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Publication Date

2023

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Stories from the Field: Black Student Service-Learning Experiences

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Rochelle N. Jackson-Smarr

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2023

The dissertation of Rochelle N. Jackson-Smarr is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2023

DEDICATION

The completion of my journey to Dr. Smarr is dedicated to my family: Torrell and Vivian Smarr, TaMetria Hamm, Faith Hamilton, and my Greater Woodlawn Park COGIC family.

To my nieces, LaNese and Michelle Hamm, I hope you are proud of your TT.

To Danielle Nicole Carmichael, my best friend who transitioned early into this journey. I sincerely miss you daily.

EPIGRAPH

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God *is* with you wherever you go. – Joshua 1:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. – 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Stories from the Field: Black Student Service-Learning Experiences

by

Rochelle N. Jackson-Smarr

Doctor of Education

University of California San Diego, 2023
California State University San Marcos, 2023

Professor Erika Daniels, Chair

The increasingly diverse student population serves as a motivating factor for colleges to reimagine both their academic pedagogy and curriculum to be more inclusive of diverse student learners' needs. Service-learning is a high-impact practice that positively influences students' academic success, and student engagement on- and off-campus, along with persistence toward graduation (Kuh, 2008, Finley & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009; McCormick et al., 2017; Valentine et al., 2021). The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) data from 2008 to 2020 reported that Black undergraduate students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than White students (Harper, 2009; Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh, 2008; Workbook: NSSE High-

Impact Practices, n.d.). However, there is limited scholarship examining the lived experiences of Black service-learners to understand their high participation in this high-impact practice.

The aim of this research study is to provide a macro picture of Black student's experiences in service-learning through reflective semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2015; Shah, 2020). To better understand the experiences of Black students' service-learning experiences, a grounded research study was used to highlight themes that emerged from the data collected by participants (Charmaz, 2017; Kimball et al., 2016; Mertler, 2019). Together the conceptual frameworks of transformative learning theory and student voice theory provided a lens into how students make meaning of their service-learning experiences. By sharing their own narrative stories about what they learned (transformative learning theory) and how they learned through their service-learning experiences (student voice theory) (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kiely, 2005; Matthews & Dollinger, 2022; Mezirow, 1997; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). This study added narrative responses from seventeen semi-structured interviews with Black undergraduate students about their service-learning course experiences. From the participants' reflective stories about the Black service-learning undergraduate experience four findings emerged: the importance of reflection, disposition to service, kinship, and service-learning's impact on their career aspirations. These findings contextualize Black students' transformative learning from their perspective about the value of service-learning courses. Practitioners, scholars, and faculty members should consider these findings as a start to understanding how the experiences of students of color in service-learning can lead to a change in pedagogy, practice, and scholarship of service-learning that is inclusive of diverse learner experiences.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Four-year college retention and graduation rates are indicators of the widening achievement gap between White students and non-White students, known as students of color. The percentage of students of color attending college has increased from 29.6% in 1996 to 45.2% in 2016 (ACE Unveils New Resource on the Status of Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education, 2019). In 2019, the college enrollment rate showed signs of a shift among college demographics, with an increase in students of color enrollment that reflected 64% Hispanic, 82% Asian, and 57% Black students, compared to 62% White students (Conditions of Education 2021, 2021). Despite the U.S. population shifting toward a minority-majority demographic, Black student enrollment and persistence toward their bachelor's degree continue to lag behind White students and other ethnic demographic groups (Flores, 2020; Wazwaz, 2015). The six-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time Black students pursuing a traditional four-year degree is 40%, compared to first-time, full-time White students' six-year graduation rate of 64% (Indicator 23: Postsecondary Graduation Rates, n.d.). In 2019, Black graduates, ages 25 to 29, held 28% of the U.S. population's bachelor's degrees. Black graduates with bachelor's degrees are 16% less than the 45% of the White population in the same age bracket (Conditions of Education 2021). This data suggests that it is time to shift from focusing on the achievement gap when analyzing academic success for students of color to focusing more on the opportunity gap (access to academic support and student engagement programs). Addressing the opportunity gap can begin to narrow the achievement gap for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Diverse learners require varied pedagogies and courses that meet a mixture of learning styles to engage and apply learning both academically and socially within the classroom and within the community (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Mungo, 2017). One way to close the opportunity

gap for students of color is to increase access to academic interventions known as high-impact practices. High-impact practices (HIPs) were codified by Kuh (2008) to emphasize ten undergraduate educational programs proven to increase student engagement, academic achievement, and persistence toward graduation. The identified HIPs are internships, first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, service-learning/community-based learning, writing-intensive communities, diversity/global learning courses, and capstone courses and projects. HIPs are active learning opportunities that deepen students' knowledge through meaningful interactions between peers and faculty beyond the classroom over an extended time frame (semester instead of weeks). Participation in HIPs fosters students' ability to work together beyond the classroom, provides students with frequent opportunities to receive ongoing feedback for improvement from faculty, and allows students to apply their learning in real-world contexts (Finely & McNair, 2013; Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh, 2008).

Service-learning is a high-impact practice that connects students' academic course learning with a community service project and on-going reflection activities. As a HIPs activity, service-learning influences students' academic engagement with increased cultural awareness, civic responsibility, reflection, and critical analysis (Kuh, 2008; Oling-Sisay, 2018; Astin, et.al, 2000; Seider, et.al, 2013). Service-learning scholarship has proven this HIP to have positively influenced students' academic success, student engagement on- and off-campus, along with persistence toward graduation (Kuh, 2008; Finley & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009; McCormick et al., 2017; Valentine et al., 2021). Greater access to service-learning courses is a campus-wide institutional method to be implemented to close the achievement gap in higher education for students of color, particularly for Black students (Harper, 2009; Finely & McNair, 2013). The

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value of high-impact practices, in particular service-learning programs, is not disputed. However, the significance of this applied-learning method on the experiences of Black students has not been examined from their perspective, beyond quantitative data analysis, to truly understand their unique experiences.

Purpose of This Study

The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) reported on their data dashboard from 2008 to 2020 that Black undergraduate students participated in service-learning courses at higher rates than White students (Workbook: NSSE High-Impact Practices, n.d). According to the 2020 NSSE High Impact Practice Participation dashboard, 55% of Black or African-American first-year freshmen students participated in service-learning courses, and 65% of Black or African-American seniors participated in service-learning courses (Workbook: NSSE High-Impact Practices, n.d). Comparatively, White students participated in service-learning as freshmen at a rate of 41% and 61% as seniors during the same time period (Workbook: NSSE High-Impact Practices, n.d). While the statistical numbers are within a 4% (seniors) and 14% (freshmen) differential range, the numerical data points provide no narrative reasoning to demonstrate why Black students participate at higher rates than White students in this particular HIP as freshmen and seniors.

The purpose of this research study was to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. Examining the experiences of Black service-learning students on their ways of knowing and making sense of their HIP experiences is two-fold: understanding the factors and motivations behind their high participation rates in this HIP and understanding how this group's experience is similar or counter to the dominant view of service-learning student experiences. An in-depth analysis of Black service-learning student

experience will begin to shift the field from blanket "charity-based" service-learning student experiences toward more contextualized experiences that collectively inform the field of service-learning. It will also highlight the distinct experiences of students of color in service-learning (Britt, 2012; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell, et al., 2012).

There is paucity of research in the field of service-learning on how Black students interpret their understanding of course content with a meaningful community service project. Black student experiences are not disaggregated through the current data-centered scholarship of the field of service-learning (Workbook: NSSE High-Impact Practices, n.d; Finley & McNair, 2013). Current scholarship notes the positive impact on Black students' engagement and academic success (Harper, 2009; Finley & McNair, 2013, Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh et al., 2013). Understanding Black students' interpretation of service-learning experiences as it relates to their academic journey and how they connect their community service projects to their course learning will provide context to understanding service-learning as a high-impact practice. This research study sought to fill a gap in the scholarship by highlighting the narrative perspectives of Black students' participation in service-learning courses to add to the current quantitative data on their experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

- How do Black students experience service-learning courses?
    - What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?
    - What dissonance in the service-learning experience do Black students encounter in their participation?

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These research questions framed the data collection and analysis of this study as it sought to gain insight on Black student experiences in service-learning courses.

Significance

The perspectives and experiences of Black students in service-learning have been minimally researched and included in scholarship (Harden, 2009; Motoike, 2017). Therefore, this study responded to the call to action by Stewart and Webster (2011) to elevate the voices and experiences of students of color within the field of service-learning scholarship, research, and practice. For service-learning to truly reach its transformative learning potential, the field should be more inclusive of understanding who the participants are, why they participate, and what ways of knowing are being transformed as a result of their participation (Gilbride-Brown, 2011). Specifically, this study will explore Black student experiences in service-learning to better understand their perspective and experiences in this high-impact practice. There is enough scholarship and practitioner knowledge on service-learning outcomes in broad instances that now is the time to assess how ethnic groups interpretations of their experience in this HIP.

Given that Black students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than any other ethnic group, it is important for researchers to closely examine the contextualized experiences of Black students (Harper, 2009; Finley & McNair, 2013; Gilbride-Brown, 2011; Motoike, 2017). There is a need for Black students to detail what they learned and how they learned. This will push service-learning to be an impactful, transformative learning pedagogy for all students.

Intentional consideration of Black student voices in service-learning experiences contextualizes their experience in the classroom and in the community. Greater access to service-learning courses can be an institutional method implemented to close the achievement gap in

higher education between White students and students of color, particularly for Black students (Harper, 2009; Finely & McNair, 2013, Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). This scholarly research study contributes to the growing counter-narrative of the White dominant perspective of the service-learning field by highlighting the experiences of Black student participation (Stewart & Webster, 2011; Song et al., 2017; Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021).

Conceptual Frameworks

It is important to also consider the ways in which students frame their own learning, knowing and acquisition of knowledge from service-learning experiences. The conceptual frameworks for this study are centered around epistemological methods of making sense of one's experience: student voice theory and transformative learning theory. Student voice theory gave narration to how Black students made sense of their service-learning course experience (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006; Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). Transformative learning theory framed the understanding of the impact of their experiences in service-learning courses that influenced their ways of knowing, being, and doing as a result of participation (Kiely, 2005; Meizrow, 1997). Together, they informed the way in which the data was analyzed by the researcher to understand how the participants identified their ways of knowing and articulated their learning as participants in service-learning courses.

Together student voice theory and transformative learning theory provided a collective lens that guided this educational research study to understand how Black service-learning students participating in this HIP articulate their ways of knowing, doing and being based on their experience. Through critical reflection and discourse regarding student learning, community service projects, and the impacts of the two learning spaces on their academic success, and

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student engagement, students were prompted to share their authentic perspectives on this high-impact practice.

Research Design

To better understand the experiences of Black students' service-learning experiences, a grounded research study was used to highlight themes that emerged from the data collected by participants (Charmaz, 2017; Kimball et al., 2016; Mertler, 2019). A grounded theory qualitative research study fills the gap in service-learning scholarship by highlighting Black student experiences based on their "participant perspective" in their service-learning courses (Mertler, 2019, pp. 82). Employing an interview methodology allowed the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews on the meaningful experiences of participants by prompting them to tell a story about their service-learning experiences. The semi-structured interview protocol provided room in the conversations to following up with probing questions to gather more details about their experiences. Participant interview studies are most often used to capture directly how someone makes meaning of their experiences, along with granting insight as to how they draw these conclusions of learning and knowing (Lareau, 2021; Johnson & Christensen, 2010). These techniques together invited participants to implement one of service-learning's foundational tenants: reflection. Participants were prompted to discuss how they made sense of how they learned and what they learned from their own perspectives by reflecting on their most meaningful service-learning experiences.

Participants were recruited for the study via the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) membership list-serv, along with the researcher's access to community engagement colleague list-serve. A participant questionnaire was utilized to collect student interest and confirm their eligibility to participate in the study. All data collected were safely

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protected and used only by the researcher to determine if participants met the eligibility requirements through demographic identifiers, service-learning course compositions, and initial questions about their experiences. Participants' identities were anonymous when they complete the questionnaire. Their identity became confidential at the end of the questionnaire if they chose to opt-in to partake in an interview with the researcher. The study sought to complete up to 20 semi-structured interviews via Zoom. A total of 17 semi-structured interviews were completed for the purposes of this study.

Definitions

Black/African-Americans - Refers to racial and ethnic attributes of Black American and the African diaspora.

Community Engagement - The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (The Elective Classification for Community Engagement - Carnegie Elective Classifications, n.d.).

Community-Engaged Learning, Experiential Learning, Applied-Learning, Direct-Service - These terms are each used interchangeably to identify teaching and learning practices that are founded on learning through action. Along with students learning with community members to better understand societal inequalities and address them collectively through academic and community collaboration.

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) - Active learning practices proven to increase student retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2008).

Service-learning Courses- "A pedagogical strategy that employs community service and reflection on service to support students in meeting academic learning goals and developing

greater community and social responsibility" (Mitchell et al., 2012). "The hyphen in service-learning symbolizes reflection and depicts the symbiotic relationship between service and learning" (Jacoby, 2014).

Students of Color and Diverse Students - These two terms will be used interchangeable to identify people racially who are non-White (Zamudio-Suarez, 2021). Choosing these terms over "minority," "underrepresented," or underserved" is choosing to recognize non-White people in affirming language instead of deficit rooted. These terms will refer to undergraduate college students "skin color rather than culture or ethnicity…I capitalize racial descriptors such as White, Black, Brown, or Indigenous. This is to acknowledge and place racial identity on par with ethnic identity Black/African American" (Singleton, 2014, p. 17).

Summary

This research study implemented a grounded theory research design to inform the broader service-learning field of Black student experiences. In doing so, the study adds narrative responses from the field of service-learning about Black student experiences that contextualizes the high proportion rates of Black service learners. Understanding all student perceptions of service-learning, depending on their ethnic background, can provide insight on how diverse students contextualize their learning experience in the classroom and with community. The limited articles and empirical studies that highlight the experiences of "service learners of color," particularly Black students, allows there to be a gap in the scholarship regarding their experiences in this high-impact practice (HIP) (Ghosh, 2021; Motoike, 2017, pp.140). The remaining chapters of the dissertation provide an overview of existing literature in the field of service-learning, the methodology of the research study including data collection and analysis. The final two chapters review the study findings and researcher recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

It is imperative to understand how the framework of the field of service-learning has shaped Black service learner experiences. The following literature review provides an overview of the existing scholarship of service-learning as a high-impact practice (HIP) through the examination of four themes: service-learning in academia, pedagogical variations in the implementation of service-learning, Black community interpretations of service-learning, and student of color experiences in this HIP. Each of these major themes has subthemes to further expound upon how service-learning scholarship emphasizes the positive benefits of student participation with a bias toward highlighting the experiences of White students (Mitchell et al., 2012; Motoike, 2017). An overview of the two conceptual frameworks guiding this research study, student voice theory and transformative learning theory, will conclude this chapter as an introduction to the data analysis of this research study.

Service-Learning in Academia

The following section discusses the emergence of service learning in academia. Thereafter, I operationalize service-learning and its relationship to high-impact practices. The scholarships of John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Dorothy Day are often cited as early contributors to the conceptual framing of the term's *community service* and *service-learning* (Jacoby, 2014; Morton et al., 2011). Dewey, Addams, and Day's collective educational scholarship identified civics, action, and reflection as essential components students need in order to learn from educational experiences (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Morton et al., 2011). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle heuristic in the mid-1980s contributed to the field of community engagement's advancement by providing an analysis and visual of the cyclical applied-learning process inherent within service-learning, that includes reflection as an essential connection between

learning and serving (Kolb, 2015; Jacoby, 2014). Moreover, the scholarships of Eyler and Giles (1999) before the start of the 21st century compiled for practitioners and faculty members several resource guides and books on how to design service-learning courses with effective learning outcomes, identify meaningful community projects, incorporate on-going reflection, and assessment of student learning (Eyler et al., 1996; Jacoby, 2014; Shah 2020).

University-level establishment of community service programs began in the mid-1980s with the formation of Campus Opportunity and Outreach League (COOL) (Brotherton, 2002; Rhoads, 1998). COOL programs provided college students agency to volunteer in the community through service projects based in low-income communities of color near collegiate campuses (Brotherton, 2002; Kendall, 1991). As a result of COOL connecting institutions with their local communities, in 1985, three college presidents (from Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford) established Campus Compact to formalize service-learning programs as an academic courses and institutional commitment to community partnerships (Blankson et al., 2015; Brotherton, 2002). To combat negative media portrayal of college students as self-absorbed and focused solely on obtaining high paying jobs upon graduation, Campus Compact formed to provide resources for colleges and universities to develop civic engagement partnerships with their surrounding campus communities to foster active citizenship among their students. Campus Compact's increased success led to the national Serve America Act that provided federal grants to aid the development of curricular service-learning courses across colleges in the 1990s (Brotherton, 2002).

In the 1990s, college students were primarily White with a small percentage being students of color, thus early service-learning participants in curricular courses were predominantly White. Since the 1990s the widely accepted narrative of service-learning courses

is that they are led by White faculty, with White students serving in communities of color in low-income neighborhoods near college campuses (Wylie, 2014). This has led to the research and scholarship of service-learning to be centered on examining predominately White student experiences (Castrellón & Pérez-Torres, 2018; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012; Oling-Sisay, 2018). In doing so, the experiences of students of color have been limited from the beginning of academic service-learning history leading to a narrow view of the participants of this developing field (Blankson et al., 2015; Bocci, 2015; Brotherton, 2002).

Service-Learning Defined

Kendall (1991) is often cited by scholars for identifying over 145 terms used to describe service-learning as an educational practice (Blankson, et al. 2015; Eyler & Giles; 1999; Mitchell, 2008). The diverse terminology of service-learning during Kendall's research included education for social responsibility, experiential education, public service, reciprocal learning, and voluntary action (Kendall, 1991). Nearly thirty years later, scholars and practitioners continue to interchange the term service-learning with the following updated terms: community service, civic engagement, and community engagement (Ghosh, 2021; Jacoby, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Morton, 2011). Each of these terms can be used to identify a curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that incorporate learning, community service (action), and reflection (Ghosh, 2021). In either setting, students are prompted to learn through experience and reflection to meet course learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999, Jacoby, 2014).

Furthermore, the term *service-learning* is polysemous as it is used to describe "a program, a pedagogy and a philosophy" by scholars and practitioners (Jacoby, 2014, p. 4; Kendall, 1991; Mitchell & Latta, 2020). Terminology differentiation can be attributed to the variety of ways that faculty can implement service projects, and reflection into their course

curriculum (Beatty, 2010; Jacoby, 2014; Yep & Mitchell, 2017). Regardless of its terminology variation, most scholars of service-learning concur that service-learning is centered around four essential tenants: academic learning, community service, reflection, and reciprocity (Blankson, et al, 2015; Bordelon & Philips, 2006; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Elyer & Giles, 1999; Furco, 1996; Kendall, 1991; Jacoby, 2014). Service-learning courses community service projects can span the spectrum of after-school tutoring and mentoring of underserved youth, developing, and implementing curriculum for a STEM course, providing companionship and social breaks for elderly to off-set Alzheimer's, or creating researching policy matters impacting services provided by community organizations.

There are a few often cited definitions of service-learning that many scholars and practitioners utilize to ground their implementation of this educational practice. Furco (1996) defined service-learning emphasizing reciprocity in partnerships as "service-learning programs are distinguished from other approaches of experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider, and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring" (p. 5). Similarly, Bringle and Hatcher (2009) defined service-learning as a

> credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflects on their service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhances sense of personal values and civic responsibility (p. 38).

Jacoby (2014) defines service-learning "as a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes" (pp.1-2). The very hyphen in the word, service-learning, represents how reflection connects learning to service to

reiterate how learning does not happen in silos, however they hyphen accentuates reflection as the process for learning through community service (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2014).

