowed him to be more himself than on campus. He sees his goal as showing the whole “authentic José”; the young man who is simultaneously an undocumented person whose family is low-income and chronically homeless yet also a student at an elite institution. José noted that the children always remembered his name even with the constant rotation of volunteers that go through the afterschool program. It brings him a measure of reconciliation, with all the dichotomies present in his life, that these children identify with him.

I feel rejuvenated when I go to Parker Hill. I feel like my strength is back. I feel like I can take the knowledge or motivation that I once had to keep doing well in school, or to focus up, but also to be confident in the decisions that I make. And that could mean instead of spending ten hours on an assignment, maybe spend only five, because I feel like I have other things to do. Maybe take care of myself emotionally or hang out with my friends, and stuff like that, you know?

When I asked whether the community service kept him engaged in classes and motivated, his response was an enthusiastic, “absolutely.” The service site had become a counterspace, giving him the resilience to persist. While the communities themselves served as counterspaces, the Community Scholars Program itself also became a haven for learning.

Deeper Learning Opportunity

Teresa, Marvin, and José all noted that discussions about race and equity, when conducted in mixed groups with students who are not low-income or of color, usually meant the learning was focused on the wealthier and Whiter students. The reflection sessions formed a counterspace in that the students felt the freedom to talk at length about their intersectional experiences as students who embraced multiple identities of race, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality and citizenship and their experiences of privilege and bias. It was a space to speak with no filter with others who were having a similar experience. Teresa, at one point, referred to the “toxic facilitation” in discussions with racially and socio-economically mixed classes or reflection sessions at St. Mary’s. For Teresa, transferring to Brooks University, a school with a mission statement that included social justice, faculty who were prepared to discuss racism and access to the reflection sessions and workshops through the Community Scholars Program created an environment that centered her own learning. Community service was no longer an escape from a toxic environment but an opportunity for her own growth. Both Marvin and José were direct in expressing how they “hated” discussing equity and racism in classes or reflection session with students who were not low-income or students of color.

The program for which José was a volunteer held reflection sessions for all of its volunteers, not just the ones from the Community Scholars Program. When I asked him to

describe what those reflections sessions were like, he dropped his head, and said, “They are awful. The volunteers say the dumbest things. I hate them”. But the reflection sessions in which he shared his thoughts and heard from other students of color in the Community Scholars Program were meaningful and useful for his own personal development. Marvin went so far to say, he just avoided classes or any discussions that addressed equity with students who were not of color or low-income on his predominantly White campus, the conversations would be just too frustrating. Similar to the participants in older studies (Green 2001/2006; Mitchell & Donahue, 2008), students of color in this study found it to be a relief not to have to address the misconceptions of White or wealthier classmates and focus on their own experiences.

Echoing the feelings of participants in other studies (Coles, 1999; Boyle Blaise & Langford, 2004; Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Green, 2001, 2003; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Shadduck-Hernandez, 2005), service-learning reflection sessions were more useful to them when conducted solely with other students who had similar life experiences, specifically other students from low-income backgrounds. In these sessions, the focus was on their own learning and growth, not supporting a White or wealthier classmate exploring these concepts for the first time. Overall, the reflection sessions with other students of color, helped the participants to understand their experiences and interactions with the on-campus community and the community site.

Sense of Belonging

In this study, students were noticeably clear in reporting that their community service experience was a saving grace for their college experience. It was through service and community engagement that the students were able to make a healthy transition to and

through college. Community service and service-learning has already been identified as a high impact tool of engagement (Kuh et al., 2010) for promoting active and collaborative learning, and for inculcating a sense of social responsibility in students. However, its role in helping low-income first-generation students to persist and thrive in college should not be overlooked. In this study, Tuan, Teresa, and Valerie shared how participation in community service-learning helped to create a sense of belonging at institutions in which they felt uncomfortable.

This lack of comfort was in part due to the “whiteness” of the institutions. Gusa (2010) use the term “White institutional presence” (p. 466) to name the uncomfortable racial climates reported by African American students on PWIs. This concept was useful in naming the experiences reported by students of color in this study; each made subtle allusions to feeling out of place for both socio-economic and racial and ethnic reasons. One example of this is the shock Teresa expressed when she found out that nearly half the population of her school, Brooks University identified as students of color. With her eyes wide, she asked me, rhetorically, “where are all these people?! They are not in my classes.” This concept of “whiteness” was not a focus of this study, but it was noted that the enrollment data submitted by the schools to the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), at the time this study was conducted in 2018, indicated that the numbers of students of color at these schools ranged from 26% to 46%. Some literature (Jack, 2016, 2019) has indicated that official data through IPEDS is inclusive of both students of color from both families of higher and lower income. Although campus racial climate was not a focus of this study, it could be surmised that the persistence of whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2017) and larger number of students of color from wealthier backgrounds was such that even when there was diversity

on campus, it was not experienced by the participants. That sense of isolation led the students in this study to find ways to cope.

When asked about the motivation to participate in this study, all the participants expressed a desire for the world to understand the strain of being a student of color and from a low-income background at a predominantly White and middle-class institution. Their responses were distressing given that there are reams of research on this topic and there were more students of color at these institutions than ever before. Yet the campus climate was still unnerving to the participants of this study, all of whom identified as of color. Teresa, for example, did not even realize nearly half her school identified as color. While never directly articulating this issue of “whiteness,” Teresa, Tuan, and Valerie spoke about their initial feelings of isolation, which were ameliorated by engaging in community service in a community of color.

For Tuan, a student at Leland College, serving in a Vietnamese enclave of Fairmount supported his transition to college and changed his initial feelings of isolation to a sense of belonging on campus. Tuan had emigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of ten. Until Leland, he lived in a working-class community that was predominantly Latinx and African American and attended a public school which had a magnet program that was enrolled by a majority of White middle-class students from a neighboring wealthier community and other Asian Americans. Before college, his daily interactions were with a cross-section of people from different races and ethnicities. The lack of diversity was an unexpected disappointment. In his opinion, a lot of White and Asian-American students with a sprinkling of Latinx and African American students did not increase his exposure to diversity, unlike his high school experience.

During orientation, the other students were impressed at the diversity here [at Leland]. They would be, like, "Wow, Leland is so much more diverse. I've never seen this many Asians before in my life". And I'm like, uh, my high school was far more diverse with more of a mix of students of color. This place is ten times Whiter for me than where I was before.

As Tuan shared his feelings about his introduction to the campus, his eyes would roll at the memory of his classmates being so impressed that there were so many Asians and claiming a sense of honor that the school was not all White.

It really put me off, even though I've interacted with White peers before too; from pretty similar privileged backgrounds where they go to SAT classes or have outside tutors. It wasn't that different for me, but this claim about the diversity of the school was just, like, a constant reminder that although I was accepted to the school, I was an outsider.

When I asked about his parents and their response to his new surroundings, Tuan reported that his parents were pleased by the lack of diversity for the status it conferred. In their eyes, his parents associated the Whiteness of the campus with power. Due to Tuans's status as a student at a private residential institution like Leland College, that power was now accessible to their son. He explained:

They didn't really see it that much as being White, but more like a place that would give me a higher social status. They would look through the dorm list of alumni who lived in the dorms, and I think one of them was a past president or something, someone important. And they were very impressed by this because I was now in the same physical space as that famous person. My parents didn't recognize the

Whiteness of the campus, but the power that they thought I now would have access too. And they were pleased with that.

For Tuan, the sudden acquisition of privilege because of a proximity to students, both White, and students of color, were wealthy, was unnerving. Having graduated from a magnet public high school program for gifted students, Tuan knew the rules and conventions of behavior in higher education regarding reaching out to professors and teaching assistants and jockeying for access to internships and other opportunities. His parents had also attended university in Vietnam, so there was some familiarity with higher education. His discomfort with the wealth on campus led him to resist this new life at Leland.

When I saw kids coming up after class, asking questions of the professor, and I thought “oh, you're in it, not for really wanting to know the professor but because you have some ulterior motive”. So, I only made an effort to behave that way if I had a strong connection with the professor.

Tuan readily admitted his reluctance to observe these norms was because he was disturbed by the lack of diversity in terms of classmates from different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic class.

Feeling isolated and needing to make money, as a first-year student, Tuan took a job as a receptionist at Leland's Community Service Center, where he learned about the Community Scholars Program. In his second year, he joined the Community Scholars Program, which would allow him to work while volunteering weekly at a mentoring program based at the Vietnamese Community Center in Little Saigon, a Vietnamese enclave in Fairmount. Participating in the Community Scholars Program helped him make a diverse group of friends and become more active in Asian American Pacific Islander groups that

support affirmative action. At the time of the interviews for this study, Tuan had been serving in Little Saigon during his sophomore and junior year, including the summer breaks. When asked in which community he feels more at home; Leland or Little Saigon, Tuan laughed uneasily and says that it is not a fair question. For him, at this moment, both are places he considered home.

From the interviews, it was clear that his involvement in community service helped him create a sense of belonging on campus. Community service introduced him to other Leland students who shared his ambivalence about the privilege that surrounded them on campus and were also interested in issues of social justice. In short, community service off-campus helped him to find community on campus and helped with transition and persistence at college. Similar to the other students in this study, he had found that volunteering in a community of color provided a vital counterspace to support an intersectional understanding of himself.

Teresa, having grown up in a small city proud of its politically liberal policies and its diversity, moving to St. Mary's, a Catholic university located in a small city in Connecticut, was a shock. It was a shock which never faded and resulted in her transferring to Brooks University, where at the time of these interviews, she was a senior.

I remember move-in day [at St. Mary's]. I was like, "Holy shit." All these nice BMWs, Mercedes, and like coming in with their U-Haul trucks and decking their rooms out with couches and all this stuff - I was just amazed by the wealth. I think there is that wealth back home, but it is more subtle. At St. Mary's, I learned a lot about what it means to have a daddy's credit card with you at all moments. You don't

have to worry about money. That's not something the students there were worried about.”

During her pre-matriculation visit, the college seemed like a pleasant place to attend school, and her parents, practicing Catholics, were immensely proud that she would be attending a Catholic institution. Teresa dove into classes and tried to cultivate a sense of belonging on campus. However, the reality of life on campus was quite different; Teresa was uncomfortable in and out of classes. In one class, the other students would spout stereotypes of men of color and make racist remarks that would go unchallenged by the professor. When Teresa spoke up, the professor reprimanded *her* for being disrespectful. To cope, Teresa found a federal work-study position as a student volunteer director of a program called, Academic Mentoring Program, (AMP) at a charter school in a neighboring city. College students were paired with a middle school student who needed extra emotional support. The children she worked with were from similar backgrounds to herself; she found herself spending up to six hours a week off-campus at the program.

It felt more like home than this school that I was at. It was really nice to hang out with a girl that kind of reminded me of myself when I was in middle school and surrounding myself with kids who I felt like were like me when I was growing up. Community engagement provided a counterspace and a sense of place and belonging in what was otherwise a hostile environment for her. Teresa volunteered at the program three times a week; the walk to the school always gave her a sense of relief. And the walk back helped her to change her perspective on St. Mary's. It was an opportunity to talk with classmates, and unlike in class where she often was put in the position of educating her peers and representing all poor people of color; this was different. She described:

I really liked the people I worked with [referring to other volunteers from St. Mary's]. I think they had really good intentions whether it came across that way or not. In my classes at St. Mary's, it felt like people were defensive when I talked about equity and not open toward me, whereas the people I worked with were really interested and open and just wholeheartedly wanted to learn about these issues, which I appreciated.