Service-learning as a teaching and learning method (pedagogy) fosters students' community awareness and citizenship by integrating academic learning from course material to a meaningful community-service project with ongoing reflection (Mitchell, 2008; Rice & Pollack, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000; Said et al., 2015). Service-learning courses are primarily student-focused with students serving in the community to learn about a social concern and how to address a problem as it relates to their course theme (Britt, 2012; Jacoby, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Rice & Pollack, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000). Faculty incorporate service-learning pedagogy into their courses to connect academic theory to practice (community service projects). By doing so, faculty integrate academic learning from a course to a meaningful community-service project with ongoing reflection to deepen student understanding (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2014; Mitchell, 2008). Collectively, these definitions of service-learning annotate that service-learning is not simply students completing service projects as a requirement of their course, rather they are learning to serve their community and society as it relates to their course (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

Service-Learning as a High-Impact Practice

Since the inception of the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2000, service-learning has been included on the survey to better understand educational practices and activities that influence student learning, development, and persistence (NSSE's Conceptual Framework (2013), n.d.; Kuh & Kinzie, 2018). As the founding director of NSSE, Kuh tracked the engagement of students in an array of educationally effective programs, now known as high-impact practices (HIPs) (NSSE's Conceptual Framework (2013), n.d.). In collaboration with the

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Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), Kuh (2008) identified high-impact practices based on NSSE survey data collected and analyzed annually from several hundred colleges and universities across the United States. High-impact practices are educational activities that have a significant positive influence on students' critical thinking skill development, academic success, increased engagement, and increased persistence to graduation rates (Kuh, 2008; Kuh & Kinzie, 2018; Finley & McNair 2013). Since 2008, the listings of HIPs has been expanded and refined to include the following curricular educational activities: first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities, service learning and/or community-based learning, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, capstone courses and projects, internships, common intellectual experiences, collaborative assignments and projects, ePortfolios, writing intensive courses (Kuh, 2008; NSSE's Conceptual Framework (2013), n.d.; National Survey on Student Engagement, 2007).

As a HIP, service-learning courses complement students in-class learning with meaningful community service projects to apply their learning in real-world experiences in unscripted situations to deepen their learning by doing (Kuh, 2008; Kuh & Kinzie, 2018). Service-learning courses provide students with an applied-learning experience through a community-based project connected to their academic course to analyze and reflect on a community concern. Many studies have examined the impact of service-learning on students. Scholars have concluded that students of color are more likely to participate in service-learning courses than their White peers in comparison to participation in other HIPs (Finely & McNair, 2013; Harper, 2009; Kuh, 2008; National Survey on Student Engagement, 2022; Oling-Sisay; 2018). Scholars have leveraged the empirical data of the NSSE to note the salutary benefits of high-impact practice participation for students of color as it correlates to their increased

academic success, engagement, and persistence through non-traditional educational activities (Harper, 2009; Finely & McNair, 2013; Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). However, few research studies examine the lived-experiences of students of color participants in service-learning courses (Becker & Paul, 2015; Castrellón & Pérez-Torres, 2018; Holsapple, 2012; Price et al., 2014; Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021).

Pedagogical Variations

Kuh and Kinzie (2013) noted in their rebuttal to the questioning of the benefits of high-impact practices (HIPs) that it is the implementation of these educational activities that substantiates the effectiveness of the HIPs label to these experiences. Consequently, it is important to highlight how the pedagogy of service-learning as a teaching and learning method influences student understanding of community development. The pedagogy focus can be on awareness and development of civic value (traditional service-learning) and social justice/civic action (critical service-learning) depending on the lens through which the course is taught (Jacoby, 2014; Deans, 1999; Mitchell, 2008; Said et al., 2015). Evolving from the traditional service-learning definition, modern scholars have shifted toward a critical service-learning pedagogical variation that emerged in the late 20th century into the early 21st century. Seeking to adapt the pedagogy and practices of the field to meet the needs of a more diverse college demographic (Britt, 2012; Jacoby, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Oling-Sisay, 2018). Scholars have made distinctions about the implementation of service-learning pedagogy to integrate student learning outcomes that deepen student awareness of social inequalities, mutually benefit community organizations, and decenter White-student learning predilections (Britt, 2012; Jacoby, 2014; Mitchell, 2008; Rhoads, 1998; Rosenberger, 2000). By distinguishing the pedagogical variations of service-learning faculty members are provided with more than one method of connecting

academic learning to application. They can utilize community service projects related to their discipline to compliment course student learning outcomes (Britt, 2012; Mitchell, 2008; Rice & Pollack, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000).

There are two main pedagogical variations of service-learning: traditional (awareness, service, civic values) and critical (skill-set, social justice, social action) (Britt, 2012; Rhoads, 1998; Rosenberger; 2000; Mitchell, 2008; Britt, 2012). Jacoby (2014) notes the distinction between the two service-learning pedagogies canonized by Mitchell (2008) as "a traditional approach emphasizes service without attention to systems of inequality, and a critical approach that is unapologetic in its aims to dismantle structures of injustice" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50, as cited in Jacoby, 2014). Both pedagogies of service-learning are committed to equity, justice and reciprocity through service to one's community (Mitchell & Latta, 2020; Oling-Sisay, 2018; Said et al. 2015). Traditional service-learning fosters students' social awareness through volunteering, critical service-learning fosters students' ability to create social change by redistributing power in communities to "move beyond the work of taking care of immediate needs, to community action that frees people from those needs" (Rosenberger, 2000, p.31; Mitchell & Latta, 2020; Said et al., 2015).

Traditional Service-Learning

Traditional service-learning emphasizes students' skill-set reflexivity and development of their civic values (Britt, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). In this pedagogical variation the community service aspect of the course is complementary to student's course content to develop specific skills and their civic awareness (Britt, 2012; Mitchell, 2008; Oling-Sisay, 2018). Students in the traditional service-learning model often select their own service site with minimal guidance from the faculty member, complete five to twenty hours of service, and discuss their experience in

class and in reflective written or oral discussions. Traditional service-learning student outcomes include altruism, tolerance, cultural awareness, and increased social responsibility at higher rates than their non-service-learning peers (Mitchell, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Students are the main beneficiaries of the service experience as they can practice their disciplinary skills in a real-world setting while developing their discipline-specific competence (Britt, 2012). Community partners receive benefit to their organizations as student volunteers assist them to provide greater capacity and increase resources available via staffing coverage. In traditional service-learning pedagogy the role of service for the course is seen to contextualize learning and encourage critical thinking of students through guided reflection. This leads to the students having both self-confidence to connect their academic knowledge to a community matter, and a sense of personal responsibility to act with the community to aid in resolving a need.

Critical Service-Learning

Mitchell (2008) was certainly not the first service-learning scholar to juxtapose two variations in the pedagogy of service-learning. It was Rhoads (1997) who initially tinkered with an alternative pedagogy of service-learning (Mitchell & Latta, 2020). Rhoads provided eight principals to move from community service to *critical service learning* that allowed for "solidarity as part of the struggle for social change and justice" (Rhoads, 1997; p. 220). He connected feminist theory with Freire's popular education model to conceptualize a refined version of service-learning. Rhoads envisioned *critical community service* as an ethic of care to foster student participation in community service tied to larger societal issues to consider their role in community development (Rhoads, 1997). He posited that service-learning community projects should not be viewed as out of classroom experiences, rather as real-life learning

experiences that involve reflecting on service in the context of broader societal systems (Rhoads, 1997, 1998).

Rosenberger (2000) extended upon Rhoads ethic of care through community service by incorporating a more direct Freirean lens to service-learning. Paulo Freire is a famed Brazilian scholar known for his liberatory scholarship based on popular education that seeks to liberate oppressed people through community organizing and literacy education that leads to critical consciousness (Deans, 1999; Rosenberger, 2000; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). Freire believed in "praxis as a pedagogy of reflection and action designed to empower the oppressed and bring about social change" (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019, p. 36). A Freirean lens on service-learning connects meaningful community service projects to course learning outcomes that foster the development of critical analysis and thinking of students through dialogue and problem-posing on social, political, and economic injustices (Rosenberger, 2000). Traditional service-learning courses provide students with social awareness and meeting individual community needs. Whereas a Freirean lens to service-learning advocates for social justice through collective action with community members (Rosenberger, 2000; Rhoads, 1998). Developing a critical consciousness about the societal systems and historical oppressions facing a community shifts service from being primarily student centered, toward being reciprocal in addressing the interests of the community as well as students learning outcomes (Rosenberger, 2000; Mitchell, 2008).

Critical service-learning utilizes a social justice lens to incorporate all stakeholders: students, community members, faculty. This pedagogy of service learning seeks to dismantle power structures and emphasizes students' investigation of the root cause of social inequalities that create a need for service projects (Mitchell, 2008; Oling-Sisay, 2018; Mitchell & Latta,

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2020). The three elements needed to shift a course from traditional service-learning to critical service-learning are: working to redistribute power among all stakeholders, developing authentic relationships inside and outside of the classroom, and utilizing a social change perspective of investigating, examining, and addressing social inequalities (Mitchell, 2008).

Similarly, as a combination of influences from social movements, critical pedagogy, and community organizing, Britt's (2012) social justice activism service-learning pedagogy highlights social inequalities and seeks to understand the root causes of social problems. Students in critical service-learning courses foster relationships with community members to better understand marginalized groups and the systemic inequalities challenging the community. As a result, students become change agents in their communities by raising awareness and advocating for structural change (Britt, 2012). Students are encouraged to use critical pedagogies to understand systemic inequalities, to recognize the inequities variations communities, and how to take action with community to address them collectively. Subsequently, of this social activism focused service-learning pedagogy, students become critical citizens of their community. They become aware of the impact of social problems negatively influencing the progress of both the community as a whole and its members (Britt, 2012). As a transformative learning experience, critical service-learning deepens student knowledge of social inequalities by challenging them to consider negative stereotypes, biases, and assumptions they might have regarding the communities they are interacting with and serving (Gardner, 2020; Mitchell, 2008; Oling-Sisay, 2018). Throughout the critical service-learning experience students examine their social responsibilities as being part of the change the community, fostering active citizenship.

Black Community Interpretations of Service-Learning

There is a counter history to the widely accepted narrative about the origins of *community service* and *service-learning* in American academia that correlates to the establishment of Black communities' post-slavery (Bocci, 2015; Stevens, 2003; Morton, 2011; Zamudio et al., 2011). Campus Compact leaders can be credited with formalizing service-learning in the academy as pedagogy, yet it is done without recognizing the role of community engagement in the Black community (Brotherton, 2002; Bocci, 2015; Kendall, 1991). At the turn of the 19th century, only a few decades removed from the end of slavery, Black communities began to internally organize for their community advancement in society through social thought discussions and collective actions to establish cultural organizations, community activities and businesses for the betterment of the Black race (Bocci, 2015; Stevens, 2003). Through communal systems in Black churches, schools, and civic organizations, Black communities addressed social welfare issues through shared agendas to address social problems impacting their community. Bocci's (2015) historiographic review of service-learning from a community of color perspective finds the contributions of W.E.B. DuBois' scholarship to be an early connection to the tenants of community service. Through DuBois scholarly and political campaigns, he advocated for the inclusion of civic responsibility into quality education in the early 1900s to uplift the Black community. This was the Black community's prototype of service-learning: collective activism in schools (social thought) and with the community engagement (civic action) (Bocci, 2015; Stevens, 2003). Black community contributions to service-learning history stems from a community perspective, which is often muted in the academic history of service-learning that favors theories by White scholars (Bocci, 2015). White scholars were able to secure funding to support their research beyond the academy, while Black communities' leveraged community

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commitment to racial uplift by creating volunteer opportunities with educational institutions established to educate the Black community (Bocci, 2015; Stevens 2003).

Community Service at Historically Black College and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have a long tradition of uplifting Black communities through student leadership and community service programs, comparable to service-learning (Albritton, 2012; Blankson et al., 2015). Many HBCUs community service programs are not connected to an academic course (Blankson et al., 2015). Regardless, service to one's community is central to the mission of many HBCUs, through established community partnerships to foster Black students' community agency and civic development. Community service hours are largely required to be eligible for graduation at an HBCUs (Blankson et al., 2015; Brotherton, 2002). Many HBCU community service opportunities were co-curricular based until the mid-1990s when the United Negro College Fund established service-learning grants as financial resources to formalize service-learning courses on HBCU campuses for academic credit. The grants transformed HBCU community service programs into academic courses and developed service-learning offices to manage university-community partnerships, including student volunteers (Brotherton, 2002). There are still some HBCUs without formalized community engagement programs that prefer a centralized community service office to coordinate student-led volunteer opportunities (Brotherton, 2002). The formal and informal service-learning programs at HBCUs reaffirm their individual institutional commitments to uplift the Black race and overall community. Akin to early Black social thought leaders, W.E.B. Dubois, Septima Clark and Mary McLeod Bethune's, to advance active citizenship for Black students (Blankson et al., 2015; Bocci, 2015; Stevens, 2003; Brotherton, 2002).

At HBCUs student community service is embedded into university cultures and graduation requirements (Brotherton, 2002). HBCUs view service to one's community as a moral code that is an extension of Black familial and cultural values. Black families and communities are filled with teachers, community organizers, activists, pastors, and parents that have pushed back on wrongdoing and sought to advocate for the greater good of their community and broader society. Therefore, the culture of HBCUs to promote service to the Black community, and beyond, are an extension of their Black families and communities' community engagement. As a result, HBCU's naturally seek to foster and maintain reciprocal relationships with their local communities for shared advancement and academic success of their students (Evans, et al., 2002; Daniels, et al., 2015).

Students of Color Experiences in Service-Learning

The development of student community awareness, social responsibility, citizenship, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are all service-learning student learning outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2014). Service-learning scholarship whether about student learning outcomes, university-community benefits, or pedagogy, largely features quantitative data being analyzed. Student narratives from qualitative studies about their experience in service-learning courses are minimally incorporated into the scholarship of service-learning (Harden, 2009; Holsapple 2012). Student perceptions of service-learning can provide insight on how they contextualize their experience in the classroom, and in the community. The intersections of both contexts can add or detract from students' academic learning of their discipline and understanding of their role in community (Harden, 2009; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Said et al., 2015).

Mitchell and Donahue (2009) examined how in-class experiences shaped community experiences for students of color in service-learning course with their White peers. The researchers identified dissonance in perspectives between the students of color and White student experiences. The found a divide between racial consciousness that connected to W.E.B. Dubois' two paradigms of consciousness: double-consciousness and dysconsciousness (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). Dysconsciousness represents the White student's inability to name racism and be aware of the influence of race in society. Students of color experienced double-consciousness as they constructed both self and racial identity in society, while contending how others (peers) view people of color based on their racial identity and similarities to communities served. The students of color saw the classroom as an additional service site and felt compelled to educate and challenge White peers to reconsider their biases and assumptions about the communities they volunteered in. Students of color often struggle with the feelings of *returning home* to similar racial or low-socioeconomic communities like their own hometown. This can cause an internal juxtaposition for students of color to waiver between being excited to address a familiar community's need and also be terrified to be *outed* (or othered) by peers for having similarities to the community being served (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009).

Mitchell and Donahue's (2009) identification of students of color experiencing double-consciousness foreshadowed the reflective essay by Hickmon (2015) regarding her own service-learning experience as a Black undergraduate woman. Considering her own identity, Hickmon, detailed her own double-consciousness and how she had to combat assumptions of being connected to *the served* group because of her racial similarity to the population being served. Yet she did not relate to the low socioeconomic experience of the community. Identifying as middle-class and being second-generation, Hickmon at times felt othered because she was not able to

relate beyond race to the population she was serving. During her service-learning experiences she navigated sharing her similar identities, while being open to learn about the factors that shape low-socioeconomic communities. Therefore, she had a sense of greater empathy and openness to learn from her community partners experiences (Hickmon, 2015). She attributed her sense of *otherness* to the lack of faculty preparation for herself and her peers ahead of the community service experience to examine and discuss how identity, race, and culture inform student community-service interactions.

Wylie (2014) conducted a similar study about differentiation of student experience across race. Their survey participants included students of color that were first-generation college students managing multiple responsibilities that included, familial obligations, full-time jobs, debt, and mental health concerns. Wylie's study found that students of color felt a sense of *returning home* while engaging in their service-learning community partner activities. White students described their experiences in low-income, communities of color as *border crossing* into unfamiliar community spaces (Wylie, 2014). For students of color serving familiar community spaces provided them an opportunity make connections between their academic backgrounds and cultural upbringings for community development (Wylie, 2014). The research concluded that diverse students benefit greatly from service-learning in familial community settings. Students of color described service-learning courses as allowing them to connect their layered identities: academic, personal, and cultural. This allowed students an opportunity to connect their cultural capital with their academic interests through a service project (Wylie, 2014).

Considering Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students that were from low-income and/or immigrant backgrounds in service-learning courses revealed an additional

differentiation of service-learning experiences (Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021). The study identified three findings that detailed how some service-learning courses decenter BIPOC students when faculty are not intentional about adjusting their pedagogy to meet the needs of all students. Firstly, faculty's lack of student preparation ahead of students' participation in community service projects by not providing community voice, community history, community demographics and their experiences with student community engagement projects. Secondly, through a lack of course discussions about race and class in relation to societal inequities. Thirdly, not addressing the possible tensions in White spaces that BIPOC students consciously or unconsciously encounter on campus and in the community. Each of these findings allude to faculty unconsciously catering to White student experiences they may encounter, rather than prioritizing student of color experiences in the course (Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021). Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie (2021), note that BIPOC students are often aware of these factors as they engage in communities for service, however, they do not have the academic language to best articulate the dissonance they experience navigating class and community spaces that do not consider their identities. The catering to White normative learning styles does not consider how BIPOC students' possible connection to a service site's population can be impacted by the lack of class preparation for community engagement with communities of color (Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021).

The scholarships of Mitchell and Donahue (2012), Hickmon (2015), Reed and Butler (2015), Valencia-Garcia and Coles-Ritchie (2021), and Wylie (2014), affirmed the experiences of Black students, and students of color, in service-learning courses are different from the predominate scholarly narrative. Having a racial and cultural connection to the community being served encourages students to participate more in the community and use their education as a

means for change. Each study demonstrated the differentiation of how students of color interpret their service-learning experiences from White students. They collective scholarships indicates the need for continued research that is inclusive of student of color experiences in service-learning (Wylie, 2014).

Summary

The literature review of this proposal provided insight into the current scholarship by examining four themes related to service-learning as a high-impact practice (HIP): service-learning in academia, pedagogical variations, Black community interpretations of service-learning, and student of color experiences in this HIP. Collectively these four themes are connected to the rationale for this research proposal: to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. Therefore, understanding the context of the current field of service-learning before the data collection of this research proposal was imperative to best understand the factors framing Black student experiences in service-learning courses.

Conceptual Frameworks

The proposed research study on Black student experiences in service-learning courses will build upon the literature review. Two conceptual frameworks were employed to guide this research study: transformative learning theory and student voice theory.

Transformative Learning Theory

As a process-oriented framework, transformative learning theory attests that adults hold a frame of reference of how they view and make sense of their interactions. Through critical incidents or challenges to their assumptions, they begin to experience a shift to both their habits of mind and points of view which lead to perspective changes (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow's

Transformative Learning Theory was originally framed around adult women returning to college after an extended absence, better understand their re-acclimation to learning in formal spaces (Bamber & Hankin, 2011; Carnicelli & Boluk, 2017; Deeley, 2010; Feinstein, 2004; Gardner 2020; Kiely, 2005). Mezirow's three phases of his ten-step model of transformative learning theory can be applied to service-learning student experiences. In doing so, the theory allows students to consider an incident of dissonance during their classroom or community project, critically reflect on what shaped the dissonance and develop a new sense of knowing about self and community as a result (Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019). Global service-learning scholar, Kiely (2005) asserts that

> Mezirow's model for transformational learning provides a useful theoretical framework for service-learning practitioners because it focuses on how people make meaning of their experiences and in particular, how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the way people make sense of ill-structured problems, crucial incidents (p.6).

Transformative learning theory is applicable to service-learning pedagogy as it highlights "the intersection of individual and social" that shifts a person's perspective to be transformative regarding self and the world around them (Tennant, 1993). Service-learning scholars have utilized transformative learning theory to illustrate the impact of service-learning on students' development of civic responsibility and to foster deeper learning and personal evolution (Bamber & Hankin, 2011; Carnicelli & Boluk, 2017; Deeley, 2010; Elyer & Giles 1999; Gardner, 2020; Kiely, 2005). Transformative learning theory is an appropriate conceptual framework since it focuses on students' ability to understand their own cognitive and behavioral shifts that espoused from their own knowing and learning from this high-impact experience. Having students articulate their experiences in service-learning based on critical incidents or dilemmas will

provide insight into their perceptions of learning in service-learning, along with insight into the logic behind their actions within the activities.