Despite the service-learning experience at St. Mary's, she was still miserable. In her sophomore year, she transferred to Brooks University, an institution located back in her hometown, closer to family but also a school that had a focus on social change. Brooks was also predominantly White, but it was an institution that had a stated mission to produce graduates who would promote social justice and address racial disparities. This university felt like a better fit for her; in terms of her desire to be in an environment that encouraged exploration into difficult conversations about race, equity, and social change. It also felt like a very emotionally safe space, compared to St. Mary's. At Brooks, both professors and students were far more open to having their views challenged. Though Brooks University was a more supportive space, Teresa was still occasionally put in the position of speaking up in class to say, "hey guys, you should think about the fact ..." to explain how life could be different for a child of color or to function as a bridge between her classmates of color. However, this institution, compared to St. Mary's, appreciated her contributions and perspective.

Even though she was much happier at her new school, the communities of color in which she volunteered were still a source of comfort because she identified with them.

I had a kid who got picked up late every day, and I kind of had this agreement with his mom because I knew she was coming from work. Technically, we weren't

supposed to be there late but, she would get there, and then we would talk for an hour. I realized that her story is very similar to my mom's, where she works two jobs. She would pay for her son to get dropped off in the morning by a school bus of this Dominican woman in her community. She [the Dominican woman] would drop off seven different kids. It was really cool because I was like, I totally know that because that was my mom who used to do that. My mom would drive around a bunch of kids in my neighborhood to go to school or after school, because she was a teacher at the school.

The similarity between the lives of her own parents to these families created a strong attachment to the program and the community served. The kinship she felt grounded her as she pursued her education. Her identification with the families motivated her to persist in school and informed her school experience.

Service in Chinatown grounded Valerie too and created a way for her to find her own place of belonging at Eliot. Valerie noted the initial challenges and the gradual feeling of belonging in both spaces.

I think initially it was challenging because I was trying to fit in everywhere. I think I'd been detached and then I returned as a college student, which seems like a place of privilege. I had to get used to that. I also had to get used to Eliot. Right now my biggest challenge transitioning is trying to, I guess, I don't know. I feel like both of those places have become my home. I don't feel like the transition is awkward or difficult as before. I definitely bring things from Chinatown, either physically or memories, to Eliot than I would. I've learned a lot of things and told people a lot of things about Chinatown that I would not have before.

As Valerie noted earlier, prior to attending college, she did not recognize herself as poor. At Eliot, the wealth disparities between her and her classmates were obvious yet when she returned to Chinatown, it was with the privilege of being a student Eliot. Valerie noted that when she returned to Chinatown, it was from a place of privilege. She realized that her family and parents of the children she tutored were impressed with her admission to Eliot. In other words, for others her social capital increased because she was a student at Eliot; a feeling she did not really feel but understood why others felt that way. As she indicates, Valerie recognized that now when she returned to Chinatown, it was with the status of a child who grew up in a housing development and now lived on the campus of a well-known college. But on campus, the socioeconomic differences between her and the other students were still apparent to her. This was a dichotomy which took getting used to, but eventually Valerie came to recognize it was possible to be part of two quite different communities and understand the influence of one on the other. Valerie noted that this reconciliation process had made her more confident about her opinions and views and is now more willing to speak out on issues of equity and justice.

In this study, students clearly reported that their community service experience was pivotal for their college experience. It was through service and community engagement that the students were able to make a healthy transition to and through college. Service-learning has already been identified as a high impact tool of engagement (Kuh et al., 2010) for promoting active and collaborative learning, and for inculcating a sense of social responsibility in students but its role in supporting students of color to persist and thrive in predominantly White environments should not be overlooked.

Transformational Learning: Changes in Beliefs, Values, and Actions

Mezirow's (1991, 2006) transformational learning theory's three dimensions of learning: understanding of self, beliefs and values and life choices influenced research questions about how the service-learning experience affected choices about course of study, understanding of social change and personal choices about contributing to social change. Transformational learning occurs when an experience results in shifts in understanding about the self; changes in beliefs and values result in changes in actions taken by an individual. During the interviews, the participants were asked about their motivations for entering college. For the most part, the answer was simple: to get good paying jobs after graduation. When asked about the motivation to engage in community service; the answer, in part, sprang from a charitable impulse and to "leave the bubble" as described earlier. After entering the Community Scholars Program, all the participants found themselves choosing classes that focused on racism, equity, and access from across the disciplines, from humanities to the sciences and at least three changed their intended majors or minors and their professional ambitions. Seeking out the classes which focused on getting them into high-paying jobs became less of a focus. The motivation to serve changed as well, from a charitable impulse to put their skills and knowledge to help communities like theirs, immigrant, low-income, communities of color. Just as the off-campus communities of color became a counterspace build personal resiliency, the community service experience changed participants perspective on social change and purpose of their college education.

Based on the interviews, participation in community service-learning results in transformational learning for José, Tuan, and Valerie. For all three, these experiences resulted in changes in self-perception, understanding the purpose of their college education

and choices made about courses of study and post-college choices. For Diego, Teresa, and Jessica choices about courses of study or plans for the future did not change significantly; even though all of the participants gained more awareness of how to use their educations to contribute to social change, as is explained in the next section *Developing a Civic Identity*.

José, whose family was undocumented and very low-income, entered college with the intention of majoring in math and physics because, as he explained to me, people who major in science, technology or math usually make a lot of money. But his experience in going between Parker Hill, the neighborhood where he mentored youth and taught in a summer program changed his mind.

But then service came, and then I switched because I realized that when I lived in the poor community, all I wanted to do was have my voice heard. All I wanted to do was speak for the experiences and for my peers that were suffering like I was, but they chose a different path than I chose. Looking around and seeing places that resemble some of the places that I've lived in, not all of them. It reminded me of the things that I've always wanted to accomplish before getting spoiled.

When he said he did not want to “get spoiled”; José was referring to the privileges and access to resources as a college student and future college graduate. Instead of being consumed with his own success, he wanted to find a way to amplify the voices of his family and people like him. Throughout the interviews, José spoke of how he felt the only reason he was in college because he was lucky enough to have parents and teachers to direct him to high-quality magnet schools and afterschool programs. From his perspective, José was fortunate enough to get opportunities that kept him safe and warm, when many of the boys he knew growing up, who were no less intelligent in his opinion, were incarcerated and marginalized. This

perspective was a factor in deciding to focus his academic choices on elevating marginalized voices.

José found that a major in comparative literature allowed him to explore narratives and voices of the marginalized and oppressed.

One of the first classes I took was *Disability Narratives in Literature*; my little brother's handicapped, you know? Yeah, my little brother has Cerebral Palsy, so I was able to reflect to understand his experience, but I also shared the literature with him. I was able to take what I'm learning in school, reflect myself, and then give it to my little brother, you know? Then I took a class called *Stories at the Border* which dealt with different borders around the world: Israel, Palestine, Mexico, United States and Pakistan and India. And then I'm currently taking a class called *Native Intelligence*, where we just had a unit on Latin America where the literature focuses on the first contact with the Spanish, first contact with Indigenous People, and we had to read this one book that gave the mic to the indigenous that was a translation of a manuscript by a pure Aztec priest from the 16th century.

For his thesis, José chose to author a novel centered on his own experiences and that of the people he knows from prior to college. At the time of the interviews, José had plans to participate in an alternative teacher credentialing program, pending reauthorization of his status under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy. His academic and career choices were the result of his community service-learning experience.

Like, José, Tuan also entered college with the intention of concentrating in an area of science but with the goal of entering medical school. While he still majored in neuroscience; he also found himself minoring in Human Rights, taking classes in the history of

immigration and colonization, policy classes in health equity and access. In interviews, he noted that given an option, he wanted his non-science classes to be addressing “real-life problems.”

There are pre-med classes I have to take, but for my electives, I don’t want to take a class in philosophy. I want to study real world, real life problems. I took a class about global health, that talks about social determinants. This one class, it was about social determinants, like we talked about HIV and how social factors influenced, and our final project was to pick some disease or health concern we care about and give a presentation that includes the social, the cultural...so those classes, I tend to enjoy more than purely science.

During his time at Leland, the controversy over the impact of affirmative action on the Asian American community erupted; specifically, allegations that affirmative action policies reduced the chances of Asian Americans gaining access to higher education. This led Tuan to become more active in pro-affirmative action groups, attending rallies and writing editorials for the school paper. At one point in our interview, indicating that he would be open to becoming a lawyer to fight for equitable policies. As of his last interviews, Tuan was still planning on medical school; but he was not interested in being the type of doctor who did not take a holistic approach to patient care. He had no interest in doing research that could not be applied in a clinical setting.

Valerie, who was inspired to attend Eliot by a spirited childhood mentor who had also attended the school, entered college with a very romantic understanding of intellectual life. While her parents defined success as earning a high income; Valerie took a broader view, imagining a successful life to be one where she could take part in social change through an

intellectual approach. Attending Eliot resulted in a shift in her perspective on the world but not in the way Valerie expected. She no longer believed in a meritocracy, or that taking an intellectual approach to the world would make it a better place. Having seen the wealth disparities between her and her classmates, and having learned about institutional racism, she no longer believed that simply having access to a good education was a key to equity. Shifting her perspective to advocating for a more activist approach to social change is the result of a cumulative effect of being a student who was the first in her family to attend college and from a low-income background on a campus with wealthier students, taking Asian American studies classes and returning to Chinatown to do community service. For Valerie, returning to Chinatown as a college student and as a volunteer had resulted in a new understanding of the Asian immigrant community.

I think my biggest impression of Eliot was based on how I spent most of my high school years kind of pretending to be an intellectual. Through books, I would learn how to speak and have a vocabulary of someone who is of a higher class. At Eliot, I was constantly surrounded by people who spoke and act and thought this way all of the time. That's how they were raised!

Valerie realized that her idea of an intelligent and sophisticated environment was a stereotype acquired by a secondary education that valorized western history and knowledge. By her own admission, she was critical of her urban, public high school and idealized what she thought was a more refined community.

I think just culturally I put a certain type of knowledge as power and also the way everyone spoke and acted and thought were very, very different than in high school or at home. It was similar to what I'd learned from just reading books, like really old

books by White people. Actually, being able to be in an environment where I could conform, kind of, or pass as someone who is of a higher class was a big learning experience for me. Particularly because I have learned that academia and all books by white people aren't really the only ways to learn, aren't going to save me or anyone really. Honestly, I've learned that they really shouldn't be worshiped now that I've arrived at a place where academia is worshiped.

This revelation that there were multiple ways of knowing and histories came from enrollment in Asian American Studies classes which focused on the history, literature, and culture of the Asian American community. In combination with her volunteer leadership positions with the afterschool, summer and big sibling mentoring programs that were run by the community-based organizations in Chinatown as part of the Community Scholars Program, she became extremely critical of her previous understanding of what defined a good education and undervaluing the knowledge of her own Asian American community. Community service-learning also helped to clarify her long-term goals,

The collaboration and cooperation required of being a community service leader was instrumental in developing an appreciation for relationships, interdependence, and intersectionality.

It reminds me that I need to keep working on not only personal growth but also finding what is that I truly value because my parents would be like, "Look for the money." That's what [their] value in life is because we don't have any. Look for the money. Then at Eliot, and in high school through my own soul searching, I thought academia was what I was searching for. Now I'm like, no. I've always been someone who is very much passionate about equity and fairness. I think fundamentally that has

never changed in me. Going from Eliot to Chinatown reminds me that I was lucky and that ... A lot of people in Chinatown are pretty lucky too compared to a lot of other minority groups. I needed to show them that this meritocracy that they believe in is not true. The world exists beyond Chinatown. I think that's a big reason why I keep coming back. I feel like it's necessary for me to come back to disrupt Chinatown norms, but also try to preserve as much of Chinatown is in me and is physically there as possible.