Student Voice Theory

The phenomenon of privileging student voice in the formation and implementation of educational policies has been well-researched by scholars in the field (Cook-Sather, 2002; Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). Cook-Sather (2002) explains the importance of "authorizing student perspective" to ensure that educational researchers are not the sole bearers of knowledge generation around student development (p.3). Instead, by authorizing student perspectives into educational research, student voices are incorporated into reforms and practices that shape their educational journeys. Empowering student perspective acknowledges and validates students' discourse "to count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education, [and reconfigure] power dynamics" of who holds knowledge and influence in education practices (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). For researchers and educators, the term student voice should signal for them to "connect the sound of students speaking not only with those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence, but also with those having power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices of schools" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). By having a voice in educational reform and practices, students also have agency to impart change in policies.

Similarly, Matthews and Dollinger (2022) distinguish student voice as two forms of student participation educational reform: student representation and student partnership. Student representation denotes students having voice on university governance typically through student government or a seat on university council to speak on behalf of the study body in senior administration spaces. Student partnership focuses on the classroom experience where the

teacher-learner dynamic is flattened to allow for students to be co-educators, and co-producers of knowledge with their faculty. While both forms have benefits to the student experience, they can also confound access and responsibility of a select group of students speaking on behalf of others which can result in tensions across campus. Therefore, it is important for researchers to know the context and lens through which students utilize their voice and the influence on policies and outcomes their particular lens has to avoid generalization of student experiences (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022).

The empowering of student voice in educational research allows for the role of educational researcher and students to be equally valid in scholarship that subsequently influences policies, pedagogies and practices that frame student experiences. For college students, it is important in their learning development to recognize their own critical thinking and analysis of learning by encouraging them to reflect on their educational encounters, along with making connections to learning outcomes. Emphasizing student perspectives in educational research fulfills a gap in scholarship that overlooks the relevance of lived experiences by those directly influenced by educational practices and policies (Cook-Sather, 2002; 2006, 2020, Matthews & Dollinger, 2022).

Summary

The field of service-learning is at a crossroads: maintain a perception of whiteness by emphasizing White student experiences or deepen scholarship by understanding student of color experiences more intentionally to inform the broader field to be considerate of diverse student experiences. The four themes of the literature review provided context for the gap in service-learning scholarship that does not often prioritize Black students service-learning experiences as prominently given their high participation rate. The two conceptual frameworks guiding this

research study allow for Black student perspectives to be the prominent voice of this study that emphasizes their lived service-learning experiences. Transformative learning theory and student voice theory correlate to one another as they prioritize students' ways of knowing, being and doing, based on their unique perspective of their experience in service-learning courses. Utilizing these two frameworks extended the researcher's aspiration to close the literary gap in knowledge about Black service-learning student experiences by amplifying their experiences through scholarship to inform pedagogy and practice.

The following chapter provides an overview of the research methodology that includes an overview of the research design, data collection practices and the data analysis utilized to make meaning of the reflective participant stories into four findings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As a high-impact practice (HIP), service-learning courses are well documented to improve student academic success and engagement, which increases their retention and graduation rates (Harper, 2009; Finely & McNair, 2013, Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). Scholars have noted that service learners of color experience and perceive service-learning courses differently than their White peers. Therefore, there is a growing interest in the field to better know how Black service learners understand this teaching and learning method from students' own perspective (Castrellón & Pérez-Torres, 2018; Hickmon, 2015; Mitchell & Donahue, 2012; Motoike, 2017; Oling-Sisay, 2018). Thus, with such data driven success of high-impact practices, it is pertinent to the field to explore Black service learners' experiences narratively. Utilizing grounded theory methodology the researcher contextualized Black student perspectives directly from the field regarding their service-learning course experiences.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. The following research questions, will guide this study:

- How do Black students experience service-learning courses?
    - What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?
    - What dissonance in the service-learning experience do Black students encounter in their participation?

Research Design

Qualitative research studies prioritize the story of participants, "making them the participant the author of their story, and the researcher becoming the consumer of that story" (Viaud, 2014, p. 58). The intent of this research study was to go beyond capturing participants' lived experiences regarding their service-learning experiences, as would be the goal in phenomenology and narrative research studies. Adequately this research study seeks to "generate or discover a theory" regarding Black service-learning student participation that is not currently articulated in scholarship. Grounded theory was the selected research design (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 82). Grounded theory serves a unique qualitative research purpose for developing a substantive theory that is missing from the field of service-learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This theory was chosen for its connection to the two conceptual frameworks that will guide the data analysis: student voice theory and transformative learning theory. Utilizing two conceptual frameworks to analyze the data collected will allow the researcher to generate a theory about the high participation rates of Black undergraduate in service-learning courses based on the participants own voices about their lived experiences in these high-impact courses. Understanding what the experiences are of Black identifying service-learning students allows the researcher to establish a theory from the participants' perspectives and correlate it to the high proportion rates of Black students in this HIP (Creswell, 2015; Mertler, 2019).

For this qualitative study the researcher was the primary instrument that collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data produced from the interviews (Creswell, 2015; Lareau, 2021). During interviews about their experiences in service-learning courses, the participants revealed individual, unique experiences as related to their ways of making sense of their learning, along with perceptions of learning from their experiences. The researcher generated a theory to begin

to explain the high participation rates of Black students in service-learning courses from their lived-experiences and reflections discussed in the interviews. This design process allowed participants in the study to have differing interpretations of how they articulated their learning and allowed the researcher to utilize comparative analysis of responses during data examination to formulate an inductive theory based on their perceptions. Accordingly, the researcher as the main research instrument, was tasked with compiling their experiences into core categories as overarching findings to catalog their responses as it relates to their service-learning experiences.

Setting and Context of Research Study

Participants from the study were recruited through the United States-based membership list-serve of the Consortium of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU). Since 1989, CUMU has served as an incubator for collaboration and innovation between higher education institutions and the communities they serve. Representing two- and four-year universities across three continents, CUMU has over 100 member institutions that serve 52 metropolitan communities with 33% identified as minority serving institutions. Collectively CUMU university network serve 2.2 million students through place-based learning that connects higher education learning with society. Through a variety of activities, programs, annual conference, and a quarterly journal, CUMU seeks to "support research and information exchange, institutional engagement and service, and public information and advocacy" (Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, nd.). Among their member institutions are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Thus, a call for research participants from within the CUMU membership list-serv provided a variety of Black service learner experiences but did not yield participants from HBCUs. CUMU's research effort to support universities hyper-local community engagement partnerships connect campus resources to community development

efforts, such as service-learning courses, is an additional rationale for surveying the students of their membership institutions. Gauging how students in these publicly engaged institutions provided a diversity of Black service learner experiences to build a broad, yet comprehensive narrative of their experiences at these types of institutions.

The researcher also leveraged their network as a community engagement practitioner by sending out additional recruitment emails through national association list-servs. In addition to, also emailing colleagues directly at other institutions for recruitment assistance through their student networks. These outreach and recruitment effort was chosen to gather national participation in the study from multiple institutions. Also, community engaged practitioners and administrators were more likely to know of Black service learner students and could readily forward the email to them to encourage their participation. Reaching out via established networks of administrators to their student networks provided personalized outreach invitation from someone known to the students.

Aside from recruiting research participants from among CUMU member network list-serve and general community engagement list-serv's, there were no identifying factors gathered regarding the participants home institutions. The researcher assumed that students that responded to the recruitment emails to participate in the study were from CUMU member institutions (Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, n.d.). This supposition by the researcher eliminated any possible harm or risk of students and their participating institutions to possibly be identified in this study.

Participants

A theoretical data sampling was used to recruit participants for this study (Mertler, 2019). Theoretical sampling allows for intentional recruitment of participants that can contribute to the

creation of a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The emails recruiting participants outlined the following selection criteria:

- Self-identifying as Black:
  - Participated in a service-learning course within the last five academic years of 2017-2022 (fall, spring, summer), and
  - Completed their service-learning course as an undergraduate student.

The target population of participants was current undergraduate and/or recent graduates that completed service-learning courses during the academic years of Fall 2017 to Fall 2022. The academic years of Fall 2017 to Fall 2022 were selected as they represent three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic causing many colleges and universities to quickly pivot to online instruction, and two-years post-pandemic as universities shifted again from predominantly online learning to hybrid learning to in-person learning modalities that impacted service-learning course models.

Students interested in participating in the study, upon receiving the recruitment email, were instructed to complete the participant questionnaire linked in the email. The participant questionnaire requested that participants affirm they met the selection criteria along with detailing their service-learning courses (course name, topic, community service project). At the end of the questionnaire students had the option to opt-in to participate in a 60-to-90-minute semi-structured virtual interview with the researcher. This study aimed to attract up to 20 participants for semi-structured interviews through the email recruitment and response to the participant questionnaire. Over the period of eight weeks, participants were recruited. The study received 49 completed participant questionnaires, however only 39 participants were eligible to participate in the research study. Participants' responses on the eligibility questionnaire were

analyzed for credibility in describing their service-learning courses (academic impact, number of hours, projects and what they wished they had known (see Appendix C). Of the 39 eligible participants all were sent an invitation to interview, however 22 participants were deemed ineligible for an interview as they did not respond to the request to schedule an interview, or they scheduled an interview but did not attend scheduled interview. The latter group makes up 18 of the 22 participants that were eligible but did not participate in the study. Despite the researcher's attempts to maintain outreach through vetted service-learning association networks and their personal LinkedIn account, the researcher was informed by a participant that the study participant recruitment flyer was shared on Twitter with an audience unfamiliar with service-learning courses. The final four participants did not respond to the researcher's repeated interview requests.

Eventually 17 participants completed a 60-to-90-minute semi-structured interview with the researcher. The higher the number of completed interviews allows for saturation of the data to fully develop a theory that is representative of Black service learner experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Therefore, the researcher believed completing a high number of interviews, allowed for a rich data set of stories that detail Black service-learner experiences.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two segments stemming from an initial call for participants by email announcement: a participant questionnaire and semi-structured participant interviews. Upon receiving a letter of support for this research study from the executive director and board of directors of Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU), the researcher sent an email through their list-serv to all CUMU campus liaison and administrators to forward the researcher's invitation to qualifying participants. Students interested in participating in the study

received the questionnaire link on the invitation email shared by their campus liaison or administrator inviting them to participate in the study. As completed questionnaires were submitted the responses were reviewed and "opting-in" participants were contacted by email to schedule their virtual interviews. A 60-to-90-minute semi-structured interview was conducted via Zoom platform with online recording and audio transcription. The following sections provide further details regarding the questionnaire and interview methods of this study.

Eligibility Questionnaire

Students accessed the link to the participant questionnaire via a Qualtrics link from the research study email invitation that was forwarded to them from their campus contact inviting them to participate in the study. The questionnaire allowed the researcher to quickly gather participant qualifications pertaining to the educational activity central to the research study (Mertler, 2019). The survey was implemented using the Qualtrics survey platform due to the ease of sending out anonymous survey links and the embedded reporting metrics of the system to provide an initial data analysis snapshot for the researcher. The brief questionnaire was comprised of multiple choice and open-ended questions that provided a cursory review of participants' eligibility to participate as a self-identified Black student with service-learning course participation experience within the last five years (Mertler, 2019). At the end of the survey, participants were asked to opt-in to participate in a 60-to-90-minute semi-structured interview with the researcher by sharing their contact information. Appendix C includes the full list of questions on the eligibility questionnaire.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a useful methodology as they allowed the researcher to have initial questions related to the overarching research questions and have the option to ask

follow-up questions depending on the participants responses related to the initial questions

(Mertler, 2019). Interviews in qualitative research serve as a method to understand narratively

from participants how they make sense of the experiences based on prompting questions

(Johnson & Christensen, 2010; Lareau, 2021). Leveraging the service-learning tenet of

reflection, the participant interviews were a reflective conversation for Black students to detail

their service-learning experiences to the researcher. Appendix D includes the semi-structured

interview protocol used for this study. Appendix E is that Interview Information sheet that details

the incorporation of the Reflective Storytelling Framework into the semi-structured interviews

that pivoted participants from simply responding to interview questions, and shifted them toward

sharing specific stories, or critical incidents, from their service-learning experiences that

influenced their ways of knowing and learning (Shah, 2020). Framing the semi-structured

interviews as reflective conversations encouraged participants to think critically about their

service-learning experiences.

The Reflective Storytelling Framework (Shah, 2020) guided the semi-structured

interview by incorporating a common service-learning reflection method: *What? So What? Now*

What?. Through the *What? So What? Now What?* model students were encouraged to think

beyond surface level reactions and observations, toward examining critical learning moments

that connect theory, community service/engagement, and further action on their part to address

social inequalities (Kolb, 1984; Jacoby, 2014; Shah, 2020). Through a series of scaffolded

questions students were prompted to identify learning moment(s) or incidents from them from

their service-learning experiences that instigated for them to have an "aha" moment or reconsider

an assumption they had, then to reflect on how and what they learned because of the identified

learning moment. Lastly, students were asked to consider how the learning moment(s) shaped their ways of knowing and being (Eyler et al., 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Shah, 2020).

The Reflective Storytelling Framework for the semi-structured interviews was further confirmed as the appropriate data collection method by the ability to connect its components to the two conceptual frameworks, transformative learning theory and student voice theory, mentioned at the end of Chapter 2. The integration of the conceptual frameworks and the Reflective Storytelling framework is shown in Table 1. This table showcases how intentional each step of this research study, from data collection to data analysis, was chosen to center student voices and their experiences.

Table 1

Reflective Storytelling Framework Components Relation to Conceptual Frameworks

Reflective Storytelling Framework	Transformative Learning Theory	Student Voice Theory
Opening. *Establish rapport, determine the context of experiences.*	Ability and Opportunity to Reflect	Authorizing Student Voices via Incorporation into Reforms and Practices
Research question 1(A): What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?		
What? *Identify and describe stories from your experience both from the class and service site.*	Make Meaning of Experiences	Reflect on Educational Encounters and Experiences/Impact on Learning
Research Question 1(B): What Dissonance in the Service-Learning Experience Do Black Students Encounter?		
So What? *Analyze emotional, political, and cultural dynamics of experience.*	Encounter Critical Incidents or Dilemmas	Recognize Own Critical Thinking and Analysis
Closing		
Now What? *Determine the implications for future practice and takeaways from learning.*	Changes in Understanding of Self and Worldview	Influence of lived Experiences on Student Learning and Knowledge

The 60-to-90-minute semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted solely online using the Zoom video software with recording permission from participants at confirmation of the interview and again at the start of the interview for a verbal consent. The usage of Zoom as a platform to interview candidates permitted the interview to be recorded and auto transcribed. Both the online video recording and transcription of the conversation alleviated the researcher from multi-tasking during the interview. As a result, the researcher was able to focus on facilitating the discussion while taking general notes on comments to follow-up on with the participant during the interview (Lareau, 2021).

At the conclusion of the eight-week interview period the researcher shared with each participant the video recording of their interview, and their interview transcription. Inviting the participants to review the research contributions during the data analysis stage fostered transparency and appreciativeness toward them for sharing their service-learning experience with the researcher. Sharing with the participants the artifacts collected for their contributions to the study is a form of member-checking that provided them an opportunity confirm, change, or remove the content that they find inaccurate, or are no longer comfortable sharing (Lareau, 2021; Mertler, 2019). This technique resembles Shah's (2021) detailing of ethical considerations to include community partners as active subjects in the research process, rather than an object of research observed and analyzed from a distance. Incorporating student reviews of the transcription and initial gleaning of their interviews, was an intentional incorporation of data validity and triangulation for authenticity and accuracy. This was done ahead of the data analysis phase to ensure that the appropriate participant approved data was analyzed for the study by the researcher. As the interviews were concluded the researcher submitted the video recordings to

Rev.com for accurate transcription of each interview, along with the video recordings of the researcher's memos after each interview.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed primarily from the semi-structured interview transcripts. The eligibility questionnaire that participants completed in order to opt-in for an interview, was used to confirm interested students' participation in a service-learning experience by providing course details and initial reflections about the value of the course. Participant responses on the eligibility questionnaire were rich with descriptions about service-learning's impact on their academics, along with items they wished they had known before participating in this high-impact practice course. In preferencing the stories of the participants, the researcher chose not analyze participants' questionnaire responses. The participants responses are not included in the data analysis that resulted in the research findings discussed in chapter 4.

Participants that completed an interview either provided a pseudonym or requested that one was selected for them. At the conclusion of the data collection phase, all the interviews and researcher memos were transcribed by Rev.com. Once each of the interview transcriptions were completed, they were printed to begin the three major phases of grounded theory coding: open, axial, and selective (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). At the start of the data analysis process, the researcher decided to conduct in vivo coding, by line-by-line hand coding the interview transcriptions while listening to the video recordings of each interview. The researcher applied in vivo coding to each transcript individually twice. In vivo coding created coding categories using the participants' own words to describe their experience (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This allowed the researcher to remain authentic to amplifying student voice by incorporating participant word-themes; selecting words that contributors use during

their interviews to articulate their sense making of their service-learning experiences. The line-by-line coding allowed the researcher to become very familiar with the stories of the participants and ensure in vivo codes identified were authentic to their experiences.

Open coding was the initial categorization of the in vivo codes into emic themes. Emic themes are categories that arise from the data gathered from the participant interviews that reflect participant perspectives (Creswell, 2015; Lareau, 2021). Open coding was conducted through hand coding each interview for emic codes, categories that are derived from the language participants used in their responses. Next, the axial coding phase began as the process of connecting the emic/open coding themes into larger categories that relate to one another under an umbrella theme. Axial coding was conducted in two phases: 1) transferring the hand-coded open codes initially to Dedoose, yet ultimately completed via MAXQDA, both qualitative data research software systems; and 2) the MAXQDA codebook was printed, cut into strips, then mapped and taped the strips onto paper to compile overarching codes based on frequency and commonality. Utilizing the printed codebook from MAXQDA the researcher cut and tapped the codes with the most frequencies into thematic/larger categories. Through axial coding over 800 codes were condensed into 21 selective coding categories that led to four key findings that emerged from the data collected. Selective coding is when a core category emerges amongst all codes previously noted to encompass all emerging themes collected from the data under one overarching finding (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The combination of hand-coding and electronic coding allowed the researcher to become readily familiar with the stories and ensure authenticity to the stories shared for accuracy. The findings that emerged during the data analysis phase of this research study are the importance of reflection, disposition to service, kinship, and service-learning's impact on their career aspirations.

Researcher Reflective Memos

Throughout the data collection phase the researcher utilized video, audio, and handwritten memoing techniques to track their deliberations after each interview. This allowed the researcher to analyze this data as additional insight for developing a grounded theory through an inductive research process (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). As noted by Lareau (2021), the researcher hand wrote, audio or video recorded a reflective memo within four hours after each interview. The purpose of the reflective memo provided space for the researcher to answer three key questions as a reflection of the interview: "What did I learn today? How does this advance my thinking? How does this information fit with the studies I read?" (Lareau, 2021, p. 180). From these reflective memos the researcher identified emerging themes, significant comments, and additional follow-up questions for the next interview as appropriate. These reflective memos served as a method to manage the researcher's subjectivity, assumptions, and biases ahead of the data analysis stage (Peshkin, 1988).

Issues of Validity, Reliability, Trustworthiness of Data

As noted by Mertler (2019) it is essential to confirm the quality of the data collected and analyzed. To manage the validity of the data being collected and analyzed the researcher incorporated three techniques: triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing. Triangulation is the process of using more than one source of data to assess the accuracy of the data. For this research study data was collected through a participant questionnaire to gauge participant eligibility, and a participant interview was the second data set to delve deeper into their service-learning experiences based on a semi-structured interview protocol. Given that students were recruited from over 100 campuses within the United States, it was highly likely that they had varied experiences depending on the institutionalization of community engagement

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at their university, central office for service-learning support, and faculty pedagogy

implementation of service-learning tenants. Together both questionnaire and semi-interviews

provided rich, thick description about Black service-learning experiences within a snapshot of

time between Fall 2019 – Fall 2022 (Geertz, 1973; Creswell 2015). The second validity measure

was member-checking data by sharing with interviewees their interview transcriptions. and

questionnaire. Through the process of member-checking the participants reviewed and had the

option to edit their interview transcripts ahead of the researcher conducting data analysis. Lastly,

the researcher engaged in peer debriefing conversations with colleagues in their doctoral

program to confirm that a critical unbiased lens was being applied during data collection and

data analysis (Mertler, 2019). These validity techniques ensured the trustworthiness and

reliability of the data to be representative of the participant questionnaire and interviews.