While her continuing involvement in the youth programs was driven by a need to be a consistent presence for the children in the program, her passion for education came from learning about Asian American history and cultivating her own identity as an Asian American woman. For Valerie, her time at Eliot and the time she has spent in Chinatown volunteering are inextricably linked in the change in her perspective about education, who she is and her role in social change, and her understanding of equity. Valerie arrived at Eliot as a physics major, intending to be a science teacher after graduation, but she has added a concentration in studio art. Science has always appealed to her because of how complexity was addressed, seemingly with order and logic. She still loves science but has learned to recognize that addressing the complexity of equity and social justice has an order and process all its own. More importantly, she has identified ways in which she can pursue her love of science and creativity; and support social justice. She also discovered that there are different ways to be an educator.

Three years of mentoring and working in youth programs had shown her that being a classroom teacher was not for her as she did not like group behavior management. She saw herself teaching but on a more public platform, "like Bill Nye,

the Science Guy” or as a science educator in museums having discovered her creative skills and outgoing nature. Given how her Asian American Studies classes facilitated her own intellectual and personal development, one day, Valerie would like to write and illustrate a children’s book on Chinatown to preserve its history and impact for future generations.

It should be noted that participating in community service was not required for any of the participants. It was a choice, which went on to inform the path of their learning as a college student and beyond.

Developing a Civic Identity

The third major finding highlighted how participation in community service-learning supported the development of civic identity, as defined by as Knefelkamp (2008), who describes a mature civic identity as “...both idealistic and realistic, patient and persistent” in how they decide to contribute to society. The process of developing a civic identity involves challenging personal perspectives and developing an ability to manage the complexities and contradictions that exist in any effort to address social change. Part of developing a civic identity relies on being motivated by social change and consciously choosing to address structural causes of equity (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996) through actions like voting, donating, or providing services. Developing a civic identity requires opportunities to gain insight to the self and to challenge your perception of the world. This finding revealed the complexities of what it means to have a civic identity for a person who has experience with poverty and racism and find a way to address those issues in society. For the students in this study, the complexities in understanding their civic identity came from managing their experiences with marginalization due to experiences with racism and classism, their

proximity and acquisition to privilege due to their association with their well-resourced institutions and with the advantages and opportunities available to them after college graduation. This proximity to privilege had implications for their development of a civic identity and how these students worked across differences with the communities they served.

It is notable that the students in this study were not initially motivated by social change or activism to address root causes of structural inequality, but by simply wanting to get off campus. However, over the course of their participation in service, they used their community service experiences to understand their own role and actions, being both low-income and students of color, in promoting equity and social justice, and ultimately their civic identity. Four of the participants, Diego, Jessica, José, and Teresa, discovered an advantage to their immersion in both the rarified atmosphere of their campuses and the comparatively hardscrabble existence of the communities in which they served, and their own families. Overall, they became comfortable crossing the borders of their historically White institution and the communities of color in which they served; regular interactions with wealthier classmates and faculty, as well as the refugees, immigrants and families just managing to stay housed and fed. This level of comfort led to a level of comfort using their combined cultural and social capital or knowledge to create a civic identity as an intermediary who disseminated knowledge between the formal classrooms of education while affirming the ways of knowing and understanding grounded outside the academy as described in Giroux's (1991) concept of critical border pedagogy José used his classes in literature to create a curriculum teaching young men as part of a summer school program about how the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, a rap artist who was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in

poetry represented the fields of literature and philosophy and were grounded in the cultural capital of Black and Brown communities beyond the formal education system. He developed the curriculum to provide the youth in his classes a connection to literature and philosophy; two subjects rarely seen as the being influenced by those with less privilege and power. The study participants indicated comfort with acting as a bridge within the low-income communities with which they identified. For example, Teresa looked forward to using her education and her language skills to help Spanish-speaking communities navigate the legal system. The community service-learning experience eased the way for the participants to become comfortable with applying their existing and acquired social capital to increase equity and access to resources for others.

This development of a civic identity was facilitated by the earlier finding from this study of how community service-learning led them to counterspaces that helped to navigate their way as students of color on a predominantly White campus. For these participants, both serving in communities of color and opportunities to engage in dialogue with a community of their peers provided an opportunity for developing a civic and racial identity simultaneously. The experiences as a volunteer in a community of color and part of a cohort of volunteers of color, who were also low-income, resulted in a willingness to see their civic identity as being an intermediary for their respective communities to facilitate access to resources and opportunities.

For Diego who had attended a private boarding school prior to college, it meant using the social capital acquired by his elite education to advocate for low-income communities by going into politics. For Jessica, whose parents had left a middle-class life in Nigeria, it meant using the skills she would learn as a financial consultant to build wealth in low-

income African American communities. José, whose undocumented status isolated him, wanted to use his creative writing skills to give voice to marginalized experiences. Teresa, a child of El Salvadoran parents who had not completed their education, wanted to become a lawyer so that she could use her education and language skills to help immigrant Spanish-speaking communities exercise their civil rights. These were all goals developed over the course of participating in a community service-learning program as college students.

The study participants did not enter college with a clear civic identity or understanding of how to use their education and skills to contribute to society. Three of the participants, Diego, Jessica, and Teresa, reported the need to get off campus as a motivating factor. The choice of using community service-learning as strategy to get off campus was supported by their own participation in such services as children.

At his private boarding school, Diego was part of a mentoring program where the older students on financial aid met regularly with newer students to ease their transition academically and socially to the atmosphere of a private boarding preparatory school. Just as Diego had received a mentor as a new student; eventually he became a mentor to younger students at the prep school. He enjoyed mentoring in high school but at Leland, he wanted to mentor young people who he felt needed the mentoring.

For me, I always thought it was good to give back or to help people, adolescents specifically, simply because at my private high school I had a mentor who helped me when I first got there, and then I mentored a younger student. When I got here it made more sense to mentor youth from the city; I saw it as sharing what I knew with kids who needed it, not with those at a prep school. The kids at a prep school would be fine.

To Diego, it made more sense to work with young people, who unlike him, did not have the opportunity to attend a well-resourced, private school. He acknowledged that the impulse to mentor low-income teens in the community versus the ones at his private school was an extension of his frustration of being in a “bubble” of wealth; surrounded by people who could ignore social issues like poverty and inequity. Jessica also wanted to help those in need, but because she had been a recipient of similar services. When asked about the reason for volunteering, Jessica shared that her family had received help from local groups, and it felt important to provide help, too.

I used to volunteer with my siblings, at the food pantry; I liked to be productive in the community. It wouldn't be just me taking or my family getting help from the food banks, or the clothing deposit places. I felt like even if you don't have a lot of stuff, there's something you can give back to other people who might not have as much as you. So, I just really like doing that for fun.

Teresa, too, was motivated by her own experiences in multiple afterschool, mentoring and tutoring programs to seek out opportunities to volunteer. Her parents were immigrants from El Salvador where her mother was educated up to the eighth grade and her father left school in grade three with very low literacy skills. For Teresa, her access to programs like Upward Bound, a federally funded program to increase access to first generation college students and other tutoring programs, made it possible for her to get into and get through college. In her own words, she “loved them.”

These charitable impulses led to a community service-learning program, but the students became social change agents because of being thrust into awkward situations in and out of classes. Being in classes where structural racism would have to be explained to

professors and awkward interactions with classmates where they had to explain their own finances were the reason for finding a suitable role in social change. As Valerie noted, before college, she was unaware of her poverty relative to that of her new classmates. Jessica, Valerie, and Teresa all noted that despite attending schools with a mix of families from low- and middle-income backgrounds, before attending a private, predominantly White institution; they had never known people for whom money was no object. Prior to college, they had never been put in a position that required explaining their lives. Valerie noted that, after arriving at Eliot, she realized that no one ever talked about money in her Chinese American community. To some extent, it was not worth mentioning as most people around her were equally poor, but it was considered rude to talk about it.

Back when I was in high school, back when I lived in Chinatown. It was very important to save face, and not talk about being poor. Versus now that I'm in college, everyone around me is pretty much upper middle class or just generally wealthier than I am.

In Chinatown, not only did no one talk about money, the slight differences between those who were low-income and middle income were barely discernible. If money was mentioned, it was because there was not enough of it. This was a contrast to Eliot, where the wealth disparities were far more obvious and could not be ignored. Teresa, who grew up in a wealthier university town with pockets of poverty, noted that money was not flaunted in her hometown, although she was aware that her family was low-income and that some of her friends were wealthy. Unlike at her experience at St. Mary's, she never felt bad or embarrassed that her family was not wealthy or lived in subsidized housing. Jessica, who knew that she would have to help her parents pay their mortgage, marveled at the cavalier

way some of her classmates would order expensive car-share rides into the city, instead of taking the free shuttle offered by the college. These confrontations in economic disparities led the participants to adapt their perspectives on their futures and motivations to engage in community service-learning.

During the interviews, all the students noted that attending these selective schools would open opportunities that would result in lives quite different from their parents. Diego, Jessica, José, and Teresa spoke about how this understanding forced a focus on how they would use these opportunities to seek social change for the communities in which they were raised. Diego noted that after four years at a private prep school, and now a private college, his awareness of his income status was a motivation to be self-aware, especially around others with financial wealth.

I'm well aware that I'm a low-income student in a wealthy institution where I have a lot of privileges, and I'm not afraid to admit that or tell people that. Even when I'm with my rich friends, I'll be like, "Yeah, I'm broke" and explain why I can't do this or that, and for me it's just been part of life, just working it and being really truthful, like, "This is my situation. That doesn't mean I should be ashamed of it, but I should use it as either motivation and try to help inspire others who are in similar situations that I am.

Diego shared an anecdote from his prep school days that highlighted how he learned that his personal story gave him the credibility needed for people with power to listen to him and how his education gave him access to a powerful network. At his high school graduation, Diego delivered a speech that prompted an older, wealthier alum from the boarding school to suggest politics as a career option. Politics had not entered his mind but the flattery from the

praise of a wealthy person who wanted to hear him talk made him think it was a possibility. In retrospect, Diego said his interest in political office was not for the right reasons as it was driven by his ego. As a volunteer, Diego became disturbed at how people who had never experienced racism or poverty would assume that they had the answers to social issues.

What worries me are the people who have been brought up in this bubble [of privilege] and have this sense of entitlement from getting all this social capital from attending schools like my boarding school and Leland. It is very easy for them to feel that they have the solutions for marginalized communities without ever have been in those communities.

His interest in politics was now about representation and how to use his education to increase access and address equity. As he described his change in perspective,

I'd rather have someone like me who, even though I've spent the last eight years in pretty elite institutions but have actually worked and lived in these communities and not the people who think they can literally rule the world just because they come out of here [referring to Leland College] and have no connection and just want to run it for the power or maybe they do care but don't know the reality. So then, I started thinking, how do I get elected? Then, I realize there's certain things that you must do to have that influence- like network, certain people you must know.

Diego had concluded that he wanted to use the access provided by his education to work with allies and be a broker for communities of color. At the time of his graduation, he was planning on a future that included law school and a combination of private and public sector experience, which would support a career in government or politics.

Like Diego, Jessica found herself thinking about how to use the access and opportunities she had been afforded to empower communities like her own. Entering college, Jessica knew she wanted to go into the financial sector as it was a way to make an income high enough for her to support her family and help pay for their new home. As she put it, “you have to be financially secure and take care of yourself before you can take care of others.” Thus, despite the interest in social justice, finance remained her choice of profession, but she wants to learn enough about finance to work with low-income communities to teach them how to build their wealth. The summer between her sophomore and junior year was spent as an intern at a wealth management firm. This internship taught her how wealth was managed and increased which led to her thinking about how she could work on social justice while still in finance. Drawing upon knowledge acquired in classes on equity and access, she decided that she would like to, after working in the private finance sector, go into economic policy to benefit communities that had traditionally been excluded from wealth-building opportunities, such as homeownership.