Researcher Positionality

I was a Black service learner, and I am a service-learning practitioner. As a Black

undergraduate I completed two service-learning courses and co-led two one-week service trips to

New Orleans. Upon graduation I was a labor organizer for an international service worker's

union traveling across the country organizing city, county, and hospital workers. Since receiving

my master's degree for the past ten years I have been a practitioner leading community

engagement and service-learning courses. From those two perspectives, I held the assumption

that Black students did not participate in high numbers in service-learning, based on my

experience and low scholarship about their experiences. For the past sixteen years, I believed this

statement to be true. However, as I became more familiar with the National Survey on Student

Engagement (NSSE) and its data, I realized my assumption was wrong. A snapshot of the NSSE

data from 2008 to 2020 is shown on Table 2, reports that Black undergraduate students

participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than White students (Harper, 2009; Kinzie et al., 2020; Kuh, 2008; Workbook: NSSE High-Impact Practices, n.d.). I was unable to find NSSE data dashboards for 2009, and 2013 through 2017 to include on Table 2.

Table 2

National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) Participant Demographics

Demographic	2008	2010	2011	2012	2018	2019	2020
Black Freshmen	40%	45%	43%	46%	57%	57%	55%
White Freshmen	36%	39%	38%	39%	51%	50%	41%
Black Seniors	51%	55%	53%	54%	67%	65%	65%
White Seniors	45%	47%	46%	47%	60%	58%	61%

The results of the table shifted my perspective to not view Black service-learning participation from a deficit-based lens. However, to see their consistent annually high participation rates in service-learning from an assets-based lens. Both the data and scholarship surrounding this research topic have given me a renewed curiosity to extend beyond the statistic of high Black service-learning participants to sharing their experiences to inform the field.

My positionality as a Black woman having completed service-learning courses as an undergraduate, managing service-learning support programs, to director of a department of service-learning at a public four-year institution that is a member of the CUMU network, have all influenced my perspective on the field of service-learning. I was aware of how my self-knowledge, experiences and desires can impact the legitimacy of the research topic (Lareau, 2021). However, I was genuinely invested in showcasing the experiences of Black students in service-learning. My own service-learning experience as an undergraduate from 2006-2008 are

not comparable to the modern field of service-learning. Instead, I leaned into Peshkin's (1988) note on managing my subjectivity

> by monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined, l do not thereby exorcize my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it--to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome-as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data (p. 20).

Awareness of my reflexivity to this research topic led to my commitment of approaching this study from a novice researcher perspective with the participants serving as experts to glean from as they share their personal service-learning experiences (Lareau, 2021). During the data collection phase, after most of the interviews I typed, or video recorded (which was later transcribed) a reflective memo to keep track of my thoughts. The reflective memo process assisted me in managing my positionality, by separating it from the data analysis portion to prevent insertion of my personal bias. Being accountable to share my reflective memos with doctoral colleagues guaranteed that I maintained a neutral viewpoint. Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing sessions with colleagues in my doctoral program to reflect on the interviews and ensure my positionality did not cloud my judgment during data collection and data analysis (Mertler, 2019).

Being ever conscious of my positionality during the data collection and analysis phase allowed me to be very open to the conversations I had with the participants. I genuinely wanted to know their experience. During the interviews I minimized my notetaking in order to actively listen and engage deeply with their stories as they were shared with me. Employing these practices allowed me to remain invested in learning about each participants stories and not comparing it to my own experiences.

Summary

The aim of this research study is to provide a macro picture of Black student's experiences in service-learning through reflective semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2015; Shah, 2020). Grounded theory was the appropriate methodology to collect the narrative experiences of Black undergraduate students that have participated in service-learning courses. Accordingly, this research study sought to establish a theory that is grounded in the perspectives of the Black service-learning student participants (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2019). Data was collected through two qualitative methods: participant eligibility questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The researcher's positionality was examined and was actively set-aside as to not influence the data analysis phase of the research process. A three-phased data analysis process was used to develop an emerging theory regarding the phenomena Black student service-learning experiences: open, axial, and selective. Through a grounded theory research design, the researcher was able to illuminate the sensemaking of Black students in service-learning courses and will detail the four findings in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this grounded-research study that examined the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. The findings that emerged during the data analysis phase of this research study are the overarching importance of reflection, their disposition to service, the development of kinship, and service-learning's impact on participants' career aspirations. Beginning with review of the two conceptual frameworks grounding this study, chapter four continues with an introduction to the study participants, along with a word cloud of key phrases utilized by participants to describe their service-learning experiences. The remainder of this chapter discusses the four aforementioned findings that emerged from participants' stories about their service-learning course experiences.

Methodology and Conceptual Frameworks

Through semi-structured interviews, data was collected from 17 Black-identifying students that participated in at least one service-learning course during their undergraduate academic career. The research questions guiding this study are:

- How do Black students experience service-learning courses?

    - What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?

    - What dissonance in the service-learning experience do Black students encounter in their participation?

These research questions were answered utilizing the Reflective Storytelling Framework (Shah, 2020). Semi-structured interview questions were designed to center "participants as author of their story" and the researcher a responsible "consumer of that story" (Viaud, 2015, p. 58). The

Reflective Storytelling Framework applies the critical reflection model *What? So What? Now What?* to scaffold the interview questions to be a conversation about critical learning moments. In doing so, the researcher encouraged participants to identify meaningful learning moments from their service-learning course experiences and consider the ways in which the experience shaped their ways of being, knowing and doing (Shah, 2020; Eyler et al, 1996; Eyler & Giles 1999, Shah, 2020). This interview framework was chosen as it centers the students' experiences (student voice theory) in service-learning and emphasizes their unique voice and lens on understanding their experiences.

Fittingly, this grounded theory research study captured students' lived experiences from stories they identified as meaningful to their service-learning experience, narratives that are often missing from service-learning participant scholarship. Together the conceptual frameworks, transformative learning theory and student voice theory, provide a lens into how students make meaning of their service-learning experiences (transformative learning theory) by sharing their own narrative stories about what they learned and how they learned through their service-learning experiences (student voice theory) (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kiely, 2005; Matthews & Dollinger, 2022; Mezirow, 1997; Welch & Plaxton-Moore, 2019).

Meet the Participants

The eligibility questionnaire attracted 49 students to complete; however only 39 were deemed eligible based on the description of their service-learning experience. Of the 39 eligible participants, 17 research participants continued through the process to schedule and complete an interview. The participants completed at least one undergraduate service-learning course between Fall 2019 and Fall 2023. At the time of the interviews for this study, seven of the

participants were undergraduate students and the other 10 were either in graduate school or working in their careers. A total of 14 women and three men participated in this study.

In addition to participating in a service-learning course as an undergraduate student, the other main requirements of students' participation in this research study were to identify as Black. Through the eligibility questionnaire and the interview, students shared how they identified ethnically, and their responses represented the African diaspora. The columns in Table 3 from the left, start with the participant's pseudonym (chosen by most), their gender, ethnicity, major while in enrolled in college, and their academic status at the time of their interview (current undergraduate, graduate school, or career professional). The color coding of Table 3 is related to the participant's academic status at the time of their interview. Participants that were current undergraduates are in the light yellow, participants in the light green are graduate school students and/or working professionals, and the participants in light blue are working career professionals. The data shared in Table 3 is combination of data collected from their eligibility questionnaire and from their semi-structured interviews.

Table 3

Black Service-Learning Research Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Major	Academic Status at the time of Interview
Leah*	F	Black/African-American (Ethiopian)	Environmental Science	Undergrad - Freshman
Keyoko	F	Black Puerto Rican	Psychology	Undergrad - Sophomore
Danielle	F	African-American	International Management	Undergrad - Sophomore
Zora	F	Black and White, Mixed Race	World Literature and Culture	Undergrad - Junior
Nikki	F	Black, Hispanic	Political Science and African-American Studies	Undergrad - Senior
Tumi	M	Black, Somalian (African)	Biochemistry	Undergrad - Senior
Gloria	F	Black	Mass Communication	Undergrad - Senior
Ranae	F	Black, Jamaican, Chinese, Cherokee	Anthropology & International Studies	Graduate School - Law School
Niesha	F	Black	Industrial and Labor Relations	Graduate School - PhD (Fulbright Scholar)
Zuri	F	Black, Haitian	Communication Sciences and Disorders	Graduate School - Speech Therapy
Solomon *	M	Black, African-American	History	Graduate School - Education & Career - K-8 General Music Educator
Atticus	M	Black/African-American (Eritrean)	Biology	Graduate School - Medicine
Twyla	F	Black, Nigerian (African)	Education Science	Career – Elementary Paraprofessional
Courtney	F	Black	Public Policy	Career – Project Manager for Tech Company
Celeste	F	Black, Hispanic, Puerto Rican, Egyptian	Criminology	Career – Service-Learning Coordinator for Non-Profit
Faith	F	Black/African-American	Public Health	Career – Wellness Coach for Hospital
Howard	F	Black, Caribbean (St. Kitts and Nevis)	Political Science	Career - Univ. Comm Engagement Center Fellow

/ Indicates participants are/were service-learning program peer leaders.

Word Cloud of Summative Word or Phrase About Their Service-Learning Experience

The participants all described positive service-learning experiences. When asked "If you could sum up your service-learning experience in one word or phrase, what would it be?" 15 of 17 participants responded with a one-word or phrase summative of their experience. Compiled Figure 1 is a word cloud of the participants responses to the aforementioned question.

Figure 1

Summative Word or Phrase of Participants Service-Learning Experience

As they responded to this question, participants proceeded to pause and/or dived into an explanation of their one-word or phrase choice, followed by the start of one of their most meaningful experiences. While most of their stories shared centered on the service component of

the course, a few responses did incorporate the course content and faculty engagement. The form of a word cloud was chosen to show the variety of how the participant' summed up their service-learning experiences. The array of positive responses from the participants is connected to the finding of the importance of reflection as they had to consider the impact of their service-learning experience. Their responses indicate that service-learning courses were indeed impactful for Black undergraduate students.

Participant Service-Learning Course Details and Career Interests

As discussed in the semi-structured interviews, participants shared the context of their service-learning experiences: location, type of community service projects, and their career interests. Research participants engaged in service-learning locally, regionally, and internationally, global service-learning. There varied service-learning experiences provided an added data point of commonalities and differences of experiences they detailed the wide array of formats to engaged learning that connects the classroom to community, near or abroad. Participants engaged in a diverse group of service projects for the community component of their course, with a few being connected to their post-graduation career interests. Table 4 details participants location of their service-learning course experiences, the type of community service projects they engaged in primarily, and their future career. The color coding of the participant tables is connected to the participants academic status (see Table 3) at the time of their interview for this research study.

Table 4

Participant Service-Learning Course Details and Career Interests

Pseudonym	Location of Service-Learning Course (s)	Service Project(s)	Career Interest
Leah*	Local SL Course	Tutoring Elementary Students	Environmental Rights Lawyer
Keyoko	Local SL Courses	Tutoring Math and Reading for Elementary Kids	Adolescent Psychology
Danielle	Local SL Course	Elementary - Reading, Admin and Foodbank support	Corporate Social Responsibility Leader
Zora	Local SL Courses	Mentoring & Tutoring Middle and High School Students	K-12 Teacher
Nikki	Local SL Course	Community Center Garden Revival and Local NAACP Advocacy Campaign	Food-Based Non-Profits to Address Food Insecurity
Tumi	Local SL Course	Reading to Elementary Students	Medical Doctor
Gloria	Local SL Course	Working with Formerly Incarcerated Women	Immigration Law
Ranae	International and Local SL courses	Medical support, building community kitchen, teaching English	Social Justice Lawyer
Niesha	International, Regional and Local courses	Non-Profit Community Organizing Campaign, Oral History Project, Labor Relations Organizing	Faculty or Labor Consultant
Zuri	International SL Course	Tutoring Elementary Students	Speech Language Therapist
Solomon *	International SL Course (SL Trip Peer Advisor)	Musical Project for Middle School Students	Music Educator
Atticus	International and Local SL courses	Reading to Second Grade Children	Medical Doctor
Twyla	Local SL Courses	Mentoring and Tutoring Elementary Students	K-12 Teacher
Courtney	Local SL Course	Tutoring Elementary Students	Former K-12 Teacher, Considering Next Opportunity
Celeste	Local SL Course	Private Investigator Assistant	Service-Learning Coordinator for Non-Profit Youth Organization
Faith	International Summer SL Course	High School Sexual Health Facilitator	Hospital Wellness Coach
Howard	Local and Virtual SL Courses	Music and Drama Education Support for K-8	Education Policy

Eligibility Questionnaire Integration with Research Findings

Participants' responses on the eligibility questionnaire (see Appendix C) were reviewed

for their depth of responses that signaled the transformative impact of their service-learning

course experiences. Based on their responses the researcher confirmed they met the research

participant criteria, and if they opted to participate in an interview, were invited to schedule an

interview. Most participants elaborated on their responses during their semi-structured

interviews. The eligibility questionnaire requested students to share the course details (title,

number of community service hours, projects, modality), along with sharing why their service-

learning experience was important to their academic career. Some participants provided a

general response such as Tumi, an undergraduate senior an aspiring medical doctor, "I needed it

for grad requirement, it was also a topic I found interesting as well." Similarly, Celeste, currently

a service-learning non-profit coordinator responded to the same question, "It impassioned me

and gave me necessary tools to lead service-learning at my workplace." Celeste's response

related to the study finding of service-learning's connection to career aspirations. Niesha's

response to the question, what do you wish you knew about service-learning before you enrolled

was particularly insightful as it provided context to an experience she shared in her interview

regarding her familial composition and interaction with peers that related to the findings of

reflection, disposition to service and kinship:

> I wish I knew or had learned about the term "white savior complex" before
> embarking upon my first service-learning experience, this is because there were
> times during my experience that... But I didn't know how to convey my feelings
> about what I was observing until much later in my undergraduate career. This
> made me feel angry and sometimes ashamed at having been a part of the
> programs. This is not to say that all of my experiences with service-learning
> programs have been as traumatizing. Much later in my undergraduate program
> there were community engagement research programs that had a service
> component but were mostly centered around collaboration and co-learning that
> were structured in such as way as to prevent the very fetishization and moments

of white savior complex I was observing in other service-learning programs I had participated in. Lastly, there is a very specific type of language or jargon used in the world of service learning that I did not understand or know about until much later in my schooling, I think a better understanding of said jargon would have influenced how I picked which programs to join and which ones to avoid.

As a participant of multiple service-learning courses and former peer ambassador for community engagement program, Niesha's response foreshadows the finding of reflection in her eligibility questionnaire that also connects to the findings of disposition to service and kinship connections with the community. In her semi-structured interview, she expanded on these comments and how they shaped her service-learning experience, along with her current doctoral studies.

The participants response were often preambles to their semi-structured interview discussions. Given that similarly worded questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews, participants were prompted to expand upon their eligibility questionnaire responses. The questionnaire responses are integrated into the discussion of the findings, as noted on in the finding section on disposition to Service by Gloria (on page 65) and Niesha (on page 71). The eligibility questionnaire provided contextualization of the participants to their stories. The following section of research findings are derived primarily from the participants semi-structured interviews, with annotations of where responses were incorporated from the eligibility questionnaire.

Four Stories (Findings) From the Field: Black Service-Learner Student Experiences

Intentionally the researcher chose the title of this dissertation, Stories from the field: Black service-learning student experiences to highlight the importance of understanding Black student's experiences in service-learning. With the high participation rates of Black students in service-learning and the absence of their stories in service-learning scholarship, it was important for the researcher to center this study on their unique experience by highlighting their stories.

The participants' reflective stories from their semi-structured interviews led to four findings: the importance of reflection, disposition to service, kinship, and service-learning's impact on their career aspirations. Table 5 introduces the four themes along with a descriptor of each theme and a quote of significance.

Table 5

Findings Descriptors with Quote of Significance and Connection to Reflection

Finding (and sub-theme)	Descriptor	Reflective Quote of Significance
Importance of Reflection	Reflection serves as an overarching finding that that elucidates the value of taking time to consider intentionally meaningful learning moments from their service-learning experiences. Through reflection participants made meaning of their experiences and articulated their learning as a result of their service-learning experiences.	"For me, it helped me to really understand what was going on because it was a lot just happening and a lot to just get used to and accustomed to. So the reflection process allowed me to just slow down and really think, what is happening? Why is this important? And then what do I need to do with it?" - Solomon
Disposition to Service • Prior Service Experience • From Served to Server	Students were predisposed to serving in the community through their prior volunteer experiences and connection to receiving similar community social support during their childhoods.	"I volunteered a lot in high school. I graduated with over 200 volunteer hours, so that's just kind of my thing. And so I just transitioned into doing it in college." - Keyoko
Kinship • Students feeling comfortable in community spaces due to racial similarities • Embracing the Diaspora Through Racial Familiarity.	Participants felt connection to the communities they served based on their racial familiarity with the Black and Brown communities they served in and embracing the African Diaspora for racial uplift.	"Feeling some sort of comradery, having chats with that Black teacher like I was mentioning before, it felt like I was having a very different experience than I was having in my classes, and it just felt like I was able to let my guard down a little bit." - Courtney "But I think it's more subconscious like, ah, I care about the diaspora, I care about other people who look like me, and I also want to serve in a capacity that I'm capable of medical trips or doing the construction ecology trips." Ranae
Service-Learning Impact on Career Aspirations • Career exploration • Career confirmation	Participants noted that their service-learning community service experience affirmed their career path.	"I think it just really helps, especially for those careers where you want to be a politician, you want to be a doctor, and you want to give back. Service learning gives you an opportunity to start establishing that while you're still learning and it helps you figure out, do I truly want to do this in 10 years? And if the answer is yes, then keep doing it. And so that's my outlook on it. That's a bit different." - Danielle

Finding #1: Reflection

As the overarching finding of this study, reflection was significant to how participants made sense of their learning in the classroom and with community. As the connection between the hyphenated term, service-learning, reflection is essential to connecting learning and serving for students in this high-impact practice. Without reflection students were simply volunteering as a course requirement. Reflection served as a meta-cognitive applicable learning opportunity that prompted students to consider what they were learning in the classroom with the faculty and peers, how they were connecting and experiencing their learning through their community project, and why it was important that the connect their learning in both environments to deepen their understanding of their course content and role in community development. Many of the participants commented how they appreciated being given the opportunity to reflect and consider the service-learning course experience. For a few, they had not considered the connections of their course to their career trajectory and/or role in working with community before and beyond the course.

Reflection helped Atticus, to "expedite the learning I was doing" in the community so that he was able to better understand his role in community change. As an internal check of motivation and understanding, Atticus felt that reflection "was important to make sure that I was trying to make something out of the experience, and not just going there and saying that I volunteered, but also talk to people and be able to help them that way." This sense of reciprocity resonated with many of the participants. As an aspiring doctor, he wanted to ensure that he learned and contributed back to the community, demonstrating self-awareness, understanding of the purpose of service-learning and reciprocity with community members.

Through reflection participants drew upon meaningful learning and serving experiences to share in their interviews. Leah mentioned early in her interview that, "if I glance aside, I pulled up my essays just to refresh myself of my experience." Referencing her prior essays and reflective notes is further confirmation of how they knew they processed their understanding of their experiences in service-learning courses. At the start of her service-learning experience Leah participated in pre-engagement reflection

> training, and it was just guiding us through the reflective process, kind of showing you that it's not a brain dump of your emotions, but it's a critical thinking process. And then I also did that now as a program assistant…And a lot of what's emphasized is combating bias. And even as a program assistant now, looking through essays, I've been trained to look at stereotypes or statements that may indicate white guilt or trying to be white savior complex or anything like that.

Through the pre-engagement reflective workshop, Leah was able to obtain an awareness of what she might encounter in the community, along with reflective processes to make sense of her learning. As a result, of her applied-learning of using the reflective process and obtaining feedback she was offered a program assistant job where she guides peers through reflection activities for their service-learning experience. As a participant in the service-learning certificate program Nikki had a different experience with her reflection requirement. While Leah had an ongoing reflective process, it seems Nikki's did not come until the end when the final assignment was due:

> I think at first I didn't see as much of what I thought. I didn't know how much was going to apply later on until I finished the course and I saw everything I did. So I think it wasn't until I went through all of it and I had to do the reflection that I looked back at either key learning things we had to do, sorry, key learning skills. I was like, oh, I did have to use that in the other way. So I think it was once I finished and had to reflect that I saw how it connected.