After learning the history of slavery in Africana Studies classes, and how the economy and capitalism affects real world policy from econ classes, I wanted to help marginalized communities learn to benefit in this system.

From her classes, her internship and experience in the Community Scholars Program, Jessica came to understand the critical role opportunity played in increasing equity. Her immediate priorities after graduation were still to go into the private sector to support her family but she was also looking at how to move into the public sector later in her career.

For José, the sudden disparities between his life and that of his family was a catalyst for seeking to use his circumstances to amplify the experiences of those most marginalized and cut off

from opportunity. Alluding to the freedom granted by DACA status and a college degree, José shared,

I can live pretty much wherever I want because I can find opportunity wherever I want. My friends can't find opportunity wherever they want. My mom can't find opportunity wherever she wants. My dad can't find opportunity wherever he wants. What I mean by opportunity is most definitely they could work manual labor and stuff like that, and my mom technically does. She takes care of an old person. They work with their hands and stuff like that, but I don't have to. I could choose what city I move to. I have options.

Acting on those options, José also chose to use writing to represent the voices of low-income communities which otherwise went unheard. For a writing assignment using ethnography, he interviewed a friend who had just gotten out of prison, but José opted to list his friend as a co-author on the piece and have the writing reflect how he and his friend spoke to each other. This meant, the words used were vernacular and the structure was not formal academic writing. When challenged by the professor and told that this was not how ethnographies worked, he defended it on the grounds that this life that was being written about belonged to his friend. His friend should be given credit for sharing his voice. The professor accepted his paper, but José noted his grade on that assignment was lower than usual. Recognizing that the voices, words, and experiences of his community would be heard if he followed the formal rules of writing, José wrote a creative thesis, a novel about the low-income community in which he grew up.

José's education in comparative literature was used as a summer schoolteacher with a classroom of thirteen-year-old boys, José used the prose of hip hop and spoken word to promote literacy. The use of hip hop provided an example of how the lives of boys of color

were chronicled in spoken word. José instructed his teenage students about poetry through the lyrics of hip-hop artist and Pulitzer Prize winning Kendrick Lamar to build an appreciation and understanding of literature through work that represented communities of color as well.

Teresa also found ease in acting as an intermediary navigating the borders of her experiences as a volunteer with the El Salvadorian children she worked with and between communities of color with whom she interacted.

One girl asked, "what is a lesbian?" I was like, oh my God, I had the same questions as a girl. My mom didn't teach me. She refused to let me take sex ed or talk about sexuality. That was never a thing in my house. I didn't have a space to feel comfortable asking questions like this. This girl was asking because knew that her family would not answer the question, I was cool to be able to help them understand. I am not part of the LGBTQ community, but I like to think of myself as an ally and this was an opportunity to encourage a child to be an ally.

In another instance, Teresa negotiated the relationship between the El Salvadorian girls and African American students in a mentoring program.

One of the mentors who is African American was wearing a weave when one of the little girls, who was El Salvadorian, was like, " how do you get your hair like that?" The community that the program was in is 80% Salvadorian, so most of the women around them are probably not wearing a weave or are not Black. I understood why the girl was asking the question, growing up, my world was primarily White and Latino. Personally, I thought it was cool that she was asking the questions. But the mentor got really upset at the little girl touching her hair because it's the whole idea of touching a

Black girl's hair, which is very valid. I privately explained to the mentors, and then they understood the girls don't know what they don't know and are really curious, and this is their opportunity to learn. Being able to have these conversations is cool. Teresa also shared how she used her Spanish language skills to help the families with whom she worked to get access to opportunities. Teresa intended to go into public interest law when she graduated, primarily because she saw that her language skills and cultural competencies would allow her to be a bridge between the legal system and the Latinx community struggling with the legal system. Through service, she found that this was something she excelled in and was interested in doing professionally.

Teresa was not the only participant to note the various levels of leadership it took to provide service to communities of color. During one of the interviews, Jessica noted, "On my own, I can't change the world, but I can try to do my part." In that last statement, Jessica captures what most of the participants in this study had learned; that social change is a collective effort. During volunteering and as part of the Community Scholars Program, participants were introduced to community leaders, funders, activists, and legislators. As a result, they learned how providing even basic services like afterschool services took a whole team of players, funders who provided grants to buy supplies, engaged parents, to provide space, and have staff. Learning about the complexities in social change, in addition to the opportunities to reflect and learn provided by a community service-learning program helped to identify how these students wanted to participate in social change beyond college.

Redefining Working Across Difference

For those advocates of the use of service-learning to increase appreciation of diversity and working across differences, this part of the emerging counterstory illuminates how

“working across difference” looks like in students of color who are volunteering in communities of color. For the most part, “working across difference” manifested itself in student learning to test the limits of their understanding and assumptions of these communities with whom they identified. Their service experience resulted in the development of a critical consciousness about social relations, vis a vis, their experiences on campus with other students and off campus within the communities of color (McLaren, 2017). This resulted in a recognition of the strange in-between world of privilege from students who identified as first-generation college students, students of color and from low-income backgrounds, yet also students with access to additional social and cultural capital due to their affiliation with their colleges. For Tuan, Jessica, Teresa, and José, the communities of color in which they were serving, the people and environment were like their own pre-college home communities. But in the case of Valerie and Marvin, they returned to the neighborhoods where they grew up as volunteers. This familiarity was encouraging, yet there was a simultaneous sense of fellowship and distance because of how their personal experiences as undergraduates at their selective institutions was allowing them to acquire a different status and would result in a life different from many of their family and home community. The social capital acquired through their college education was a key difference between them and the communities they served. The civic identities described in the previous section were largely about applying that capital for the common good.

The participants in this study went into community service motivated by a sense of charity (Kahne & Westheimer, 1994) but also confident of making a tangible difference in the communities due cultural and linguistic competencies and acknowledging that there was a perception of being smart because of their status as full-time college students. As a student

affairs and community engagement professional of over fifteen years, there was an awareness that students are often motivated by a sense of charity, using their language and familiarity with a community to do good but also feeling that due to their skills, they would be better volunteers and have greater impact than someone without their cultural knowledge. This risk was apparent when two of the participants used the words, “savior mentality” in their approach to service and their motivation. The use of the term is significant, as it is different than simply having a “charity or social change approach”, terms that are used in research from research on service-learning and civic engagement. The concept of a “savior mentality” comes from theories on critical pedagogy, and from Freire’s concept of oppressor consciousness (Straubhaar, 2015) which asks that those with the privilege of formal education and material resources resist the urge to underestimate and disempower those who have not had access to the same resources (Freire, 1996). A side effect of this concept, with respect to service-learning is being surprised by the discovery that they knew less about the community than believed.

This idea of being a “savior” was explicitly raised by Jessica and Tuan while Diego spoke in different terms about his expectations of the impact of his community service. These participants became conscious of how their shared identity with the community was not enough; that there could still be significant difference between them and the community selected. But also, that shared identity did not mean they knew how to address all the challenges facing the communities. All three were surprised to understand that the underlying premise of the savior concept, having access to formal education and material resources, applied to them.

In her interviews, Jessica freely admitted that, in high school, she did have a savior mentality, thinking that her volunteering efforts could be transformational for the lives of the people for whom she was volunteering. The summer after her freshman year at Eliot was a wake-up call to understanding the institutional barriers to social change. She stayed in Boston to take a job as a summer counselor in a day camp, which served the same children as the mentoring program. As a counselor, Jessica learned about the limits of her personal experience as an immigrant.

I was really surprised when two of my students, I think they were seven or eight. They didn't know how to read, and they didn't know their ABCs. And they were enrolled in American school. They weren't ESL students either...One of them was born here but then left to return more recently, and the other one got here when he was about two or three. They didn't know their ABCs or how to read. I was really shocked, and I realized I didn't have enough time or training, or resources to teach students. It was kind of sad realizing that there was no way I was going to teach them to read in these five and a half weeks of the summer program.

Jessica was motivated to volunteer for this program because the children were immigrants like her. She thought she could use her own experiences to help these immigrant children adjust to life in America. But these children had a quite different life story. Jessica's family emigrated from Nigeria, where her parents were middle-class educated professionals with their own businesses who were able to make sure Jessica and her siblings did well in school. Jessica was surprised to meet children who could not read. She didn't know what the children's life history was, but it was an experience that checked her assumptions about immigrants.

Tuan, like Jessica discovered he had overestimated his familiarity and understanding of the local Vietnamese and larger immigrant community. Tuan had chosen to volunteer in Fairmount, known for its immigrant population but also a neighborhood known as Little Saigon due to the large Vietnamese population. The program he worked at was at the Vietnamese Community Center, so he expected to work primarily with Vietnamese kids. As it turned out, the youth programming at the center included immigrant youth from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. He was surprised but felt that as an immigrant person of color, there was still a shared experience. Tuan realized this was not the case, and, like Jessica, came to understand that not all immigrant stories are the same and there was a difference he would have to navigate between him and his youth he supervised.

The big challenge was checking my biases and assumptions when creating projects for the kids. I had to ask myself, "Oh, maybe I'm thinking of this like a Vietnamese [person], from my Vietnamese perspective?" I had to recognize a larger cultural context. It was a challenge because some kids in the classroom look like me, and others don't, and I had to ask, how do I navigate that? I think that was something I didn't think about before. Before I was like, "Oh, I can work with Viet kids." I have the skills. But once I got started, I realized that my skills were limited. Still useful, but not always enough.

For Tuan, working across difference meant not just recognizing the limits in his affinity with the local Vietnamese community but also the other youth and families in the program. To some extent, Tuan thought it would be easier to have an impact in immigrant community, but like Jessica, discovered that it was a lot more complicated. In the case of these two

participants, they learned how to interrogate this difference on their own and in dialogue with peers.

Tuan's use of the phrase "savior" was notable because, at first, he did not think he could have a "savior mentality" because he was not White. Tuan felt that as a person who identified as Asian, low-income, an immigrant and queer, he did not have enough privilege to be at risk of a savior mentality in his work with a Vietnamese immigrant community. On the contrary, initially Tuan felt at an advantage in addressing issues in the Vietnamese enclave because he was low-income and an immigrant just like the community in which he worked.

I realized that I'm coming from a place of more privilege at this point in my life, and that when I do these things, I don't want me being too savior-y which I didn't think was possible because I wasn't White. I get that even though I, too, am Vietnamese, I am not from this community. I'm coming into this community based on what I thought we have in common and not necessarily because I belong originally in this community.

Tuan interpreted the concept of a "savior" as a White person, who had no personal experience with the community. After all, in the workshops and reading materials offered by the Community Scholars Program he read, a "savior" was described as a person of privilege working with those who are oppressed, and historically this referred to people with power, usually White people. However, Tuan went to work with local Vietnamese community thinking that, as a Vietnamese American, he would intrinsically know how to help the community. He now understood that he was essentially a visitor to this community. He needed to follow the lead of those who lived there and would be there long after he had graduated and moved on. It was true that he identified with the community, but as a college

student, he was also coming from a place of privilege. Tuan recognized the relative power imbalance vis-à-vis he was not part of community. He came and went, and the experience was likely more impactful for his intellectual and social growth than advancement for the community. Similar to how his parents were impressed with his proximity to Whiteness and the power that conferred; Tuan realized that he had resources because of his access as a college student.