Both Leah and Nikki connected with their university's center for community engagement. Each had unique experiences where one had guided reflections (Leah) throughout their community

service-learning experience, while the other submitted a reflective paper at the end of the term as a requirement of the certificate (Nikki). They each, Leah, and Nikki, demonstrate the discrepancies within the field of service-learning around a standard process for incorporating reflection practices into courses and programs. Yet as an essential component of service-learning, the requirement of reflection provides a foundation upon which reflective practices can be developed over time.

Solomon shared that, "the reflection process allowed me to just slow down and really think, what is happening? Why is this important? And then what do I need to do with it?". Initially during his service-learning trip, he was unsure of the purpose of the reflective prompts. Yet after a few times of not receiving full credit on his weekly journals, he began to see the value to "pause and reflect" on his experience teaching music courses and the academic course he was taking. Additionally, as a current elementary music educator he readily shared, with a smile, that he incorporates reflection into his courses, using the *What? So What? Now What?* reflection model with his students.

While discussing her Thai international service-learning experience, Ranae shared that she encountered some dissonance while teaching English courses at "a local orphanage in Chiang Rai". She began to reflect on her direct-service experience's impact on the community she was serving in:

> Reflection required me to be like, "But that's not my place." So it was this mixture of I didn't do enough, but I'll never be able to do enough. And so I have to be able to, in my service, pass the baton on to somebody who is prized and capable and willing and more appropriate to be doing that kind of stuff. So I think that only comes from reflection. It doesn't really come from the class in my experience, where people are telling you that. It really comes from you sitting back looking at what you did, what you didn't do, what you'll never be able to do in order to see how could this really go beyond me?

From her intrapersonal reflections along with discussions with peers, and years beyond her time in Thailand, Ranae is able reflect on her role in short-term service trip with longstanding impact. She was still grappling with service-learning not being a one-and-done activity to be completed in one trip. Through reflection, now in her second year of law school, Ranae came to terms with the reality that not all service-learning trips are able to be completed in one trip, rather their project was one-piece of an larger project that the community can be continued beyond her time there. She realizes now that are more factors and systems to be considered when completing service-learning projects that are beyond what students can complete in a quarter, semester or six-week trip.

Through reflection students were able to consider their relation to self, others, and the world. Courtney, a program manager for a technology company, summarizes the impact of reflection as an opportunity to "understand that service learning was not about me" that it is more about supporting the progress of the course she was observing rather than all about what she took away from shadowing. For her it was about understanding change that is already occurring in the community and learning through the experience. It is not a one-sided student experience benefit, but an exercise in reciprocity by contributing to community through her service.

Reflection provided Black undergraduate service-learning students with the opportunity to connect the learning that occurred in their classroom with academic theory and in practice at their community services site, which allowed them to make sense of their learning, change their worldviews, self-beliefs and amplify their voice for change they want to see.

Finding #2: Dispositions to Service

Being involved in one's community was not a new activity for the participants. Many noted their familial and religious upbringing that exposed them at a young age to the importance

of volunteering. Their disposition to service was homegrown and modeled through active adult community engagement around them as they grew up, along with being fostered through their pre-college volunteer experiences and familial connections to accessing community support during their upbringings.

Familial Influence on Service Disposition

Participants noted conversations and activities with their parents about serving in the community for community betterment. Their parents are active volunteers in their home communities through fraternities, churches, and peer groups. Danielle's parents "are very community centric…they raised me, you got to give back". Her parents' community involvement laid a foundation for her to be involved in her local community. While in the seventh grade, Danielle and her mother and her participated in a church service trip to paint a wall in Costa Rica. She considers herself to be

> very service-oriented person. I came into college knowing that I didn't want to just do something to make money, like go and be an executive or a CEO. So then once I found out about service learning, it fit in really well with my priorities and it's a mode of learning and applying the stuff you learn in the classroom in the general public, which I really like so it just happened to fall my lap.

Similar to Danielle's experience, many of the participants dispositions to service were fostered through prior volunteer experiences helped them to identify the difference between volunteering, community service and service-learning.

For Faith, a participant that completed a six-week international service-learning course in Jamaica, she recalls that prior to her college she "did a lot of community service growing up, so I was aware of what community service looks like and expectations, and I really went into this coming from a place of selflessness, recognizing this isn't about me". Her disposition to serve was impressed upon her since she was a young child by her mother that "You're here on this

earth to serve people". The call to serve from her mother led her complete volunteer opportunities before entering college, which created a foundation for her to be open to completing a service-learning course and one that was international to extend her knowledge on public health views in a foreign country.

A few participants grew up firsthand seeing their role models actively engaged in community matters, which influenced them to have a temperament to want to engage in giving back to their communities. Nikki, a senior majoring in Political Science and African American studies, volunteered previously with her family at community organizations, "I had done stuff with either different organizations… I did some with my family. We would do it for holidays a lot of times". Familial volunteering is a good example of a disposition of service being developed directly by those who have influence on participants day to day lives and character building. Similar to Nikki, also pursing the university's service-learning certificate is sophomore Danielle, who shared that community involvement is a family activity "my aunts do it, my uncles do it, my mom does it". Her mom is a doctor, and her father is a former business executive that is now very active in his local fraternity chapter's volunteer activities. Danielle's "dad's an Omega and he loves giving back". Danielle's parents' dispositions to be active in their local community through volunteering has led her to wonder why others are not involved. She does not see why anyone would "live a life where you don't give back to the people who are around you. That doesn't seem normal to me". Being involved in one's community through church, social organizations or community agencies, has allowed for Danielle to make serving a core part of her character and way of life.

"Community has always been a big piece of who I am" shared Gloria, a senior studying Mass Communication. She shared on her eligibility questionnaire that "growing up I watched

women before me evolve simply by helping the community in some way. Once inspired I spent hours on hours doing things for the community in my hometown." The inspiration of seeing women in her community being empowered through serving, led Gloria to complete over "500 service hours" in high school. She found the experience motivating, "seeing women just getting back up and wanting to do something better with themselves was just extremely, it was really inspiring". Therefore, enrolling in a course that paired her academic studies with community service project to work with formerly incarcerated women was not a new experience for her. She hopes that once she graduate's, she will be able to continue to give back by working with similar organizations as an immigration lawyer.

The role modeling of their adults and parents being involved in their communities through volunteer opportunities influenced the dispositions to service for Faith, Gloria, Nikki, and Danielle. Their family's active community engagement allowed them to seek out opportunities to serve in their communities. Which later allowed them to be interested in courses that connected their academic learning with community service experiences.

Prior Community Service Experiences

Participants' prior experiences provided an establishment for why they were predisposed to serve with their communities. "I'm always in some type of organization regardless, school related, church related. I'm always in something", shared Zuri, a graduate student studying speech therapy. Continuing community engagement while in college for Keyoko and Gloria stems from their high school volunteer engagement. Psychology major Keyoko completed over "200 volunteer hours", while senior Mass Communication major, Gloria recalled completing "500 service hours" by the time she graduated high school. Gloria's active community engagement did not slow down when she enrolled in college, for her **"community has always

been extremely important to me and being able to give back and whatnot. I knew that I wanted to find a way to be able to do that" in college. Her volunteer experience that began prior to college was expanded through a college student organization. She then leveraged civic engagement experience with her academics when she enrolled in a service-learning courses. The course led her to learn about the university's service-learning certificate program. Through curricular and co-curricular activities, she has remained engaged in community matters.

Participation in national service-orientated organizations provided participants with volunteer experiences on a broader scale. Currently working at his university's center for community engagement, Howard shared that he "participated in the National Honors Society in high school" where he facilitated student volunteers at a food drive and other community events. His engagement with the community provided him with the opportunity to see a need in the community and organize his peers to provide a solution. Relatedly, freshmen Leah volunteered with her high school Interact club, a Rotary Club high school program, to assist individuals with mental illnesses, in her hometown in Colorado. This was admittedly a new experience for Leah to interact with individuals dealing with "behavioral and emotional challenges" pertaining to mental health. She enjoyed "doing fun little activities with them in the gym because it was snowing outside, so just a little parachute kind of activity and we'd all go underneath and enjoy time with each other". Leah and her high school peers were providing activities for adults with developmental delays. As a high school student, Leah, the opportunity provided her a chance to go outside of her comfort zone and with individuals she didn't interact with often.

Leah's prior volunteer experience also comes from her religious background, where she volunteered with her church's youth. She grew up in an Ethiopian Orthodox church, comprised of children "who were born in the US and their parents are immigrants" and "in seeing that

disconnect between these two groups of people. I started doing some Bible studies with the kids" where she helped kids learn a common Aramaic prayer and translate it to English for better comprehension. Her compassion for helping others extended into her service-learning course on the "Design of Childhood" that allowed her to be further observant of how children she was mentoring interacted with readings and lessons she provides on environmental justice. She smiled when she reflected that when engaging with children, "it's just planting a seed. And you see they just have this vast imagination, and their brain isn't afraid". She took inspiration from them to be curious and unafraid to ask questions in her own courses.

Similar to Leah, Solomon referred to his religious upbringing as a foundation to his community service experience. The son of a pastor Solomon–born, raised, and college educated in his hometown – shared that his father "does a lot of work in the communities. So, being a member of the church and seeing him and helping him out, I've been experienced with doing community service". He was familiar with typical volunteer experiences where you "do for this set population, and then you just leave". He was one of the only participants that made the distinction that he did general "community service, yes, but not service learning". For him volunteering with his church community alongside his father, "wasn't that interactive" it was absent of the "collaborative piece that service-learning kind of provided for" him of working with community members to addresses their identified need. As a participant that spent six weeks in Jamaica as part of a summer service-learning course, Solomon credits his experience leading a high school music course as an "enlightening experience". He beamed with pride as he shared that "my service learning experience shaped who I am… different than who I am today prior to my service learning experience". His experience with the service-learning course in

Jamaica was more transformative to him academically, personally and career wise, than simply volunteering.

Twyla also has volunteer experience with her church's children's department since 2011. During the early months of COVID-19 she shifted her duties to "also volunteer with the food distribution program, which is also through my church, too" to be a part of her church's response to food inequalities at the time. As a nontraditional college student over the age of 24, Twyla was the only participant that noted she had children. As such she mentioned that she "volunteer with my daughter preschool parent program. I was on parent forum; I was a president." Her volunteer experience was connected to her parental engagement and religious membership, which benefits her as an elementary educator interested in becoming a K-12 teacher able to adapt to variety of settings and students.

Another aspiring K-12 educator of the participants is junior Zora, studying World Literature and Culture. Zora's prior volunteer experiences are related to her serving as a classroom assistant from a young age, starting in the

> fourth grade I've been a mommy's helper and a babysitter, and I was helping with different youth clubs and activities. And I've just always surrounded myself by working in different aspects with kids that were younger than me, even when I was still a kid.

As a culmination of "all of the different things that I've learned over the past 10 years have just built up" for Zora to know how to interact with children of various ages. As a result, she was able to quickly acclimate to assisting middle and high school students for her service-learning courses. These prior experiences allowed her to feel comfortable during her service-learning course where she volunteered in middle and high school classrooms with students of varying ages and backgrounds. Having a prior experience of engaging with children, youth and community members provided the participants with a foundation of patience and comfort as they

entered similar environments for their service-learning project hours. This led them to have a disposition to serve their community full of compassion, curiosity and being open to learn as they assisted their community members.

From Served to Server

In addition to a disposition to serve through familial or religious backgrounds, the motivation for serving in the community can often be because they were served by the community. A few participants noted that they felt compelled to engage in service-learning courses, to give back to community (to be a server), as their families had been in similar circumstance as the served, receiving support from community agencies. Therefore, a few participants have a more personal, emotional connection and rationale for why they choose to serve in their communities.

Celeste shared that during her upbringing she has "been through homelessness with my family, specifically my siblings and my mom," when they lived abroad in the Middle East. Despite their temporary conditions, she noted her mother's dutifulness to "not curse anyone or blame anyone for our situation. Just try to help as best as you can. It will return to you". Currently working as a Service-Learning Coordinator for a local non-profit, Celeste's finds that her mother's words ring true in her life, as she is "seeing it with where I am in life right now. I've been given the opportunity to continue to help because I've already been helped". Direct-experience with being on the receiving end of community support or accessing social services contributes to participants seeking to serve others during times of need. Being able to be a server allows them to pay it forward by being of support to others in need, similar to how they accessed services when their families' faced hardships.

Zuri is a current graduate student who shared her familiarity of receiving services recalling "how we sometimes struggled with certain things" during her upbringing. Her familial experience with receiving community support is motivation for why she has been involved in her community and participates in service-learning courses.

> I feel like it helped kind of, because I kind of grew up in it. And having other people like us going to church drives to get canned food and stuff like that, because we really didn't have it like that. So I feel like my identity kind of shaped that aspect because of it. Because I feel like I kind of went through that or being on the other end of it.

Her personal experience of experiencing hardships as a child receiving food drive support provided her with the opportunity to know what it is like to be on the receiving end of the service. Correspondingly, she has compassion for the students and community members she worked with during her volunteer and community service-learning experiences.

A heightened awareness of the sensitivity of volunteering in communities with familiar socioeconomic status as the college student volunteers, is not one that is often considered by the peers of the study participants. As a high school student Niesha "grew up with my family members having a physical or mental disability, several family members. I spent my entire high school career working at" a local disability rights advocacy organization. During the summer before her sophomore year in college, she participated in a summer service-learning course in upstate New York where she completed her community service project creating advocacy campaigns for a local disability rights organization, therefore she was passionate about this experience. Currently, as a Fulbright scholar and fourth year Ph.D. student, she recalled a disagreement with a peer who did not consider that classmates might come from similar communities of color that they were completing their service projects in for the summer. Niesha's "family is very much so working class…But there was literally no difference between

that family" she was working alongside in the local community and that of her own family. Growing up Niesha "lived in section 8 housing up until [she] was 13". Her personal family connection to the community they were volunteering in, positioned her to be an advocate for low-income communities of color. In particular, Niesha mentioned on her eligibility questionnaire that during her experience she encountered

> white classmates [that] made me feel uncomfortable due to the extent to which they would patronize and sometimes fetishize the communities were supposed to be working with. In a lot of ways, the same communities that were being fetishized were ones that reflected my own community.

It wasn't until she had completed a few more service-learning courses that she was introduced to term of "white savior complex" to better understand the lens her peers were likely viewing their community service experience, that differed from her own familial connection to service.

Niesha's motivation for service-learning and community service is strongly correlated to her own family's experience receiving services and her disposition to be of service to others. This close connection to giving back to the community is one aspect of the experience that is personally motivating for students' desire to serve. Atticus, has a similar familial background as Niesha. "Being Black and also being low socioeconomic status with my dad being a taxi driver and my mom being a crossing guard", which allowed Atticus to feel able to "connect much easier, but I think once getting there, I was confronted with the different identities we have as soon as we confront someone who has similar race or gender." He persisted past these different lived experiences of his youth participants and found that "you can't just connect on race. There has to be a deeper connection of the human being to the human being. But I think that's always a start of [how] we can have some... at least a student's shared experiences". He sought other ways to connect with students he was tutoring by exploring their interests and sharing his own.

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Participants disposition to service was influenced by their familial upbringings, prior volunteer experiences as high school students or with community organizations. Additionally, a few participants shared that they were familiar with receiving community support when their family's experienced hardship and it influenced their own reason to be involved in their community. These are all motivating factors for the participants to have a willingness to enroll in a course that requires community service project hours. They have individual foundations that stem from having compassion for others that leads them to want to serve and be involved in community matters.

Finding #3: Kinship

The theme of kinship stems from participants' stories that highlighting their sense of connection with the community members they were interacting with as part of their community service experience. Kinship for the participants resonated throughout their stories by them developing authentic, meaningful, and long-lasting relationships with community members. Kinship was fostered by the participants through their interactions which led to them feel comfortable within community spaces they were serving due to racial similarities with the communities they served within, along with an embracement of the African diaspora to promote community uplift.

Kinship Through Racial Representation

As a student at a predominately white institution, Courtney recalled "feeling like some questions and conversations that people were asking in my regular courses just didn't push hard enough" she sought off-campus community engagement opportunities to deepen her knowledge and critical thinking experiences. In doing so, she was able to find connection at her service-learning site with the children by going to "the elementary school a couple times a week, it just

felt like I could be myself. I mean, not that I was really showing my personality to these fourth-grade students, but it just felt like there was a level of understanding between us all". Furthermore, she was able to establish "some sort of camaraderie, having chats with that Black teacher…it felt like I was having a very different experience than I was having in my classes, and it just felt like I was able to let my guard down a little bit". Courtney's informal conversations with the classroom teacher provided her with the opportunity to find kinship connections through racial similarities and career interests. This, in turn, allowed for her to gain mentorship, as well, from the teacher.

Feeling comfortable in the classroom with Black and Brown students being taught by a Black teacher allowed Courtney to find community where she could be herself. The relationship she established with her classroom teacher served to be her

> my most memorable experience because she was a Black woman. She was only a few years older than I was, maybe late 20s, early 30s or so. And she was just talking to me about how she got into education, and we were chatting about that. And she was commenting on how helpful I had been throughout the semester… having chats with that Black teacher like I was mentioning before, it felt like I was having a very different experience than I was having in my classes, and it just felt like I was able to let my guard down a little bit.

The mentorship she received from the classroom teacher affirmed for Courtney, her desire to become a teacher upon graduation. The lessons learned from this classroom experience were valuable for her when she became a Teach for America elementary teacher in Maryland for two years after college during the pandemic. Citing burnout as the reason she is "intentionally in a random position right now…because I needed a breath". Yet, when recalling this story she smiled visibly when sharing how the classroom management skills that she observed from this teacher was useful for when she was later asked to teach an activity on behalf of teacher. While

she is currently resting and recovering from the teaching profession, as a project manager for a tech company, she is pondering her next career move.

Racial similarities of kinship students allowed participants to more quickly connect with the students. Tumi described his kinship experience in the classroom as "the fact that it wasn't a big deal that [he was] Black", as he completed his service hours in a school predominately attended by Black and Brown students. For him,

> being in a classroom where it's just all these young peoples, some that look like me, it was very comfortable and I felt right at home, right at ease. It was no big deal. The way I would talk, sometimes I would just talk using vernacular that they're familiar with, and it was very easy to move that way because they'd pick up exactly what I'm putting down.

The opportunity to simply be their authentic self without having to code-switch depending on who is in the classroom, is a form of kinship that many participants mentioned. **"**It's really nice to see that face that also has some element like you who isn't going to judge you upfront for the way that you live, who's never going to make assumptions about you and your family", shared sophomore Danielle regarding why Black students are likely to participate in service-learning course. It may start out as Danielle states as "a cultural thing that we're taught more to give back to those who helped make us the way that we are to our community that we live in". However, Danielle continues, that for some Black service learners "they were that student who was being read to 10 years ago and so they know firsthand how it feels to have someone who looks like them, who might understand their experiences a bit more, who isn't going to judge them". Seeing their younger selves in the children and youth they were mentoring provided them with a chance to let their guards down and not overthink how their words or actions might be misinterpreted. Racial similarities helped participants ease into community project tasks without having to overly monitor their language and behavior.

Kinship by Embracing the African Diaspora

Many of the participants volunteered in predominately Black and Brown communities, and many of them saw their experience as an opportunity, as did Faith to "to embrace the diaspora". She expressed an openness to learn about the Jamaican culture as part of the African diaspora that differs from her own African-American experience. It caused her to reflect on her own diasporic experience,

> feeling connected to the people there, but not really because I don't have a
> Caribbean background, but I'm also of African descent. And so, feeling extremely
> connected to them despite living in a different country. I grew up, I did grow up
> in a predominantly Black community, but it was strictly African Americans.
> There weren't many folks from West Africa or the Caribbean. And so being able
> to be over there and embrace the diaspora a little bit more was my aha moment.

This dissonance of having a racial similarity but ethnic differentiation, was a common one that many participants acknowledged however, it did not dim their curiosity to learn about another culture. Coming from a Haitian family, Zuri saw similarities with the Caribbean culture of Jamaica where she completed her six-week service-learning course. Beyond the Africa diaspora similarities, she still felt the youth saw her as American:

> I felt like it was good that I was around other people that had the same skin color
> as me. But it also felt like an out of…I felt like I was home, but then I didn't at the
> same time. So I felt like I was going into their world.