When I started, I thought the savior mentality it could not apply to me, I wasn't White and besides, I was going to volunteer in my community-the Vietnamese community in Fairmount. As it turned out, it wasn't true because I wasn't born in this community. I am coming in into this community based on what I thought we have in common. Yes, I'm Vietnamese and I speak Vietnamese but I'm also a student who comes here from Leland for a few hours every week and then goes back [to campus]. When I think about working and doing community service, I realized that, at this point in my life, I'm coming from a place of more privilege now. When I come into a new community that whatever I do has to be led by what the community wants, not what I think they need or based on my personal experience. Now I want to use my privileges to give power to this community.

As part of his service, Tuan had secured grants from Leland College for the Vietnamese Community Center to which he had access because he was a student at Leland. This was a key example of how he had privilege, access to resources that few in Little Saigon had. It was also an example of how he could leverage those resources for the leaders in the community to do their work. When asked whether he saw himself as a change agent, he said that yes, but not because of what he does alone but with others. For him, social change is

furthered as a collective, and it is something that takes time, hence his focus on creating systems that are sustainable beyond his own involvement.

Like Tuan and Jessica, Diego, too, learned that he had less in common with the youth and families than he originally believed, in addition to being surprised by tensions between marginalized groups. He was surprised and disappointed when the youth and/or families were not as motivated to act on opportunities to which he had alerted them, such as free SAT classes. Diego made the mistake of assuming that the students and families with whom he worked were the same as he and his family because both were low-income. He soon realized that his life was quite different than the youth he mentored. Diego never had to live with violence the way his youth did. The youth he worked with spoke frequently of brushes with violence and friends or family who had died from gun violence. As he put it,

I still remember how it is to be a teenager and a teenager of color, but just my life has just put me in a completely different stratosphere than the kids that I work with. Yes, I lived in a poor, working-class neighborhood, but I have not experienced gun violence or gentrification, I really can only empathize and try to understand where they're coming from.

Another area of difference that surprised the students in this study was how race relations manifested in the communities in which they worked. During the summer Diego took a job (through the Community Scholars Program) with a program which hired local high school youth to work in summer camps, he learned about the racial tensions between the teens assigned to him. His job was to be a counselor for the youth, and to develop workshops on college access, job readiness, and social-emotional skills to all the teens. For Diego, working

with these camps was his first foray into education and the non-profit world. He was excited to be working with other adults dedicated to equity and access and youth of color.

The junior counselors with whom he worked were largely Black and Latinx. Even though police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, took place a few years before, the topic of police brutality came up during talks about social issues. For these Black and Latinx youth of color, tensions with the police were a common issue. Though it was an issue for all the youth, Diego noted that tensions would rise whenever the issue of police brutality came up over which community suffered more. He had experience in explaining things to classmates with no experience with poverty or racism, but it was a surprise to be negotiating between groups of people who shared lived experiences of oppression.

During that summer, a lot of the African Americans didn't like the Latinos, or it seemed that way because they would drop anti-Latino sentiments, and I started to talk to them about intersectionality, and explain, "We are in the same boat. We suffer from the same systems."

As a person who was good at being a student, Diego's response was to use the workshops that were part of his job to teach and explain about shared histories of oppression and talking about intersectionality; an effort he reports were marginal at best. Diego never specified the "anti-Latino" sentiments; and when asked, he shook his head. During that same summer, Diego also found himself having to mediate between staff supervisors of color and the youth of color.

For most of the teens, these junior counselor jobs were their first jobs, and as such, some issues would come up. In this case, the junior counselors at one of the camps had a problem with punctuality when returning from lunch. The tardiness would frustrate the

director of the camp, a South Asian woman. This director of the camp asked Diego, as the counselor assigned to work with the youth, to be a mediator when she met with the youth to discuss the issue of punctuality because of his relationship as a mentor with the youth. This group of four Black youth identified as female and one Black youth identified as male. When Diego arrived for the appointment, he saw that the program director had lined the teens up against the wall. This immediately concerned him because it looked like a police line-up. Diego also noted that the director seemed to talk at the teens, not with them. It did not seem like a dialogue. He describes what happened,

The teens are against the wall and she steps forward and points, and then one of the teens is like, "Why are you stepping towards me?" In certain communities, that means you want to fight, its aggressive, so I intervened by saying, "All right, we need to take this somewhere else." But that was one of the situations where I also realized how, although the director had the best of intentions and was just trying to supervise, she clearly did not understand that she was escalating the situation by lining them up against a wall and talking at them. I moved the group into a circle so both groups could identify a solution to the problem.

Diego was surprised that this young woman of color did not realize what she had done wrong. He had assumed that she was aware of the dynamics of working with young people of color, particularly African American teenagers who are familiar with being wrongfully treated.

For me, that was one of the things that really challenged me, the idea that even well-intentioned people who are doing this type of job [running a low-cost summer camp], and be a person of color too, can often not really help a situation, simply because

either they didn't know or thought that their way of doing things was the best method, without no understanding of context or culture.

Like Tuan and Jessica, it was a surprise when he realized the gaps in life experiences with a community that otherwise seemed very familiar. For practitioners and scholars using service-learning as pedagogy and practice, these experiences indicate that students of color also work across differences; but the nature of that difference is very distinct from the traditional black-white, middle class-low-income paradigm. A more complex and nuanced understanding of the contours of “difference” needs to be developed. For the participants in this study, the experience of crossing borders between campus and community raised their awareness of how social relationships morph by relations of power and privilege. The participants in this study were all people of color going into neighborhoods of color with whom they may have shared language, socio-economic status, immigration history, food preferences, cultures, and religions, but that did not mean they had the same lived experiences and concerns. But also, their positionality as college students coming to the neighborhood as volunteers effected their relationships and understanding of the experience.

Overall, this study highlighted the effect on motivation and adjustment for students identified as low-income and of color attending a private residential PWI. The communities of color in which the students served became safe counter-spaces to support both personal and intellectual development, create a sense of belonging on campus, support civic identity development. For the field of service-learning and community engagement, the findings highlight the centrality of the impact of intersecting identities on both the community service experience and the dominant narrative of “working across difference” within service-learning and community engagement.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter contains a summary of the study, limitations, a discussion of the major findings, as well as implications for practice and future research.

Summary of the Study

Decades of research on community service-learning (Astin et al., 1999; Giles & Eyler, 1999; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2017) support the contribution to increased critical thinking, appreciation of diversity and participation in civic engagement (Astin et al., 2000; Felton & Clayton, 2011). Despite being lauded as a “high impact practice” (Kuh et al., 2011), community service-learning also been firmly criticized for a dominant narrative that tends to focus on the experience of the student who identifies as White middle class, transformed by entering an unfamiliar environment, usually a low-income community color (Butin, 2005; Mitchell & Donahue, 2017). For the White, middle-class students, the uniqueness of being an “other” and the contrast with their lives on campus catalyze academic and social development. This narrative leaves little room for participants who identify with other races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes and the complex layers of influence on the community engagement experience (Dahan et al., 2019) for all participants. In this study, the objective was to center the voices of students of color in service-learning as a first step towards establishing a more multi-faceted narrative for the larger field through a critical theoretical

framework and qualitative research design. The following research questions framed the study:

1. How do students of color use their co-curricular community service-learning experiences, on and off-campus, to navigate the borders between the PWI campus in which they attend school and the community they serve?
 - a. How does involvement in community service-learning influence students' decisions about academic and professional options, specifically, course of study, majors, graduate school, careers?
 - b. How does the community service-learning experience shape students' understanding of their own role and actions in promoting equity and social justice, and ultimately their civic identity?

The research questions focused on the influence of community service-learning on adjustment to life on a predominantly White campus, on class selection, professional plans, and civic identity and viewed through the lens of a conceptual framework of critical race theory, critical border pedagogy and transformational learning. Critical race theory's (CRT) concept of a counterstory and the centrality of personal experience provided a methodology for this study. CRT's tenets about the myth of meritocracy and centrality of experience were used in interpreting the personal transformations of these participants. For example, as part of the Community Scholars Program, students participated in workshops run by community leaders and grassroots activists. Those relationships also reinforced that legitimacy of knowledge held by communities of color. Cultivating these relationships made students in this study realize that meritocracy needed access to resources, as well as serendipity. To capture the experiences of the students in this study, a series of in-depth, semi-structured

interviews of seven students who participated in the Community Scholars Program was conducted.

The site for this study was a co-curricular community service-learning program that provided incentives, including financial, for low-income students to engage in service. The participants all identified as low-income, and identified as African American, Latinx, Asian American, Dominican, Vietnamese, Chinese and Nigerian. As a result, the sample set supported the inquiry into the community service-learning experiences of students who hold intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, citizenship and class and attended predominantly White institutions. The small sample and use of a series of interviews and the conceptual framework were instrumental in understanding how the regular crossing of campus boundaries and an off-campus community of color to serve contributed to the learning experience for this particular group of participants in community service-learning programs.

Critical border pedagogy was used to understand how interactions and experiences as students who have experienced bias inform worldviews, of the complexities and contradictions of social issues. Transformational learning theory provided indicators, changes in values, beliefs about self, and action regarding courses and plans to understand the impact of community service-learning on these students. The narrative produced indicated that the students' cultural, social, and experiential assets facilitated a service experience that helped manage the fatigue that comes with intersecting identities on a PWI; and gave greater clarity on developing a sense of purpose for the education and adulthood into the future.

The counterstories from this study asserts that multiple intersecting identities of race, class, ethnicity, and immigration history serve as assets and challenges in the community service-learning experience. Overall, the students grappled with their understanding of issues

of social justice with their experiences as people of color within the predominantly White campus community. The counterstories that emerged were an expansion to the dominant narrative which posited that relied on a paradigm of students going from the campus with others like them to an unfamiliar community with people of vastly different experiences. For the students in this study, the juxtaposition of life on campus and the communities of color off campus drove the transformational experience of community service- learning. Overall, the study participants appreciated how their community service-learning experience provide an active and collaborative learning environment, culturally relevant learning and opportunities to center their own learning and interrogation of their perspectives.

This study was conducted also situated within a co-curricular community service program that utilized key service-learning practices regarding depth of service and included structured reflection by trained facilitators (Walker & Walker, 2018) and provided financial compensation for participants instead of course credit. While courses that use service-learning are the standard, it also appears to be the foundation for co-curricular programming in higher education. Although finding literature quantifying and comparing the number of institutions that offer course-based service-learning and co-curricular service-learning programs is a challenge, it is recommended that further studies explore and contrast the experiences of students of color who hold intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, and class in both course-based and co-curricular service programs at both predominantly White and minority serving institutions.

Discussion

The counterstories that emerged answered the research questions on how participation influenced the college experiences of students from low-income backgrounds, who also

identified as students of color as well as the impact on their academic choices and how they would choose to contribute to social change. In this section, the findings are further explored to understand how the community-service-learning experience helped the participants to thrive in the unfamiliar environment of a historically White institution and sudden exposure to privilege as a member of the institution while still identifying closely with the challenges of the communities of color in which they served. Overall, students in this community service-learning program developed intellectual curiosity and curated a critical consciousness of how to understand their experiences given their lived experiences of being in contact with both oppression and privilege. Despite a lack of focus on campus racial climate, the findings highlighted the persistence of the Whiteness and middle-class culture on increasingly racially and socioeconomically diverse campuses. This finding of a how the community service-learning experience facilitated a sense of belonging on campus helped to inform the recommendations for practice that addresses the ongoing challenges in racial climate and how community service-learning practices can help to ameliorate this environment.