She is describing a racial familiarity, yet acknowledging the cultural experiences as different. Regardless, of the cultural differences she still felt kinship with the community and has returned on her own to reconnect with some friends she made while there. Racial familiarity resonated with many of the participants as it allowed them to see themselves in the participants they were serving. Keyoko shares that "being able to connect with people that look like me and give back

resources that I have access to has always been something that's very important to me." It is an act of care, for Black participants, to seek to serve others that look like them.

In her eligibility questionnaire response to service-learning's importance on her academics, Ranae noted the importance of kinship relationships to her experience. "I think human connection and sustaining strong interpersonal relationships with communities was the primary reason I kept doing service learning in the US and abroad". As a two-time international service-learning course participant and current law student, Ranae "care[s] about the diaspora, I care about other people who look like me, and I also want to serve in a capacity that I'm capable of" doing something positive and uplifting. Affirming Ranae's thoughts, Gloria assert that "I genuinely think it comes from a place of wanting better for us [Black people], ultimately. You want better for us. And I think that's another reason why I got involved in the Baton Rouge community because there are so many Black people". Service-learning for these participants is a call to action that is complemented by their academic studies, but also develops their civic engagement interests through structured community service. It is a way for them to be a part of community solutions that impact Black communities similar to their own.

Finding #4 Service-Learning's Impact on Career Aspirations

Pre-professional experience in students' collegiate experience is often reserved for another high-impact practice: internships. Service-learning course with their shared learning spaces of classroom and community, is an additional experiential learning opportunity that provides students with career-readiness and workplace experiences. For Faith and Gloria, service-learning courses confirmed their career aspirations. Faith participated in a six-week service-learning course in Jamaica. During this trip she facilitated sexual and reproductive wellness workshops for high school students. For Faith the "experience really put a stamp on,

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"Yes, this is what I want to do. This is what you need to do". And it wasn't just focused on I need to be in the sexual health sort of area but in all areas of health overall". Currently she is living in New York City and working as a wellness coach for a corporation. Her service-learning experience "started up this passion inside of me to work with different populations around health, different health needs, and hone in on … individual needs in [people's lives] pertaining to their health". She was able to see the tangible connections between her undergraduate service-learning course experience in Jamaica working with youth on well-being matters and pursue a career in a similar field upon graduation.

Gloria is a senior that decided to move back home to ease the financial cost of education on her family as her younger siblings began to enroll in college. While doing so, she is partaking in the certificate program that Gloria learned about in a class presentation by their university's community engagement center. Essentially, Gloria is enrolled full-time in her southern university, yet completing her final semester in college virtually and completing service hours in her home community. When considering service-learning courses influence on her career trajectory, Gloria affirmed that

> I want to be a lawyer. Well, no, I want to be I will be a lawyer and I have always been a little confused on what I wanted to do. I knew how I knew I wanted to help people. And after doing service learning and just volunteering as a whole, I knew that I had to do something that was going to move people…in those ways. And that's when I came up with immigration law.

Service-learning led Gloria to consider law school in here last semester of her undergraduate education. She settled on immigration law as "a way for me to serve individuals maybe not in the same way but it's just me being able to serve people, and also connect with community and help not just my people but minorities as a whole. It's just shown me how important this is to me".

She is articulating her agency to empower others and identifying a career that will allow her to advocate for social justice and rights of underrepresented individuals.

Service-learning courses "solidified in me that I was on the right path of you are definitely going to be helping kids for the rest of your life. That is what you're going to be doing" as Celeste explained. Currently as the Service-Learning Coordinator for a police service academy, Celeste connects youth with police officers for community-based projects. She was introduced to the organization as an undergrad by the professor that taught her service-learning course. The professor recommended she reach out to the program director of the organization who is also a faculty member at her college, after the professor noticed her appreciation for service-learning programs. Hesitant at first to pursue the opportunity, Celeste shared that the program director had a reputation of being stern "I did not want to get involved because I was very scared of Dr. Hamm. I didn't really like him. He was known around the campus". Nonetheless, in need of extra credit for her criminology course, she pursued the volunteer hours with the organization and established a relationship with Dr. Hamm, which led to her first role post-graduation. In a few short years, she has revived their program to have a service-learning component that incorporates the EARS model which stands for "education in the classroom, action in the community, and then reflection about what has been learned". The model has the tenants of service-learning, which allows her to teach a pre-engagement course for the youth and officers before they begin their service hours, along with incorporating reflection sessions. Celeste's experience is unique in that her service-learning courses led to full-time employment with the organization based on her volunteer experience. It is great to see that this high-impact practice can pique the interest of a student, raise them on the hiring radar of an organization and lead to an emerging career.

As a Navy veteran, Tumi's a non-traditional undergraduate student. He worked in Navy Medicine as a Corpsman and decided he wanted to become a doctor. He retired and immediately enrolled in college to pursue his medical degree full-time. Tumi connected his service-learning course experience to his medical career aspirations: "I'm working to become a doctor and I think I want to be a pediatrician, I'm not sure. But I was like, "You know what? Let me plug in more to my community by doing this work, so that I can understand," what his patients may be encountering locally, before they meet him in the hospital. In addition to volunteering with a local youth organization, Tumi's service-learning experience allowed him to tutor elementary students consistently for one quarter. Through both experiences he hopes that he will be "able to see these young patients, again, just give them that hope…And also ask them, 'cause now I know a little about education. "Hey, how's school going? Are you being supported?". He is alluding to being a more holistic doctor that will be aware of treating the full scope of the patient and not the ailment. In doing so he is connecting his service experience with his education that, career, family, and life are all intertwined to impact a person's well-being. His experience now in a service-learning course has future implications for his career in medicine.

Similarly, Ranae's initial interest in service-learning courses was due to her aspirations to "be a doctor and this is how you get into medical school. You go and get your patient contact hours so that you can say you're passionate about it and you've done this kind of work before, so you're not just entering medical school without experience." She had a very clear motivation for seeking out community engagement experiences that would provide her with the necessary experiences to have a strong medical school application. As a pre-freshman she saw and responded to an advertisement to participate in a medical supply trip to the Dominican Republic. After serving in Dominican Republic, she completed two additional service-learning courses in

Thailand and Peru. "Ultimately all of these trips" shifted Ranae's career interests from medical school to "really made me want to dive headfirst into policy in the US, a place where I know it would be appropriate for me to work in." She is currently a second-year law student seeking pursue public policy and social justice in the U.S. Engaging in various service-related courses, projects, "all the trips made me more aware of policy and how it impacts lives." The courses provided Ranae with exposure to career opportunities that were likely not on her radar at the start of her academic undergraduate career. Going through the experiences her career view was expanded along with how she viewed her role in improving society.

Solomon and Howard are two Black males from the same east coast community, but they attended neighboring universities. Together they both had career-affirming experiences through their service-learning courses. Solomon, the son of a pastor had engaged in several community volunteer opportunities. For him "service-learning experience shaped who I am". Prior to enrolling in the six-week Jamaica service-learning course, Solomon readily shared that he "was completely content with going back to Foot Locker and just letting the days go by after I graduated college". However, his service-learning experience,

> it made me reach higher because I had no aspirations to go to grad school, I had no aspirations to actually be a teacher... But after I had the service-learning experience, it really opened my eyes to just the possibilities of life, the things that you can do, the ways you can be successful.

Solomon's service-learning course in Jamaica required him to teach a music education for summer school participants at a local school. Currently he is a music teacher for grades K-8 students, along with being a full-time graduate student pursuing his master's degree in Music and Music Education. Thus, his service-learning experience connected his passion for music and teaching music into a career as a music educator. Upon returning from the Jamaica service-learning course experience he signed up to be a teaching assistant for the next summer cohort.

For Howard, he grew-up in his university's neighboring community, and is familiar with the robust university-community partnerships with local schools and community agencies. As a freshman he really

> didn't know what I wanted to study or wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to think about, how do we reform education within the United States, especially thinking about how do you do that within the local [city] context?

Through conversations with his academic advisor, a community service-learning course was suggested to him, Music in Urban Spaces, a course that connected his passion for music, education and interest in social change. He served as a music classroom aid to support young musicians as they honed their craft. During the pandemic he engaged in a public service fellows program with a course that "examine [d] the relationship between [westside of town and university] and really help us understand, okay, now you know this relationship" which gave him context to better examine the partnership between the university and community. The initial service-learning course combined with the public service fellows' program, prompted him to reflect on

> interacting with students and seeing those students and building relationships with those students and helping them learn and seeing how I can just do a little bit to impact them, it really helped me understand that if you have a partnership, let's say with a school or a group of young people, that impact can go a long way. And so that made me think more about education and reform and where things can fit… And so that changed my directory. I became really interested in those sorts of questions. And my focus academically really shift towards politics and education.

After completing the public service fellows' program, Howard began working in the university's center for community engagement. Upon graduation he began to work full-time at the center and will begin his graduate studies in educational policy to expand his view on "education and reform". He is hoping to pursue a career in education policy upon completion of his master's degree.

Sophomore Danielle's career aspiration to be a corporate responsibility advisor, to ensure corporations are ethically engaging in their local communities. She was initially introduced to service-learning courses through a class visit from her university's' center for community engagement to enroll in the service-learning certificate program. The program allowed students the option to make any course service-learning by connecting with the center to partner with a community-based organization to complete service-hours related to their course project while learning about the community. At the end of the service-learning presentation, she thought to herself, "I'll do it. I'm already giving back. I might as well get course credit for it." While her initial interests in service-learning were to connect her current volunteer experiences with academic credit, her view on the value of service-learning shifted. Danielle views service-learning courses as an opportunity for students to explore "careers where you want to be a politician, you want to be a doctor, and you want to get that service running [service-learning] give you an opportunity to start establishing that …while you're still learning, and it helps you to figure out".

Participants in this study corroborated Danielle's sentiments that service-learning provides students with academic and community service experiences to explore their career interest along their academic journey. Regardless of students' majors, service-learning courses allow students opportunities to explore the variety of roles to apply their learning before graduation. Comparable to internships students develop transferrable skills from their service-learning courses and through reflection consider how to apply their skills toward their future career aspirations.

Summary

The reflective stories of undergraduate Black service-learners affirm their positive learning experiences in this popular high impact practice. Utilizing two conceptual frameworks, transformative learning theory and student voice theory, as lens to examine their stories, allowed the researcher to identify themes representative of their unique narrative experiences about how they learned through service-learning courses. Through the overarching finding of reflection, the additional findings about their experience emerged from their stories: disposition to service, the development of kinship, and service-learning's impact on participants career aspirations. These findings begin to develop an emerging theory supporting the high participation rates of Black students in service-learning experiences. This will be further explored in the final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5: Discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Presently, the narrative experiences of Black service-learning students are sparse in scholarship, aside from aggregated student of color narrative experiences (Harden, 2009; Motoike, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to research and study the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. Through a qualitative, grounded research study, seventeen narrative experiences were shared by Black participants across the United States. This dissertation shares the stories of seventeen participants who made meaning of their academic learning within their community service projects, thus leading to an emerging theory regarding the high participation rates of Black students in service-learning courses.

The emerging theory as a result of this study will be introduced first in this chapter to frame the discussion of this dissertation. The research questions will be answered through the lens of the emerging theory with assertions and recommendations from the researcher. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the study's limitations, the researchers' positionality statement, implications for leadership and social justice, future research consideration, and a conclusion of the overall dissertation study.

Emerging Theory

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this dissertation research study to develop a theory that begins to fill the gap in service-learning scholarship and practitioner knowledge regarding the high participation rates of Black students in service-learning courses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, the emerging theory regarding the high proportion of Black student engagement in service-learning courses can be correlated to their disposition to service,

kinship connections developed through their community partner and member interactions, the value of reflection to better understand their role in community development, and the opportunity to explore career interests through their service-learning participation. This theory is directly correlated to the four findings of this research study as they drawn from the participants perspectives about their experience in service-learning courses.

Acknowledging and validating that Black students have a disposition to community service through their prior volunteer experiences with their family members, churches or community organizations, allows for many of them to be open to completing service hours for a course without hesitation. Given that many of the participants attended predominately white institutions they were one of a few Black students or students of color in a class as well. Therefore, completing a service project in a community of color working alongside individuals that have similar racial backgrounds provided them a kinship connection, beyond the university that allowed them to have a sense of belonging. Additionally, through reflection discussions, journal prompts, and essays, they were able to connect their learning within the classroom to their direct-service experience in the community that deepens their post-graduation preparedness. In doing so, they can affirm or pivot a career aspiration by exploring their interests through a variety of community service-learning courses and projects that provide them with real-world experience for post-graduation competitiveness. As a result of their experiences, they become competitive candidates upon graduation with their development critical thinking and reflection skills that they can detail while sharing their community service experiences with future employers. Through their service-learning experiences Black students can see the transformative learning value beyond the classroom that benefits them academically, socially, and professionally. The high participation rates of Black students in service-learning are related to

their lived experiences that allow them to leverage their disposition to service as a result of their prior volunteer experiences, kinship connections with community members, service-learning's connection to career aspirations, and the importance of reflection that deepens their post-graduation preparedness and competitiveness. The concept of experiential learning is a result of their participation in service-learning.

Research Findings Connection to Existing Literature

The lived experiences of Black service-learning students led to four findings that explain how they experienced service-learning courses: importance of reflection, disposition to service, kinship, and service-learning's impact on their career aspirations. These findings demonstrated the value of student voice theory by showing students' abilities to articulate their own meaning making of critical learning moments in their academic career. As a result, they had transformative learning experiences that caused them to pause and reflect on critical learning moments from their service-learning experiences that led them to consider prior volunteer experiences, current academic understandings, and future career considerations.

Primarily in service-learning scholarship, the development of critical thinking skills, increased academic success, increased student engagement on- and off-campus, along with a heightened persistence to graduation, are all outcomes of students' participation as reconstituted in current literature (Finley & McNair 2013; Kuh, 2008; Kuh & Kinzie, 2018). Therefore, the gap that this research fulfills is from the students' perspective and not from the researchers' analytical lens about their experiences. Thus, the emerging theory regarding the high proportion of Black student engagement in service-learning courses can be correlated to their disposition to service, kinship connections developed through their community partner and member interactions, the value of reflection to better understand their role in community development,

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and the opportunity to explore career interests through their service-learning participation. These are all findings directly based on Black undergraduate students who practice meaning making of their lived experiences in service-learning courses. However, they are not neatly aligned with the findings of this research study derived from the lived experiences of Black students. Therefore, these findings the researcher notes that Black student experiences are different from the traditional service-learning outcomes that service-learning scholars posit in the literature reviewed in chapter 2. The findings are more aligned with components of critical service-learning pedagogy: "social change perspective, working to redistribute power, and developing authentic relationships" as noted in Table 6 (Mitchell, 2008, pp 62).

Table 6

Critical Service-Learning Elements Mapped to Study Findings

Critical Service-Learning (CSL) Components	Description of CSL Component	Research Findings
Social Change Orientation	Challenging students to consider their role in creating more just and equitable society	• Disposition to service, • Service-Learning Connected to Career Aspirations
Working to Redistribute Power	Amongst all participants in the service-learning relationship. Seeking mutual benefits and voice for all constituents.	• Reflection • Research focus on Centering Black student's Lived Experiences
Developing Authentic Relationships	In the classroom and in the community building, collaborative connections with one another that leverages differences.	• Kinship

Viewing service-learning through a critical lens incorporating a social justice orientation that decenters one student group's experience over another (Rosenberger, 2000). In this study, centering the Black student experience revealed that Black students unconsciously take a critical lens to their service-learning experience. In doing so, the counternarratives of service-learning

are amplified and provide new insights into the student experience that are different from academic observations made by scholars that limit student voice in their research.

Research Assertions Introduction

By centering Black student voices in service-learning experiences, this qualitative research study highlighted critical service-learning elements that resonated from participants reflective interviews. Therefore, three assertions are made as a result of, the participant stories and findings:

- o Black students have prior community engagement experiences that they bring into service-learning courses that should be acknowledged and valued.
- o Flexible service-learning course designed allowed Black students to engage in service through a variety of structures.
- o Black students persist past minor dissonance in their service-learning experience to continue to have positive community engagement experiences.

These assertions answer the research questions guiding this study

- o How do Black students experience service-learning courses?
  - What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?
  - What dissonance in the service-learning experience do Black students encounter in their participation?

In responding to the research questions, the researcher will expound upon these three assertions and provide recommendations for service-learning constituents. Throughout the following assertions there are quotations from the participants of the study to further demonstrate the rationale for the assertion and the forthcoming recommendations. This is done to highlight that

current literature does not include direct-student insight, voice or perspective on service-learning practice, scholarship, and pedagogy.

Research Question 1: How do Black students experience service-learning courses?

"Inspirational, fulfilling, impactful and purposeful" were all words that participants used to describe their service-learning course experiences (see figure 1, chapter 4). Through their prior volunteer experiences, they have dispositions to service that enables them to be willing to enroll in a course that requires a community service project. Each of the findings of this research study are connected to the overarching theme of reflection: prior disposition to service, kinship connection, service learning's connection to career aspirations. Through reflection, participants recalled that their prior volunteer experiences shaped their character for being open to completing community service projects for a course as an undergraduate student. Keyoko a participant noted that building kinship connections meant "being able to connect with people that look like me and give back resources that I have access to has always been something that's very important". As such participants noted that they felt comfortable in community spaces interacting with youth and community members who either had similar racial or socioeconomic backgrounds as they did. Lastly, participation in service-learning courses allowed students to consider their career aspirations, which affirmed for them their future career paths of working directly with people for social and community well-being. Through reflection students shared their takeaways from service-learning course experiences and how they learned from their overall service-learning experience.

Assertion: Black students have prior community engagement experiences that they bring into service-learning courses that should be acknowledged and valued.

Their prior experiences led them to have prerequisites to their service-learning experience that allowed them to be familiar with communities of color. Along with having a compassionate disposition to being open to learning with community through direct service opportunities. Taken together, this prior framing allowed them to have positive service-learning course experiences that when they encountered challenges with their peers or faculty members, it did not derail their entire learning experiences.

Zora, an undergraduate junior studying world literature and culture, while volunteering at a local high school for her service-learning course observed a classmate's

> very stern talking to them, kind of talking down to them. And then the teacher was like, "You can ease up a little bit." And then she started goofing off with them and cussing, and I think it was just hard for her to find that balance.

This led Zora to consider if "it was my place to correct anything or say like, "Hey, maybe you should or shouldn't do this," unless she came to me first". Reluctantly she decided to allow the teacher to guide her classmate on how to best connect with the students. However, she did intervene when she felt the classmate was being inappropriate when

> she came back laughing and was kind of disturbing the class, and the one time that I spoke up, I was like, "Hey." I was like, "No judgment, but you should maybe just be careful just because you've been cussing a lot." And she was like, oh, shit. I know, I'm so sorry, blah blah blah." And I was like, "Please, they're 14.

Zora's awareness of how to engage with students less than five years younger than her is due to her ongoing engagement in classrooms stems from

> so many years of experience working with kids. Ever since fourth grade I've been a mommy's helper and a babysitter, and I was helping with different youth clubs and activities. And I've just always surrounded myself by working in different aspects with kids that were younger than me, even when I was still a kid. And so I

think all of the different things that I've learned over the past 10 years have just
built up.

Leveraging over ten years of experience working with youth close to her own age has allowed
Zora to feel confident on how to interact with children and manage classrooms. Zora's prior
applied-learning experiences allowed her to have insight on classroom interactions that her peer
did not at the time of their shared mentoring experience, nor did her peer consider requesting
support from Zora.

Similarly, a few of the participants mentioned incidents with their peers they were open
to learning from community interactions with children, youth, and adults at their sites. These
interactions guided their meaning making of community service experiences to inform their
academic understanding of course topics. Service-learning courses complemented their academic
plan and allowed them to gain valuable career-readiness skills that were transferable for their
next course or future career. By far the biggest takeaway from the course was the importance of
reflection. For Solomon, a participant of the Jamaican six-week service-learning course, he felt
that reflection prompted him to consider "what does it mean to actually be an active participant
in that community". Reflection allowed participants to engage in intentionally with their service
projects, along with identifying what they were learning, and how they were learning and how it
informed their coursework, project, and role in community.