A Return to Normalcy

For the students in this study, the act of leaving campus to go to a low-income community of color meant returning to normalcy, away from the rhythms of campus life and to an environment where their experiences were the same as the people around them. As detailed in Chapter 5, participants in this study described life on campus as being in a bubble because everyone lived in the similar housing, ate the same food in the dining halls, and had the same concerns of classes, grades, and the future. This environment was unrealistic and steeped in Whiteness. The bubble was disturbing because it allowed classmates to be ignorant of the hardships faced by many but also masked their own personal mental and

financial hardships experienced as low-income students at a private residential university. Two participants noted that they realized their own poverty once exposed to what it meant to be middle class or wealthy, describing it as the “worst surprise”. On their campuses, these students were first exposed to people who had disposable income and families who understood American higher education systems and practices. The students in this study relied on older siblings or their own research in learning how to steer their way through the American academic bureaucracy, in addition to not having any flexibility in their budgets.

The gap in income between them and their wealthier classmates can be seen in Jessica’s response to how her classmates would pay for expensive car-share rather than wait for the free campus shuttle or José did not understand why people went out for dinner when they had paid for dining plans. Both Tuan and Valerie, who identified as Asian American, both noted that many of their Asian American classmates were wealthy and had gone to predominantly White high schools. As such, Tuan and Valerie were unimpressed when their classmates extolled the diversity of their respective institutions because of their high school experiences. Tuan and Valerie had gone to schools with significant numbers of students of color from different socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. Consequently, the communities of color in which they volunteered became counterspaces, as did the Community Scholars Program. By moving, even briefly, into an environment where it was normal to be an immigrant, or speak another language at home, or be undocumented or have a limited income; their sense of comfort on campus increased.

Increased Resiliency and Confidence

Getting involved in the Community Scholars Program introduced these participants to other undergraduates who had similar backgrounds as immigrants, as being low-income, of

identifying as a student of color. The program had provided friends with whom they felt comfortable; it was liberating and increased their sense of belong on campus. The students in the study acknowledged that much of what they learned about social issues came from the leaders and practitioners encountered as part of their community service. Meeting community leaders who became mentors and teachers, like their professors, raised confidence in their own identities, linguistic and cultural competencies. As a result, they had the emotional energy to be intellectually curious and look for classes that could build upon their own knowledge capital.

Motivation for Higher Education

During the interviews, all participants were asked about their motivation for college and how they chose their classes. All of them indicated that their initial goal when starting college was to secure a degree that would guarantee a life of financial stability. Yet once involved in community service-learning, their choice of classes was not concentrated in fields that would lead to high paying jobs, like STEM. The participants drifted towards classes that took a critical approach, like ethnic studies classes or policy studies classes to complement what was learned from community leaders. Two participants, Marvin and José changed their majors from business and math to education and literature, respectively. Others like Tuan and Valerie added minors that reflected their interests in policy and art in addition to their major fields of study which were in the sciences.

Becoming an Agent of Social Change

A research question for this study asked how participation in community-service learning led to the development of a civic identity that helped participants how, as individuals, would contribute to the common good. In understanding the nature of a civic

identity, this study relied on Knefelkamp's (2008) definition of a civic identity as one that seeks an understanding of the world around them, or moral dilemmas and social inequities to make a conscious choice to figure out how to contribute to the improvement of society. An assumption made going into the study was that the civic identity development of students of color from low-income backgrounds would be aware of social justice issues, by virtue of lived experiences with racism and classism (Johnson, 2015). Another assumption was that students from a low-income background seeking degrees from well-resourced, historically White residential institutions were motivated by the material benefits of being graduates from these institutions. Indeed, all but three of the participants in this study said their motivation to study in college was to do well financially to support their families. The remaining three did not mention acquiring personal wealth but they also did not specify being motivated to use their degrees for social change. To some extent, any civic identity developed would require participants to reconcile the need for financial security with the need to address the issues of equity and justice that were an impediment to security for them and their families. Jessica and José, for example, said they planned to use their college educations to make enough income to make sure their families were securely housed and fed. For Jessica, her plans to go into wealth management or finance directly after graduation did not change because her parents still needed help with their mortgage. But she also understood that once her family was secure, she could use her knowledge to help low-income families build their wealth. José did not have a specific career in mind, beyond majoring in a STEM field because those fields yield high incomes. As a result of the community service-learning experience, he looked at the field of education which could provide financial stability but also meet his need to give

support to the communities that were important to him and to youth who did not have the opportunities he had received.

The participants in this study all found themselves becoming more aware of the influence of their educations and use of their skills to be advocates for marginalized communities. This awareness led the students to find out how to build a professional pathway to financial security and leverage their education to create positive social change for their communities. This increased understanding of the impact of their education to increase their own ability to be agents of social change also made them reconsider, as CRT frames it, the idea of a meritocracy. Like the others in this study, the juxtaposition of their SLCE experience and life on campus resulted in rejecting this idea of a meritocracy. Leaving and returning to campus, building relationships with the constituents of the community-based organizations with whom they volunteer sharpened the sense that social change was a collaborative, not individual process. Access to equity and opportunity are not just determined by self-motivation and commitment; but also, some luck and privilege in having access to resources.

The interplay between choice of classes and community service-learning experience implied that the involvement in a community service-learning program also led to seeking out courses using critical approaches, like ethnic studies classes or classes focused on equity, on the issues raised during their volunteer work. The choice of classes and participation in community service-learning addressed issues of inclusion and belonging on these predominantly White campuses. Overall, the students in this study valued their community service-learning experience for refining or in some cases changing their understanding of equity and social justice issues; for giving them a respite from their lives on campus,

providing a foundation that grounded their academic and personal experience at college and connecting them to affinity spaces on and off campus. This counterstory helped to address one of the key criticisms of the dominant narrative in community service-learning that emphasizes how participants learn to work across difference.

Redefining Difference and Blurring Boundaries

According to the narrative which emerged out of this study, students of color, regardless of how much they reflected the demographics of the neighborhood, did have differences to learn to work across. The nature of the difference had to do with learning how to balance their intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, class and nationality with their affiliation with the university and their connection to the volunteer site. To some extent, the participants in the study sought to find comfort with who they were becoming; people who would become familiar with what it meant to have experiences marginalization having grown up with limited access to money, experienced housing and food insecurity but now also experienced the privilege of financial security due to their college educations.

The challenges in working across difference for the students, in some ways was similar to their White classmates. Like their White counterparts, these students were motivated by charitable impulses and a belief that they, with their cultural and linguistic knowledge could create positive social change in the world. As the findings indicated, even students who experience marginalization can overestimate their own influence and underestimate the ingenuity and resolution of those who have not had access to the same opportunities and resources. All students, even those who experience oppression, who participate in community service-learning must recognize the temporary nature of their relationship to the community. Not only do they not have the same lived experiences as

people in the community, but they are college students who will eventually graduate and go away. This was true even for the participants like Marvin and Valerie, who found themselves returning to their childhood neighborhoods. Returning as young adults gave them a fresh perspective on the community. Valerie shared that in high school, she had a romantic notion of being an intellectual and a belief in meritocracy. Getting involved in community service and meeting community leaders from Chinatown made her understand that without a balance of power and privilege, meritocracy was a myth; but also, that all knowledge was not contained in school. From community leaders, she acquired knowledge in a wide range of areas, from policy to history to art and began to have more confidence in her own identity and her perceptions from her own lived experiences. In high school, she could see the challenges facing her community; lack of affordable housing, linguistic isolation, gendered norms but saw her community through a narrow deficit-based lens. At the time, it seemed to her the solutions must be found in places that seemed free of these challenges, like the halls of institutions like Eliot College. Due to her community service-learning experiences, she saw a different side to her old neighborhood. She met leaders and community members who were actively leading the charge to bring justice to the community and learned how grassroots efforts were informing policy; that the solutions were not coming from the academics of Eliot College but from people just like her.

The Enduring Persistence of Institutional Whiteness

The data collected for this study was useful in highlighting the influences on the community service-learning experience from the perspective of students of color, but also highlighted the concept of the persistence of Whiteness (Gusa, 2010), a concept adjacent to a central tenet of critical race theory, the permanence of racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Although the campuses represented in this study had high percentages of students from diverse backgrounds; the participants did not feel as though they were many other students like them. Tuan made references to the “whiteness” of the campus, even after recognizing the sizeable Asian-American student population and Teresa was shocked at hearing that 50% of the student population at her school identified as people of color. This understanding of the persistence of Whiteness resulted in recommendations that faculty and staff should develop more curricular and co-curricular opportunities for underrepresented students that support learning and development.

When these interviews took place, these institutions had higher than expected enrollment rates of students of color than assumed at the conception of the study. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the undergraduate enrollment of Asian, Black, Latinx, and Native American students at the institutions represented in the final sample were anywhere from 26% to 45% at the institutions attended by the participants. These statistics came as a shock to at least one participant. Teresa, a senior at Brooks University, was incredulous at learning her institution's actual enrollment statistics. Upon finding out that her school just made the cut-off for being a PWI, her response was, “where are all these people?! They are not in my classes.”

One reason for her not recognizing the diversity on her campus may have had to do with the fact that the NCES statistics, data which is self-reported by the institutions, belied the reality that those percentages are inclusive of both students of color from both low-income families and higher income families (Jack, 2016, 2019). A possible conclusion to be made is that the persistence of whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2017) was such that even when there was diversity on campus, it was not recognized by the participants. Gusa (2010) identified

the concept of “White institutional presence” (p. 466) to name the uncomfortable racial climates reported by African American students on PWIs. This concept was useful in naming the experiences of students of color in this study. Just as these students did not recognize that their campuses were increasingly diverse, they continued to report circumstances that have been featured in years of research on higher education and racial climate.

During the interviews, the students in this study were asked why they decided to participate in this study. The response was a desire to make sure higher education heard their perspectives and made changes within their institutions. Their request recalled a sentence in the foreword from Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s book, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012) where she writes, “research as something that is done to people by outsiders and from which there is no apparent positive outcome” (p. xi). It seemed heartless to tell them that there was 20 to 30 years of research documenting the poor climate for students who did not identify as middle class and/or White on campuses and that it was much worse before. Revealing that the biases appeared to be baked into the culture of many institutions of higher education would also highlight how higher education has failed to make the changes necessary to be more supportive of their social-emotional and learning needs in and out of the classroom.

This was not a study about campus racial climate or higher education’s role in addressing inclusion and equity issues. Yet, many of the findings speak to how underrepresented students on PWI campuses—students of color, low-income, queer, non-gender conforming—are all challenged to feel included in higher education because of institutionalized, heteronormative Whiteness. It occurs to me that the continued isolation on campuses is because higher education, like community service-learning, tends to lean on limited narratives that elevate the perspective of White and middle-class students and faculty.

Dismantling this limited narrative will require changes to both the curricular and co-curricular learning environment. The emergence of a multi-conscious narrative has implications for the broader discussion on inclusion and representation in higher education. It should be noted that the students in this campus found ways to break down the whiteness of their campuses by grounding themselves in off-campus communities of color but also using that service experience to search for classes that were culturally responsive to their interests and lived experiences. Tuan, José, Jessica, and Valerie all sought courses that focused on communities of color, whether in history, political science, economics, literature or science. Having access to these experiences in and out of the classroom contributed to creating a space for themselves on these historically White campuses. In the next section, some actionable practices directed at both faculty and staff who create and manage curricular and co-curricular programming in higher education are described.

Implications for Practice

The recommendations for practice in this section are directed at both faculty and staff who create and manage curricular and co-curricular programming in higher education. For co-curricular settings, those who use service-learning in programs or courses should be trained in practices to create supportive spaces for students to reflect or engage in dialogue with others, as described below. To increase curricular opportunities, faculty and staff should support efforts to increase courses of study that center the history and perspective of marginalized communities, such as ethnic or critical studies classes. This is a specific recommendation for institutions that are residential and serve traditional aged undergraduates as that was the population represented in this study.