Recommendations

Acknowledging that students have prior volunteer experiences from high school extra
curriculars, to community service projects with their families, religious, or civic organizations is
essential to understanding the student experience. Faculty should foster a learning environment
in the classroom for students to map out their community service experiences that led them to
this course. The activity is an opportunity for students to identifying how they contributed to

their hometown communities or were civically engaged with student organizations. Providing opportunities to reflect and discuss about their prior experiences welcome students to how they are approaching both the course topic and community service experience. Fostering conversations among peers about their prior experiences allows the professor and the students to understand the varies ways that they have all participated in community engagement. This is an asset-based approach to service-learning courses that prompts students to consider what they bring to the community experience, what they might need more understanding about and who of their classmates can they learn from during the experience. By having experience community service students share their prior volunteer activities, they are able to model for other students how to authentically build relationships with community members. Incorporating prior student experiences through written reflections or video testimonials, sharing about their service-learning experiences, gives a student to student perspective on the course intentions beyond the faculty member's identified learning outcomes. In doing so, the faculty actively redistributes power in the course to center student voices of all constituents. Also including community partner voices of the service sites about their volunteer expectations and how the projects contribute to their organization and the overall community is essential in contextualizing the experience before students begin their service. Inviting community partners to the class or hosting a class session at the can provide added context of the community and the projects the students will embark in. Faculty and practitioners should approach their service-learning course with optimism that most students have prior community service experience. The challenge then is for them to connect their academic course content to meaningful community service projects that complement student learning and has reciprocal benefits for community partner organizations.

Research Question 1b: What transformative learning do Black students derive from the service-learning experience?

According to Mezirow (1997) and Kiely (2005), transformative learning is best indicated through how participants "make meaning of their experiences and in particular, how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the way people make sense" of their critical learning moments. In this case, the service-learning participants made meaning of both their in-classroom knowledge that informs their community service experience, and their community service engagement enlightens their course content understanding. Meaning making of their overall experience occurs typically in three phases: pre-, during, and post- community service. These milestones of meaning making are connected to the community service project, as that is the learning environment where they are able to observe, apply and recalibrate their in-classroom understanding directly with their project and with community members. For Black undergraduate students' transformative learning derived from their direct-service community service projects, ongoing reflective activities (assignments, discussions, essays), flexible structures of the course (faculty-led, center for community engagement intermediary, and student-tracked certificate program), kinship connections with community partners and members, and faculty receptiveness to course suggestions.

At the core of their transformative learning experience is the composition of service-learning courses. By not having a one-size fits all approach to service-learning course model, it allows for participants to adapt to the service-learning tenets in a multitude of ways that foster how they learn, what they learn, how they understood their learning to apply it to their academic or professional career. The structures of participants' service-learning courses were varied. From their reflective stories study participants confirmed the essential components of a service-

learning course experience: academic content led by a faculty member, reflection assignments, and community service project.

Assertion: Flexible service-learning course design allowed Black students to engage in service through a variety of structures.

Five participants connected with their university's center for community engagement to identify a local community organization with an established university partnership, that had a similar focus as their course where they could complete their service (Leah, Danielle, Nikki, Keyoko, Gloria). At Leah's university, "instead of the teacher directly or the professor directly communicating with the school. But the professor communicates with" the university's center for community engagement to request community service projects connected to their course topic. Leah's Human Biology course professor offered students 5% extra credit for students to teach paired down Science of Sport lessons to elementary students. While the extra credit was minimal, it was draw for her:

> who doesn't love extra credit? But I knew that I would be engaging. I love learning, and service pairing with that was ideal. And it's extra time for you as a student as well. You're going to these sites. You're taking the time to make these lesson plans. It's an additional class with the reflection process, essays. So yeah, I wasn't just solely based on that extra credit, but I did receive it, which was nice.

The opportunity to share what she was learning with local youth was enticing to Leah with the extra credit being a perk for her participation. As a first-semester freshman, she was looking for ways to connect with the local community, so she gladly took up this opportunity when her professor announced the direct-service option for the course. Therefore, she connected with the Program Assistants at her university's center for community engagement to identify a school to complete her service hours at for the semester.

All attending the same southern university, Danielle, Nikki, Gloria, and Keyoko, were introduced to their university's certificate in service-learning through in-class announcements from Program Assistants of the center for community engagement. Each was aware that the course they were enrolled was service learning; however, the announcement of the certificate intrigued them to consider a long-term commitment to engaging with community for course credit. In order to make a class not tagged service-learning count for the service-learning certificate, participants have to meet with their professor and outline the community service project. For Nikki, she met with her faculty and shared "I'm going to work with X organization and I'm going to connect it back to the class this way. Do you approve it being connected that way?". Once the faculty member approves of the community service project, the student can create a contract with the community partner to complete their service hours "and then I do the reflection" with the community engagement center, once verified they submit to the course faculty and receive course credit, along with certificate credit. Once Danielle heard of the service-learning certificate requirements "you just need three of those service learning courses and a hundred volunteer hours over four years" she thought to herself, "I'll do it. I'm already giving back. I might as well get course credit for it." For Keyoko, participation in a service-learning course led her to considering how to incorporate more service into her academic journey:

> the course was one way for me to transition into consistently volunteering in or after the course because I got to meet a lot of other people who to volunteer. And so, I get to go volunteer with people from that class or that class was how I learned about the [service-learning certificate] program that I'm in anyway. So, if I didn't take that service-learning course, I might have never heard about the program and wouldn't be trying to get the distinction. So, I think it did definitely open up a lot more opportunities for me to incorporate service in my college experience.

The service-learning certificate program encourages students to think beyond course credit and apply what they are learning to community service projects in real-world settings. As participants pursuing the certificate they connect with the campus center for community engagement, network with their course faculty for approval to complete service hours and reflect on their applied-learning experience throughout out their undergraduate career. Upon completion of the service-learning certificate program requirements, participants graduate with honors, receive a medal, and attend a special ceremony; all incentives to be civically engaged while pursuing their academic interests in the classroom and with community.

Tumi and Twyla – both non-traditional students older than the traditional college student of 18-24 years old –noted that they did not know the course they enrolled in was service-learning until the first day. While initially surprised by the additional requirement to complete service hours for their course, they welcomed the opportunity to learn through the service-learning course experience. For aspiring medical doctor, Tumi he

> stumbled upon this class, 'cause for my college specifically, it covers a couple university requirements…So this class, it piqued my own interest, because in the future, I'm working to become a doctor and I think I want to be a pediatrician, I'm not sure. But I was like, "You know what? Let me plug in more to my community by doing this work, so that I can understand something that will make me feel uncomfortable.

Tumi was able to see the benefits of a service-learning course toward his career aspirations, along with being open to learning about a field of study he did not have much knowledge or experience. Thus, he capitalized on the opportunity to tutor and mentor elementary children to provide him with pre-medical school training on how to connect with younger patients now, rather than waiting until medical school. Notably encouraged to apply to the prestigious university by her middle school daughter, Twyla is already actively engaged in her community through her church and with her children's schools. Yet, when she was not aware that her major,

Education Studies, had service-learning courses as requirement for the degree. As a transfer

student in her first service-learning course Twyla

> was kind of a little bit of surprise for me, because when you come to school you're just like, oh, I'm just going to take my classes, I'm going to finish. And then I was like, oh, if you take this class, you have to take this class, you have to take the [service-learning] class. I was like, okay.

She quickly learned that the service-learning courses were part of a sequence of required courses

that she "actually needed to graduate". However, as an aspiring teacher she accepted this

requirement for her degree and arranged to complete her next three service-learning courses over

the next three quarters at the same elementary school. She leveraged the service-learning

opportunity to create long-term community service partner relationship at one site that allowed

her to tutor, mentor and observe in different classrooms each quarter.

Promotion of an international service-learning experience to Jamaica for six

weeks enticed Faith, Solomon and Zuri to participate in the program at their urban

northeastern university. Currently living in New York City, Faith credits her "experience

in Jamaica kind of led me to understanding that this is what it is that I want to do and this

is how I want to reach people" and now works for a hospital as a Wellness Coach.

The remaining two participants, Howard, and Atticus were advised to take a service-

learning course by a peer or advisor. Howard recalled talking with his advisor as a freshman and

not knowing what he wanted to study, his Academic Advisor being aware that he played an

instrument, encouraged him to enroll in "a course called Music in Urban Spaces or Music for

Social Change". This gave him the opportunity to mentor aspiring elementary musicians, while

learning the tenants of teaching to youth. His Academic Advisors suggestion during his freshmen

year is the start to his academic career of seeking out service-learning courses to explore

inequalities in education and consider a career in education policy. A friend actively engaged in

community engagement off-campus and student-leadership development opportunities encouraged Atticus to consider a service-learning course. Through minimal peer pressure

> a friend told me to do it, so I was like, "Sure, why not?" But I think... I think I just like the idea of just helping black people do things. That's, I think, the long and short of it. Because I enjoy service in general.

As one of two aspiring medical doctors within this research study's participant group, Atticus found service-learning courses to be beneficial to preparing him to be a holistic doctor in the future. During his senior year, he participated in a community engagement leadership certificate program that gave him "the tools to kind of turn it into something more significant or change it to something that you can do more work within the future." Participation in the community engagement certificate allowed him to reflect on his service-learning experiences to identify the transferable skill he developed through these experiences for his future career.

The assortment of service-learning courses and program styles offered the students varied entry points into community engagement that is connected to their academic study. As a high-impact practice, service-learning provides students with a variety of ways to apply their learning through guided reflection and connected academic content. Students reflect on their experiences as they develop career-readiness skills.

Recommendations

As a teaching and learning method, service-learning courses have ingrained reflection, learning, and serving into the fabric of the course. However intentionally weaving these components is demonstrated through the pedagogical lens that faculty utilize to facilitate their courses. Employing a critical service-learning pedagogy will establish a course tone that decolonizes service-learning from centering white student experiences and center diverse student experiences. In particular, Black service learners, as they have demonstrated through this

research study have both prior volunteer experiences and dispositions to service. These are two key characteristics of participants that allow them to be the new model service-learning participants that are more willing to learn through direct-service experiences, overcome any dissonance and continue to engage with community beyond the course or in repeated service-learning course experiences.

Additionally, it is important to institutionalize service-learning courses as a graduation requirement. As a graduation requirement it ensures that more students, participate in civic and community engagement experiences prior to graduation as a means to develop their post-graduation competitiveness with transferable skills and meaningful experiences beyond the classroom. Positioning service-learning as a community-focused learning opportunity allows for students to become civically aware and engaged in community matters early into their adult lives to ensure that courses are properly tagged and that all students are aware of this high-impact practice before graduation. If institutionalization is not possible, universities should consider creating a community engagement center or department that can serve as a university-community intermediary that establishes, maintains, and supports community organizations seeking to partner with faculty to address their research interests, along with building their organization capacity by having college students complete sustained service hours. Practitioners in a campus center for community engagement support the administrative aspects of university-community partnerships by overseeing agreements for partnerships, maintaining a database for service-learning opportunities, training peer ambassadors to be reflective workshop leaders supporting service-learning courses, facilitating a certificate to track student engagement as they develop career-readiness competencies, and hosting end-of-year showcases to celebrate the student, faculty and community contributions over the past year. The center for community engagement

can also serve as training incubator to for faculty and community partners to learn about service-learning pedagogies and best practices, along with how to engage in reciprocal community engaged learning partnerships.

Research Question 1b: What dissonance in the service-learning experience do Black students encounter in their participation?

Literature that speaks to the student's experience is little to none, as a result there are not many articles to build upon or refute in existing literature. One article that does consider the challenges students encounter is "I do more service in this class than I ever do at my site" (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). In this article, participants indicated that they had to do more educating of stereotypes and biases with their peers; a form of service within the classroom. This type of peer-to-peer service can lead to Black students experiencing a double-consciousness in navigating their self and racial identity both within their classrooms and the communities they serve in for their course. When interacting to correct their peers may or may not also make assumptions about the student of color intervening (Hickmon, 2015; Mitchell and Donahue, 2009). A few participants encountered dissonance with their peer classmates at the community partner site and in the classroom.

Leah had an interaction with a peer at her elementary school where she was co-teaching a course, when "one of [her] peers, she was explaining some directions, and the kids were very confused. So I'm like, okay, I got to step in now." In the moment, she did not hesitate to intervene on behalf of the students, still she considered if instead she "should have let me take a step back. Let me maybe circle around the classroom". Like Zora, Leah leveraged her summer teaching experience with "Generation Teach, under AmeriCorps, where she taught fifth grades environmental justice topics. She observed that kids that young are at "a really important

developmental time. This experience provided her with the forethought to watch students' body language for comprehension of the instructions by her peer and seeing that they were not understanding she instinctively intervened with clarifying information. As Twyla noted about her own service-learning preparation it was

> encouraging that because they tell you that somehow you have been prepared that being a teacher is not going to be easy. You're going to have surprises. And also they gives you idea what you should do.

Pre-engagement preparation for a community service project can only be so encompassing of what students can anticipate at their sites. Faculty and staff can provide a framing for how to encounter common scenarios and challenges at a site. However, most preparatory activities are regarding community partner and member interactions. There is a heightened awareness on preparing students on what to expect while serving. Yet there is often minimal consideration of peer-to-peer interactions.

During an evening of downtime in Jamaica, Faith recalled a time when her a group of her peers went out to a local bar where played "American songs because they saw a bunch of Americans." A song with explicit lyrics was played and a White classmate sang along including singing an offensive word that is often censored in American music. She expected the other White students to intervene as they professed to be "ally of our community", instead they did not. For Faith the

> experience kind of opened my eyes to, wow, there's a lot of white people out here just still saying things that they have no business saying. And bringing it to his attention, he was so shocked, like, "Oh, what did I do wrong?

Lack of action to understand the offense of the word, led to a brief split between the Black and White student groups on the trip. While they still attended courses and their

community service projects, she admits there was a bit of hesitation to return to their pre-incident mingling activities so freely.

> We felt safe enough to talk about that together. But in terms of us wanting to pursue that deeper intimate connection with the rest of the group, I think that that was kind of off the table at that point. We tolerated it. We did the fun stuff, we did the work, the collaborations, the projects. We laughed when we were together in the group setting, but in terms of, "I have a place of safety here," we found that in each other.

Over the course of the trip, the students realized that "the guy who said it, he was kind of alone because everyone isolated him. But it was him" that was not willing to see the error in his action and its impact on the group dynamics. The professor even provided space in their weekly class to discuss the incident but the student was not receptive. Faith and her peers were able to isolate the incident on as a moment and not something that defined their overall experience. Regardless of this incident, she still believes that participation in service-learning courses allows participants "to gain a certain level of knowledge…for me, [it is] being able to serve." The opportunity to learn and serve continues to be an enticing educational experience for Faith as a working professional.

Assertion: Black students persist past minor dissonance in their service-learning experience to continue to have positive community engagement experiences.

Students will need to be resilient to overcome setbacks they encounter at their site by leveraging pre-engagement activities, reflection practices to examine the situation, and prior experiences on how to best navigate community experiences. From their direct experience, students begin to gain skills, knowledge, and familiarity with serving to make them better volunteers in the community.

Near the end of Ranae's service trip to Dominican Republic she shared her concerns with her faculty member and encouraged her to reconsider how she could reframe the course to highlight how Haitian women in the Dominican Republic are empowering themselves.

> We should be focused on how we can just engage with people like normal people instead of looking at them like, "Oh, they're victims of racism and texturism." It all exists and you have to know it exists. But to frame the whole discussion like, "This is just so bad." It felt very reductive and limiting and I just felt like it was difficult for her to understand that without being secondary to a professor who has maybe lived that experience or someone who's just more closely connected to the island of Hispaniola, but she's not and it just very clearly showed.

The professor was receptive to Ranae's feedback. Ranae's experience provided a counternarrative to what the professor was likely expecting as they initially designed the service-learning course. The professor providing space for feedback and discussion allows for the course to grow and meet the learning needs of all students while also honoring the communities they will be working within. For the next iteration of the course, the faculty member recruited a Dominican and Black Ph.D. student to co-lead the course with them.

The final assignment is often a culminating assignment that asks students to reflect on their overall takeaways from experience that includes their observations of academic content at their service site and any connections from they see from the literature to their service project, along with any discrepancies they may have encountered. For Keyoko's final assignment she and her peers collectively felt that the final assignment was viewing the students the mentored from a deficit-based lens. They were expected to write a reflection on how the child was able to on their own overcome systemic inequalities to be marginally successful. She described the assignment:

> he wanted us to write an essay about talking about the agency of the student and what structural or societal factors impacted the way that they grew up and the area that they live in…And to us, it seemed very exploitative of our experience with the students… but we weren't expecting to write an essay about it as if the child was just a participant. These are real children that we had real connections with.

The college students in Keyoko's course saw the students they mentored as more than an object they encountered; they saw them as real people they connected with on a personal level. This is another example of student advocacy not just for their selves but also for the respect of the participants they worked with in community. The students felt it better to share what they learned from their interactions with the community participants based on the societal factors impacting their lives from their perspective. Rather than examining their lives through a deficit lens of how the children were impacted by social inequalities. Similar to Ranae's experience, the professor for Keyoko's service-learning course was receptive to the students and adjusted the final assignment to be of an observation of their experiences with community members.

The receptiveness of the faculty member showed the participants to know that their voices were heard and mattered as a policy was changed. These considerations by the faculty member allowed for students to see their influence on course design and structures in practical ways that will make the next group of students experience better. Speaking up to provide constructive criticism is rarely easy for students to do, however, in service-learning Black student demonstrated agency to advocate to not have abstractive experiences that "other" their participants.

Recommendations

Sharing difficult stories about race, class, and privilege through reflective activities, is an opportunity to bring in unheard voices amongst the participants, faculty, and community members being served. This encourages students of color with their White peers to interrogate the complexities of societal inequities, and consider how they can address them at their service sites. Students must be encouraged to have conversations with community members to better understand the community, the need for service and implications of societal inequalities. This

allows the students to have a service-in-relationship experience at their community partners. Centering service-learning around building relationships with the community and discussions about race and class, will enable students of color to share their own stories about race both in class and in community (Green, 2003).

Researchers concluded through an analysis of participants in two service-learning ethnic studies courses that centered community voice and elevated community partners as co-educators of student learners, faculty were able to decolonize the experience for students. By countering the normative perceptions of community engagement and including community voice in designing and implementing projects, students learned about systemic barriers in the community impacting underrepresented and under-resourced communities. Community partners as co-educators taught the students how community organizations utilize community assets to combat social inequalities. Through an ethnic studies service-learning course framework, community voices were elevated and invited into the classroom to educate students and faculty. Ethnic studies service-learning faculty shifted the traditional power dynamics of the university-community partnership, by working collaboratively with community leaders to identify a social problem to dive deeper into as a course topic and develop a reciprocal community project connected to student interests, resulting in community needs being met (Yep & Mitchell, 2017).

Just as representation matters to the students participating in service-learning to relate to the Black and Brown communities they often serve in, it is equally as important that the faculty that teach these courses have an established reciprocal partnership with community members. Having either connection to the community being served will prevent faculty from creating exploitive courses that observe communities in distress and provide band-aid support through student projects that blindly reinforce stereotypes of the communities.

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For faculty it is important to have an established background with community engaged learning and its tenets to ensure that they are aware of the cultural and community contexts within which students are completing their service projects. While it is great to leverage the community connections of a campus center for community engagement, it is an added benefit when the professor's research or scholarship is connected to the course topics, and they work in partnership with community partner organizations to design projects that meet course learning outcomes and community partner needs. If that is not possible, then inviting a longstanding community partner to guest lecture on the community experience for students to establish expectations and how to best learn through serving with community members. Incorporate community conversations into the course for continued reciprocity with community.

Limitations

There were three limitations to this research study on the qualitative experiences of Black service-learning students: generalization, service-learning course variety, and minimal HBCU student participation. The main limitation to this research study was that I did not seek to make a generalized theory that encompasses all Black service learner experiences. This limitation is attributed to the fact that Black people are not a monolith ethnic group. Therefore, attributing all the experiences of Black students' high participation rates to the narratives collected by the participants in this study would have been unfounded, and not the goal of qualitative research. It would also have been counterintuitive to my study focus, which was humbly sharing the experiences of Black service-learners. Rather, their experiences can begin to contribute to a theory regarding Black service-learning experiences that can be built upon in further studies. Secondly, the wide variety of universities and colleges of CUMU membership greatly differed in the structure/design of service-learning courses and community service experiences: upper or

lower division, discipline, number of community service hours, required or optional service hours, and depth of reflection on learning and service experiences connected to course learning outcomes. Lastly, of the 101 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) recognized by the Department of Education, only two are members of the CUMU network (Smith, 2017; *What Is an HBCU?*, n.d.). Therefore, the minimal number of HBCUs in the CUMU network limited the robust inclusion of HBCU student experience in this research study. However, an inclusion of participants from HBCUs into the study was welcomed to contribute their voices and experiences to provide insight on how their students articulate their service-learning experiences. Mindfulness of these limitations did not hinder the validity of this study, rather they served as boundaries that can be expanded upon in future studies that intentionally incorporate student voice and critical race theory.