The recommended practices are made in recognition that this study reflects the images of service-learning classrooms presented in earlier studies (Coles, 1999; Green, 2001, 2003; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009) about the difficulty of discussions about social justice with students of different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. As in earlier research, the students of color in this study also disliked exploring issues of social justice with students who have had no experiences with racism or inequity and report a poor campus racial climate (Leath & Chavous, 2017; Mwangi, 2018). However, this study implies that engaging in reflection within an affinity space was productive to their learning and that working directly with off-campus communities of color create a sense of belonging to counter the racial climate on campus. To provide an improved racial climate and supporting learning spaces, PWI administrators and faculty must fully embrace the principles of reciprocity embedded within service-learning to expand its borders of teaching, learning and research to the non-academic communities and groups external to the institution. This would include communities that have been traditionally considered to be object of research, teaching, and learning rather than partners in research, teaching and learning.

The recommendation to recognize the legitimacy of the social, cultural and knowledge capital of communities of color on and off campus has been described as “counter-normative” (Ash & Clayton, 2004) because of the assertion that knowledge can be generated outside of controlled relational confines of the institutional setting of higher education. The use of counter-normative measures to change a dominant culture is necessary as the “normal” way of doing things is an obstacle to equity and access in higher education. The students in this study were able to deepen their understanding of the world, and the process of social change by stepping off campus and interacting with people who were not

professors and graduate students, and from information not imparted in libraries and classrooms.

Recommendations for Practice: Reflection Spaces and Cohort Program Designs

Based on the words of the participants in this study, it seems that the students who identified as people of color and low-income much preferred reflecting with others who had a shared life experience. This study also affirms the effectiveness of community service-learning programs for low-income students (Keen & Hall, 2008), counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012), the critical role of reflection in service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Richard et al., 2016) and support for the cohort model and affinity groups in service-learning programming (Mitchell, 2015). This study affirms the continuing challenges in facilitating sensitive and productive conversations on race and privilege amongst heterogenous groups. These are challenges that have been noted in previous studies (Green, 2003; Tilton, 2017, Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2020) with recommendations to create safe reflective spaces through cohort designs and the use of affinity-based reflection spaces.

Programs that create a sustained learning environment based on cohorts can take the time to establish trust and community among participants of diverse backgrounds. Alumni studies (Mitchell & Rost-Banik, 2020) have indicated that a cohort model can provide the environment in which participants can build trust with each other, enough to have sensitive conversations about race and privilege. In the case of the Community Scholars Program, each cohort of students identified as low-income, were interested in social change, and participated in the same trainings, events and reflection sessions. The participants not only formed a cohort but also shared a common identity of having a low-income, aged 18-24 and being full-time college students.

In this study, the reflection spaces for this program were places of emotional safety or counterspaces. Reflection is a critical part of the success of service-learning but in this case, the implication was that being in an affinity group with others with similar experiences facilitated richer and deeper discussion and greater growth. It is also an opportunity for students who share a lived experience to help each other learn and reflect, without taking precious time and mental energy to provide a background for understanding. As Teresa pointed out, her reflection opportunities within the Community Scholars Program centered her own learning with a learning community that shared a similar understanding of the world and could provide a safe space within which to process the challenges faced while in the community service-learning program. For example, in this study, the students grappled with the realization that they had overestimated their commonalities with the community of color in which they served. This finding is a cautionary tale for practitioners as it illustrates how students who reflect the demographics of the community may also have challenges in connecting as volunteers. Practitioners of service-learning should learn how to support students understand their differences with the community despite a great deal of similarity through appropriated facilitation strategies or creating opportunities for dialogue with peers. One strategy that is suggested for practitioners who seek to support students who reflect the demographics of the host community is to explore cohorts based on affinity.

Affinity based cohorts in community service-learning liberate students of color, or who occupy other oppressed identities, from being teachers when they should be students. Affinity-based cohorts are made up of participants of a similar background, for example, a shared racial, ethnic, gender or socio-economic identity. This was a suggestion made by Tilton (2017) as well. For institutions that offer co-curricular community service-learning,

designing programs that are specifically for students from low-income backgrounds, like the Community Scholars Program, would create an affinity group for students who identify as low-income. On a campus dominated by middle-to upper class students, this would be an appropriate way to create an affinity-based program. Another suggestion is for practitioners to partner with affinity-based student organizations based on shared race, ethnicity, or national origin on community service projects to create supportive spaces for reflection and service.

Strategies for Service-Learning Courses: Decolonization and Community Engagement

Though the site of this study was a co-curricular program, the service experience motivated students to find classes that were culturally responsive to their lived experiences. In this study, there was a relationship between access to both culturally relevant service opportunities and classes with decolonized curricula, as well as the ability to stay engaged over a longer period for up to three years. This implies that the longer the opportunity to serve and learn, the better. To increase the opportunity to engage in critical discourse and disrupt dominant narratives, institutions should offer both curricular and co-curricular opportunities that extend opportunities to engage in service and/or take classes that take a critical approach or decolonized curricula. For universities offering co-curricular programs, long-term involvement can be supported by specific strategies and incentives, such as work-study programs and development of critical studies classes.

In the previous section, it was noted that co-curricular programs that were also a work-study opportunity would generate long-term engagement, as would cohort-based programs. In the curricular space, the movement to decolonize the curriculum would provide critical fields of study and be a natural fit for the pedagogy of service-learning or as a

complement to co-curricular programming. This recommendation to support curricular decolonization comes from the participants in this study who found that their participation in community service-learning and enrollment in decolonized classes were important to their own intellectual understanding of social justice and effected their behaviors and values. This was especially true for those who did not have access to critical service-learning classes. For these students, opportunities to decolonized curricula offered an opportunity to supplement their co-curricular service-learning experience.

Decolonization of the curriculum refers to interrogating how knowledge is created, shared, or taught and is used (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). The recommendations presented here support previous calls (Sturm et al., 2011) to integrate the goals of increased diversity and inclusion with community engagement in research, teaching, and learning in the academy. The suggestion to use “counter-normative” (Harrison & Clayton, 2012, p.29) teaching and research practices within the culture of the academy, such as those found in service-learning has been advocated by proponents of curricular decolonization. Decolonized curricula break down the walls between those who study and those who are studied. For students who do not identify with middle-class White culture, decolonized curricula center their identities as learners and is culturally relevant pedagogy. The literature on decolonized curricula and methodologies also reads similarly to the scholarship on community engagement in higher education.

The rationale for recommending giving support to the efforts to decolonize the curriculum in the teaching and learning functions of higher education is because both service-learning and curricular decolonization are movements similar in philosophy and approach (Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Both fields amplify the idea that

knowledge is a democratic concept; it can come from any source and is not exclusive to the academy. For example, service-learning and ethnic studies amplify the voices of groups that traditionally go unstudied. Ethnic studies are an example of a decolonized curricula which is grounded in the knowledge and living history of communities that are ignored in traditional disciplines and an area for community engagement (Mitchell & Coll, 2017; Yep & Mitchell, 2017). For this reason, ethnic studies are a natural fit for community engagement higher education as the field already engages the world outside campus in teaching and learning but also serves as a complement to co-curricular community service-learning programs. For institutions that only offer co-curricular community service-learning programs, expanded access to decolonized curricula increases access to classes that provide an intellectual foundation for students engaged in community service. Both service-learning and decolonization are movements that seek to change practices within higher education which perpetuate marginalization and oppressions. Increasing access to decolonized curricula also addresses the classroom environment for students when issues of social justice are discussed. Using the example of an ethnic studies class, students of color can focus on their own learning, and not feel responsible for addressing microaggressions from classmates of different backgrounds.

Professors of ethnic studies courses can provide the scaffolding necessary for those who are unfamiliar to the social justice issues instead of classmates who are already acquainted with racism and inequity. This would address one finding of this study and previous literature on service-learning, that students of color do not like having conversations exploring equity, access, and social issues with those who have never had to experience lack of access or scarcity of resources. At the same time, there is a desire to learn more about the

histories and experiences of their own people. There are other fields of study, such as humanities, political science, that would also benefit from offering a critical approach.

Curricular decolonization efforts and community service-learning programs have other factors in common. Both practices give equal weight to the knowledge in studies, data sets and published papers and people with degrees to the knowledge held outside of the academy and shared through the retelling of history and institutional memory. This recommendation for practice was drawn from the finding that none of the students indicated interest in ethnic studies classes, or a desire to explore health or educational disparities. Those are the classes, However, that the students gravitated towards while they were engaged in community service-learning programming. Seeking out classes that would provide greater context and explanation for what was witnessed as volunteers with off-campus communities. Also, the participants in this study noted how much was learned from leaders and others met while at their volunteer sites. Overall, community service-learning can be a powerful experiential learning opportunity, but classes provide an intellectual space to process their own observations and understanding.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to present a counterstories which centered the experiences and perspectives of students of color in community service-learning. For the most part, the findings indicate that for students of color, sustained engagement in service in a community of color was critical to their personal and intellectual development while attending a predominantly White institution. Community service-learning, especially as a co-curricular tool, is used increasingly as a way for students and faculty to make sense of the complexities and contradictions of social issues, gain empathy and develop a sense of social

responsibility. Appreciation and recognition of the multiple narratives, such as were identified in this study, can help community service-learning be a platform for social change. Community service-learning is all about personal inquiry and the disruption and rebuilding of a worldview. For this reason, additional research to build off the counterstories presented here is necessary to replace any dominant narrative.

There are many counterstories in service-learning, and future research should address those stories to create an accessible and inclusive practice. This study yielded more than one counterstory, even with a small sample of individuals who shared four key characteristics. One could conclude that there are multiple narratives because most people occupy multiple identities that influence the perspectives borne of those multiple identities to form a unique worldview. Research focused on the relationship between community service-learning, civic and racial/ethnic identity development across income levels for students of color, impact of affinity-based community service-learning models, and the role of place and positionality in service-learning and/or civic identity development is recommended. Earlier it was noted that a limitation of this study is the size of the sample and being based at a particular type of institution with a specific population; traditionally aged undergraduates aged 18-24 enrolled at residential historically White institutions. The participants who all identify as low-income and as students of color, are also first-generation college students as well as immigrants. Studies with access to larger samples with students who do not fit this exact demographic would be recommended, such as students at open access institutions, or ones that matriculate older students.

Research on Impact of Community Partners on Learning Outcomes

In this study, the influence of leaders and practitioners from the community was noted by the students but not thoroughly explored in this study but is worthy of additional inquiry. Future research should address the impact of using community partners as co-teachers on students in both course-based and co-curricular service-learning programs. Additional research in this area may help to counter the common narrative of stakeholders from higher education bringing resources into communities with one that recognizes the power of the combined resources of the community and the institution. Similar to research on civic identity development, the research on the impact of community partners on learning outcomes should be conducted with sensitivity to multiple identities and socio-economic status.

Research on Civic Identity Development Across Identities and Class

Johnson (2017) sought to identify how civic engagement experiences through community service contributed to an increase in civic knowledge, recognition of values and led to a lifetime to civic engagement. Johnson noted that few studies have explored the connection between civic identity and identities related to race, class, and gender. The original design of the sample was focused on students from a low-income background and who identified as a person of color enrolled at a PWI. Unintentionally, everyone in the sample also identified as a first-generation immigrant and first in their family to attend college in the United States. To explore the influence of other narratives or to understand commonalities across experiences, research focused on middle-class or wealthy students of color, in addition to the experience of students of color who serve in their own communities while attending predominantly White institutions. Future research should also include and

compare the experiences for low-income American-born students of color or whose families had been in the United States for several generations, as well as middle-class students of color.

The findings from this study amplify the experience of community service-learning of students of color between the ages of 18 and 24, but longitudinal research of greater depth into the durable impact of community service-learning on civic engagement is necessary. While these students have demonstrated significant development in self-awareness, in their own understanding of social justice issues and identifying ways to be social change agents; they are late adolescents. Plans and perspectives change, based on a person's age, and these students will continue to have new experiences. In addition, to the existing research on the long-term impact of service-learning and civic engagement on alumni (Keen & Hall, 2008; Mitchell, 2015; Richard et al., 2016), longitudinal studies on the impact of college service-learning experiences for students of color across income levels and immigration status and the influence civic engagement into adulthood are necessary.

Research on the Role of Place and Positionality

For researchers and scholars of civic engagement and service-learning, the findings imply that the concept of *place* was key to the community service-learning experience. Exploring service-learning in the context of place identity, how identity is influenced by their physical environment (Hauge, 2007), would provide more insight as to why students of color found emotional safety or counterspaces in their communities of color and how it facilitated an attachment to the campus. It seemed that the feeling and acceptance of identifying with two spaces that are quite different from one another, such as a residential predominantly White campus and an urban ethnic enclave was key to a successful community service-

learning experience. Tuan provided an example of this when he was asked which place, he considered more “home like”; the Vietnamese neighborhood in which he spent 8 to 10 hours a week or the campus; he said he could not choose. In other words, the meaning of place and geographic identity was an essential part of participation in service-learning and their college experience. This was significant considering the alienation Tuan felt when first arriving on campus. Geographic identity is described as the influence of a physical location on perception (Hauge, 2007).

Dahan et al. (2019) noted that there was a lack of attention paid to place and positionality to the service-learning experience, referring to it as “place neutral” (p. 2) with no regard as to effect of how the learner relates to the community in which they serve and the university in which they are enrolled. For the students in this study, the constant crossing of the boundaries of hometowns, classrooms and dorms of the college, and the communities in which they served helped to develop an understanding of themselves and emotional grounding regardless of their physical location. Further research into this phenomenon would support the development of practices that open the boundaries of a campus to include the learning environment outside of classrooms, labs, and published knowledge.

Conclusion

This study, while focused on the specific community service-learning experience of students at PWIs who identify as low-income and as students of color, has implications for the community engagement in higher education overall. In looking at the findings, the community engagement experience of these students is a microcosm of the larger engagement experience for higher education. The students used the term “bubble” to describe what life on campus was like; an insular existence focused on matters important to only those

within the bubble. The bubble metaphor is like the metaphor of the “ivory tower” (Shapin, 2012) often ascribed to higher education, to describe a positionality removed from the practicalities of life and influenced by a narrow set of circumstances particular to a small, privileged population. The students in this study reported that the motivation to engage in community service-learning was rooted in a desire to make social change, using their educational experiences, linguistic and culture capital to create social change. Community engagement in higher education is similarly motivated by a public purpose (Harrison & Clayton, 2012) but also finds itself challenged because effective engagement requires a reassessment of assumptions about roles and process.

As Harrison and Clayton (2012) noted, the power of service-learning is in its “counter-normative nature” (p. 29) where participants, whether faculty or students must adjust to taking roles and identities that are not just novel, but counter to how one has been socialized. Community engagement in higher education, whether through service-learning or engaged research has been promoted as the way to return to the public purpose of universities. But as the narratives provided by the students in this study indicates, community engagement is a messy process because of the constant calibration of motivation, power, resources, needs and circumstances between the institution, individuals involved and the community. Indeed, the point is there is no one singular narrative of the service-learning experience but rather a constellation of narratives that represent the multiple intersecting identities of participants in service-learning classes and programs. The participants in this study did not fit the simple dominant narrative of a middle class, White student going into save a community of color that was low-income by providing services or imparting solutions to problems. Instead, the narratives were far more complex due to their intersecting identities

as students from low-income backgrounds, first in their family to attend college, as immigrants, being from the communities they served and as members of their respective institutions. People nor communities do not have just one story. As a practice that is essentially people-centered, service-learning or any community engagement in higher education cannot have just one narrative. This study did highlight one narrative that has gone unnoticed, and that is how community engagement in higher education can address issues of diversity, inclusion and belonging.

With this study, community service-learning, an opportunity that already exists on many campuses, can be a conduit for mitigating an environment which can often feel oppressive to students of color to cultivate a sense of belonging, community, and purpose, achieving the democratic purposes of higher education. This is especially important for students who struggle to find their place on a predominantly White campus. This does not mean community engagement can erase an institution's racial history or be a miracle cure for intergroup tensions on campus because as critical race theory says, the persistence of racism and Whiteness is real. However, it can be addressed in ways consistent, if counter-normative, with the core values and mission of higher education.

When this study was conceived, it was in response to how community service-learning is used to address the need to instruct students about diversity and equity and to demonstrate how students of color experience service-learning. Furthermore, as the concept of community engagement has moved from service-learning to engaged scholarship (Sandmann & Jones, 2019; Boyer, 1996) and moving community engagement into the core mission of higher education in the production of knowledge, the need for multiple narratives became more important. The circumstances recalled the TedTalk by Chimamanda Ngozi

Adiche, “The Danger of a Single Story” (2009) where she warned of the excessive power given to a dominant narrative. Her TedTalk is a helpful reminder to why counterstories are so important. As she explains in her talk,

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is "nkali." It's a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. (Adiche, 2009)

The power of the dominant narrative in community service has influenced the use and understanding of community service-learning as a tool of promoting diversity and charity. But elevating other narratives can shift how community service-learning is used in the radical act of transforming higher education to be agents of social change for stakeholders on and off campus. Another quote from Adiche’s (2009) TedTalk notes how multiple narratives can be an act of social justice:

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

As the researcher, this research and future scholarship is intended to contribute to the creation of stronger, respectful collaborations that build upon the strengths and resources of both institutions of higher education and community partners.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE: DEMOGRAPHICS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Name
University/College
Any other universities/colleges attended:
Year of College Completed:
Expected Graduation Year
What year of college are you going into the fall
Home Town
Home State
Home Country
Self-reported/Perceived Socioeconomic Level
Ethnicity
Race
Gender
Educational Level of Parents or Guardians

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

First Interview

Takes place via video or near campus

Introduce self and purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study is to find out about your college experience, how service experiences, like this one, influence you in the choices you make, how you behave, perspectives you have, in how you make decisions about courses, jobs, career, how the world works with regard to social justice and equity. This study is particularly focused on Students of color at Predominantly White Institutions. I will be asking you about your experiences on your campus; I'm looking for your stories and just to learn about your experience.

1. Tell me about where you grew up? What was your hometown like? Your high school?
 - a. Ask about racial/ethnic, socio-economic demographics of school and hometown, if they do not mention it.
 - 1) What is it like being a student here? As a student of color?
 - 2) Why did you decide to spend all this time volunteering? And why this particular program?
 - a. Probes: Ask what program; what does the program do? What do they do in the program? Ask them to describe the neighborhood/community served—racial/ethnic demographics, socioeconomic, host organization name/mission if they know it. Ask specifically if they chose that program because they reflected the racial/ethnic demographics of the community served by the program?
 - 4) How does it feel to be in ____ (name of the neighborhood) versus being on campus? Specifically, how does it feel to be in a community where you are racially or ethnically similar to the others, as opposed to being on campus, which is predominantly White?
 - 5) One of the goals of the Community Scholars Program is to develop your thinking about social justice. Talk to me about how you define social justice and equity. What do you imagine your role to be in promoting social justice and equity?
 - 6) Why did you agree to be part of this study? What part of the study piqued your interest—the focus on community engagement and service-learning or students of color at PWIs? Why?

Second Interview

Can take place via teleconference or in person

Repeat what the purpose of the study is

1) It's a couple of months later; what do you think of the program? Is it what you expected?

2) How has school been?

3) What is it like, transitioning between the academic, predominantly White campus environment while you travel into the more diverse and off-campus environment and returning to campus? What does it feel like for you?

Probes: Is there anything about this experience that is challenging or easy for you? Tell me about that

4) What is it like in the community for you? How does it feel to be a person of color, and also a student from (name of university)?

Probes: Has anyone said anything to you about being a student at (name of university)? Do people at the program (clients, participants, children being tutored etc.) have questions about your experience here or why you volunteer? Is there anything about this experience that is challenging for you? What is easy? Have there been any surprises?

Follow up on the conversation from the last interview

Third/Final Interview

Repeat what the purpose of the study is

Follow up on conversation from last interview

1) It's a couple of months later; how is program? How is school?

Probes: Will you be continuing with the program? Why, Why not?

Summer plans: will you be working in this community? Another community?

2) Looking back at the beginning of the year, you said you were doing this program for the following reasons: (repeat from the first interview). What do you think of your response? Was the experience what you expected? Why or Why not?

3) This is our last interview; so let me ask you: How has participating in this program affected your life as a student?

Probes: How have you changed? What are you doing differently now compared to before you started school and before you started going to ____? (name the neighborhood or program name) How has this affected your classes or participation in classes? Plans for post-graduation?

4) Talk to me about how you now define social justice and equity. What do you imagine your role to be in promoting social justice and equity now? Recall what they said in their first interview and explore if it has changed and why.

Note: These interview questions are kept broad intentionally in order to allow the students to talk as much as possible. Some of the students may know me, some may not and thus, therefore, expect to be “answering questions” as opposed to simply talking with me and giving me their stories. The students should be as natural as possible; comfortable so that their tones, pauses, and vocalizations can give life to their narratives

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE CODEBOOK

Research Question	Primary Coding	Examples	Theme
<p>Q1: How do students of color use their community service-learning experiences, on and off campus, to navigate the borders between the PWI campus in which they attend school and the community in which they serve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To escape the bubble, repeated use of the term “bubble”, a term to describe the surreal insularity of campus where everyone was preoccupied with grades, classes, lived in the same type of housing and ate the same food • “the bubble” also referred to the whiteness and upper-middle class culture of the campus • Initial discomfort on campus • To meet people with similar interests, particularly in social issues 	<p>“had to get out of here” “this place is a bubble, it’s not real”</p> <p>“sense of relief getting off campus”</p> <p>“Can be my whole self” [in the community]”</p> <p>“the reflection spaces in program were about my learning; I loved them”</p> <p>“had never seen wealth like that.”</p> <p>“I feel like I’m inferior to majority of the people here”</p> <p>“It’s just more like a natural community; different threads connect us, not like school where everything is centered around academic and professional interests” (referring to friends made through community service)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving the Bubble • Counterspaces on and off campus • Sense of Belonging • Change in sense of self

<p>Q1a: How does community service-learning influence decisions about academic and professional options, specifically, course of study, majors, graduate school, careers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice of major before and after starting community service • Taking courses influenced by service • Change for further schooling. • Consideration of different professional pathways 	<p>“I think my service work has really pushed me to learn more about how history has affected marginalized communities”</p> <p>“I have to help my parents pay off our house...but eventually policy, economic policy development in inner cities”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in actions • Changes in beliefs
<p>Q1b: How does the community service-learning experience shape students’ understanding of their own role and actions in promoting equity and social justice, and ultimately their civic identity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-college motivations; charity or social change? compulsory or voluntary? • Motivation in college • Avoid savior complex, awareness of structural barriers to social justice • Discovering differences with service community • Impact of their degree 	<p>“my family had taught me it was important to give back”</p> <p>“I did service in high school; it was part of my high school curriculum”; “my high school talked a lot about social justice”; “I didn’t even know the term educational equity”</p> <p>“There’s also other, like outside impacts like resources or just generally systems that are already in place like government and things like that definitely affect how much I can impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Civic Identity • Working across difference • Changes in belief, values, action

the communities I
work in”
“I’m willing to
share my
experiences to show
other Asians that its
okay to share your
experiences or it’s
okay to be radical,
share your opinions”

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