Implications for Leadership and Social Justice

Focusing on the achievement gap of Black students in service-learning courses aligns with Ladson-Billings' argument to focus on Black students in her research on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). CRP emphasizes pedagogical practices that support the lowest performing students, often Black students, to succeed and leverage these positive practices for the achievement of all students (Ladson-Billings 2014). Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy emphasizes that faculty develop teaching and learning methods that combine academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness for the achievement of all students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Validating student-lived experiences in the classroom through discussion of their culture, incorporating cultural references, and adjusting teaching styles to meet varied learning styles will cultivate student self-efficacy and academic success. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy promotes a social justice framework within service-learning pedagogy to

develop informed and engaged students. As community members, students will see themselves community change agents within and outside of the classroom. The additional qualifiers should be considered when transforming service-learning to be culturally responsive pedagogy of diverse learning needs and styles (Song et al., 2017; Valencia-Garcia & Coles-Ritchie, 2021).

Understanding the experiences of students of color in service-learning can lead to the pedagogy and literature being transformed to be inclusive of all diverse learners. Critical Race Theory (CRT) should be applied to future service-learning student experience research. CRT's "emphasis on narratives and counter-stories told from the vantage point of the oppressed" will allow for student of color lived experiences to be incorporated into the research. CRT connected to service-learning pedagogy contextualizes student of color lived experiences by incorporating their voices into scholarship intentionally (Zamudio et.al, 2011).

It is imperative that educational leaders adjust to meet the needs of diverse students by identifying barriers and addressing inherent institutional challenges that consistently widen the diverse student achievement gap from their White peers. Service-learning pedagogy with its community-based projects can perpetuate a pedagogy of Whiteness when faculty do not prepare students to engage with community sites with a self-examination of their racial identity, community identity, and social inequalities within the community. Not incorporating conversations about race, class, and social inequalities in service-learning courses allows for the service experience to be about students feeling good and not about addressing social inequalities with the community through service. Educational leadership and faculty must be intentional about university-community relationships that involve students providing a service. They must seek to develop culturally competent students that become community leaders able to navigate

communities of difference and leave them better than they were when they entered (Estrada, 2020; Green, 2003; Morton, 2011; Wylie, 2014).

Future Research Considerations

Further research on the specific Black student experiences in service-learning courses should focus on the Black student experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Examining the student experience at HBCUs will contribute to the overall field of service-learning by examining the cultural and institutional dynamics of service-learning at predominately Black institution with service-learning courses as graduation requirements. Additionally, continuing the research thread of Stories from the Field and focusing on Latino/x student experiences is essential to changing the narrative of service-learning to be more inclusive of diverse learners

Future study should consider the 20th century origins of community service and social action in Black communities and their impact on modern community engagement. Many movements started in Black communities by Black social change activists that bettered Black lives and others. Researching the evolution of grassroots organizing the Civil Rights Movement that lead to national legislative change, assisted by the student-led movement on college campuses and surrounding communities by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), to today's multigenerational Black Lives Matter movement. Black students have been on the front lines of many community engagement movements on- and -off college campus protesting, advocating, and petitioning for social justice issues. This hearkens back to Black community interpretations of service-learning where Black community leaders organized for community advancement through communal systems that leveraged community knowledge and created volunteer opportunities for the betterment of Black communities (Bocci, 2015; Stevens,

2003). Further research should investigate how and why some Black students choose to participate in this form of community engagement and not the formal academic service-learning model.

Of the seventeen participants, five of them mentioned participation in an international service-learning experience, often known in scholarship as global service-learning. Kiely's (2004) "A Chameleon with a Complex" article began a scholarly conversation regarding student's experiences reacclimating to campus-life after their international service-learning course experiences. However, there is a gap in global service-learning scholarship that looks at both the academic status of an U.S. based Black participant and their international experience. Of the five participants that had an international experience, two participated in more than two international service-learning courses. There is a gap in the literature around Black service-learning students in international experiences and further research is necessary to understand their experience.

The continued research on the aforementioned topics will begin to transform the scholarship of field of service-learning to be culturally responsive to the diverse interests of Black students. Subsequently, focusing on the Black service learner experience will begin to emphasize student of color experience more prominently in scholarship and practice. This necessary research will close the educational achievement gap through intentional service-learning course design and pedagogy that is relevant to Black students lived experiences, that benefit all diverse learners.

Conclusion

Service-learning is an often identified high-impact practice (HIP) defined as an opportunity for students to apply what they are learning in the classroom to a community-based

project and reflect on their experiences in the classroom (Kuh, 2008; Finely & McNair, 2013). This HIP has the potential for students to become change agents, actively involved in civic and community matters that complement their academic learning and preparation for the workforce. However, a concerted effort to reimagine practice and scholarship that emphasizes the Black student experience can result in more positive learning experiences for students of color. In doing so, it will change the classroom and community narrative to not focus on the ideal service-learning student, but to focus on the current student demographic of colleges: diverse students of color. Expanding narrative scholarship to include student perceptions of learning, in particular Black students, provides direct insight into how they articulate their experiences in this well-participated HIP. Examining the experiences of Black service learners provides inspiration for the next chapter in the field of service-learning to be responsive and inclusive of diverse learners.

The findings of this research study illuminate why Black students participate in higher rates than White peers in service-learning. Through their student voices considerations about the student experience were articulated that are often not found in scholarship. This is a beginning of the conversation to shift the narrative of inclusive critical service-learning tenants that allow for all students to engage in social justice practices that in tandem foster student and community development for a more just society.

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Appendices List

(Brief Description)

The following includes a list of appendices and brief descriptions. See full appendix descriptions as separate documents.

A. Consent Form: This form will be emailed to study participants. The researcher will also articulate the purpose of the study and time commitment on the part of participants.

B. Participants Recruitment via Email: Email communication via email list-serv of Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) with study overview, participant eligibility requirements and link to Qualtrics questionnaire.

C. Qualtrics Questionnaire: This Qualtrics survey will be used to determine participant eligibility requirements. Survey will be anonymous until student opts-in to participate in a semi-structured interview by sharing their name and email for contact by researcher.

D. Semi Structured Interview Guide: Guiding questions for a 60-to-90-minute interview.

E. Interview Protocol: A brief explanation will be provided to study participants about the purpose of the study, length and duration of the interview followed by review of consent form and confirmation of eligibility.

F. Interview Information Sheet: Will be used to confirm participant eligibility at the time of the interview.

<center>**Appendix A: Informed Consent**</center>

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE:
Dear Student,

My name is Rochelle Jackson-Smarr and I am a doctoral candidate in the joint doctorate program in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a study about Black student experiences in service-learning courses. This is important because Black students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than any other ethnic group. You are invited to participant in this study since you self-identify as Black and have completed a service-learning course between the academic years of fall 2017 and spring 2022. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form.
The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. You will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to confirm eligibility to participate. You will then be invited to participate in a 60-to-90-minute one-on-one semi-structured interview. The primary risk of participation is time, based on your ability to make yourself available for a 60-to-90-minute interview. The main benefit is that your participation may contribute to the research in this field.

STUDY PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:
If you agree to participate, you will be one of twenty (20) Black service-learning participants who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:
If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following:
- Read, sign and return this consent form, to the researcher via email at *jacks02@cougars.csusm.edu.* Upon receipt of the signed consent form the researcher will contact you within 5 days to schedule a 60-to-90 minute interview.
- Participate in an interview scheduled at least two weeks in advance. The interview will be conducted via Zoom with both video and audio transcription recordings. The 60-to-90 minute interview will consist of you responding to approximately twenty-four questions. Interviews will be conducted virtually. All interviews will be audio- and video-recorded. Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES:
There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:
- Participants may be uncomfortable answering the survey or interview questions.
- The time participants spend for participating in the study might be considered inconvenience.

SAFEGUARDS:
To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:
- Interview sessions will be restricted to 60-to-90 minutes. If it persists longer than this duration, it
can be stopped at your request.
- Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the researcher and dissertation faculty for analysis on a password-protected laptop and stored in an online cloud system, Box.com, that requires a two-step authentication sign-on by the researcher. The interview will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. The digital recordings will be destroyed following final analysis, no later than December 31, 2023.
- Pseudonyms for students will be used to minimize the risk of identification. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable of have negative connotations. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your responses will be kept confidential. The primary investigator is working alone, thus limiting others from having access to data. Pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity as well as that of your institution of study.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and other personal information will not be used. Documents and recordings will be kept on a password-protected laptop and stored in an online cloud system, Box.com, that requires a two-step authentication sign-on with the primary investigator only having access to the documents. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:
The benefits of participating in this study are minimal to you directly, however, your participation will
provide insight on how Black students articulate their service-learning experience, a population that has statistically participated in service-learning at higher rates than their peers.

PAYMENT OR INCENTIVE:

You will receive payment for taking part in this study. The primary investigator understands the time commitment behind your participation in the research. You will receive compensation in the form of a virtual $20-gift card at the end of the interview.

Contact Information
If you have questions about the study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at rjacksonsmarr@ucsd.edu./Jacks02@cougars.csusm.edu. Or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Erika Daniels at edaniels@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

Participant's Consent
By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study. Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

☐ I give permission for my interview to be audio and video taped.
☐ I do not give permission for my interview to be audio and video taped.

Name of the Participant: _____

Signature of the Participant: _____

Date:_____

Subject of Email: Research Study- In Need of Participants

      Greetings members of Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)! Rochelle Jackson-Smarr is a doctoral candidate in the joint doctorate program in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). She is conducting a study about Black student experiences in service-learning courses. This is important because Black students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than any other ethnic group. Over a third of our members are minority-serving institutions, and approximately 65% have applied for and been awarded the elective Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement – making it a reasonable population from which to recruit for this study.

I am looking for Black self-identifying undergraduate students who have participated in a service-learning course between fall 2017 and spring 2022 at CUMU member institution. Please share this request and/or copy the research study invitation below to a student that you believe meets the research study eligibility requirements.

Participate in Research Study About Black Service-Learning Student Experiences

Dear **{Insert Student Name}**,

      My name is Rochelle Jackson-Smarr and I am a doctoral candidate in the joint doctorate program in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). I am conducting a study about Black student experiences in service-learning courses. This is important because Black students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than any other ethnic group. You are invited to participant in this study since you self-identify as Black and have completed a service-learning course between the academic years of fall 2017 and spring 2022. If you are interested in participating in this research study complete this questionnaire. Once completed and it is confirmed you met the eligibility requirements, I will email you with a request to participate in a 60-to-90-minute interview. Questionnaire Link to participate in research study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study

If you are interested, or at least ***curious***, about participating please contact me at 760-221-3733 (text) or email me at: rjacksonsmarr@ucsd.edu /jacks02@csusm.edu.

Warmly,

Rochelle Jackson-Smarr, M.A. | <u>Pronouns</u>: She, Her
Doctoral Candidate | *University of California, San Diego & California State University, San Marcos*

Appendix C: Qualtrics Questionnaire

Research Study Title
Stories from the Field: Black Service-Learning Student Experiences

Researcher
Rochelle Jackson-Smarr, jacks02@cougars.csusm.edu/rjacksonsmarr@ucsd.edu, (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Rochelle Jackson-Smarr (principal investigator) is a doctoral student in a joint doctoral program between University of California, San Diego and California State University San Marcos.

Overview of Questionnaire
The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses. You will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to confirm eligibility to participate. Participants identity will be anonymous when they complete the questionnaire. There identify will become confidential if at the end of the questionnaire they opt-in to partake in an interview with the researcher. Participants opting in will be contacted by email to schedule their virtual semi-structured interviews.

Consent to Participate in Research Study
- o I do consent to participate in this study
- o I do not give my consent to be in this study

- **How do you identify?**
    - o Black
    - o Black/African-American
    - o Black and
        - ▪ Fill in the blank
    - o Latino or Hispanic
    - o Asian
    - o Native American
    - o Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    - o Two or More
    - o Other/Unknown

- **What is your undergraduate major?**
    - o Fill in the Blank

- **Did you take a service-learning course between Fall 2017 and Spring 2022? (Fall, Spring and Summer semester count)**
    - o Yes, I did
    - o No, I did not

- **Name up to two service-learning courses that you completed as an undergraduate student?**

- Course 1:
  - Service Learning Course Title – Required or Optional Service Learning – Number of Hours to Serve
- Course 2:
  - Service Learning Course Title – Required or Optional – Number of Hours to Serve

- **What community organizations did you do your service project with for the above identified courses?**
  - Course 1:
    - Service Learning Course Title - Community Organization – Project Tasks Completed
  - Course 2:
    - Service Learning Course Title - Community Organization – Project Tasks Completed

- **Were any of your community service projects completed virtually (online)?**
  - Yes
  - No

- **Why was service-learning an important part of your academic experience?**
  - Fill in the blank

- **What is one thing you wish you knew about service learning before you enrolled in the course?**
  - Fill in the blank

- **Do you consent to your response from this questionnaire to be use anonymously (non-identifiable to you) in a research study on the experiences of Black students in service-learning courses?**
  - Yes, I consent
  - No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

This is the end of the questionnaire portion of this research study. Your responses have been recorded anonymously. If you choose to proceed your responses will become confidential between you and the researcher only.

Are you interested in participating in a 60-90-minute interview to further share your service learning experience as part of this research study?
  - Yes, please contact me using this information:
    - Name, Email Address
  - No, I do not want to participate in an interview.

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Opening. [Establish rapport, determine the context of experiences.]
- Tell me about yourself.
  - How do you self-identify? How do you describe yourself? What city do you call home? How does this shape your identity as Black?
- Tell me about your community service experience.
  - Prior to taking a service-learning course, what volunteer activities had you completed?
  - Why did you complete these volunteer activities?

What? [Identify and describe stories from your experience.]
- Tell me about your favorite service-learning course.
  - Let's start with the course details: Title. Discipline. Number of Hours Required. Local or International Service.
- Why was this your favorite course(s)?
- What was the significant learning moment for you?
- How did the instructor share their reasoning for including service-learning in the course components?
  - How did they connect their course topic to the applied-learning that takes place through community-service?
  - How was reflection described? Was critical reflection discussed?
  - What type of reflection formats were shared?
- Share with me an intriguing conversation or discussion you had in class with peer or one-on-one with your professor that really piqued your interest or deepened your understanding of the topic?
- Tell me about your community service experience.
  - How was your community partner introduced to your class?
    - Was the community partner invited to class to share about their site and connect with students before service began?
    - How were you prepared for enter community and start serving?
  - What project (s) tasks did you complete for (x) hours a week?
  - In what ways was the project created through a partnership between the faculty and community partner?
  - How did your project address a gap or need of the community partner site? What was your role in assisting them to meet a need?
- Tell me how you concluded the course and service experience.
  - Did you have to write a paper or provide a presentation for your classmates?
  - Did you have to provide a deliverable to the community partner? A document, brochure, handbook?

So What? [Analyze emotional, political, and cultural dynamics of experience.]
- Analyze, for me, the emotional, political, and cultural dynamics of your service-learning experience?
  - What experience stands out the most in your service-learning experience?
    - Was it a classroom discussion?

- Was it a community partner observation with members or conversation at the site?
- What aspects of the course attributed to your learning/takeaway from this engaged-learning course?
  - How did you know you learned something from taking this course that you did not know before?
- What components of the service project impacted your learning the most?
  - How did you know you learned this from the community service portion of the course?
  - Why did this standout to you as a learning moment?
- Where did you learn the most at in this service-learning course: the classroom or at the community partner site?
  - Was there a balance of both spaces the classroom and the community partner site together?
  - How did the two spaces collectively influence your learning about the topic, the community, or community matter?
- What, if any, were the challenge(s) of your service-learning experience?
  - How were you able to persist despite the challenge?

Now What? [Determine the implications for future practice and takeaways from learning.]
- How did your service-learning course experience influence your academic success?
  - Did you graduate on time? Receive better grades?
  - Did you have a renewed sense of purpose for your studies?
- How did your service-learning experience influence your career aspirations?
  - Did your career aspiration change, as a result of, this course? If so, in what ways?
- Why are service-learning courses important to college student learning and development?
- What do you wish students had known before they started their community service?
- What could have been offered before you started your community service?
- Why do you think Black students participate in service-learning courses?
- Why should any student participate in service-learning courses?

Closing. [Renegotiate the Interview Process, discuss next steps, pursue reciprocity.]
- Is there another story you'd like to share that was transformative to your learning?
- What do you think I should have asked you about your service-learning experience in this interview?
- Now that the interview is concluding, are you comfortable selecting a pseudonym, so I can cite you in the findings of this study?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for your participation. My name is Rochelle Jackson-Smarr and I will be your interviewer. This interview is meant to explore your experience a Black service-learning student. Before we begin the formal interview process, I am going to share with you an overview of this research study and the format of the interview.

Introduction to the Interview
The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses.

The Reflective Storytelling Framework will guide our interview by incorporating a common service-learning reflection method: *What? So What? Now What?*. Through the *What? So What? Now What?* In this model, you are encouraged to think beyond surface level reactions and observations toward examining critical learning moments that connect theory, community service/engagement and further action on their part to address social inequalities. Through a series of connected questions, you will be re prompted to identify a learning moment(s) or incidents from them from your service-learning experiences. Experiences that instigated for you to have an "aha" moment or reconsider an assumption you had, then to reflect on how and what was learned because of the identified learning moment. Lastly, students will be asked to consider how the learning moment (s) shaped their ways of knowing and being.

During the interview, I will place the question for you in the chat.

The location of the study and all participants will be made anonymous in the writing of the report. Your responses will be kept confidential. All data collected, including this interview, will be kept on my password-protected laptop and stored in an online cloud system, Box.com, that requires a two-step authentication sign-on that is accessible by me alone. This interview will take approximately 60-to- 90 minutes. You will have an opportunity to review all the information gathered (transcripts, audio and video recording) during this interview to help ensure that information has been noted correctly.

Next, I will review the consent form that you agreed to and signed [review consent form]. I will place the signed copy in the chat for your review again.
[Turn on and Zoom recording feature]

General Information
I need to start with confirming your eligibility. [Interviewee information sheet]

Interview
I would now like to begin the interview about your experience as a Black service-learning student.

[Proceed with interview questions]

Closing Remarks

I want to thank you for participating in this interview. This interview will be transcribed and saved on my password-protected laptop and stored in an online cloud system, Box.com, that requires a two-step authentication sign-on that is accessible by me alone.

At this time, I would like to I would like to provide you with a $25 Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation for your participation in this study. Kindly confirm I have listed your correct email in the chat [Paste participant email in chat and receive verbal confirmation or request to send gift card to new address]. I will send you the gift card via email within the next 60-minutes. Again, I am deeply grateful for your time, participating in this study and most importantly, sharing your Black service learner experience with me!

[Turn off recording device].

Date of Interview

Time of Interview:

Name of Interviewee:

Dear Participant,

My name is Rochelle Jackson-Smarr and I am a doctoral candidate in the joint doctorate program in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD). The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate Black students in service-learning courses.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?
You are invited to participant in this study since you self-identify as Black and have completed a service-learning course between the academic years of fall 2017 and spring 2022. This is important because Black students participate in service-learning courses at higher rates than any other ethnic group.

What will I do if I agree to participate?
If you agree to participate in the study, you will participate in a 60-to-90-minute interview.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty, and you will be able to keep any incentives you have earned up to the point at which you withdraw.

What are the benefits to me for being in this study?
The benefits of you participating in this study are minimal to you directly, however, your participation will provide insight on how Black students articulate their service-learning experience, a population that has statistically participated in service-learning at higher rates than their peers.

What happens to the information collected for the study?
Your responses will be kept confidential. I am working alone, thus limiting others from having access to data. Pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity as well as that of your institution of study. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and other personal information will not be used. Documents and recordings will be kept on a password-protected laptop and stored in an online cloud system, Box.com, that requires a two-step authentication sign-on with the primary investigator only having access to the documents. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?
There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:
- Participants may be uncomfortable answering the survey or interview questions.
- The time participants spend for participating in the study might be considered inconvenience.

Who should I contact for questions?
If you have questions about the study, please call me at ((XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at rjacksonsmarr@ucsd.edu or Jacks02@cougars.csusm.edu. Or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Erika Daniels at edaniels@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS