Contextualizing How Undergraduate Students Develop Toward Critical Consciousness

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how interactions between undergraduate students and their learning environments influenced their development toward critical consciousness. Critical consciousness represents a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that is necessary for meeting the demands of today’s diverse democracy and that underlies the ability to demonstrate social responsibility (Freire 1970, 1973; Landreman, Rasmussen, King, & Jiang, 2007). Environments investigated in this case study included curricular and co-curricular experiences associated with a critical service-learning course, the institutional culture of a large public research university, and U.S. society at large. Two sets of research questions guided this study: (1a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments promote development toward critical consciousness? (1b) How do these types of interactions help students develop critical consciousness? (2a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments inhibit development toward critical consciousness? (2b) How do these types of interactions stall or interfere with students’ development toward critical consciousness?

Case study, grounded upon the respective tenets of interpretivism and critical theory, served as the primary methodology. An undergraduate, semester-long course at a large public research university that focused on complex social issues associated with poverty served as the case. Data collection methods included participant-observation of class sessions; document analysis of course materials and students’ written assignments;
and three semi-structured interviews with key participants including the lead educator, the graduate teaching assistant, and nine racially and ethnically diverse students. Data were analyzed using narrative inquiry strategies to identify both individual and sociocultural narratives regarding interactions that influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness.

The outcome of this case study is a rich, nuanced description of the context of the case, which highlights the characteristics of the educators, students, and curriculum that formed the basis for the interactions that influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. Also, from this case study, five refrains regarding how interactions promoted and/or inhibited students’ development toward critical consciousness emerged. These five refrains show how students’ beliefs about injustice, engagement in experiential learning opportunities, interactions across racial and ethnic differences, forms of communication during class discussion, and conceptualization of leadership influence students’ ways of making meaning of themselves in relation to their social worlds. This study ultimately enriches understanding of how development toward critical consciousness happens as well as how educators can help foster such development.

Also, this study holds important implications for research and practice. In terms of research, this study provides a methodologically innovative and rigorous way to study development in context. In terms of practice, this study provides nuanced recommendations for how to design institutional and departmental policies that support students’ development toward critical consciousness. In addition, it describes specific ways educators can enhance their ability to facilitate learning related to complex social issues.
This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Wells\textsuperscript{1}, the educator who made this research possible. May this dissertation help all of us who work within higher education and student affairs know how to carry on her legacy of effecting social change.

\textsuperscript{1} Because Dr. Wells was a participant in this study, this is a pseudonym designed to maintain her confidentiality.
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Heroes didn’t leap tall buildings or stop bullets with an outstretched hand; they didn’t wear boots and capes. They bled, and they bruised, and their superpowers were as simple as listening, or loving. Heroes were ordinary people who knew that even if their own lives were impossibly knotted, they could untangle someone else’s.
—— Jodi Picoult, Second Glance

My Ph.D. journey has been filled with these types of heroes—people who bleed and bruise because they are supremely human, who listen and love because they are deeply compassionate, and who unknot and untangle because they are extraordinarily wise. Many such heroes made this dissertation possible. I am honored to take this opportunity to acknowledge these individuals.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................... v

Vita ........................................................................................................................................... x

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................... xiv

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... xx

Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................................................... 1

Scholarly Conceptualizations of Critical Consciousness ......................................................... 3

The Role of Higher Education in Cultivating Critical Consciousness ................................... 6

What Development Means Within Contemporary Higher Education ................................. 8

The Relationship Between Development and Learning for Critical Consciousness ............. 13

Key Strategies for Helping College Students Develop Critical Consciousness ................. 15

Key Barriers to the Development of Critical Consciousness Among College Students .......... 20

The Need to Better Understand the Developmental Ecology for Critical Consciousness ....... 24

Purpose and Design of the Study ......................................................................................... 25
Refrain 2: Connecting With Community Members Within Real-world Contexts .. 173

Refrain 3: Dispelling the Illusion of Unity Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Peers................................................................. 188

Refrain 4: Moving from Debating to Dialoguing About Social Issues .......... 200

Refrain 5: Focusing on Individual Efforts Rather Than Collective Action......... 214

Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 226

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications .......................................................... 230

Discussion of Findings ...................................................................................... 231

Refrain 1: Bringing in Background Beliefs Regarding the Scope of the World’s Injustice ............................................................................. 236

Refrain 2: Connecting With Community Members Within Real-World Contexts . 240

Refrain 3: Dispelling the Illusion of Unity Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Peers................................................................. 247

Refrain 4: Moving from Debating to Dialoguing About Social Issues .......... 253

Refrain 5: Focusing on Individual Efforts Rather Than Collective Action......... 258

Implications ........................................................................................................ 262

Implications for Research .................................................................................. 262

Implications for Higher Education Policies and Practices .............................. 268

Strengths and Limitations .................................................................................. 275

Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 278
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Layers of Context in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Developmental Ecology Theory ........................................................................................................................................36
Table 4.1 Demographic Information for Study Participants .................................................134
Table 5.1 Summary of Developmental Ecology of LEAD 2100 ..........................................232
Table 5.2 Summary of Findings Regarding Interactions that Influenced Development Toward Critical Consciousness ..........................................................................................234
Chapter 1: Introduction

In today’s increasingly complex and globalized U.S. society, community members engage in interactions that demand an understanding not only of difference but also of societal inequities. For example, Dan Habib (2014) described how he and his partner worked to negotiate societal inequities as parents of a child with cerebral palsy:

Over time, we finally came to terms with the fact that [our son] had a disability, and he would have a disability—a lifelong disability. So what do we do now?....The vision that became obvious to us was that we needed to make sure that he felt like he belonged—that he belonged in our neighborhood, that he belonged in our community, and perhaps more than anything, that he belonged in his local school. (4:55-5:28)

The need to negotiate societal inequities exists in both personal and professional contexts and emerges as much during routine daily experiences as it does during specific large-scale social movements. Yasir Billoo (2008) described how his identity as an “American Muslim of Pakistani descent” requires him to think about how to introduce himself:

Twice, I have sworn to uphold and protect the Constitution and the laws of this nation: once when I became a citizen and once when I became an attorney….Every day, I have to introduce myself to new clients, judges, and other...

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2 Throughout this dissertation, I use the term community members rather than citizens to include individuals who are not officially citizens of the United States but who nonetheless are members of U.S. communities on local, regional, and national levels. When quoting other scholars, I retain their terminology.
The societal demands that Habib and Billoo face entail societal inequities that extend beyond individual or isolated acts of prejudice. Creating inclusive classrooms and communities is not a matter of changing only one person’s attitudes or actions but rather of shifting societal norms regarding disability. Likewise, addressing the pervasiveness of stereotypes is not a matter of addressing only one person’s biases but rather of recognizing and transforming power dynamics among groups within society.

As individuals transition out of adolescence and into adult roles—a period that Arnett (2006) termed emerging adulthood—they face the need to wrestle with serious questions regarding societal inequities in order to fully participate in and contribute to society. Such questions include the following:

What are the values and limitations of my culture?....

Why is suffering so pervasive?

How am I complicit in patterns of injustice?

Will I always be stereotyped? (Parks, 2011, pp. 178-179)

As Parks (2011) explained, “all of these questions are about the relationship of self and world” and “are questions of consequence that can’t be simply ducked as irrelevant or ‘not my concern’” (p. 179). Yet, according to Parks, many emerging adults today are bypassing such questions on their way to adulthood as they jump from one culturally prescribed hurdle to the next. Thus, they often assume adult roles and responsibilities without having deeply and critically examined their selves in relation to their social worlds, which leaves them ill-equipped to understand and address issues at a societal—
not just personal—level. Ultimately, long-term solutions for the types of societal inequities Habib and Billoo face remain unimagined. For today’s globalized society to become more socially just, emerging adults need to develop a type of critical thinking that scholars have termed *critical consciousness* (Freire, 1970, 1973; Landreman, Rasmussen, King, & Jiang, 2007).

In this chapter, I introduce a case study that investigates how interactions between undergraduate college students and their learning environments influence their development toward critical consciousness. First, I describe how scholars conceptualize critical consciousness. Then, I explore the role that higher education in the United States plays in cultivating critical consciousness. Finally, I provide an overview of the purpose, research questions, methodology, and significance of this case study.

**Scholarly Conceptualizations of Critical Consciousness**

Freire (1970, 1973), a Brazilian educator and philosopher known for working to liberate socially disadvantaged Brazilians through literacy education, described critical consciousness as the depth of awareness and way of making meaning that individuals need for participating in democratic societies. He explained that critical consciousness allows individuals to “avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them,” accept responsibility for and take an active role in solving problems, and engage in dialogue rather than personal attacks (Freire, 1973, p. 18). Writing within a U.S. context, bell hooks (2003) asserted that critically conscious individuals are aware of and able to challenge “dominator thinking” (p. 2) that
stems from the hegemony of White supremacy. Describing her own journey toward critical consciousness, bell hooks (2003) explained:

As a girl I had initially believed white teachers who told me we did not read black authors because they had not written any books or any good books. As a critically thinking college student I learned to interrogate the source of information. (p. 2)

Given that bell hooks discussed critical consciousness specifically related to race within the U.S., she emphasized that critical consciousness involves developing the ways of thinking necessary to make an intentional choice to resist racist socialization. According to bell hooks (2003), “where there is consciousness there is choice” (p. 56) for all individuals.

Describing how individuals develop critical consciousness, Landreman et al. (2007) explained that individuals need to gain awareness of four central aspects of themselves and their societies including the following:

(a) the historical, political, and social implications of a situation (i.e., the context);
(b) [one’s] own social location in the context; (c) the intersectionality of [one’s] multiple identities (e.g., race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation);
and (d) the inherent tensions that exist between a vision of social justice and the current societal conditions for all people. (p. 276)

Given the educational contexts in which Freire worked, critical consciousness originally was associated with educating individuals with marginalized social identities who experienced oppression and was linked to the notion of false consciousness (Quintana &

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3 According to APA (2010), “racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized” (p. 75). Thus, to be consistent with the most current APA style guidelines, I capitalize all references to racial and ethnic identities throughout this dissertation except in direct quotes. I retain authors’ original language and style when quoting directly.
Segura-Herrera, 2003; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). Jost (1995) defined false consciousness as “the holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that…contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or group” (p. 401). While false consciousness can lead individuals with marginalized identities to internalize oppression and see themselves as inferior, critical consciousness can empower individuals and help them develop “a perspective and sense of self with which to psychologically protect against the deleterious effects of oppression” (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p. 270).

More currently, scholars have identified critical consciousness as an important way of making meaning for all individuals—those with dominant social identities who experience privilege as well as those with marginalized social identities who experience oppression (e.g., Bell, 2007; Davis & Harrison, 2013; Landreman et al., 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2007). For example, Zúñiga and colleagues (2007) explained that all students “need to grapple with understanding their own social identity group’s history, involvement in patterns of privilege or oppression, and the impact of this history on themselves and others” (p. 9). Likewise, as Quintana and Segura-Herrera (2003) stated, critical consciousness can allow all individuals to recognize “the illegitimacy of oppression” (p. 274).

Although many scholars and educators agree that critical consciousness is important to—if not essential for—participating in today’s democratic societies, research suggests that this way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s society is rare among the U.S. adult population. Studies of adult development indicate that the majority of adults within the U.S., particularly those with dominant social identities, are not
critically aware of the societal norms in which they are imbedded and struggle to see or act beyond the status quo (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Hardiman & Keehn, 2012; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). On the whole, a gap exists between the way of making meaning adults need to address societal inequities and the way in which many adults currently make meaning. Higher education within the U.S. plays a vital role in bridging this gap.

The Role of Higher Education in Cultivating Critical Consciousness

As Nussbaum (1997, 2010) explained, a traditional aim of U.S. higher education in general and liberal arts education in particular has been to prepare students for their roles as members of a democratic society. Discussing the historical origins of U.S. higher education, Nussbaum (1997) noted that liberal arts (i.e., general) education is grounded upon three key philosophical tenets:

Socrates’ concept of “the examined life,” on Aristotle’s notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is “liberal” in that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world. (p. 8)

Although contemporary educational contexts differ in significant ways from the contexts in which liberal arts education began, U.S. colleges and universities continue to demonstrate commitment to civic aims.

Contemporary commitment to civic aims in higher education appears within the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)’s (2015) list of essential
learning outcomes. According to AAC&U (2015), which comprises more than 1,300 institutions ranging in type from community colleges to research universities, “students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining….personal and social responsibility including civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning” (“Essential Learning Outcomes”). Even as societal forces prompt colleges and universities to place increasing emphasis on higher education’s economic aims and private benefits, scholars point out the importance of higher education’s civic aims and public benefits (Knight Abowitz, 2006; Nussbaum, 1997, 2010; Thornton & Jaeger, 2008). Arguing against dualistic notions of economic and civic aims, Nussbaum (2010) noted, “We are not forced to choose between a form of education that promotes profit and a form of education that promotes good citizenship: A flourishing economy requires the same skills that support citizenship” (p. A88). Similarly, Knight Abowitz (2006) explained that the vocational and liberal arts aspects of higher education are inextricably intertwined given that “paid work occupies a central but not exclusively defining role” of human life (p. 17). To elaborate on the link between vocational and liberal arts aspects of higher education, Knight Abowitz (2006) stated:

While vocational studies focus on the world of work, liberal studies focus on the problems, experiences, and questions of being human. And surely inquiry into the human condition, including questions of purpose, value, and meaning, is not less important than questions of vocation. Indeed, one’s work and professional identity formation are infused and shaped by the broader, exciting questions of meaning and existence. (p. 17)
Each institution strikes a unique balance between vocational and liberal arts aspects of higher education, but many—if not most—institutions within the U.S. include both aspects as they aim to prepare students simultaneously for the world of work and the world at large (AAC&U, 2015; The Carnegie Classification, 2015).

Cultivating critical consciousness involves not only a focus on civic and liberal arts aims but also an emphasis on learning that leads to development. Because critical consciousness represents a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s society, it requires students not merely to add to what they know but also transform how they know (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Davis & Harrison, 2013; Landreman et al., 2007). To demonstrate critical consciousness, students must shift from uncritically adopting societal norms to analyzing the assumptions that give rise to those societal norms. In addition, they must shift from viewing social issues based only on their own identities to demonstrating a commitment to addressing interconnected systems of oppression (Hernández, 2012; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998; Watt, 2007). These shifts involve a developmental process through which students broaden their frameworks for making meaning of themselves in relation to their social worlds (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Thus, to foster critical consciousness, educators must establish development as a key goal of learning and understand how to design learning experiences to promote students’ development.

**What Development Means Within Contemporary Higher Education**

The meaning of development within today’s higher education settings primarily arises from the philosophical underpinnings of the student affairs profession. Describing the origins of student affairs, Dungy and Gordon (2011) noted, “As colleges and
universities began to diversify [during the mid-1800s], so too did the need to employ educators who would handle student unrest, discipline issues, housing administration, and other duties that the college president and the faculty could not” (p. 63). Due to the nature of their roles and responsibilities outside classrooms (i.e., within co-curricular settings), student affairs professionals have focused their efforts on fostering holistic development. In the 1937 Student Personnel Point of View (SPPOV), which represents a foundational document that guides student affairs educational practices, the authors noted that student affairs professionals should help students develop as a whole person and thus attend not only to students’ intellectual development but also to their personal and social development (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012).

Student affairs professionals’ commitment to fostering holistic development has given rise to two broad categories of developmental theories related to college students: cognitive-structural theories and psychosocial theories (Jones & Abes, 2017). Collectively, these two categories shape what development means within the context of higher education. Both categories build upon Sanford’s (1962, 1966) work in psychology. As Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) noted, Sanford “distinguished development from change (which refers only to an altered condition that may be positive or negative, progressive or regressive) and from growth (which refers to expansion but may be either favorable or unfavorable to overall functioning) (p. 7). Development specifically refers to shifting toward ways of making meaning that enable one “to integrate and act on many different experiences and influences” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 7).

Cognitive-structural theories of college student and adult development focus on the mental schemas or structures that individuals use to evaluate knowledge claims, make
decisions, construct identities, and negotiate relationships (Jones & Abes, 2017). King (2009) explained that several 20th century theorists sought to understand whether Piaget’s (1950, 1965) developmental principles, which he derived from research regarding how children’s thinking and moral reasoning evolved over time, also applied to the periods of adolescence and adulthood. Like Piaget, theorists who extended his research adopted assumptions associated with the constructivist-developmental tradition of psychology. In particular, they assumed that individuals use mental structures to actively interpret (or, in other words, construct) their experiences and that individuals’ mental structures evolve over time to allow for increasingly complex interpretations of one’s self and one’s world. In effect, mental structures refer to how individuals form beliefs and make decisions—not to what individuals believe or what decisions they make (King, 2009; emphasis added).

Currently, multiple cognitive-structural theories of college student and adult development inform student affairs educational practices (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Perry, 1970). As Love and Guthrie (1999) explained in their synthesis of cognitive-structural theories, the theories collectively describe a general trajectory from what they termed unequivocal knowing to generative knowing. In this trajectory, students move “from viewing the world as predominantly known, certain, and knowable to viewing the world as predominantly ambiguous, complex, and not completely knowable” (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 79). The general trajectory from unequivocal knowing to generative knowing also involves a shift from uncritically receiving knowledge from authority figures such as parents and professors to critically evaluating and co-constructing knowledge (Love &
Guthrie, 1999). Overall, based on cognitive-structural theories, development represents a process whereby students gradually broaden their understandings of themselves and their worlds. Yet, none of these theories focuses on how students broaden their understandings amidst the complex power and privilege dynamics associated with today’s diverse college student campuses as well as today’s local and global communities.

While cognitive-structural developmental theories as a whole focus on mental structures individuals use to construct their beliefs, identities, and relationships, psychosocial developmental theories focus on the issues and decisions individuals negotiate during particular periods of their lives. Psychosocial developmental theories related to the field of higher education stem from Erikson’s conceptualization of identity development (Jones & Abes, 2017). Jones and Abes (2013) explained that the fifth of Erikson’s eight developmental stages represents the key stage of late adolescence and centers on the question, “Who am I?” Drawing upon psychological ideas regarding identity, scholars initially sought to understand how college students addressed the question, “Who am I?” in relation to certain areas such as political and religious affiliations, relationships, and careers (e.g., Chickering, 1969; Josselson, 1987, 1996; Marcia, 1964, 1966). More recently, some scholars have looked to fields such as social psychology, sociology, and cultural studies to generate theories regarding social identity development.

Jones and Abes (2013) explained that social identity development theories consider dimensions of identity such as race, culture, and gender on both a personal and societal level. While some theories focus on a single social identity such as Cross’s
(1971) Black identity development model, Cass’s (1979) model of sexual orientation identity formation, and Kim’s (2012) Asian American racial identity development model, other theories focus on multiple social identities such as Atkinson, Morten, and Sue’s (1983) Minority Identity Development (MID) model and Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI). Looking across theories regarding identity and social identity development, these theories collectively describe a process whereby individuals gradually gain deeper awareness and appreciation of who they are in relation to others (Jones & Abes, 2013; Kardia & Sevig, 2001). Despite their name, psychosocial theories continue to focus more on individual rather than social processes of development. As a result, the ways in which group dynamics and connections to various communities influence students’ ability to deepen their awareness of themselves and others remains unclear.

Holistic models that describe development related to one’s identities and relationships as well as one’s cognitive ways of making meaning have served to blur the distinctions between cognitive-structural and psychosocial theories (e.g., Abes et al., 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994). In addition, holistic models have emphasized the importance of connecting—rather than separating—how students view knowledge (i.e., cognitive development), see themselves (i.e., intrapersonal development), and relate to others (i.e., interpersonal development). Returning to the foundational principle of holistic development, many contemporary student affairs professionals and researchers frame development as a process that involves gaining more complex understanding and deeper awareness in multiple domains of one’s life. This holistic approach is well suited for understanding the multifaceted nature of critical
consciousness; nonetheless, it continues to focus primarily on individual factors associated with development. Also, although the holistic approach integrates the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains of development, it does not fully integrate psychological and sociocultural processes of development, which is necessary to understand how critical consciousness emerges.

**The Relationship Between Development and Learning for Critical Consciousness**

Fostering critical consciousness within collegiate contexts involves an intricate relationship between learning and development. Based on Vygotsky’s (1987) description of possible types of relationships between learning and development, the relationship necessary to help students demonstrate critical consciousness is one in which learning and development “are neither two entirely independent processes nor a single process” but rather are “two processes with complex interrelationships” (p. 201). Vygotsky (1987) explained that “it would be a tremendous error to assume that there is a complete correspondence between the external structure of the educational process and the internal structure of the developmental processes that it brings to life” given that “the educational process has its own sequence, logic, and complex organization” (p. 206). Although learning and developmental processes are not one and the same according to Vygotsky, the two processes need to be related when students enter a learning context without having yet developed certain desired ways of making meaning. Based on research regarding children’s development when they reach school age, Vygotsky (1978) explained that “properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning” (p. 90). In other words, learning can precede and spark development.
**Collegiate learning environments designed to foster development.** Within higher education, current research indicates that many college students make meaning of their identities, relationships, and beliefs in ways that are less complex than those necessary to fully meet collegiate learning outcomes and negotiate demands they will face beyond college (e.g., Abes et al., 2007; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Hardiman & Keehn, 2012; Torres & Hernández, 2007). As a result, several developmental theorists have argued for the importance of intentionally designing collegiate learning experiences to foster development. For example, Baxter Magolda and King (2004) provided a template for sequencing educational activities to allow students to gradually develop more complex cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal ways of making meaning. The authors also provided models of developmentally sequenced educational activities from a range of higher education contexts such as a community college multicultural education course (Hornak & Ortiz, 2004), an international service-learning program (Yonkers-Talz, 2004), and a residence life division (Piper & Buckley, 2004). Each model confirms Vygotsky’s (1978) assertion that “properly organized learning” can lead to development (p. 90). Although the models address how various learning contexts can and, for some students, do foster development toward more complex ways of making meaning, none specifically document the relationship between learning and developmental processes associated with critical consciousness.

**Definitions of development and learning for this study.** Vygotsky’s theory, along with current research regarding collegiate experiences, point to the need to make a distinction between learning and developmental processes while also examining how the two processes intertwine. For this study, I use the term *development* to mean a process
whereby “early level skills are reorganized into higher-level skills that allow individuals to manage more complex units of information, perspectives, and tasks” (King, 2009, p. 598). In turn, I use the term learning to mean a process through which students enhance their knowledge or skills in some way (Illeris, 2009). Although the terms are distinct, they can overlap when learning helps students transform their knowledge and skills into broader frameworks for making meaning. Based on existing literature regarding college student development (e.g., Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Jones & Abes, 2013), I frame shifts toward critical consciousness as constituting a developmental process whereby individuals gradually broaden how they see themselves in relation to their social worlds. However, through this research, I aimed to understand how this developmental process occurred within a particular collegiate context. As a result, I situated this developmental process within a broader learning process to enrich educators’ understanding of how learning relates to development toward critical consciousness. The results of this study help integrate the traditionally separate bodies of literature regarding college student learning and college student development.

**Key Strategies for Helping College Students Develop Critical Consciousness**

The aim of helping students develop critical consciousness stems from Freire’s (1970, 1973) educational philosophy. Influenced by the Marxist philosophical assumption that political and economic change requires collective action, Freire believed that collective action requires individuals who experience oppression in society to become conscious of their oppression and work toward their own liberation (Rosenberger, 2000). Describing key distinctions between the Brazilian context in which Freire worked and the U.S. context in which contemporary educators work, Rosenberger
(2000) noted that “the philosophical basis for change in the United States grows out of the notions of democracy and individualism” (p. 29). Also, while Freire focused his educational efforts on adults who experience oppression, contemporary U.S. educators seeking to foster critical consciousness often work with emerging adults who have not yet fully assumed adult roles and responsibilities (Arnett, 2006) from both dominant and oppressed groups in society (Rosenberger, 2000). Contemporary U.S. educators have adapted the strategies Freire originally used to foster the development of critical consciousness for their particular purposes and contexts. The application of Freire’s work to U.S. higher education contexts has given rise to three key strategies for fostering critical consciousness among today’s students: experiential learning, dialogue, and analysis of power dynamics within society.

Discussing the importance of experiential learning, Freire (1973) asserted that “the Brazilian people could learn social and political responsibility only by experiencing that responsibility” and could learn democracy primarily “through the exercise of democracy” (p. 36). Freire (1973) further explained that Brazil’s “traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness” (p. 37). Thus, one key strategy Freire used to foster critical consciousness was to encourage students to actively participate in decision-making processes within community contexts such as their places of employment, churches, and social organizations.

Within today’s U.S. higher education contexts, experiential learning often takes the form of community engagement initiatives and service-learning programs. Although community engagement and service-learning represent distinct categories of educational
practice, they collectively aim “to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community” (AAC&U, 2016, “Service Learning, Community-Based Learning”). For example, a participant in an internship program that combined professional practice with service explained how direct experience deepened her understanding of how to address social issues:

I spent considerable time working in issues surrounding police brutality in Chicago. Not the theory of why police beat others, not the theoretical civil rights objections to such brutality, but the nuts and bolts of how to fight such actions and remove the officers associated with them. (Egart & Healy, 2004, p. 132)

Through experiential learning, today’s collegiate educators—similar to Freire (1973)—seek to help students take personal and social responsibility for real-world issues as well as grapple with the complexities of democratic communities. The dual focus on personal and social responsibility prompts students to consider their relationship to broader communities in which they live, learn, and work (Rhoads, 2000). Seeing this relationship is essential for critical consciousness (Freire, 1973; Landreman et al., 2007).

From Freire’s (1973) perspective, experiential learning also provides the opportunity for meaningful dialogue about social issues. Dialogue, in turn, represents another key strategy for the development of critical consciousness by encouraging students “to discuss courageously the problems of their context” (Freire, 1973, p. 33) and “perceive themselves in a dialectical relationship with their social reality” (Freire, 1973, p. 34). Rather than being passive recipients of others’ perspectives, students who engage in dialogue play an active role in analyzing and generating solutions for problems. Freire
(1973) enacted dialogic education in the form of “culture circles” in which students and educators collectively worked “to clarify situations or to seek action arising from that clarification” (p. 42). In contrast to lecture-based educational approaches, in which educators tend to dictate information to students, dialogic education involves substantial discussion and interaction among students and educators.

One way in which today’s collegiate educators enact dialogic education is through facilitating seminars. In some cases, the seminars stand alone as full courses in and of themselves while in other cases, the seminars supplement large lecture courses. Both formats aim to engage students in active exploration of course ideas and concepts (Tsui & Gao, 2006). Baxter Magolda (1999) captured how educators sought to enact dialogic education in a course focused on the sociocultural foundations of U.S. education. After students had viewed the film *All American High* during a large lecture session, one educator began her seminar by explaining:

> Today is primarily on concepts regarding the film, and next time will be on readings. In groups, introduce yourself, have one person be a recorder, and pursue five questions. If we have time, we will share as a group. If not, I will summarize them and hand that out next week. (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 176)

The educator wrote the five questions she intended students to discuss on the board and then circulated among the small groups of students to offer occasional input. The educator brought her expertise to the discussion, but she also left space for students to make meaning of the film based on their own experiences and perspectives. As Shor and Freire (1987) explained, dialogic education involves “the sealing together of the teacher
and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study” (p. 100). In its ideal form, it involves active participation among both educators and students.

A final strategy Freire used to help students develop critical consciousness was analysis of power dynamics within society. Freire explained that education that fosters critical consciousness and, in turn, liberation of individuals who are oppressed stimulates critical analysis “that goes beyond the walls of the school” and extends to “the capitalist system” in which the school is embedded (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 35). Freire focused on analysis of power dynamics associated with economics, which reflects the influence of Marxism on his educational philosophy. At a broader level, though, Freire used this strategy to help students recognize how the dominant ideology of a society shapes knowledge and relationships (Shor & Freire, 1987).

Analysis of power dynamics within society serves as a key tenet of critical pedagogy, which informs the educational practices of a range of contemporary collegiate experiences. According to Davis and Harrison (2013), critical pedagogy aims to help students become aware of the socially constructed nature of knowledge; recognize contextual factors that influence knowledge; examine the societal processes that lend legitimacy to some perspectives while marginalizing other perspectives; construct, rather than receive, knowledge; and develop their own beliefs and values. Educators who teach courses in ethnic studies departments or courses that fulfill general education diversity requirements may draw upon critical pedagogy to inform both the curricular content and process (Hornak & Ortiz, 2004; Landreman, 2005). In addition, critical pedagogy may guide the efforts of educators who facilitate social justice-oriented experiences such as service-learning programs that connect service to larger social issues (Jones, Gilbride-
Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Rosenberger, 2000) and programs that train students to serve as social justice allies (Reason, Broido, Davis, & Evans, 2005).

Like Freire (1973), many contemporary collegiate educators draw upon all three strategies—weaving dialogue and analysis of societal power dynamics into experiential learning opportunities—in order to foster critical consciousness (e.g., Hornak & Ortiz, 2004; Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005). Thus, these strategies are not wholly distinct from one another; rather, they tend to overlap and interrelate amidst complex learning contexts. When combined, these strategies represent an intentional effort to help students not only function within but also work to attain the ideals of democratic communities.

**Key Barriers to the Development of Critical Consciousness Among College Students**

Even when educators design educational experiences that include experiential learning, dialogue, and analysis of power dynamics within society, development of critical consciousness is not guaranteed. Several barriers may interfere with the process by which students move toward a broader understanding of themselves in relation to their societies. Generally speaking, such barriers fit within three main categories: developmental, social, and pedagogical. Developmental barriers involve factors related to the ways in which students reorganize their current ways of making meaning into broader ways of making meaning. Social barriers relate to the dynamic interpersonal relationships among students and educators in a group learning context. Pedagogical barriers address challenges associated with educators’ abilities to facilitate learning and development among students.
Developmental barriers. As a developmental process whereby awareness of one’s self and one’s society evolves over time, movement toward critical consciousness involves complex interactions between individuals and their environments and depends on a delicate balance between developmental challenges and supports (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Kegan, 1994; Sanford, 1966). Kegan (1994) explained, “Environments that are weighted too heavily in the direction of challenge without adequate support are toxic….Those weighted too heavily toward support without adequate challenge are ultimately boring” (p. 42). Contexts that provide too much challenge with too little support may prompt students to “cling tenaciously to the familiar and what they know and understand” and “seek (knowingly or not) to maintain their former selves in new environments” (Jones, 2008, p. 72). When students focus more on maintaining their former selves than broadening their ways of making meaning of themselves in relation to society, they work against the aims of development. In addition, developmental barriers arise when the ways of making meaning students need to meet learning goals are far beyond students’ current ways of making meaning. Bridging such a wide gap between where students are and where educators want them to be usually requires more time and structured support than that allotted for semester-length collegiate experiences (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Kegan, 1994).

Social barriers. The collaborative nature of dialogic education generates a series of challenges as multifaceted interpersonal dynamics arise among students and educators. Within the context of a graduate student colloquium, Tracy and Baratz (1993) found that participants’ concerns about how to participate in discussion were complex because “while people wanted to be seen as smart, they wanted to avoid appearing as though they
were concerned about displaying their intellectual prowess” (p. 306). In addition, current social norms give rise to concerns about broaching certain diversity-related topics such as racism. As Tatum (1992) explained, “although many students are interested in the topic [of racism], they are often most interested in hearing other people talk about it, afraid to break the taboo themselves” (p. 5).

Moreover, power dynamics among students may generate silence rather than active exchange of ideas. For example, when a discussion centers on complex social justice issues, students with privileged social identities may stay silent because they “may not be eager to acknowledge their own advantages or change their thinking about themselves and others” while students of Color may remain silent “to protect themselves against a potentially hostile environment” (Jones, 2008, p. 77). Abes also described the challenge of fostering dialogue among diverse groups of students by explaining, “I have had a lesbian student silently stare at me…because I allowed space for another student to discuss how her religious beliefs made her not want to study queer theory” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 216). Given that societal systems of privilege and oppression grant more legitimacy to some students’ perspectives than others, some students’ perspectives serve to reinforce the status quo. Such perspectives may oppress students with marginalized identities as well as close off opportunities for meaningful dialogue and critical analysis (Applebaum, 2003).

Dialogue depends on authentic, mutual relationships in order to allow all students to engage in the difficult tasks of discussing topics society deems taboo, examining their own social identities, and listening to diverse others’ perspectives (Davis & Harrison, 2013; Tatum, 1992). If students are overly concerned with their peers’ perceptions or if
they remain unaware of the power dynamics among the group and the power associated with their own perspectives, they may not be able to engage in the type of dialogue that fosters critical consciousness.

**Pedagogical barriers.** Educators may also find it challenging to enact dialogic education through their teaching. Wildman (2007) explained that U.S. collegiate educators are socialized to follow dominant cultural scripts of education that portray teachers as omniscient experts whose role is to transmit information to naïve students. Dialogic education may require educators to assume an unfamiliar role in relation to students. For example, educators often report experiencing tension between opening up space for discussion and covering key points on the issue at hand. A professor in Goodman, Murphy, and D’Andrea’s (2014) study of interdisciplinary seminars found it difficult and risky to spend less time talking in class because this required him “to sit back and ‘hope’ that the students would engage in an intelligent discussion of the material without his help” (p. 12). Educators of courses involving dialogue among students with diverse social identities also recounted struggling with how to encourage students to share their perspectives while ensuring that students had the necessary foundational knowledge to understand and analyze issues (Quaye, 2012).

Experiential learning as well as courses and co-curricular programs that focus on analysis of power dynamics in society also run counter to dominant cultural scripts of education. Given the traditional educational paradigm within higher education, which emphasizes the delivery of well-established knowledge instead of the joint construction of ideas and which separates intellect from emotion (AAC&U, 2002; Parks, 2011), educators seeking to foster critical consciousness find themselves caught between
traditional models and new ideals. The traditional educational paradigm ultimately acts as a barrier by de-valuing the strategies necessary to help students develop critical consciousness.

The Need to Better Understand the Developmental Ecology for Critical Consciousness

Both the strategies for and barriers to the development of critical consciousness involve complex interactions between students and their learning environments. Just as no one strategy is effective for all students in all cases, no one barrier systematically stalls development. Understanding how development toward critical consciousness occurs and how educators can promote development toward critical consciousness requires understanding the dynamics of the developmental ecology in which students live and learn. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained:

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

A developmental ecology perspective encompasses the complexities of both individuals and environments. Rather than foregrounding individual factors as developmental psychology theories tend to do or, alternatively, focusing primarily on sociocultural factors as campus climate models are designed to do (Jones & Abes, 2017), developmental ecology theoretical perspectives emphasize the interconnections between individual and environmental factors (Patton et al., 2016). The system as a whole
represents the focus of study. For example, if the system consists of students taking a course at a large research institution in the United States, researchers using a developmental ecology theoretical perspective study how students shape and are shaped by the course, the institution, and U.S. society. Examining such mutually shaping influences is essential for understanding the role higher education does and can play in students’ development toward critical consciousness. Studying only one part of the system obscures which factors and which interactions between factors foster development. In contrast, a developmental ecology theoretical perspective offers the ability to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the developmental processes associated with critical consciousness. Although scholars and educators have advocated the use of a developmental ecology theoretical perspective in recent years, relatively few have incorporated it into their work (Patton et al., 2016). Thus, how the developmental ecology of contemporary higher education settings influences students’ development in general and their development toward critical consciousness in particular remains largely unknown.

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

Through this dissertation research study, I aimed to better understand how interactions between undergraduate students and their learning environments influenced their development toward critical consciousness. Environments included, but were not limited to, curricular experiences that took place within the classroom, co-curricular experiences that took place outside the classroom, the university as an institutional culture, and U.S. society at large. Also, to capture the complexities and nuances of how
development occurs through higher education, this study was designed to integrate psychological and sociocultural aspects of development.

Research Questions

Specific research questions that guided this study included the following: (1a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments promote development toward critical consciousness? (1b) How do these types of interactions help students develop critical consciousness? (2a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments inhibit development toward critical consciousness? (2b) How do these types of interactions stall or interfere with students’ development toward critical consciousness?

For the purposes of this study, critical consciousness refers to a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that is demonstrated through behaviors such as exploring diverse perspectives on social issues, analyzing root causes of societal inequities, and taking responsibility for helping address social problems. Also, within the context of this study, I use the term interaction to convey the bidirectional nature of influence between students and elements of their learning environments. Interactions took a variety of forms such as reading a text, writing an assignment, posting a comment on an electronic discussion board, and interpreting feedback from an educator. Thus, interactions were not limited to in-person activities. In addition, interactions were not limited to direct connections. They also included indirect connections. For example, although a participant may not have had a direct connection with university administrators, they nonetheless interacted with administrators via university policies.
Research Design

Given that the research questions for this study focused on complex and dynamic interactions associated with learning in higher education, the research design stemmed from a theoretical “borderlands” approach (Abes, 2009, p. 141). Guided by the assumption that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and shaped by societal structures of power, I situated this study along the borders of interpretivism and critical theory (Glesne, 2011). Based on interpretivist assumptions, I approached the examination of students’ development with the understanding that students actively construct meaning of their experiences and that students simultaneously shape and are shaped by their environments. Critical theory assumptions informed my decision to focus on critical consciousness as an important way of making meaning necessary for college graduates to develop. In addition, from a critical theory perspective, I approached the examination of students’ development with the understanding that societal structures of power influence both the processes and outcomes of development.

The primary methodology for this study was case study. Case study was well suited for the purposes of this research because of its emphasis on rich, nuanced descriptions of complex social scenes and its “intensive focus” on a particular learning context (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 93). In addition, by using case study, I was able to treat development as both a cognitive and social process—a characteristic that many researchers acknowledge but that few attend to in their choice of methods (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology and methods in more detail.
Significance of the Study

This research study builds upon existing literature related to college student development and contributes to the field of higher education and student affairs in four key ways. First, it focuses specifically on undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness—a way of making meaning necessary for meeting the demands of today’s diverse democracy but one that many college-educated adults have not fully developed (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Hardiman & Keehn, 2012; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). This way of making meaning, though related to critical thinking, is distinct in that it involves being able to reflect on and critique not only one’s own assumptions but also societal assumptions (Freire, 1970, 1973; Landreman et al., 2007). A better understanding of how to help students develop critical consciousness stands to enhance not only higher education but also U.S. society given that critical consciousness is necessary for participation in democratic communities and pursuit of democratic ideals.

Second, this study is significant because it was both methodologically rigorous and innovative. In this study, I examined development not only through interviews with students and educators but also through participant-observation of learning experiences and analysis of weekly reflection papers that students wrote. This range of methods provided much-needed information about how development occurs in the moment and within specific contexts. Thus, this study addresses consistent calls within higher education to understand the links between students’ personal characteristics and their learning contexts (Patton et al., 2016; King, 2009; Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, & Wang, 2012). Also, this research was methodologically innovative because it overcame
limitations of students’ self-reports of their development (Bowman, 2010a; Pascarella, 2001) by also incorporating perspectives based on class observations and interviews with educators.

Third, by using a developmental ecology theoretical perspective, this study investigated how multiple environmental factors ranging in scope from those associated with students’ immediate learning contexts to those related to U.S. cultural norms intersected. By focusing on intersections among multiple environmental factors, this study provides a detailed map of the contextual forces that help and hinder undergraduate students’ ability to develop toward critical consciousness.

Finally, this study shows clear links between educational practices and development because it describes development within a common collegiate context—that of a 15-week, three-credit-hour undergraduate course. Overall, this study enriches understanding of how development toward critical consciousness happens as well as how educators can help foster such development.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced the context for and significance of this case study regarding how interactions between undergraduate college students and their learning environments influence their development toward critical consciousness. I discussed the need for students to develop critical consciousness in order to participate in and contribute to democratic communities and highlighted the role higher education plays in helping students develop critical consciousness. Then, I focused more specifically on higher education to identify strategies for and barriers to students’ willingness and ability to develop critical consciousness. Finally, I explored the need to understand how
development toward critical consciousness occurs in context—a need that informs both the purpose and design of this study. In the next chapter, I provide an integrated literature review regarding the developmental ecology for critical consciousness within higher education.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Existing literature regarding college students’ cognitive development has led to “consensus about the general contours of development in this domain” (King, 2009, p. 615). For example, Love and Guthrie’s (1999) synthesis of a range of cognitive development theories indicates that college students in general move from seeing the world as certain and knowable to recognizing the need to navigate complexities and ambiguities within their world. Yet, such general contours leave two substantive gaps. First, they reflect Western assumptions regarding the goals of development in college. Because the general contours stem from Perry’s (1970) theory of intellectual and ethical development, which was grounded primarily upon the experiences of White male students who attended Harvard during the late 1950s and early 1960s, they do not fully attend to the ways of knowing among students from non-dominant populations (Taylor, 2016). For example, while dominant ways of knowing within a U.S. higher education context often emphasize debate and rational decision making, non-dominant ways of knowing tend to prioritize dialogue and ethical actions (Collins, 1989; Hester & Cheney, 2001). Given the increasing diversity among the college student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), scholars must find more inclusive ways to define cognitive complexity.

A second key gap that emerges from existing literature is that the general contours of cognitive development do not sufficiently describe developmental processes. On the whole, existing literature focuses more on “identification of structures that characterize
developmental stages” than on “analysis of processes of real-time activity within specific contexts” (Granott & Parziale, 2002, p. 2). Filling this gap requires studying development in context, which several college student development scholars have called for (e.g., Patton et al., 2016; King, 2009) yet few have done in a systematic way.

Through this case study, I aimed to fill both of these gaps. To define cognitive complexity in more inclusive ways, I focused on a way of making meaning termed critical consciousness—which incorporates characteristic ways of knowing among non-dominant communities (Freire, 1970, 1973). Rather than emphasizing individualistic and abstract reasoning, which tends to privilege Western and White, male-centric ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Collins, 1989), critical consciousness emphasizes community-based and experiential knowing. This emphasis on constructing knowledge within a community and based on experience aligns with characteristic ways of knowing among many marginalized groups such as those of Black women (Collins, 1989), Native Americans (Hester & Cheney, 2001), and international students from non-Western countries (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Critical consciousness honors the diversity of today’s college students by positioning both knowing through experience and through critical analysis as complex ways of knowing.

In addition, critical consciousness fits with the aims of collegiate experiences designed to help students with privileged identities as well as those with marginalized identities demonstrate social responsibility (Rhoads, 1997; Rosenberger, 2000). By requiring inquiry and analysis of societal norms and ideologies, critical and creative thinking regarding real-world social issues, civic knowledge and engagement to address systemic societal inequities, and ethical reasoning and action regarding social justice, critical
consciousness integrates key outcomes of collegiate education (AAC&U, 2015).

Understanding how diverse undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness stands to advance research regarding cognitive development as well as contemporary collegiate educational practice.

Given that scholarship regarding educational practices that promote development toward critical consciousness stems from several separate lines of research, I take an integrative approach to reviewing existing literature in this chapter. To integrate psychological and sociocultural perspectives regarding development, I draw upon the developmental ecology theoretical framework in general and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) theory of the ecology of human development in particular. According to Jones et al. (2014), a “theoretical framework links the unsettled question to larger theoretical constructs” (p. 22). For this case study, the developmental ecology theoretical framework links the question of how undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness to larger theoretical constructs regarding human development as well as environmental influences on thought and behavior patterns.

Then, to address the context of the course I selected as a case, which was grounded in critical service-learning pedagogy (Mitchell, 2008; Rosenberger, 2000), I integrate research regarding the general contours of college student development with scholarship on service-learning in general and critical service-learning in particular. Distinguishing critical service-learning from traditional forms of service-learning, Rosenberger (2000) explained that critical service-learning extends “beyond empathy and ‘helping others’” and provides “an avenue of education that enlarges students’ critical consciousness and contributes to the transformation of society” (p. 42). I use the four key
components of Bronfenbrenner’s theory—process, person, context, and time—to organize this section to show how existing literature helps describe the developmental ecology necessary to promote development toward critical consciousness. This section necessarily alternates between broad descriptions of developmental concepts and more narrow discussions of service-learning practices given that current developmental theories describe collegiate experiences rather generally (Patton et al., 2016; Jones & Abes, 2013) while current service-learning studies often focus on a specific program (Holsapple, 2012).

**Key Tenets of the Developmental Ecology Theoretical Framework**

According to Wozniak and Fischer (1993), four key tenets underlie and give rise to the developmental ecology theoretical framework. First, the framework rests on the assumption that psychological phenomena including the process of development take place through complex interactions between individuals and their environments. As Wozniak and Fischer (1993) noted, explaining the process of development requires “joint reference to active, constructive characteristics of both the individual and the interactional and physical contexts within which the individual acts” (p. xii). A second key tenet of the developmental ecology theoretical framework is that human action and thought are both fundamentally social processes. Based on this tenet, development in how humans act and think involves not only internal mechanisms such as reflection but also social mechanisms such as interactions with others. The third key tenet is that development represents a process as well as an outcome. To fully understand the complexity of development, researchers must study not only what changes in human action and thought take place during the lifespan (i.e., the outcome of development) but
also how such changes take place (i.e., the process of development). Finally, researchers who operate from a developmental ecology theoretical framework assume that the proper place in which to study development is in settings that approximate the complexity of naturalistic conditions. Through these four tenets, developmental psychologists intentionally depart from positivist-based research practices, which tend to focus primarily on internal mechanisms associated with development and seek to minimize the effects of contextual factors. Although these four tenets move the study of development closer to fields such as social psychology and anthropology, they maintain a distinct focus on development of individuals rather than the evolution of societies.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Theory on the Ecology of Human Development**

In the 1970s, Bronfenbrenner proposed a specific theory to describe the ecology of human development. Based on his work conducting cross-cultural research in diverse cultures, Bronfenbrenner (1979) concluded that human developmental processes and outcomes “clearly varied by place and time” and recognized that ecologies “as yet untried” may hold powerful potentials to promote development (p. xiii). According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), Bronfenbrenner’s theory evolved over three phases. In the first phase, which spanned from 1973 to 1979, Bronfenbrenner critiqued much of the existing research in psychology and human development for being artificial because studies were often conducted in laboratory settings rather than naturalistic settings. He also argued that existing developmental theories did not adequately attend to the contexts in which humans live. Rosa and Tudge explained that these research limitations left Bronfenbrenner, along with social policymakers, largely unable to address practical questions about the lives of children and their families. Thus, Bronfenbrenner proposed a
theory to study development in context. In the original version of his theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) focused on describing four nested and interconnected layers of context that surround the developing individual. These layers of context, which increase in scope, include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Table 2.1 provides definitions and examples of each layer. Given the focus of the present study, the examples are tailored to U.S. collegiate contexts.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>An immediate, face-to-face setting in which a person engages in activities, roles, and relationships that directly influence development</td>
<td>Courses a student is currently taking; co-curricular activities in which a student is actively participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MesoSystem</td>
<td>The interrelations among two or more microsystems (i.e., settings in which a person actively participates)</td>
<td>Interrelations among a student’s home, work, and school environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>The interrelations among two or more settings, at least one of which does not “involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25)</td>
<td>Interrelationships between a student’s courses and university policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>Overarching patterns, belief systems, and ideologies of the culture or subculture in which the micro-, meso-, and exosystems are embedded</td>
<td>Ideology of the American Dream; belief that race does not, or should not, matter in contemporary society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Bronfenbrenner (1979) devoted considerably more attention to describing environmental rather than individual factors associated with development in the original version of his theory, but he did so given the dearth of psychological theories that attended to the environment at the time and to make clear the social nature of human development. Rosa and Tudge (2013) clarified that his focus “was not simply on the environment, or context, but on the ecological system that included the developing individual” (p. 246).
The second phase of Bronfenbrenner’s theorizing, which spanned from 1980 to 1993, included a stronger focus on individual factors. Summarizing the key shifts in Bronfenbrenner’s theory from the first to the second phase, Rosa and Tudge (2013) explained:

In addition to paying greater attention to the role played by the individual in his or her own development, he attended more to processes of development and focused explicit attention on the passage of time. He also revised his concepts of development and of ecological environments (particularly the microsystem and macrosystem) and formulated a new research paradigm for the study of human development. (p. 248)

Bronfenbrenner’s revised concepts of development and ecological environments reflect a more intentional effort to focus on how interactions between individuals and their environments influence development. Whereas the original version of his theory helped situate individuals within multi-layered environments, the second iteration of his theory emphasized how the link between individuals and their environments functions in development. To revise the definition of development, Bronfenbrenner (1993) adapted Lewin’s (1935) classic formula for human behavior (i.e., behavior is a function of both person and environment). Also, he revised the definitions of the ecological environments to explicitly discuss factors that influence development.

Another defining feature of the second iteration of Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) theory was the research paradigm he termed the process-person-context model. Bronfenbrenner (1993) explained that this model “envisions the possibility of variation in developmental processes as a joint, synergistic function of the characteristics of the
person and the environment” (p. 20). This model served to operationalize his revised definition of development and encourage researchers to examine how individual and environmental variables intertwine to produce developmental outcomes. According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), “many developmental investigations…employ analytic models that assume only additive effects” and treat “the influences emanating from the person and the environment, as well as within each of these domains” independently (p. 8). In contrast, the process-person-context model conceptualizes the influences of personal and environmental factors as synergistic in the sense that the total effect on development may be greater than the sum of each factor’s individual effect.

Bronfenbrenner expanded the process-person-context model to include time—or, what he sometimes referred to as the chronosystem—in the third phase of his theory. The third phase spanned from 1993 until 2006. Although Bronfenbrenner died in 2005, his publications extended through 2006 (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), Bronfenbrenner broadened the concept of time in this third phase “to include what happens over the course of both ontogenetic and historical time” (p. 254). In the third phase, Bronfenbrenner also elaborated on the processes that serve as the driving force of development and the role personal characteristics play in development. Overall, the third phase of Bronfenbrenner’s theory reflects his most current and comprehensive conceptualization of the ecology of human development. Thus, in the sections that follow, I draw primarily from this version of his theory. However, because the original version of his theory offers the fullest description of the four layers of context, I use Bronfenbrenner’s early work to discuss contextual factors that influence development toward critical consciousness.
Research on the Developmental Ecology for Critical Consciousness in Higher Education

Although researchers in higher education have only recently begun using developmental ecology theory to study development (Patton et al., 2016), a great deal of research on college student development currently exists related to each of the four components of the process-person-context-time model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). In this section, I use the process-person-context-time model to synthesize existing lines of research. For each component, I first draw upon cognitive-structural and psychosocial bodies of developmental theory to discuss theoretical constructs relevant to the development of critical consciousness. Cognitive-structural theories foreground epistemological (i.e., cognitive) development whereas psychosocial theories foreground identity and social development. Both cognitive-structural and psychosocial theories are applicable to the development of critical consciousness given that critical consciousness involves complex ways of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social worlds. For each component of the process-person-context-time model, I also discuss relevant service-learning literature to show how general theoretical constructs apply to service-learning contexts. When possible and appropriate, I focus specifically on critical service-learning contexts. Because the developmental ecology theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of context when studying development and because the context of existing studies and theories is inherently different from the context in which I conducted the present study, I provide contextual details when first discussing a study or

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4 Epistemology, which refers to students’ “assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge” (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 3), closely relates to but is more specific than cognition. Some scholars of college student and adult development prefer the more specific term epistemology over the broader term cognition, so I use epistemology when discussing their work.
theory. Through the contextual details, readers can assess the degree to which the findings apply to the present study.

**Process**

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the process component of the developmental ecology research model encompasses specific interactions between individuals and their environments called proximal processes “that operate over time and are posited as the primary mechanisms producing human development” (p. 795). Based on his work in child development, Bronfenbrenner (1993) identified two general types of proximal processes. The first type involves social interactions between the developing person and one or more others such as parents, teachers, or peers. To spark development, interpersonal interactions must be reciprocal in nature whereby each person influences the others (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) clarified that proximal processes also can involve interactions with objects and symbols that invite “attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration, and imagination” (p. 798). The second type of proximal process involves engagement in progressively more complex activities and tasks. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) added that such activities and tasks must occur on a regular and sustained basis to foster development.

Scholars within the fields of college student development and adult development generally recognize the important role that interactions with others and engagement in increasingly complex activities play in development (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Patton et al., 2016; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kegan, 1994). Yet, they also have described more specific processes by which development occurs. These more specific processes include a balance of challenge and support (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Baxter Magolda &
King, 2004; Sanford, 1966), accommodation of new perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2009), recognition of cultural complexities (Bennett, 1993; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Perez, Shim, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2015), and salience of social identities (Davis & Wagner, 2005; Jones & Abes, 2013; Pizzolato, 2003). I discuss each of these processes below.

**Balance of challenge and support.** Within college student development, Sanford (1966) initially proposed that development occurs through a balance of challenge and support. As a pioneer in studying how interactions between individuals and their environments influence development (Patton et al., 2016), Sanford explained that institutions foster development by presenting individuals with challenges, assessing their ability to cope with the challenges, and offering support when the challenges become overwhelming. Drawing upon Sanford’s (1966) scholarship regarding how an imbalance between challenge and support inhibits development, Patton et al. (2016) explained:

> If the environment presents too much challenge, students may do the following: regress to earlier, less adaptive modes of behavior; solidify current modes of behavior; escape the challenge; or ignore the challenge if escape is impossible. If there is too little challenge in the environment, students feel safe and satisfied, but their development is limited. (p. 36)

Challenge presents the need to develop a broader, more complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social worlds while support helps students transition to a broader, more complex way of making meaning. Kegan (1994), a developmental psychologist who studies how individuals’ ways of making meaning of their identities, relationships, and beliefs evolve throughout the lifespan, explained that “the balance of
support and challenge leads to vital engagement” in one’s environment (p. 42). Sanford’s and Kegan’s respective work aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s assertion that development requires engagement in increasingly complex activities and tasks. Moreover, their work emphasizes that students need support to be willing and able to engage in activities and tasks that present challenge.

Through a longitudinal study of college student and adult development, Baxter Magolda (1999, 2001, 2004b) described three specific challenges and three accompanying supports that foster development of complex ways of making meaning of one’s identities, relationships, and beliefs. Together, the three challenges and three supports Baxter Magolda described represent the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM). To create the model, Baxter Magolda (2004b) analyzed interview data from a 17-year longitudinal study of young adults’ development, which began in 1986 with 101 predominantly White first-year college students at Miami University. In addition, she drew upon findings from an observational study of three semester-length undergraduate courses to identify conditions that foster complex ways of making meaning (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2004b). The LPM provides an elaboration of the two general types of proximal processes Bronfenbrenner (1993) identified by describing the nature of interactions with others that foster development and the types of activities and tasks that represent developmental challenges for college students and adults. According to Baxter Magolda’s (2009) most recent articulation of the LPM, which stems from her continued longitudinal study with 35 participants throughout their 30s, individuals ranging from parents and partners to educators and supervisors supported participants’ development by:
• Respecting their thoughts and feelings, thus affirming the value of their voices;
• Helping them view their experiences as opportunities for learning and growth, and
• Collaborating with them to analyze their own problems, engaging in mutual learning with them. (p. 251)

In turn, individuals challenged participants to develop by:

• Drawing participants’ attention to the complexity of their work and life decisions, and discouraging simplistic solutions,
• Encouraging participants to develop their personal authority by listening to their own voices in determining how to live their lives, and
• Encouraging participants to share authority and expertise, and work interdependently with others to solve mutual problems. (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 251)

Based on Baxter Magolda’s research, the supports and challenges that comprise the LPM help individuals—college students and mid-career adults alike—develop from relying on authorities to using an internal sense of self to make decisions.

Within the context of service-learning, Yonkers-Talz (2004) used the supports and challenges of the LPM to design Casa de la Solidaridad, a Jesuit higher education program in El Salvador. Although Yonkers-Talz did not term the program critical service-learning per se, he nonetheless described the program as one that aligns with the general purposes of critical service-learning. For example, he noted that the program aims to help students “exercise their imaginations to include the realities of people who
live in poverty” and use information from multiple cultural perspectives “to make wise decisions for themselves but also for the common good” (Yonkers-Talz, 2004, p. 151).

To assess how the program affected students’ epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development, Yonkers-Talz conducted a series of four interviews with 42 undergraduate students who participated in the program. The first interview took place during students’ first week in El Salvador, the second interview took place at the end of the program, the third interview took place one year after the students’ participation in the program, and the final interview took place two years after the students’ participation in the program.

Yonkers-Talz (2004) found that “exposure to the realities of people living in poverty while living in a different culture” represented a key challenge (p. 168). Several forms of support helped balance this challenge including “personal and communal reflection, community living and experiences with poor Salvadorans, and assignments that integrate[d] students’ experience in marginal communities with academic disciplines” (Yonkers-Talz, 2004, p. 168). When students experienced an optimal combination of challenge and support, they demonstrated development along all three dimensions (i.e., epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal). For example, Jackie described the development she experienced through the Casa program:

The Casa experience definitely influenced my way of thinking. Previously, I had never had to make decisions on social justices [sic] types of things. I didn’t really read the newspaper. I was interested in world events but they didn’t concern me because they didn’t seem all that real….But then after the Casa, I realize how
world events need to play a role in my life because I am responsible. I have a responsibility to be aware of what is going on. (Yonkers-Talz, 2004, p. 172)

The findings from Yonkers-Talz’s assessment help confirm the importance of balancing challenge with support to foster development within service-learning programs.

**Accommodation of new perspectives.** Another foundational mechanism for college student and adult development is accommodation. According to Wozniak and Fischer (1993), Piaget adopted this concept from Baldwin (1897) and applied it to his research on children’s intellectual development. Kegan then built upon Piaget’s work to describe how accommodation occurs across the lifespan (King, 2009). Based on Piaget’s (1950, 1965) and, by extension, Kegan’s (1982, 1994) respective theories of development, accommodation occurs when individuals cannot make meaning of new perspectives with their current mental frameworks and, as a result, experience disequilibrium. To resolve the disequilibrium, individuals work to broaden their mental frameworks to accommodate the new perspectives and reach a new level of awareness.

Baxter Magolda (2009) described the process of accommodation as follows:

> We [as humans] interpret things we see along the way through the perspectives we have acquired—rules of how we have come to think about the world and ourselves….When we have an experience that contradicts our rule, we usually see it as an exception rather than seriously questioning the rule we have come to trust. Only when we have encountered a number of exceptions do we stop to consider whether our rule needs to be changed. (p. 3)

Encountering multiple exceptions to one’s rules for making meaning sparks disequilibrium.
Some scholars refer to disequilibrium as dissonance. Festinger (1957), a social psychologist, described dissonance as a phenomenon that produces a cognitive conflict and elicits one of three responses: a change in one’s thinking, a justification of one’s thinking, or an effort to ignore the conflict and maintain one’s current way of thinking. A change in thinking represents accommodation when it results in a broader, more complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social worlds. Foundational theories of college student development describe disequilibrium and dissonance as essential to developmental processes. For example, Sanford (1962) noted that development “will not occur until stimuli arrive to upset the existing equilibrium and require fresh adaptation” (p. 258). However, Belenky et al. (1986) questioned the necessity of dissonance in their study of women’s ways of knowing.

Through interviews with 135 women from a range of academic institutions and human service agencies, Belenky et al. (1986) found that most women in their study reported learning best when educators believed—rather than doubted and challenged—their current ways of making meaning. The authors explained:

In the psychological literature concerning the factors promoting cognitive development, doubt has played a more prominent role than belief. People are said to be precipitated into states of cognitive conflict when, for example, some external event challenges their ideas and the effort to resolve the conflict leads to cognitive growth….On the whole, women found the experience of being doubted debilitating rather than energizing. (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 227)

Belenky et al.’s findings suggest that, for women in particular, accommodation may occur through cognitive connection more so than cognitive conflict.
connection occurs when an educator serves as a midwife who encourages a student to give birth to new ways of making meaning. Baxter Magolda (1992) also found gender-related patterns by which the predominantly White college students in her longitudinal study learned best and developed cognitively. For example, while male students preferred to learn through debating views with peers, female college students preferred to learn through listening to peers’ perspectives. Overall, research indicates that how accommodation occurs within educational contexts depends in part on students’ gender.

For students engaged in service-learning experiences, disorienting dilemmas are thought to lay the groundwork for accommodation (Kiely, 2005). Based on a longitudinal case study of a service-learning program in Nicaragua, Kiely (2005) defined a disorienting dilemma as follows:

A critical incident or event that acts as a trigger that can, under certain conditions (i.e., opportunities for reflection and dialogue, openness to change, etc.) lead people to engage in a transformational learning process whereby previously taken-for-granted assumptions, values, beliefs, and lifestyle habits are assessed and, in some cases, radically transformed. (p. 7)

For example, the recognition of social and economic disparities between Nicaragua and the United States represented a disorienting dilemma for some participants in Kiely’s (2005) study and led to accommodation by prompting participants “to rethink their political assumptions, spending habits, loyalties, and global position on the map of power and wealth” (p. 12). Nonetheless, the specific conditions under which disorienting dilemmas result in accommodation and lead to a broader understanding of one’s relationship to society remain unclear (Giles, 2014; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011).
Synthesizing several cognitive development theories, Love and Guthrie (1999) explained that the greatest accommodation students experience as they develop cognitively involves shifting from unequivocal knowing in which they see “knowledge and truth as universal, certain, and dispensed by authorities” (p. 78) to generative knowing in which they “have the power to generate, produce, originate, or author their own truths” (p. 80). Similarly, by drawing upon Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of holistic development that encompasses not only cognitive but also interpersonal and intrapersonal development, Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004b) explained that the key developmental shift required for meeting 21st century demands involves moving from uncritically following external formulas to demonstrating self-authorship. According to Baxter Magolda (2001), self-authorship represents “the capacity to internally define [one’s] own beliefs, identity, and relationships” (p. xvi). Participants in the qualitative component of the Wabash National Study, a longitudinal investigation that began in fall 2006 with a sample of 315 diverse college students from six different liberal arts institutions, experienced varying degrees of shifts toward self-authorship during college (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2012). For example, while Diana began college looking for and listening to others’ expectations to decide how to be successful, she eventually used her internal voice to choose a career path that aligned with her own goals and interests (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2016).

Yet, recent scholarship using critical and poststructural perspectives challenge the idea that shifts toward greater agency to author one’s own truths and paths are always possible and inherently indicators of development. Abes and Hernández (2016) explained that “when people are systematically dismissed as sources of knowledge,
viewing themselves as knowers is often not a possibility” (p. 101). Likewise, when people encounter risks and dangers associated with demonstrating agency, asserting their own perspectives and interests is often not a safe option. Based on critical and poststructural perspectives, “development is not always movement toward complexity but rather continuous, fluid interactions with systems of oppression” (Abes & Hernández, 2016, p. 107). Reconceptualizing development in this manner suggests that a key developmental shift in college involves becoming aware of the complex dynamics within one’s social world. Using critical race theory (CRT) to interpret research regarding Mexican American women’s development of political consciousness through activism (Hernández, 2012), Hernández (2016) described the importance of focusing on how individuals make meaning of aspects of their social worlds including social forces (e.g., racism, privilege, power); social systems (e.g., politics, institutional practices and policies, economic and social classes, social norms in a community, historical legacy); as well as environment (defined as location and the mix of individuals in a community as regards the diversity of perspectives and identities). (p. 172)

Critical and poststructural perspectives on self-authorship highlight the need to better understand how systems of privilege and oppression influence how developmental shifts occur and re-evaluate what constitutes a shift toward more complex ways of making meaning.

**Recognition of cultural complexities.** Applying developmental theory to collegiate learning outcomes, King and Baxter Magolda (2005) theorized that the accommodation process for intercultural maturity entails moving from holding naïve
perceptions about one’s own and others’ cultures to using multiple cultural frames and engaging in “meaningful, interdependent relationships with diverse others” (p. 575). By analyzing interview data from the Wabash National Study, which included a diverse group of students, Perez et al. (2015) provided empirical support that helped confirm the developmental trajectory toward intercultural maturity that King and Baxter Magolda described. Also, Perez et al. (2015) identified transitional phases that “signaled shifts from initial to intermediate and from intermediate to mature levels of intercultural maturity” (p. 773). The model of intercultural maturity development that King and Baxter Magolda theorized and Perez et al. refined aligns with Bennett’s (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, which spans a continuum from denial of difference to integration of difference. Denial of difference represents the first of three ethnocentric stages and is characterized by indifference to or ignorance regarding cultural differences. Integration of difference, which is the final stage in the category Bennett termed ethnorelative, involves the ability to operate from multiple cultural worldviews and transcend the cultures of which one is a part (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003).

Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) proposed the Multicultural Education Framework as a way to help college students, particularly those who identify as White, shift from naïve to complex understandings of cultural differences. The five-step framework aims to scaffold students’ developmental transition toward a multicultural perspective by helping students examine what constitutes a culture. For example, through the first step of the framework, students work to recognize and examine the socially constructed nature of culture. In effect, the Multicultural Education Framework provides a model for how
educators can facilitate development toward intercultural maturity, at least for White students.

Service-learning also represents a way in which educators seek to facilitate development toward intercultural maturity. Overall, research findings suggest that service-learning helps students shift from a naïve to an intermediate level of intercultural maturity (Holsapple, 2012). According to Holsapple’s (2012) review of “55 published empirical studies assessing diversity outcomes from service-learning” (p. 6), two of the most commonly reported outcomes include students’ re-examination of stereotypes and students’ development of knowledge about the served population. Both of these outcomes indicate that students who participate in service-learning programs gain a more complex, less naïve understanding of cultures different from their own. For example, Jones et al. (2011) described how students who interacted with people living with AIDS in New York realized that “the face of AIDS as ‘some poor dying child in Africa’” was not true (p. 33).

Research also indicates that students who engage in service-learning often gain a more complex, less naïve understanding of their own culture. For example, the predominantly White female participants in Kiely’s (2005) study described how their interactions with diverse others in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, prompted greater self-awareness. One participant stated, “‘I became so aware of my white, American privileged status…and the independence I have as a woman in the U.S.’” (Kiely, 2005, p. 10).

Finally, some studies show that students who engage in service-learning develop the ability not only to see differences in culture but also to empathize with those who are
different than they are. Lundy (2007) used the Emotional Empathic Tendency Scale, a 33-item self-report survey, to explore students’ empathetic tendencies based on whether they chose to complete a service-learning project, interview project, or research paper for a lifespan developmental psychology course. Administering the survey before and after students completed their chosen project, Lundy (2007) found that “only the service-learning students demonstrated a significant increase in empathy scores between the beginning and end of the semester” (p. 26). Participants in Jones et al.’s (2011) study who worked with people living with AIDS also demonstrated empathy by considering how the stigma of HIV/AIDS affected people’s daily lives and relationships. Although existing literature offers glimpses into what developmental shifts occur when students engage in service-learning, it leaves several questions unaddressed. In particular, whether and how engagement in service-learning prompts shifts from intermediate to mature forms of intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Perez et al., 2015) is largely unknown.

Moreover, educational research and practices that focus on the development of intercultural maturity fall short in describing the development of critical consciousness in two key ways. First, as Chizhik and Chizhik (2002) noted, multicultural education is often tailored to White, middle-class students because it often focuses on helping students learn about diverse cultures and/or identify their own biases about race, class, and gender identities. Referring to common readings in multicultural education courses, Leonardo (2004) noted, “Ruminations on whiteness are not new to many people of color” and represent novel material only for White individuals “who read mainly white authors” (p. 142). In essence, multicultural educational practices are often designed with a White
group of students in mind. Such practices may address, but rarely focus on, systems of privilege and oppression. As a result, how students develop awareness of and the ability to address the systemic nature of societal inequities is largely unknown. Second, research regarding multicultural education in general (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002) and service-learning in particular (Holsapple, 2012; Jones et al., 2011) is based upon samples of primarily White students. Such research does not adequately examine the experiences of students with marginalized identities for whom interacting with diverse others and navigating systems of privilege and oppression represent daily realities rather than optional collegiate outcomes.

**Salience of social identities.** Integrating sociological and psychological concepts, theories of social identity development help highlight how context influences the accommodation of new perspectives. Tajfel (1982), a social psychologist, first used the term *social identity* to mean “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 2). To explain how a focus on social identity influences scholarship regarding identity development, Jones and Abes (2013) explained, “a socially constructed view of identity promotes a move away from seeing identity as essentially an unconscious process leading toward individuation, although one rooted in social context, toward elevating that social context as integral in the construction of identity” (p. 57). Thus, theories regarding social identity serve to explain how individuals make meaning of their ties to and membership in various social groups.
In a grounded theory study of identity development among 10 diverse women college students, Jones (1995) found that experiences of difference played a key role in identity development. Describing the findings from Jones’s original study, Jones and Abes (2013) explained:

When difference was keenly felt, identity was shaped. The precise experience of difference varied across such dimensions as race, religion, sexual orientation, and culture, and across certain defining experiences, and included both visible (for example, race) and invisible (for example, eating disorder) differences. For each participant, however, the experience of difference provoked discernment about a dimension of her identity that she might otherwise have taken for granted. (p. 70)

Experiences of difference prompted particular aspects of participants’ identities to become salient. Jones and Abes explained that salience occurs though dynamic interactions between an individual’s identities and larger sociocultural contexts, which are shaped by societal power structures and accompanying systems of privilege and oppression.

Research indicates that privilege tends to inhibit identity salience while oppression tends to spark identity salience. In a study examining experiences associated with the development of self-authorship among 35 students at high risk of withdrawing from college, Pizzolato (2003) reported that college admissions privilege represented a major factor in students’ developmental processes. As Pizzolato (2003) explained, “college admissions privilege refers to the unsolicited benefit of not having to figure out how to apply to or pay for college” (p. 804). While lack of privilege sparked development by requiring students to create their own pathways toward and strategies for
collegiate success, high privilege inhibited development by providing “excessive support that crossed the line into protection” (Pizzolato, 2003, p. 808). Students with high levels of college admissions privilege did not have to wrestle with questions of how to apply to or pay for college; consequently, their expectations for attending and being successful in college did not become salient.

Similarly, Davis and Wagner (2005) explained that privilege related to gender inhibits the development of college men’s social justice attitudes and actions. According to Davis and Wagner (2005), privilege serves as a barrier to development because “those with privilege who are unaware of oppression…see nothing that needs liberating” (p. 32). In contrast, college students with marginalized identities may more readily see the need for and take steps to work for social change. In her study of decision-making processes and developmental capacities among high-risk college students, Drobney (2012) reported that Victoria, a student of Color with a low socioeconomic status, decided to start a mentoring program for African-American teenage girls called the Inner Voice League (i.e., IV League). Victoria explained that the purpose of the IV League is to help girls not “‘to be influenced by what society says they have to do or what society says they have to be’” so they “‘can just learn about themselves and what they really want to be’” (Drobney, 2012, p. 78). Victoria recognized how societal expectations serve to oppress African-American teenage girls based on her own experiences. Ultimately, research indicates that developing critical consciousness, which involves being able to see one’s “own social location in the context” (Landreman et al., 2007, p. 276), requires an individual’s social identities to become salient. While privilege works to keep social identities hidden, oppression helps make social identities visible.
Service-learning experiences, especially those that are critical in nature, can foster the salience of social identities through interactions with diverse others and discussions of societal inequities (Holsapple, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). Nonetheless, research suggests that some social identities become more salient for students than others. In a longitudinal study examining the long-term influences of service-learning on students’ identity development, Jones and Abes (2004) found that many participants shared insights regarding their own social class and economic privilege, but few spoke explicitly about other identity categories such as race and sexual orientation. Jones and Abes (2004) proposed that the salience of social class was strongest “because students were clearly able to see how they could make a tangible difference in terms of poverty” at their service sites, which included an AIDS service organization and a neighborhood food pantry (p. 161). Similarly, within international service-learning contexts, participants’ nationality tends to be particularly salient given their immersion in a different country (Kiely, 2005; Taylor, Jones, Massey, Mickey, Reynolds, & Jackson, in press). Nonetheless, the extent to which and ways in which service-learning fosters salience of other identities is less clear based on existing research.

Summary. According to the current literature base, service-learning experiences can help White students in particular make shifts toward intercultural maturity, which may provide the foundation for critical consciousness (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000), by providing them with the opportunity to engage over a period of time with diverse others. Such interactions, especially when accompanied by intentional reflection, can allow one’s own and others’ social identities to become salient (Jones & Abes, 2004) and may spark a sense of disequilibrium (Kiely, 2005). Identity salience, along with disequilibrium, can
in turn prompt accommodation by which students work to broaden their understanding of themselves and their social worlds. Nonetheless, whether accommodation occurs depends on complex dynamics between students’ own identities, their current ways of making meaning, and the nature of challenge and support they experience (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In addition, the extent to which service-learning experiences in general and critical service-learning experiences in particular help students broaden their understanding beyond the personal level to a societal level remains unclear (Holsapple, 2012).

**Person**

How the proximal processes that underlie development occur depend on characteristics of both the developing person and surrounding layers of context. Bronfenbrenner (1993) described the developing person primarily based on what he termed developmentally instigative characteristics, which represent “the attributes of the person most likely to shape the course of development, for better or for worse” by inducing or inhibiting “dynamic dispositions toward the immediate environment” (p. 11). Bronfenbrenner identified four types of developmentally instigative characteristics including personal stimulus characteristics, selective responsivity, structuring proclivities, and directive belief systems.

Personal stimulus characteristics, which include personality traits such as attractiveness or passivity, influence development by setting in motion reciprocal processes of interpersonal interaction that often escalate over time. Discussing personal stimulus characteristics within the context of higher education, Renn and Arnold (2003) noted, “Different students elicit particular responses from peers and faculty,
administrators and coaches” (p. 268). Selective responsivity relates to individuals’
willingness to explore particular aspects of their physical and social environments. For
example, research indicates that individuals who value and seek to address questions
about the meaning of life are more likely to develop critical consciousness (Landreman et
al., 2007; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998; Reason, Roosa Millar, & Scales, 2005). According
to Bronfenbrenner (1993), structuring proclivities refer to “the tendency to engage and
persist in progressively more complex activities” (p. 12). Within undergraduate
community-based research courses, Giles (2014) found that some students responded to
dissonance they experienced by further engaging in the activity in order to learn while
other students withdrew from the dissonance-inducing activity. Finally, directive belief
systems involve the ability and propensity to take agency for shaping one’s
environments. For example, in Broido’s (2000) study of six White, heterosexual students
who identified as social justice allies, participants demonstrated agency by actively
working to clarify their beliefs and values and solidify their knowledge regarding social
justice issues. Bronfenbrenner (1993) explained that directive belief systems are similar
to the concepts of locus of control and goal orientation but “are conceived and analyzed
not as developmental outcomes but as dynamic developmental forces” (p. 13). From
Bronfenbrenner’s perspective, directive belief systems can either enhance or inhibit
development.

Bronfenbrenner conceptualized developmentally instigative characteristics as
interacting in complex ways with other components of an individual’s developmental
ecology. He explained:
Developmentally instigative characteristics do not determine the course of development; rather, they may be thought of as “putting a spin” on a body in motion. The effect of that spin depends on the other forces, and resources, in the total ecological system. (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 14)

Research related to college student development in general and college students’ development of critical consciousness in particular describes several other personal characteristics that also serve as forces or resources within a given developmental ecological system. Key personal characteristics include students’ personal histories, social identities, and current developmental capacities. I discuss research related to each of these personal characteristics below.

**Personal histories.** According to constructivist-based developmental theory, which rests on the assumption that students actively interpret their experiences, students make meaning of their collegiate experiences based in part on their earlier experiences during childhood and adolescence (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). For example, in Landreman et al.’s (2007) study examining how 20 racially and ethnically diverse collegiate educators developed critical consciousness, educators recounted how exposure to diversity—or lack thereof—at a young age influenced their perceptions of society. Although 17 of the 20 participants reported growing up in a racially and ethnically homogeneous neighborhood, participants gained different degrees of exposure to diversity based on their social identities. Landreman et al. (2007) explained:

For the White participants who were raised in the United States, the experience of growing up in a White community extended to a belief that these shared characteristics represented a sort of universal norm….In contrast, the participants
of color raised in the U.S. were taught about and were aware of racism from a young age despite their limited experiences with Whites within their respective neighborhoods. (p. 282)

Yet, research suggests that even when individuals become aware of societal inequities at a young age, they may not necessarily make sense of the inequities at a societal level. For example, Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) reported that a non-traditional, African American student who had lived through poverty “linked poverty to personal flaws” (p. 60). Expressing her views on people living in poverty, the student stated, “Just because you are low-income does not mean you have to act low-income. Opportunities are out there. Some people don’t want a job” (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004, p. 60). Mere exposure to diversity does not lead to critical consciousness. Rather, exposure to diversity intertwines with multiple other factors including messages students gain from their parents.

Research indicates that parents play a significant role in an individual’s development of critical consciousness. According to Mustakova-Possardt’s (1998) study of the development of critical consciousness among mid-age adults, parents are especially influential in helping students develop moral motives associated with critical consciousness. Mustakova-Possardt (1998) reported that “the degree and nature of agency in adulthood is proportional to the agency modeled by the significant sources of authentic moral authority in childhood” (p. 26) such as parents. Individuals in Mustakova-Possardt’s study who lacked figures of authentic moral authority while growing up struggled to develop personal agency and personal moral responsibility, which in turn inhibited their development of critical consciousness. Similarly, Diemer,
Hsieh, and Pan (2009) found that among high school students of Color with low socioeconomic status, parental influence was a significant predictor of students’ motivation to transform sociopolitical inequity. Within a collegiate context, Reason et al. (2005) reported that White undergraduate students who identified as racial justice allies often cited their parents as a key influence on the development of their racial justice attitudes. Reason et al. (2005) explained, “Parents were influential through conversations about race and racial issues. Parents also provided diverse experiences for their children through intentional exposure to diverse others” (p. 537). However, for children from oppressed groups, Quintana (1998) noted that dominant societal ideologies were more influential than parental attitudes in shaping preschool children’s attitudes about their own and others’ ethnicities. Quintana’s research, like Landreman et al.’s, points out that personal histories intersect with students’ social identities to influence when and how individuals understand who they are in relation to others.

**Social identities.** Students’ personal histories combine with their social identities to influence the starting point for their developmental journey toward critical consciousness. In a model of racial identity development, Hardiman and Jackson (1992) explained that young children unconsciously adopt the worldview of socializing agents such as parents and teachers and internalize messages about what it means to be Black as well as what it means to be White. For example, as children transition from the first to the second stage of the model, they begin to accept the messages that “being Black means being less than” and that “White equals superiority or normality, beauty, importance, and power” (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, p. 25). Students’ social identities influence the nature of privilege and oppression they experience firsthand. Yet, research indicates that
the experience of privilege and oppression is not universal for a given social identity. Rather, students’ social identities intersect in complex ways with dynamics of the environments in which they grow up. For example, Torres’s (2009) research regarding how a group of Latinx students made meaning of racist beliefs highlighted the contextual nature of privilege. While some participants in Torres’s (2009) study began college identifying as Latinx and exhibiting “the behaviors of an oppressed minority,” other participants began college preferring to be seen as Anglo and demonstrating “behaviors associated with the majority privileged society” (p. 511). How participants identified their ethnicity determined whether they believed that negative stereotypes regarding Latinx applied to them. In effect, students’ perceptions of their social identities provide two broad starting points for the development of critical consciousness: at one starting point, students recognize but uncritically accept oppression; at another starting point, students remain blinded by and unaware of privilege.

Social identities also influence the particular developmental tasks students must address as they work to develop a more complex understanding of themselves in relation to society. As Hardiman and Jackson (1992) described in their racial identity development model, the third stage—which they termed resistance—involves an emerging awareness of systems of privilege and oppression and manifests differently among Black and White students. For Black students, resistance can involve feelings of pain as well as of anger and hostility toward White people and “fellow Blacks (or other targeted people of color) who collude with White people” (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, p. 29). For White students, this stage focuses on grappling with privilege either passively or actively. Passive resistance involves “a prevailing feeling that the issue [of racism] is too
big and nothing can be done about it” whereas active resistance involves “a sense of personal ownership of the problem” (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992, p. 28). Describing resistance within the context of learning environments focused on diversity and social justice goals, Jones (2008) explained that White students demonstrate resistance due to taken-for-granted privileges, lack of exposure to diverse others, and lack of developmental readiness to recognize systems of privilege and oppression. In contrast, students of Color may demonstrate resistance during diversity and social justice learning experiences because “engaging with White students in these contexts requires too much energy, risk, and vulnerability, with little hope of reciprocal effort” (Jones, 2008, p. 77).

In addition, college student development scholars have documented additional tasks that students of Color face as they move toward complex ways of making meaning of their identities, relationships, and beliefs. Based on analysis of longitudinal interviews with 29 Latinx college students from four different higher education institutional contexts, Torres and Hernández (2007) reported that participants’ developmental processes involved addressing issues of racism including managing negative stereotypes regarding their self-image, finding support and building relationships for dealing with the effects of oppression, and recognizing the structural nature of racism. Discussing how these findings compare with those of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study, which included predominantly White students, Torres and Hernández (2007) explained, “Although Latino/a college students display many of the characteristics described in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study, they have distinct issues resulting from their Latino/a identity, culture, and experiences” (p. 571). Although Hardiman and Jackson’s (1992) racial identity development model theorizes that White students’ developmental processes also
involve grappling with racism, research suggests that White students’ racial privilege often allows them to remain unaware of racism during college. In a study of White students’ perceptions of race and racism, Hardiman and Keehn (2012) found that most participants did not acknowledge the existence of racism. Lack of firsthand experience with systems of oppression such as racism reduces, if not altogether eliminates, the perceived need to address such systems as students make meaning of their identities, relationships, and beliefs.

Finally, social identities influence not only what developmental tasks students see the need to address during college but also how development occurs. For example, Torres and Hernández (2007) found that “being introduced to new worldviews and definitions of ‘Latino/a’” (p. 569) represented a key developmental impetus for college students in their study. Also, in a study examining the influences of social identity on service-learning outcomes, Jones et al. (2011) found that students reported experiencing different degrees of dissonance based on their social identities. The authors explained that students of Color and queer students in the study “appeared to experience less angst and dissonance” (Jones et al., 2011, p. 36) about interacting with diverse others given that their daily lives in college required interacting with diverse others. Thus, experiences that fostered movement toward more complex ways of making meaning were different for students of Color and White students. Although research documents the general influence of social identities on developmental processes, more research is necessary to understand how social identities intersect with other personal and contextual factors associated with service-learning to foster development toward critical consciousness.
**Current developmental capacities.** A final personal characteristic that shapes interactions between students and their environments and influences developmental processes is students’ current developmental capacities. According to Baxter Magolda and King (2012), developmental capacities give rise to “the strategies students use to understand what and how they are learning” and to determine “what to pay attention to, whose advice to listen to, what can be gleaned from a positive or negative experience, and in general how to navigate complex environments” (p. 4). For example, through a longitudinal study regarding the ways in which 10 diverse lesbian college students perceived their multidimensional identities, Abes and Jones (2004) found that students’ cognitive developmental capacities influenced how they perceived their multiple social identities.

To explain the nature of the connection between students’ cognitive developmental capacities and perceptions of their social identities, Abes et al. (2007) proposed the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI). In the RMMDI, students’ cognitive developmental capacities function as a filter. A highly permeable filter allows a majority of contextual, external influences to directly affect the individual and represents less complex ways of making meaning in which individuals uncritically accept societal norms regarding their social identities. In contrast, a less permeable filter allows only select contextual, external influences to affect the individual and represents more complex ways of making meaning in which individuals critique societal norms and develop their own constructions of their social identities. For example, with a highly permeable filter, a participant in Abes and Jones’s (2004) study believed she could not be “Catholic, feminine, or professionally successful as a lesbian.”
Upon developing a less permeable filter, this participant realized that her sexual orientation did not necessarily need to affect her religious beliefs and practices, appearance, or professional success. She was able to make meaning of her sexual orientation in a more internalized, less socially prescribed way. Overall, the RMMDI suggests that as the filters through which students perceive their social identities become less permeable, students become better able to critique societal norms and demonstrate critical consciousness.

In addition, King, Baxter Magolda, and Massé (2011) found that students’ developmental capacities influenced the outcomes of collegiate learning experiences. Based on analysis of experiences in which first- and second-year college students reported experiencing dissonance while interacting with diverse others, King et al. explained that such exposure to diversity did not always result in enhanced intercultural understanding. While participants with relatively complex ways of making meaning “used dissonance as a catalyst for reframing their views and putting their experiences in a larger context,” which led to development, participants with less complex ways of making meaning became immobilized by the dissonance or were unsure how to proceed (King et al., 2011, p. 482). King et al.’s findings suggest that interactions with diverse others do not automatically or necessarily spark development. Rather, for such interactions to be developmentally effective, students may need to possess the developmental capacities associated with an openness to and appreciation of differences.

Within the context of a critical service-learning course, Jones, Gilbride-Brown, and Gasiorski (2005) explained that effective engagement in service experiences and class activities depends in part on students’ degree of developmental readiness.
According to Jones et al., White students who were not developmentally ready to explore power and privilege dynamics associated with social issues demonstrated resistance to critical service-learning. For example, some students resisted by not thinking critically “about the connections between complex social issues, power/privilege, and the very need for their community service work” (Jones et al., 2005, p. 11). Other students resisted by remaining “unapologetic about their own position of privilege” (Jones et al., 2005, p. 12) or making “statements of blame pertaining to the service recipients and the situations in which they find themselves” (Jones et al., 2005, p. 14). Resistance can represent a mismatch between students’ current developmental capacities and the developmental demands of their contexts. Developmental theorists propose that such a mismatch can lead to development given sufficient support (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1999; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Kegan, 1994; Sanford, 1966), but existing research leaves open the question of what constitutes sufficient support, particularly for students with less complex ways of making meaning.

**Summary.** Students’ personal histories, social identities, and current developmental capacities collectively shape how they engage in and interpret their experiences within a critical service-learning course. Personal histories that involve experience with diversity, social identities that make systems of privilege and oppression visible, and current developmental capacities that allow for an openness to interacting with diverse others help lay a foundation for students to maximize the developmental potential of critical service-learning. In contrast, personal histories that provide little to no exposure to diversity, social identities that mask systems of privilege and oppression, and current developmental capacities that create right-and-wrong versions of cultures can
spark resistance to the aims and goals of critical service-learning. No single personal characteristic, then, ensures the developmental effectiveness of critical service-learning. How personal characteristics specifically provide challenge and support within critical service-learning contexts remains a question in need of more research.

**Context**

Development in general and development of critical consciousness in particular depends not only on personal characteristics but also contextual factors. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993) proposed that development occurs through bidirectional interactions between—rather than additive effects of—personal characteristics and contextual factors. In the following section, I discuss how interactions at each level of context (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems) are thought to influence the development of critical consciousness. Again, I begin at a broad level by describing interactions associated with collegiate contexts and then move to a more specific level by describing interactions associated with service-learning.

**Microsystem interactions.** A microsystem refers to settings in which students engage in face-to-face interactions, which directly influence development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed the following hypothesis regarding microsystem interactions:

Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person. (p. 59)
Findings from Baxter Magolda’s (1992, 2001, 2004b, 2009) longitudinal study of college student and adult development and from Baxter Magolda’s (1999) observational study of three undergraduate courses support Bronfenbrenner’s hypothesis. For example, during annual interviews during their college experiences, participants reported that developing meaningful connections with educators who validated their ability to know supported their learning and development. One participant explained that professors during her junior year of college validated her ability to know by asking her what she thought about course concepts rather than telling her what to think (Baxter Magolda, 1999). According to Baxter Magolda (1999), validating students’ ability to know allows students “to risk traveling to more complex ways of making meaning” (p. 68).

Reciprocal and supportive relationships with peers can also create conditions conducive to development. Participants in the qualitative component of the Wabash National Study who demonstrated greater-than-average development during college identified peers as a key source of support for their development. Barber et al. (2013) explained that peers such as friends, roommates/housemates, and fellow members of student organizations “were the people with whom students processed dissonance and found support to stand up for themselves in relationships, including challenging family relationships” (p. 882). Similarly, multicultural educators in Landreman et al.’s (2007) study recounted that authentic relationships with diverse colleagues and friends that allowed for “ongoing, honest dialogue and reflection” (p. 292) were essential to their development of critical consciousness. Analyzing mid-age adults’ development of critical consciousness, Mustakova-Possardt (1998) found that environments that foster “empathy, relatedness, and a common purpose with others” (p. 26) facilitated individuals’
abilities to demonstrate concern for justice and equity. In contrast, environments in which participants experienced relationships as more distant and disconnected appeared to hinder the development of critical consciousness. Mustakova-Possardt (1998) explained, “People who described compartmentalized, self-interest-oriented, or casual relationships, with limited or no empathy, seemed to become estranged from themselves first, and…tended to engage less and less fully with their world” (p. 26). Overall, research suggests that individuals who belong to a community characterized by empathy, honesty, and interconnectedness are willing and able to move through—rather than withdraw from—dissonance-inducing experiences and thereby broaden their understanding of themselves and their social worlds.

Supportive communities can help open the door for individuals to interact with diverse others in meaningful ways; in turn, individuals who walk through the door and form relationships with those whose social identities differ from their own often can take steps toward critical consciousness. In Landreman et al.’s (2007) study, multicultural educators recounted that exposure to diversity facilitated their development of critical consciousness. Landreman et al. (2007) noted that “many participants described hearing stories from and developing meaningful relationships with people different from themselves as having the most influential and sustained effects on their awareness” (p. 285). This finding fits with Reason et al.’s (2005) research regarding racial justice ally development in which they found that White students with diverse families and friendship groups were more likely to reflect upon race and racial issues. Also, in Reason et al.’s (2005) study, “first-year students who had pre-college experience with structural diversity demonstrated more developed understandings of Whiteness than students from
more homogenous backgrounds” (p. 537). Based on current research, interacting with diverse others allows social identities to become more salient, which can make systems of privilege and oppression more visible.

Research regarding service-learning experiences also indicates that mutual relationships with diverse others can support students’ development. Based on longitudinal research of an international service-learning program in Nicaragua, Kiely (2005) identified connecting with others as a key component for transformational learning by which students deeply examine their previously taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and their world. According to Kiely (2005), “connecting is learning to affectively understand and empathize through relationships with community members, peers, and faculty” and involves “learning through nonreflective modes” such as caring, listening, and comforting (p. 8). Likewise, Rhoads (1997) asserted that to maximize students’ ability to learn from others in service contexts, educators should develop service-learning experiences characterized by mutuality. Rhoads (1997) explained that “mutuality implies a degree of collaboration and equality between parties involved in service and rejects the patronizing perspectives often suggested in the idea of charity” (p. 149). Drawing upon Mead’s concept of symbolic interactionism, Gilligan’s research regarding moral development, and Nodding’s educational philosophy rooted in an ethic of care, Rhoads emphasized the important role mutual relationships with diverse others plays in fostering empathy and a sense of social responsibility. In an interview a year after participating in a community service project, a participant in Rhoads’ (1997) study noted:
I have found that meeting people and interacting with them helps me to see that the barriers they face are real and if I care about living in a better society, then I need to contribute in some way….You have to be willing to treat all people with dignity. Everyone deserves that. (p. 146)

Rhoads’ study affirms that microsystems, whether they represent curricular or co-curricular environments, that allow students to develop mutual interactions with diverse others and form supportive relationships in which they can engage in honest dialogue support students’ development toward critical consciousness.

**Mesosystem interactions.** According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), a mesosystem “comprises the linkages and processes” between two or more microsystems and involves a specific focus on “the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting” (p. 22). Bronfenbrenner hypothesized that a mesosystem enhances development under two main conditions. First, a mesosystem enhances development if the roles, activities, and relationships in which the developing person engages foster “mutual trust, a positive orientation, goal consensus between settings, and evolving balance of power in favor of the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 212). The types of interactions and processes that foster development within one microsystem should extend and apply to the mesosystem. For example, within the context of service-learning, relationships within classroom settings and service sites alike should be mutual in nature. Also, according to Bronfenbrenner, the goals of each microsystem need to align to maximize the developmental effectiveness of the mesosystem. Through a case study of a critical service-learning experience, Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) described how a mismatch
between educators’ goals and community partners’ goals can interfere with the development of critical consciousness. During the experience, which focused on understanding social issues associated with families living in poverty, students met with local informants such as pastors, social agency staff members, and youth educators. Boyle-Basie and Lanford (2004) explained:

Students asked informants what they should do to help. To a person, informants responded: Volunteer! Donate Money! Give of your time! Citizen action was defined as individual volunteerism and charity. This focus contrasted sharply with the critical orientation of the seminar. Overall, from the community contacts, students heard compelling personal stories, both heartwarming and heartrending, but learned little about structural roots for or symbolic/media influences on poverty. (p. 61)

In this case, informants’ goals of encouraging students to volunteer and donate money conflicted with educators’ goals of helping students examine the structural roots of poverty. The goal conflict served to reinforce rather than broaden students’ current ways of making meaning of poverty. The developmental importance of goal consensus among microsystems suggests that development associated with service-learning also depends in part on goals within other microsystems in which students interact such as families, workplaces, and student organizations.

Second, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that “the positive developmental effects of participation in multiple settings are enhanced when the settings occur in cultural or subcultural contexts that are different from each other, in terms of ethnicity, social class, religion, age group, or other background factors” (p. 213). This hypothesis aligns with
service-learning research that emphasizes the importance of border crossing. According to Kiely’s (2005) research, crossing contextual borders during an international service-learning experience in Nicaragua sparked a complex transformational learning process for predominantly White, female, middle-class U.S. students. By crossing a range of contextual borders, participants realized “how their identity and position in the world are not only defined by nationality and physical boundaries, but also shaped by socially, culturally, politically, economically, and historically constructed borders” (Kiely, 2005, p. 10). However, in a study that included a more diverse group of participants, Jones et al. (2011) found that “not all borders were crossed by all students and that not all border crossings were sustained” (p. 35). Students’ social identities and the assumptions they brought to the service-learning experience influenced what borders they crossed. Also, Jones et al. (2011) reported that “as time passed, the less navigable cultural borders of power and privilege placed significant demands on participants, making it hard to sustain developmental gains” (p. 35). Thus, the mere act of crossing borders does not guarantee development. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) developmental ecology theoretical framework, the developmental effect of crossing borders depends on interactions with other personal and contextual factors.

**Exosystem interactions.** Representing a more distal layer of context, the exosystem “comprises the linkages and processes” between settings, at least one of which does not involve the developing person but that nonetheless influences development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 24). Providing examples of exosystems within higher education, Renn (2003) explained that “faculty decisions about curricula, federal financial aid policies, and decisions made in a parent’s or partner’s workplace might
influence the environment of a college student” (p. 389). Institutional values also make up part of students’ exosystems and help shape the ways in which students engage in educational experiences. For example, in a study examining how institutional culture influences students’ sense of civic responsibility, Thornton and Jaeger (2008) described how the University of Virginia’s value of student self-governance provided a foundation for the university’s educational goals. Originating with Thomas Jefferson, the institution’s founder, the institutional value of self-governance encourages administrators and faculty to design educational experiences that help students gain leadership skills necessary to be able to govern themselves. In a similar way, the University of North Carolina’s value of serving “people of the state” prompts educators to encourage students to engage in community service (Thornton & Jaeger, 2008, p. 169). According to Thornton and Jaeger’s findings, exosystems within higher education help communicate the type of relationship students should have with their communities and direct students’ time and energy toward certain educational experiences.

Exosystems influence the extent to which students see the importance of developing critical consciousness and, in turn, can access collegiate opportunities that help them develop critical consciousness. Although exosystems do not directly affect students’ development, they nonetheless shape students’ perceptions of and motivations for certain learning experiences. In effect, exosystems may influence the degree to which students are willing and able to participate in developmentally effective microsystems.

**Macrosystem interactions.** Finally, macrosystems represent the broadest layer of context; they comprise cultural or subcultural patterns and belief systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). According to Renn and Arnold (2003), macrosystems
within U.S. higher education encompass “meritocratic notions derived from democratic values and capitalist ideology” as well as “cultural understandings of gender, race, and ethnicity” (p. 273). Such meritocratic notions and cultural understandings give rise to societal norms that emphasize individualism and downplay the structural nature of oppression. For example, as Chesler, Peet, and Sevig (2003) explained, explicit racism “has largely disappeared from the American scene or has gone underground” (p. 219).

Based on societal messages, many students show reluctance—and, in some cases, resistance—to the idea of discussing social identities and oppression at a societal level (Jones, 2008; Kardia & Sevig, 2001; Tatum, 1992). In interviews with 41 White college students from three different universities, Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) found that students defined racism primarily in terms of individual prejudice and acts of discrimination. They explained, “Only five of the subjects mentioned or implied that racism was societal, institutional, or structural, and of these only two truly believed that racism is part and parcel of American society” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000, p. 66). Studies with more diverse samples of participants also indicate that today’s college students struggle to recognize how societal structures of power shape the meaning of race. Johnston’s (2014) study, which involved a racially diverse group of 18 students, showed that participants most frequently conceptualized race as biologically essentialist. That is, they described race in ways that implied inherent differences based on genetics, heredity, or other biological indicators (e.g., skin color, hair texture, eye shape). Only four participants conceptualized race as a power relation and described race as a function of privilege and oppression; all four of these participants were upper-division students
who had experience working on campus or in service organizations to support marginalized racial or ethnic communities.

In general, studies suggest that many contemporary students are socialized to not see and not look for inequities among racial and ethnic groups. Kardia and Sevig (2001) noted:

The emphasis in popular U.S. culture on “pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps” implies that individual experience is the strongest force in our lived reality, that we need not attend to what is going on around us as long as we ourselves are taking care of business. (p. 252)

The societal norms of individualism and meritocracy in the U.S. interfere with college students’ willingness and ability to broaden their perspectives beyond personal identity and thereby inhibit development toward critical consciousness.

Individualism also serves as a barrier to community engagement by creating a culture characterized in part by tribalism (Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks, 1996). Through tribalism, social arrangements become fortified along professional, cultural, or social boundaries. Discussing the effects of tribalism on individuals’ sense of social responsibility, Daloz et al. (1996) noted:

Tribalism makes role-based morality appealing—the assumption that if I simply carry out my role as a lawyer or physician, parent or public advocate, business person or government regulator, and everyone else does the same, somehow everything will turn out all right….responsibility to the whole is thus deferred (implicitly or explicitly) to somewhere or someone else when one tries to take refuge in a role and social enclave. (p. 13)
Tribalism, along with individualism, serves to focus attention primarily—if not exclusively—on the welfare of one’s self and one’s immediate social group. Based on such societal norms, taking action to address larger social issues seems unnecessary and unimportant. Similar to exosystems, macrosystems shape students’ expectations and assumptions regarding the necessary relationship between themselves and their society.

**Summary.** According to current research, critical service-learning courses in which students feel that they are part of a trusting, empathetic community both within class and at their service sites can facilitate development toward critical consciousness (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998; Rhoads, 1997). Such communities provide the support necessary for engaging across differences and raising critical questions about societal inequities (Landreman et al., 2007). Moreover, the broader contexts in which a critical service-learning course is embedded can provide support by emphasizing the common good rather than individual merit (Daloz et al., 1996).

**Time**

The final component of Bronfenbrenner’s developmental ecology theoretical framework is time, or what is sometimes termed the *chronosystem* (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the concept of time in developmental ecology encompasses three increasingly broad levels:

*Microwtime* refers to continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process. *Mesotime* is the periodicity of these episodes across broader time intervals, such as days and weeks. Finally, *Macrotime* focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across
generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course. (p. 796)

Time represents both a personal characteristic associated with an individual’s lifespan and a contextual factor related to historical periods.

Discussing how microtime and mesotime influence development, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) proposed that an activity must take place during a sustained period of time in order to foster development. Based on this hypothesis, one-time events and first-time experiences are unlikely in and of themselves to help students develop a broader understanding of themselves in relation to others. For example, in an ethnographic study of a community college business course intentionally designed to help students develop a multicultural perspective, Hornak and Ortiz (2004) found that students’ lack of exposure to diverse others initially posed challenges to their development. However, students became more willing to learn about diversity as the course progressed and they gained more exposure to diverse racial and ethnic groups. Similarly, among first- and second-year college students who described experiencing dissonance when interacting with diverse peers, King et al. (2011) found that students who had minimal exposure to diverse others experienced intergroup anxiety when they initially interacted with diverse others in college. The intergroup anxiety stalled development of more complex ways of understanding different cultures. Within the context of service-learning, research also suggests that the developmental effects of service accrue over time (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

At the macrolevel of time, historical events help shape the particular nature of societal inequities and, by extension, the solutions necessary to work toward social justice. Using an ecological perspective to understand the process of sociopolitical
development (SPD) by which individuals gain the knowledge and skills necessary for social action, Watts, Williams, and Jagers (2003) explained:

SPD is a relative notion. Teaching African American youth to read might be a benign act today, but it would have been heroic under the system of North American slavery and in the post-Reconstruction South. Even within the same time period, social context contributes to differences in the meaning of behavior.

(p. 189)

Watts et al. (2003) argued for viewing SPD as “a cumulative and recursive process” (p. 192) involving many transactions over time, each of which are influenced by one’s background and social context.

For today’s college students, historical events such as the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, which was created in 2012 after police officer George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin (blacklivesmatter.com/about), help highlight the need to address societal inequities regarding race and provide a social network to support collective action. Overall, large-scale shifts in societal values, interests, and issues influence the society in which students are working to locate themselves.

**Conclusion**

Based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) developmental ecology theoretical framework, understanding development toward critical consciousness within a critical service-learning course requires paying close attention to how students interact with multiple layers of context. Although research suggests that a balance of challenge and support is necessary for development to occur, it also suggests that striking this balance is
inherently complex given that what counts as appropriate challenge and support depends on a range of personal characteristics including personal histories, social identities, and current developmental capacities. Moreover, a range of contexts, along with particular timing of experiences, influence whether students are willing and able to accommodate new perspectives and recognize cultural complexities. The integration of literature regarding general developmental concepts with particular service-learning research indicates that fostering development toward critical consciousness is not a matter simply of adding more support or challenge but rather of intentionally structuring a network of interactions.

Although the existing body of literature regarding college student development identifies the key processes, personal characteristics, contextual factors, and time elements that influence development, it provides only limited attention to and insight on how these components interact. Moreover, research that focuses on interactions between individuals and their environments tends to describe interactions at a general level rather than within specific learning contexts. The ways in which particular educational experiences foster undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness remains relatively vague and incomplete. Through this case study, I mapped the developmental ecology for critical consciousness more clearly and comprehensively to create a holistic, contextualized portrait of how students develop during a given educational experience.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodology that guided this case study of how interactions between undergraduate students and their environments influence students’ development toward critical consciousness. Jones et al. (2014) used the analogy of Russian wooden nesting dolls in which each doll is embedded within a larger doll to explain that “how data are analyzed and the ways in which data are collected are determined by a particular methodology, which is situated within a philosophical stance” (p. 12). A researcher’s philosophical stance encompasses and informs decisions regarding both methodology and methods. To begin at the broadest level, I first discuss my philosophical stance for this study, which was grounded upon two main epistemological and theoretical foundations including interpretivism and critical theory (Glesne, 2011). Next, I describe my selection of case study as the methodology for this research and explain my sampling strategies for cases and participants. I then articulate the strategies I used for collecting and analyzing data. I conclude by discussing how I enhanced the trustworthiness of this research to ensure ethical fieldwork and writing and how my positionality influenced this research.

This case study focused on how development toward critical consciousness occurred within the context of an undergraduate critical service-learning course. Two sets of research questions guided this study: (1a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments promote development toward critical consciousness? (1b) How do these types of interactions help students develop critical
consciousness? (2a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments inhibit development toward critical consciousness? (2b) How do these types of interactions stall or interfere with students’ development toward critical consciousness?

**Epistemological and Theoretical Foundations**

Jones and colleagues (2014) noted that “one’s worldview of the nature of existence and knowledge has implications for how one will embark upon a study” (p. 12) because it informs all aspects of the research process ranging from what questions appear worthwhile to ask to what findings count as valid. Two intertwined aspects of one’s worldview include ontology and epistemology. An ontology represents a set of assumptions regarding the nature of reality while an epistemology represents a set of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge. According to Crotty (1998), ontology and epistemology are closely related because one’s understanding of reality influences one’s beliefs about what can be known and how it can be known. For example, researchers who believe that reality comprises multiple truths stemming from individuals’ lived experiences in turn believe that they can come to know individuals’ truths rather than an absolute or universal truth. For the purposes of qualitative research, Jones et al. used the term theoretical perspective to encompass both ontology and epistemology. In particular, Jones et al. (2014) defined *theoretical perspective* as “philosophical (epistemological and ontological) assumptions that guide methodology” (p. 10). In this section, I adopt Jones et al.’s definition of *theoretical perspective* and use this term to describe my assumptions regarding both the nature of reality and knowledge. When discussing assumptions about the nature of reality specifically, I use the term *ontology*; in
turn, when discussing assumptions about the nature of knowledge specifically, I use the term *epistemology*.

**A Borderlands Theoretical Perspective**

According to Glesne (2011), four main theoretical perspectives (also known as paradigms) inform how quantitative and qualitative researchers alike approach and conduct research. These four main theoretical perspectives include positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. Pascale (2011) explained that positivism “is anchored to the same ontological premise of the natural sciences: The world exists as an objective entity and is (at least in principle) knowable in its entirety” (pp. 13-14). The main purpose of social science research guided by positivism is to make generalizations and predictions regarding social phenomena (Glesne, 2011). While positivism assumes that an objective reality exists that researchers can know through direct and value-free measures, interpretivism is based on the notion of a subjective, socially constructed reality in which “the world is always interpreted through [one’s] mind” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 143). Similar to interpretivism, critical theory assumes that reality is subjective and socially constructed; yet, critical theory is distinct from interpretivism in its emphasis on societal structures of power, which give rise to dominant ideologies that distort reality. Social science research guided by critical theory “critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions” (Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Poststructuralism, which is closely related to and used somewhat interchangeably with postmodernism and postcolonialism, aims not only to critique but also to deconstruct social conditions. The goal of deconstruction stems from
the assumption that reality is “ultimately unknowable” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p. 155) and that truth is always partial, plural, and contextual (Glesne, 2011).

Because the assumptions of positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and poststructuralism lead to different—and, at times, contradictory—research aims and methods, researchers tend to choose one main theoretical perspective in which to situate a study. However, Abes (2009) recommended working within theoretical “borderlands” by “bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data” (p. 141). For example, for a study on lesbian identity development, Abes used an interpretivist and postmodernist theoretical perspective to tell a richer story of students’ development than she could have done by using either theoretical perspective alone. Abes (2009) explained, “Using multiple theoretical perspectives to research student development theory highlights the complexity and messiness of student development; it challenges educators to simultaneously view students from multiple perspectives and to genuinely live and work within a context of multiple realities” (p. 150). A theoretical “borderlands” approach (Abes, 2009, p. 141) allows researchers to broaden the scope of any one theoretical perspective and challenges researchers to embrace tensions that arise among different theoretical perspectives.

Rather than simply ignoring or cleanly resolving tensions that arise, researchers who work at the borders of two or more theoretical perspectives aim to live with the tensions to emphasize that multiple legitimate interpretations of phenomena exist. In essence, these researchers take a both-and, rather than an either-or, approach to interpretation (Abes, 2009; Lather, 2006; Plummer, 2005).
Given my assumption that the reality of how undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness is subjective, socially constructed, and shaped by societal structures of power, I situate my study along the borders of interpretivism and critical theory. In the next sections, I describe each of these theoretical perspectives in more detail and in relation to research regarding college student development. Then, I explain how I brought these theoretical perspectives together for the purposes of this study.

**Interpretivism Within the Context of College Student Development Research**

As a form of social science research, interpretivism is based on the philosophy of idealism, which holds that the world is known not through direct observations and measures but rather through individuals’ perceptions and interpretations (Glesne, 2011; Schwandt, 2007). Researchers using an interpretivist theoretical perspective seek to know “how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, perception, etc.” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). For example, interpretivist researchers studying college student development work to better understand how students make meaning—or, in other words, construct the realities—of their identities, relationships, and beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2004a; Jones & Abes, 2013). Also, interpretivist researchers acknowledge that they bring their own perceptions and interpretations to the research process, which inherently influence the data they collect and the meaning they make of the data. Based on interpretivist assumptions, researchers construct the realities of the phenomena under study with (not removed from) participants. Addressing a common misperception of interpretivism, Glesne (2011) noted, “These constructed realities are viewed as existing…not only in the mind of the individual, but also as *social constructions* in that
individualistic perspectives interact with the language and thought of the wider society” (p. 8).

Although interpretivism broadly attends to both individual and social constructions of reality, some traditions of interpretivism focus more on individual constructions while other traditions emphasize social constructions. Two specific traditions of interpretivism related to college student development research include constructivism and constructionism. Jones et al. (2014) explained, “Constructivism is more connected to the natural world and Piagetian psychology; constructionism to the social world and sociology” (p. 17). Likewise, Gergen (2009) explained “constructivists tend to place meaning within the mind of the individual, while social constructionists locate the origin of meaning in relationships” (p. 26). For example, constructivist researchers within the field of college student development focus on understanding the mental schemas or structures students use to make meaning of themselves and the world around them, while acknowledging that the meaning-making process occurs through dynamic interactions between students and their environments (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 2004a; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kegan, 1994). Constructionist researchers in higher education focus on understanding how social, cultural, and historical factors socialize students to adopt particular patterns of beliefs and actions, while acknowledging that individual students have agency to resist and reshape such patterns (e.g., Magolda & Ebben Gross, 2009; Rhoads, 1995). Given constructionism’s focus on the macro-level of society—where structures of power become most visible—it tends to foster “the critical spirit” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58); thus, it leans toward or even aligns with critical theory in some cases. Despite nuanced differences, constructivism and constructionism both guide
researchers toward understanding students’ lived experiences and constructed realities within a given social context (Glesne, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). For the purposes of this study, I drew upon both constructivism and constructionism to simultaneously attend to individual and social constructions of reality among participants.

**Critical Theory Within the Context of College Student Development Research**

Moving beyond description toward transformation of socially constructed realities, critical theory is critical in the sense that it aims to critique and work to change conditions that limit human freedom and justice (Glesne, 2011; Usher, 1996). As Glesne (2011) explained, “Critical theory research tends to focus on issues of power and domination and to advocate understanding from [the] perspective of the exploited and oppressed” (p. 10). In addition, critical theory research often involves *praxis* in which researchers work not only to develop theory through their research but also engage in advocacy and social justice actions. Carspecken (2012) explained:

> Critical qualitative research aims to understand itself as a practice that works with people to raise critical consciousness rather than merely describe social reality….It will work with [participants] to make implicit forms of knowing-how into explicit and criticizable forms of discursive knowledge. It will contribute to social change directly.  

(p. 44)

Within college student development research, scholars use critical theory to focus explicitly on how societal structures of power, and the resulting dynamics of privilege and oppression, shape students’ understandings of their identities, relationships, and beliefs (Jones & Abes, 2013). My decision to focus on development toward critical consciousness, which involves students learning to recognize how systems of privilege
and oppression affect themselves and others, aligns with critical theory’s emphasis on advocating for social justice. By contributing to a deeper understanding of how college students develop critical consciousness, the findings from this research can help collegiate educators more effectively foster critical consciousness and, by extension, can help a greater number of college students graduate with the willingness and ability to address societal inequities.

Scholars in higher education also use critical theory to center the lived experiences of students with marginalized identities and raise awareness of inequities within learning contexts (e.g., Espino, 2012; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). According to Glesne (2011), critical theorists often draw upon standpoint epistemologies, which “are positioned in the experiences, values, and interests of a group that has traditionally been oppressed or excluded” (p. 10). Standpoint epistemologies include, but certainly are not limited to, CRT, queer theory, and feminist theory—each of which represents a distinct research tradition with its own history, assumptions, and methods. A unifying principle among the different traditions of critical theory is the need for researchers to understand how societal structures of power give rise to dominant ideologies, which leads to the marginalization of other ideologies. For the purposes of this study, I initially drew upon the main tenets of critical theory to examine the nature of power dynamics within the case study context. After recognizing that the power dynamics centered on race, I then drew upon the core assumptions of CRT to more closely observe and analyze how race and racism influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT involves five core assumptions, which include the following: 1) racism remains a systemic issue within U.S. society, 2)
working to eradicate racism requires White people to recognize how their interests converge with people of Color, 3) race remains significant due to individuals’ social constructions of what different racial categories mean, 4) race intersects with other social identities and such intersections create multifaceted experiences regarding race, and 5) the practice of counterstorytelling through which people of Color share their stories helps people better understand race and racism. Using CRT to collect and analyze data allowed me to look for counterstories that illustrated how development toward critical consciousness occurred differently between White students and students of Color.

**The Blending of Interpretivism and Critical Theory for the Current Study**

Throughout this study, I used interpretivist assumptions to frame development toward critical consciousness as a subjective, socially constructed, and contextual process that centers on how individuals make meaning of their environments. Philosophically, I agreed with Bronfenbrenner (1979) that “what matters for…development is the environment as it is *perceived* rather than as it may exist in ‘objective’ reality” (p. 4). In addition, I used interpretivist assumptions to structure my research as a process of co-constructing knowledge with participants with the ultimate aim of enriching educators’ understanding of how undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness. Yet, because no one theoretical perspective is complete on its own and because individuals are not always aware of or able to articulate how societal structures of power influence their lives (Jones & Abes, 2013), I used critical theory assumptions to focus explicit attention on how systems of privilege and oppression shaped the contexts in which I conducted research. Although I did not aim to foster transformation of societal conditions as directly as many critical theorists (Glesne, 2011; Madison, 2012), I did aim
to establish transformation of societal conditions as a key aim of higher education and raise awareness of how to help students gain the skills and abilities necessary to work toward transformation within their respective spheres of influence. Among the various positions that qualitative researchers can take, I assumed what Fine (1994) referred to as the “voices” position rather than taking an “activism” stance (p. 17). While researchers who position themselves as activists directly intervene in the research context to advocate for social justice, researchers who assume the “voices” position (Fine, 1994, p. 17) convey participants’ voices through their research as a way to illuminate how participants’ experiences fit or do not fit with dominant discourses and practices (Madison, 2012).

On the whole, interpretivism and CRT collectively allowed me to examine how individual factors intertwined with social structures to influence undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness. However, because these two theoretical perspectives have different histories and assumptions, some tensions existed. In particular, tension existed with regard to the purpose of research. CRT assumptions indicate that it is not sufficient for research to provide a better understanding of participants’ lived experiences because the ultimate goal of research is to transform participants and society in order to address societal inequities. As Green and Stinson (1999) explained, research that does not explicitly critique power structures that shape participants’ lived experiences runs the risk of reinforcing the status quo. Yet, from an interpretivist perspective, the emancipatory agenda that CRT researchers tend to pursue can take the focus away from participants’ perspectives. Working simultaneously to
provide a better understanding of participants’ lived realities and spark social change proved challenging.

Tension between interpretivism and CRT also arose during data analysis. CRT emphasizes the need to analyze societal power structures related to the research context, which may require researchers to interpret participants’ lived experiences in different ways than participants themselves express (Jones & Abes, 2013). While interpretivist assumptions prompt researchers to stay as close to participants’ actual words as possible during data analysis, CRT assumptions encourage researchers to deviate from or go beyond participants’ actual words when necessary to offer a structural analysis of the phenomena under study and center the constructs of race and racism. This tension made it challenging to describe the often-invisible societal structures of power that shaped students’ development toward critical consciousness while honoring students’ interpretations of their own development. I navigated this challenge in part through the use of counterstorytelling given that the perspectives of students of Color often brought societal structures of power to light. In addition, I explicitly incorporated my own perspective into the findings and used my own voice as a scholar—if necessary—to identify and describe societal structures of power that I observed within the case study context.

Although working along the borders of interpretivism and critical theory created some tensions, it also offered benefits over using only one theoretical perspective. For this study, purely interpretivist assumptions would have proved incomplete because they do not intentionally focus on how systems of privilege and oppression influence students’ development toward critical consciousness. In turn, purely critical theoretical
assumptions would have been inadequate because they do not emphasize how individual participants make meaning of societal power structures (Jones & Abes, 2013). But the combination of interpretivism and CRT allowed me as a researcher to focus explicit attention on systems of privilege and oppression while also prompting me to watch and listen carefully for how participants negotiated such systems as they worked to broaden their understanding of themselves in relation to their society.

Methodology

For this study, the primary methodology was case study informed by the philosophical foundations of symbolic interactionism and narrative inquiry (Patton, 2015). In addition to fitting with interpretivist and critical theoretical perspectives, case study was well suited for my research aim of examining how development toward critical consciousness occurs within the context of an undergraduate critical service-learning course. Case study methods provided an “intensive focus” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 93) on the developmental ecology of a particular undergraduate critical service-learning course. In this section, I describe the basic tenets of case study. Then, I explain the philosophical foundations of and rationale for the approach to case study I took for this study. Next, I explain the sampling, data collection, and data analysis strategies for this case study. I conclude by discussing the trustworthiness of this research and my positionality as a researcher.

Key Tenets of Case Study Research

As a specific form of qualitative research, case study shares the general characteristics of qualitative research, which include “the search for meaning and

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5 It is important to note that case study as a methodology differs from case study as a pedagogical tool. As Yin (2008) explained, “The purpose of the ‘teaching case’ is to establish a framework for discussion and
understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 39). Yet, case study is distinguished from other qualitative research approaches by “the intensive focus on a bounded system” (Jones et al., 2014, pp. 93-94).

To illustrate what constitutes a bounded system, Merriam (2009) explained:

The unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study. For example, a study of how older adults learn to use computers would probably be a qualitative study but not a case study….For it to be a case study, one particular program or one particular classroom of learners (a bounded system), or one particular older learner…would be the unit of analysis. (p. 41)

Providing a contemporary and comprehensive definition of case study, Creswell (2007) explained:

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

According to Jones et al. (2014), researchers in higher education and student affairs frequently use case study methodology given that many curricular and co-curricular contexts represent cases.

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debate among students” (p. 8). In contrast, the purpose of a research case is to provide “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” that enhances understanding of the phenomena under study (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).
Case study is grounded upon three key tenets. First, based on its focus on a bounded system, case study is characterized by intensive description (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). According to Flyvbjerg (2011), intensive description contains rich, complete, and in-depth details of the case or cases at hand. Intensive description is also known as thick description—a term borrowed from anthropology to indicate that the description “goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act” in order to probe “the intentions, motives, meaning, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1989, p. 39). Due to such intensity and thickness of description, a case study provides a means of investigating complex interactions among multiple variables related to the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009).

A second key tenet of case study is its emphasis on a particular context (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). Describing the reason for this emphasis, Jones et al. (2014) noted, “Because cases are situated within a bounded system, understanding the relationship of the case to the bounded system is crucial” (p. 95). Case study research describes not only the case itself but also how the case relates to the larger surrounding context. Case study’s emphasis on a particular context leads to concrete, contextual knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 1981). Although this type of knowledge differs from the abstract, formal knowledge associated with traditional academic research, it more readily resonates with readers’ experiences. Concrete, contextual knowledge also provides a basis for making naturalistic generalizations, a process by which readers recognize how findings regarding a given phenomenon transfer to other contexts and relate to other experiences (Merriam, 2009). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), concrete, contextual knowledge is more valuable than general
knowledge in the social sciences given that universals regarding human affairs do not exist.

A third key tenet of case study research is that it is heuristic. Merriam (2009) explained that case studies “can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (p. 44). By providing an intensive description of the phenomenon of interest within a particular context, case studies allow readers to learn vicariously and see vivid examples of real-life processes and practices. In addition, the insights that emerge from case study research can represent “tentative hypotheses that help structure future research” and thereby advance a field’s knowledge base (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). Thus, case study serves to enrich understanding of both practice and research.

Philosophical Foundations That Informed This Case Study

The bounded system that comprises a case study can be studied in a number of ways depending on the research questions at hand (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Jones et al. (2014) explained, “Because case study is both a unit of analysis and a methodology without a presumed philosophical tradition attached to it, case studies are very conducive to being combined with a theoretical perspective” (p. 94). For the purposes of this study, I combined case study methodology with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) developmental ecology theoretical framework, which I described in depth in chapter 2. In addition, I grounded my approach to case study upon two philosophical traditions within qualitative research including symbolic interactionism and narrative inquiry (Patton, 2015).
Stemming from the field of social psychology, symbolic interactionism is based on the assumption that “people create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality” (Patton, 2015, p. 133). Within qualitative research, symbolic interactionism is closely associated with constructionism in the sense that it focuses on shared symbols and understandings among social groups. Researchers operating under the assumptions of symbolic interactionism emphasize the importance of empirical observation; they “attend carefully to the overt behaviors, speech, and particular circumstances of behavior settings in which interaction takes place” to understand the ways in which individuals make meaning (Schwandt, 2007, p. 284). I drew upon symbolic interactionism to examine shared meanings among groups of students within the selected case and to investigate how participants’ behaviors and speech reflected the extent to which they were developing toward critical consciousness.

Narrative inquiry then allowed me to attend to how individual and social stories comprised shared meanings among groups of students. Describing how narrative-based research involves both individual and social stories, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted:

The focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individual experiences but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. (p. 42)

For the purposes of this study, I drew upon narrative inquiry to evoke stories from participants regarding experiences that influenced their willingness and ability to broaden their understanding of themselves in relation to their social worlds. I also used the tenets
of narrative inquiry to attend to my role as a narrator in the research process. As Jones et al. (2014) explained, “Although the researcher collects individual narratives in the form of stories in narrative inquiry, the researcher also ‘re-storys’ these narratives through analysis and interpretation” (p. 85). Recognizing my role as a narrator allowed me to carefully and intentionally strike a balance between my voice and those of participants and continuously reflect on how my own story intersected with the stories being lived and told in the selected case. In particular, I was able to better recognize counterstories within the data by critically reflecting on my role as a narrator.

**Rationale for Using Case Study to Examine Critical Consciousness Development**

By using case study methodology, I was able to help answer scholars’ calls for the need to study development in context (Patton et al., 2016; King, 2009) and thereby enhance research regarding college student development in three key ways. First, because case study emphasizes using multiple sources of data, I was able to interpret participants’ development based not only on perspectives students shared in interviews but also based on a range of other perspectives such as those I gained through participant-observation. The multiple sources of data I collected based on case study methodology provided a rich, multifaceted understanding of students’ development toward critical consciousness.

Second, case study methodology allowed me to integrate the psychological and sociocultural aspects of developmental processes associated with critical consciousness. This integrated portrait better fits the complexities and nuances of development than a portrait that focuses on only psychological or sociocultural aspects. As Bronfenbrenner (1993) explained, the macrosystem—which consists of the norms of a given culture,
subculture, or other broad social structure—in which individuals interact with their environments provides “the forms of developmental process that can, or cannot, take place within it” (p. 25). Through case study methodology, I was able to examine the sociocultural contexts that provided the blueprint for students’ developmental processes as well as the particular manifestations of development that arose from this blueprint based on students’ personal characteristics.

Finally, through case study methodology, I was able to effectively examine the links between development and educational practices. For example, participant-observation methods allowed me to see how educators’ actions shaped and were shaped by students’ actions and how peers influenced one another’s learning. Case study represented not only an appropriate methodology for this study but also an innovative approach to studying development among college students.

Methods

In qualitative research, method refers to a set of procedures for studying the research questions at hand (Jones et al., 2014). Although methods are situated within and guided by a particular methodology, they are more concrete than methodology in the sense that they represent the techniques of data collection and analysis. To begin data collection for a case study, researchers must determine which case or cases on which to focus. Thus, I begin my discussion of methods with a description of my sampling and recruitment strategies for selecting a case in which to examine how undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness.
Sampling and Recruitment

Sampling in qualitative research emphasizes “appropriate coverage of the phenomenon” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 109). Achieving appropriate coverage involves more than selecting a certain number of participants; it also involves purposefully deciding which context and which participants within that context will effectively provide insight into the given research questions. Describing how sampling in qualitative research differs from sampling in quantitative research, Patton (2015) stated that while statistical probability sampling is based on the logic and power of generalization, qualitative purposeful sampling is based on the logic and power of in-depth understanding of particular cases—or, what he refers to as “information-rich cases” (p. 53). Like Jones et al., Patton explained that qualitative purposeful sampling decisions center on quality, not quantity. For case study research in particular, qualitative purposeful sampling “occurs on at least two levels: selection of the case and selection of the participants within the case” (Jones et al., 2014 p. 97). I first discuss the sampling strategy for the case I selected for this study and then discuss the sampling strategy for participants.

Case selection. For this study, I based my selection of a case primarily on the logic and power of what Patton (2015) termed deductive theoretical construct sampling. This sampling strategy involves selecting a case that manifests “a theoretical construct of interest so as to examine and elaborate the construct, its variations and implications” (Patton, 2015, p. 288). Given that my theoretical construct of interest was critical consciousness development and that my aim was to understand how development toward critical consciousness occurs within undergraduate education, I identified undergraduate
critical service-learning courses at a research-intensive university as a general type of educational experience from which to select a specific case.

An undergraduate, semester-long, critical service-learning course at a research-intensive university represented an appropriate case type for this study for several reasons. First, although research universities comprise only about seven percent of U.S. higher education institutions, they enroll more than 30 percent of all college students in the United States (The Carnegie Classification, 2016). Consequently, a substantial number of college graduates in the U.S. earn their baccalaureate degrees from research universities and enter a wide array of professional and personal contexts that involve issues of societal inequities. Gaining a better understanding of how students at this type of institution develop toward critical consciousness holds implications not only for millions of college students but also millions of U.S. community members.

Also, according to AAC&U (2016), service-learning represents a high-impact educational practice and, as such, is a key strategy institutions use to increase student engagement and foster student development. In particular, through critical service-learning, educators explicitly and substantively aim to help students broaden their understanding of themselves in relation to their communities and understand issues of inequity at a societal level (Mitchell, 2008). Despite the increasing popularity of service-learning (Campus Compact, 2016), the developmental processes associated with service-learning in general and critical service-learning in particular are unclear and warrant in-depth examination (Holsapple, 2012).

Finally, a semester-long course allowed for frequent and consistent observation of the same group of students, educators, and community members over a 15-week period.
Many co-curricular workshops and programs also focus on helping students understand and address societal inequities, but the structure of such co-curricular experiences is typically less formal and more fluid than that of courses; as a result, the group of students at each occasion of the workshop or program may shift, which means that the developmental ecology may change each week. A semester-long course provided a specific developmental ecology and set of individual-environmental interactions to observe over time.

To select a specific case for this study, I looked for an exemplar of an undergraduate critical service-learning course. According to Patton (2015), “any exemplar of a phenomenon of interest can be a worthy single-case study” (p. 273). I used the following criteria to identify an exemplar:

1. the course must include weekly meetings with a university faculty or staff member and students to discuss academic concepts;
2. the course must include experiences that allow students to interact with community members;
3. the curriculum must include readings, discussions, and activities that require students to grapple with how to address inequities that currently exist within society;
4. the learning goals must align with the aim of helping students develop toward critical consciousness;
5. the course format must be a relatively small (i.e., 20-25 students) discussion-based seminar to allow for observation of social processes associated with development toward critical consciousness;
(6) the student composition of the course must be diverse in terms of social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, social class, gender) to allow for assessment of how development toward critical consciousness occurs for students with dominant social identities and those with marginalized social identities; and

(7) the university faculty or staff member(s) responsible for facilitating the course must be willing and able to participate in this research study and grant access to class sessions and associated activities.

To begin the case selection process, I collaborated with staff members in the university’s Office of Service-Learning to generate a list of potential courses. I identified a total of five undergraduate courses (one of which offered multiple sections) that fit most or all of the seven criteria. For each of these five courses, I reviewed a copy of the syllabus and met with the instructor to better understand how the course fit the criteria. Through meetings with instructors, I learned that two of the courses would not allow me to engage in participant-observation because they were not being offered during the semester in which I was collecting data. In addition, one of the courses represented a prison exchange program and met in a correctional facility; the security protocols associated with this course would have made conducting qualitative research especially challenging. The curriculum and format for the remaining two courses were similar, so I made my selection based on criteria six and seven. Based on past enrollment trends, one course offered a greater likelihood of enrolling a diverse group of students. This course also offered benefits in terms of access to class sessions and associated activities because the lead educator was a full-time staff member and the one who originally developed the curriculum. As a result, the lead educator felt free to
decide when and how to allow me to participate in the course. The lead educators for sections of the other course were graduate teaching assistants, whose roles did not lend the same level of autonomy and historical knowledge regarding the course they were teaching.

Ultimately, I selected Dr. Wells’s\(^6\) fall 2016 section of LEAD 2100\(^7\) as a case. Coordinated through the College of Education at a large, research-intensive university in the Midwestern region of the U.S., LEAD 2100 represents a broad category of seminar-style courses related to organizational leadership. The course is open to all undergraduate students. Because it fulfills a requirement for a leadership studies minor, it typically attracts students from a range of majors who are interested in serving as leaders within their respective professions. Since 2013, Dr. Wells has taught a section of LEAD 2100 that focuses on rural poverty. According to the syllabus, Dr. Wells’s LEAD 2100 section focuses on “defining poverty, its causes, its effects, and its solutions” and aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Introduce students…[to] poverty studies as a discipline within social sciences
- Provide students with the language to discuss leadership, civic engagement, and service in a scholarly manner
- Help students development their ability to understand how various social processes and structures affect one another
- Encourage students to develop a better understanding of how their own lives and significant relationships are shaped by larger social forces

\(^6\) To ensure participants’ confidentiality, all names of people and places are pseudonyms.
\(^7\) Institution-specific information such as the course number and title and college and department names are also pseudonyms.
• Explore the power and importance of...narrative and how it can be used to influence social change

The final two course objectives made this course directly related to and particularly appropriate for the examination of undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness.

**Participant recruitment and selection.** After obtaining approval for this study from the university’s Institutional Review Board (study number 2016B0123), I requested permission from Dr. Wells and Elon, the graduate teaching assistant (TA), to conduct research within the fall 2016 section of LEAD 2100 that they were co-teaching. See Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment materials I used. Both instructors consented and granted me unrestricted access to the course. Then, during the first class session of LEAD 2100, I recruited students to participate in the study. I provided each student with a two-page written description of the study (see Appendix A), which explained that students could participate at one of two levels. The first level involved granting me permission to observe them during class sessions and while they are serving at a community service agency as well as review assignments they would complete for the course. The second level involved also agreeing to complete brief weekly journal entries and participate in three semi-structured interviews for this study. I reminded students of the opportunity to participate in this study during the second class session to recruit additional participants. During the recruitment process, Dr. Wells expressed her support of the study and encouraged students to consider the opportunity to participate.

In total, 26 of the 27 students enrolled in the course chose to participate at the first level. For the one student who did not provide informed consent to participate at the first
level, I purposefully omitted that student from all field notes and did not review that student’s course assignments. The 26 students who chose to participate at the first level comprised a predominantly White group; none of the students openly identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Nearly half of the students were pursuing undergraduate majors in sports administration, which was due to the fact that LEAD 2100 fulfills an elective for the sports administration bachelor’s degree program. Students’ class years varied, but only two students were completing their first year in college. Of these 26 students, nine chose to participate at the second level. Six of the nine students who represented key participants identified as students of Color. See Table 4.1 for specific demographic information for the nine key student participants and the two educators in this study.

In addition to the two educators and 26 students who participated in the study, five alumni of the university who served as guest speakers for a panel discussion in LEAD 2100 allowed me to observe their engagement in the panel discussion and audio record their comments. The perspectives the alumni shared through the panel discussion contributed to my understanding of the nature of the LEAD 2100 curriculum and students’ interactions with people who have lived experiences with poverty.

All participants signed informed consent forms prior to their involvement in the study. See Appendix B for copies of the informed consent forms.

**Incentives for participation.** For the lead educator of LEAD 2100, I provided a $100 incentive in the form of two $50 Visa pre-paid gift cards. I explained that the incentive was intended to allow the educator to pursue a professional development goal or contribute to a social justice cause of her choosing. For each student participant who
agreed to participate at the second level, which required completing brief weekly journal entries and participating in three semi-structured interviews, I provided a $50 Amazon gift card.

Data Collection

For a case study, researchers need to collect data from multiple sources in order to produce detailed, nuanced descriptions of social phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Also, collecting data from multiple sources allows for triangulation, which involves examining “a conclusion (assertion, claim, etc.) from more than one vantage point” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 298). As Stake (2005) explained, case study “gains credibility by thoroughly triangulating the descriptions and interpretations, not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of the study” (p. 443). To allow for ongoing triangulation, I collected data from four sources: participant-observation of class sessions and co-curricular experiences, document and artifact analysis, interviews with students and educators, and weekly journal entries from students. I describe each data source below.

Participant-observation of class sessions. Consistent with case study methodology, I engaged in participant-observation of class sessions as well as co-curricular experiences. In total, I observed 13 weekly class sessions, two experiential learning events that constituted course requirements, and two optional co-curricular experiences. The two experiential learning events involved participating in a field trip to Appalachia and volunteering at one of several Halloween parties sponsored by local community centers. For the co-curricular experiences, I was a spectator at a women’s athletic event to help show support for two athletes in the course and I attended a
university-sponsored lecture related to the course’s focus on rural poverty. In total, I observed approximately 47 hours of interactions related to the course and took 122 typed pages of field notes.

Glesne (2011) explained that participant-observation ranges “across a continuum from mostly observation to mostly participation” (p. 64). For this study, my main role in the course entailed observing and taking notes regarding aspects of the social context such as group dynamics and levels of student engagement. For example, I paid attention to what types of questions posed by either the educator or students sparked in-depth and open exchanges regarding social issues. On a few occasions, I gained permission from the educator and students to audio record during class to supplement my written notes. My participant-observation of class sessions also entailed informal interviews with students and educators who agreed to participate in the study. Through informal interviews, which took place shortly before or after class sessions, I worked to build relationships with participants. I also sought clarification or elaboration on events I observed in previous weeks or themes that were beginning to emerge. The informal interviews played an important role in helping me ensure the accuracy and richness of my observations.

Document and artifact analysis. To create a rich, holistic description of the case, I also collected data by analyzing course documents and artifacts. For this study, relevant documents and artifacts included the university’s course catalogue, the course syllabus, PowerPoint slides and documentary videos shown in class, readings and videos assigned as homework, and students’ weekly reflection papers. Students’ weekly reflection papers were a particularly rich data source given that the students who chose to
participate in interviews and keep weekly journal entries were not representative in terms of academic plans or racial and ethnic identities of the class as a whole. Educators provided a specific prompt for each week’s reflection paper assignment, but in general, they expected students to write a succinct but well-supported analysis of the topic at hand. Within their analysis, students were required to include a quote that a peer had shared during the previous class discussion and cite information from assigned readings and videos. Educators required papers to be at least one double-spaced page in length, though they encouraged students to submit longer papers if so desired. The reflection regarding the required community service experience took the form of a blog post on the course’s electronic discussion board; for this reflection, students were also required to post at least one response to another student’s post.

Students completed a final reflection paper in which they addressed the following points:

- What moment sticks out to you as you reflect on the semester? Why?
- Please relate a specific example that helped you see a connection between at least two of the focus areas we studied throughout the term.
- Discuss one peer comment from the semester that changed or supplemented your perspective on a specific issue.
- How has your understanding of social complexity changed throughout this semester?

The TA chose to include the final point specifically to assist with this research. Including the final reflection paper, students wrote a total of 10 reflection papers throughout the semester.
**Semi-structured interviews.** Another key way in which I collected data was through a series of three semi-structured, constructivist-based interviews with the lead educator, TA, and each of the nine students who consented to participate in interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) termed the process of facilitating constructivist-based interviews *active interviewing* to convey the interactive and dynamic relationship between the interviewer and participant. As Holstein and Gubrium (2003) explained:

> Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge—treasuries of information awaiting excavation—as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. (p. 68)

I co-constructed knowledge with participants during interviews by asking open-ended questions and allowing participants room to guide the conversation toward topics they deemed important and relevant. All semi-structured interviews with educators and students were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The TA and seven students participated in all three interviews; the lead educator and two students participated in the first two interviews. The interviews allowed me to balance my interpretation of the developmental processes I observed during class sessions with educators’ and students’ perspectives regarding these developmental processes.

**Interviews with educators.** The first 45- to 60-minute interview with each educator took place at the beginning of the semester and focused on the educator’s background and the developmental ecology of the course. With regard to the latter, I asked each educator to discuss the four layers of context in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979,
1993) developmental ecology model (i.e., micro-, meso-, eco-, and macrosystem). For LEAD 2100, the mesosystem included two key microsystems: (1) the classroom, and (2) the Appalachian community that served as the site for a required field trip during the semester. The exosystem included such settings as the following: departmental and university policies, research and best practices within the field of critical service-learning, and community service agencies at which each educator serves or has served. The macrosystem included cultural norms to which each educator explicitly attended while designing the course. For example, cultural norms related to social class in Appalachia represented part of the macrosystem for LEAD 2100. Through this first interview, each educator identified key elements of each layer of context and discussed his or her interpretation of how these elements influenced the course’s learning goals and processes.

The second 45- to 60-minute interview took place after the ninth week of the course and shortly after the required field trip to Appalachia. This interview focused on students’ progress toward meeting course goals related to critical consciousness. In particular, I asked each educator to draw upon his or her experiences teaching the course to identify and describe interactions in the classroom and during the field trip that were helping students gain a broader understanding of themselves in relation to society. I also asked each educator to identify and describe interactions in the classroom and during the field trip that were interfering with or hindering students’ development toward critical consciousness.

The final interview served as a member check regarding the emerging findings (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). The lead educator was not able to participate in this interview due to health issues. The TA participated in this interview during the final
week of the semester, and the interview lasted approximately 70 minutes. To begin the member-checking process, I asked the TA to complete a brief paper-and-pencil survey with Likert-scale statements about the emerging findings. I derived the statements on the survey from the initial rounds of data analysis and worded them in a way so as not to suggest a desired response. In other words, agreement with a given statement did not necessarily indicate confirmation of a particular theme. To introduce the survey, I explained that the statements represented tentative themes as well as lingering curiosities that had arisen from the data analysis I had completed up to that point. I emphasized that I genuinely wanted to understand the participant’s perspective on the statements and did not expect a particular response to any of the statements.

After the TA completed the member-check survey, I asked him to explain his responses and share additional comments regarding how students developed toward critical consciousness through the course. For example, on the survey, the TA indicated that he strongly disagreed with the statement that the documentaries in the course were as effective as the field trip to Appalachia in terms of helping students see what it really means to live in poverty. During the discussion of the survey, he explained that he strongly disagreed with this statement because many students described the field trip to Appalachia as a particularly influential aspect of the course in their final reflection papers. Yet, he also explained that the documentaries were especially effective for highlighting international poverty given that the course did not provide the opportunity for students to travel internationally. The member-check survey ultimately allowed me to gain a more nuanced understanding of key factors that influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness.
For detailed protocols for the three semi-structured interviews with LEAD 2100 educators, see Appendix C. The protocol for the third semi-structured interview includes the statements on the member-check survey.

**Interviews with students.** For students who agreed to participate in interviews, the first 45- to 60-minute interview took place between the first and fourth weeks of the course. Through the first interview, I focused on understanding each student’s personal characteristics related to critical consciousness. For example, I invited students to discuss aspects of their personal histories they deemed relevant to the course such as previous experiences with service and first memories of witnessing or experiencing oppression. I also explored students’ motivations and expectations for LEAD 2100 as a way to understand their orientation toward and predisposition for course goals related to critical consciousness. In addition, I asked students to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and then discuss how they were making meaning of their social identities (e.g., race, social class, gender).

The second 45- to 60-minute interview took place immediately following the required field trip to Appalachia. In this interview, I focused on better understanding how each student was learning to make meaning of societal inequities and how aspects of their personal background and the course were helping them learn. I began this interview with a free-write exercise in which I asked students to review their journal entries and reflect on their experiences in LEAD 2100 thus far. I then prompted students to describe what they had learned about societal inequities. After students completed the free-write exercise, I explored the key points they wrote and worked to identify how their thinking about societal inequities had evolved since the beginning of the semester. For this
interview, I also incorporated a mapping activity through which I presented students with a list of multiple aspects that my observations had suggested might be influential to their learning process and asked students to categorize the aspects as follows: (1) aspects that were helping broaden their thinking, (2) aspects that were making it difficult to meet the course goals related to critical consciousness, (3) aspects that were not influencing their thinking, and (4) aspects that did not apply to them. Consistent with constructivist interviewing techniques, I allowed students to decide how to complete the mapping activity. Some students chose to physically sort the aspects into different categories while others opted to verbally discuss how each aspect was influencing their learning. After discussing aspects on the list, I asked students to identify additional aspects they felt were influencing their learning.

The final 45- to 60-minute interview served as a member check. Of the nine students who agreed to participate in interviews, two were unavailable for the third interview. Before beginning the member-checking process, I asked students to reflect on insights they had gained about social issues during the four class sessions that had taken place since the second interview. During this part of the interview, I asked probing questions as necessary and appropriate to identify aspects that had influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. Then, I asked students to complete a brief paper-and-pencil survey with Likert-scale statements about the emerging findings. Similar to the survey I asked the TA to complete, the survey for students consisted of statements based on the initial rounds of data analysis. I emphasized with each student participant that I genuinely needed their perspective on the statements to move forward
with the research. In addition, I explained that each statement was designed so that any option on the Likert scale was appropriate and valid.

After indicating the degree to which they agreed with each statement, students had the opportunity to discuss their responses. By the third interview, I had established a relatively high level of rapport with participants, which allowed them to disagree with or voice a different perspective on survey items. Of the seven students who participated in the final interview, four students in particular noted aspects of the survey items that did not fully or accurately capture their perspectives. For example, one student voiced her disagreement with the term *obligation* in the statement, “I feel an obligation to help others within my community succeed.” She noted that she wants to help others within her community succeed but does not need to do so. Another student circled the word *most* in the statement, “I developed a personal connection with most of my peers in [LEAD 2100]” and wrote the word *some* in the column on the survey designated for notes. When I sensed that a participant may not be fully comfortable disagreeing with survey items, I reiterated that I was genuinely curious to know what he or she thought about the statements and had no expected answers in mind. Overall, the member-check survey surfaced multiple responses to and interpretations of the emerging themes; thus, it helped me better understand if or how a particular theme resonated with each participant. The member-check survey also proved invaluable for recognizing the connotations of key terms I used to describe the emerging findings.

For detailed protocols for the three semi-structured interviews with students, see Appendix D. Again, the protocol for the third semi-structured interview includes the statements on the member-check survey.
Weekly journal entries from students. During the first eight weeks of the semester, participants who agreed to participate in interviews for this study also completed brief journal entries each week to document key interactions they experienced or messages they encountered regarding societal inequities. The journal entries provided insights that served as a starting point for the second semi-structured interview with each participant. Although students were welcome to draw upon the ideas they discussed in their weekly reflection papers for LEAD 2100, I emphasized that the journal entries were distinct from and supplemental to their weekly reflection papers. As a result, for the nine students who served as key participants for this study, I collected data from both their course assignments and their weekly journal entries. The weekly journal entries were necessary given the limitations of using courses assignments as data. Holsapple (2012) noted that such data are “not created by the students to explicitly provide truthful accounts of their experiences, responses, and outcomes” but rather are created “to receive grades” (p. 14). In addition, although the weekly reflection paper prompts connected in some ways to the research questions guiding this study, they did not align fully with the constructs I was examining. Asking students to create journal entries specifically for this study allowed me to focus their attention on ideas and experiences directly related to the development of critical consciousness.

To encourage students to invest the time and energy necessary to create weekly journal entries that were not required for the course, I allowed students to choose how to format their entries. I also offered a template for those who needed or wanted additional structure. At students’ request, I sent a weekly text message reminding them to complete a journal entry for the purposes of this study. Participation during each week was
voluntary, and students did not need to participate each week to continue with the study. Of the nine students who served as key participants for this study, six kept weekly journal entries. Four of the six students used the template I provided, one student sent me emails each week, and another student recorded hand-written notes on loose-leaf notebook paper. For the specific prompt and template for the journal entries, see Appendix E.

**Pilot Study.** Prior to the start of this research study, I conducted a pilot study to test the effectiveness of the interview protocols. Following Glesne’s (2011) advice to conduct a pilot study “in situations and with people as close to the realities of [the] actual study as possible” (p. 56), I piloted the first two educator interview protocols with three educators who teach critical service-learning courses. I also piloted the first two student interview protocols with three undergraduate students in the process of completing a critical service-learning course. I used the results of the pilot study to refine the interview protocols. In particular, I created the mapping activity for the second student interview based on the pilot study because students struggled to identify specific aspects of the course that influenced their learning. Also, from the interviews I conducted with educators during the pilot study, I recognized the importance of asking educators to specifically articulate their definition of critical consciousness. Overall, the pilot study findings allowed me to enhance my ability to gain rich and relevant information from interviews.

**Data Analysis**

To understand and describe how dynamic interactions between undergraduate students and their learning environments influenced their development toward critical consciousness, I used narrative inquiry. By directing my attention to how individual
stories contributed to and compared with broader patterns within the research context, narrative inquiry helped me ensure that the findings represented the diversity and complexity among participants’ perspectives (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Each observation of a class session and each journal entry a student created represented a small story, which included talk about very recent events experienced as part of everyday life (Chase, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2007). The semi-structured interviews with students and educators, combined with insights from document and artifact analysis, comprised big stories. According to Freeman (2006), big stories allow for reflection on significant experiences and the contexts in which such experiences happen. Following Gubrium and Holstein’s (2009) advice, I approached “the big and little stories as reflexively related, not categorically distinct, dimensions of narrativity” (p. 144). Thus, I treated the data as a series of nested stories in which stories regarding participants’ development toward critical consciousness were situated within stories regarding sociocultural patterns that influenced development.

The database for analysis included the following: approximately 120 typed pages of field notes, a total of 30 interview transcripts, and 10 sets of reflection papers. Because the weekly journal entries that some student participants completed served as a starting point for the second round of interviews, I analyzed the weekly journal entries in conjunction with and as part of the transcripts for the second interviews. I initially used a line-by-line narrative coding process by which I worked to stay as close as possible to participants’ own words while looking for narrative features such as names of characters, places of action, story lines, silences, tensions, and continuities and discontinuities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For example, Mrs. Holden with whom students interacted
during the LEAD 2100 field trip emerged as a prominent character within the data. Also, lack of discussion regarding racial dynamics among class members represented a noticeable silence throughout the data. I completed this line-by-line narrative coding process on an ongoing basis and used the codes I developed from each week’s data to inform subsequent observations I made and additional rounds of interviews I conducted.

With the assistance of NVivo 8, I then aggregated the line-by-line codes into broader themes. Guided by CRT, I paid particular attention to how systems of privilege and oppression created dominant narratives as well as counterstories regarding how students developed toward critical consciousness. Drawing upon Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016a) advice for analyzing the intersectionality of racial and ethnic identity development, I conceptualized participants’ racial and ethnic identities as “inseparable yet not conflated” (p. 48) and considered how the classroom and university context shaped meanings of race and ethnicity. Recognizing the connections between and contextual nature of race and ethnicity helped me identify which participants’ narratives served as counterstories and avoid automatically associating the act of counterstorytelling with a particular racial or ethnic group of students.

In addition, as I generated broader themes, I used the technique of intertextuality to interpret participants’ stories within the context of sociocultural narratives. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2009), intertextuality involves identifying narrative influences that help shape what stories participants tell and how they tell them. For example, during interviews, I listened for language from course readings and videos that was helping frame how participants were making meaning of complex social issues. I also attended to
how discourses at the institutional and national level were shaping how students were making meaning of themselves in relation to their societies.

Throughout the analysis process, I read and re-read the data to continuously refine the themes based on direct interpretation. As Jones et al. (2014) explained, “direct interpretation emphasizes individual participants in each case as a meaning unit in and of itself” (p. 98). Finally, as I developed findings, I worked to draw naturalistic generalizations to allow readers to vicariously experience participants’ stories and evaluate how participants’ experiences relate to that of students and educators in other contexts. By analyzing narratives at both an individual and societal level, I was able to provide a rich, contextualized case study of how interactions between individual and environmental factors influenced student participants’ development toward critical consciousness.

**Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

The traditional criteria for evaluating the validity of research within the human sciences stem from the positivist research paradigm in which researchers believe an objective reality and absolute truth exist and seek to discover truth through a priori methods (Lather, 2007). As Lincoln (1995) noted, the traditional criteria include objectivity, reliability, internal validity, and external validity. But, as Lather (2007) explained, the traditional criteria as a whole are at odds with interpretivist and critical theory research paradigms. For example, Glesne (2011) noted that researchers “cannot create criteria to ensure that something is ‘true’ or ‘accurate’ if [they] believe concepts are socially constructed” (p. 49). In addition, Lincoln (1995) noted that according to critical theory epistemologies, “texts that claim whole and complete truth or that claim to
present universal, grand, metanarrative, or generalizable knowledge...are themselves specious, inauthentic, and misleading” (p. 280). The traditional, positivist-based criteria are irrelevant at best and counterproductive at worst for research grounded in interpretivist and critical theory.

As a result, researchers working within interpretivist and critical theory research paradigms have reconceptualized validity to better fit their respective assumptions about reality and truth (e.g., Lather, 1986; Lincoln, 1995; Richardson, 2000; Scheurich, 1996). These various reconceptualizations of validity open up new possibilities and responsibilities for what counts as rigorous, ethical research. Although the specific definition of and criteria for validity depend on the specific assumptions and aims of the research paradigm guiding a study, interpretivist and critical theory research paradigms in general seek to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process and findings. Trustworthiness refers to the quality and credibility of the study (Glesne, 2011; Jones et al., 2014).

For interpretivist-based studies, key trustworthiness criteria include (but are not limited to) honoring participants’ voices, capturing the richness and complexity of lived experiences and social contexts, and creating a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participants (Jones et al., 2014; Lincoln, 1995). I met these criteria through the strategies of triangulation, thick description, and member checks. Glesne (2011) defined triangulation as the “use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives” (p. 49). This study involved multiple data-collection methods (e.g., journal entries, semi-structured interviews), multiple sources (e.g., students, educators), and multiple theoretical
perspectives (e.g., interpretivism, critical theory). Through triangulation, I obtained data regarding diverse perspectives on and multiple layers of developmental processes, which allowed me to examine the complexities of students and their learning environments. In addition, triangulation provided the foundation for the second trustworthiness strategy of thick description. Jones et al. (2014) explained that thick description draws readers into the research setting and allows them to understand the cultural nuances and patterns within the setting. Schwandt (2007) clarified that the description is thick due not to the amount of detail it contains but rather based on the interpretive nature whereby the description serves to explain the meanings and intentions associated with participants’ lived experiences. In addition, thick description assists with transferability. Discussing the concept of transferability, Schwandt (2007) explained:

Case-to-case transfer, an activity that is the responsibility of the reader of research, can be accomplished if the [researcher] provides sufficient detail about the circumstances of the situation or case that was studied so that readers can engage in reasonable but modest speculation about whether findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances. (p. 127)

Finally, I used member checks to help foster a reciprocal relationship with participants. In general, member checking involves sharing findings with participants to ensure the findings resonate with their lived experiences (Jones et al., 2014). I engaged educators and students in the member-checking process throughout the study. In particular, I provided educators with summaries of my analysis of each set of weekly reflection papers and invited them to share comments or clarifications. Also, I explicitly designed the third interview as a way to engage educators and students in the member-checking process.
process. Through the third interview, I presented preliminary findings to participants through a grounded survey. In a grounded survey, researchers develop items based on the data they have collected and analyzed as a way to gain additional reactions to and check interpretations of the data (see Ripley, 2013, pp. 220-221 and Davis, 1997 for further discussion of grounded survey techniques).

Because this study was also guided by critical theory, I addressed key trustworthiness criteria for research “openly committed to a more just social order” (Lather, 1986, p. 66). Two trustworthiness criteria associated with critical theory include (1) transparency regarding one’s biases, purposes, and positionalities as a researcher and (2) identification of counterpatterns as well as convergences within the data. I used reflexivity—or what Lincoln (1995) termed critical subjectivity—throughout data collection and analysis to be aware of and transparent about myself as a researcher, my research purposes and processes, and my positionality within the research context. Lincoln (1995) explained that reflexivity “enables the researcher to begin to uncover dialectic relationships, array and discuss contradictions within the stories being recorded, and move with research participants toward action” (p. 283). Also, as Lather (1986) noted, reflexivity “gives some indication of how a priori theory has been changed by the logic of the data” (p. 67) so that readers can see how the conclusions a researcher draws are grounded in the data. By engaging in ongoing critical reflection, I monitored how my perspectives and social identities intermingled with those of participants and influenced how I collected and interpreted data. For example, I was particularly cognizant of how participants of Color would view the process of sharing their experiences about race and racism with me as a White woman. I looked to participants of Color to decide how much
detail to share so as not to impose the burden of educating others about race and racism on them. In addition, I made sure to discuss race and racism with White participants as well.

I began the critical reflexive process by articulating my positionality, which appears in the next section of this chapter. I continued this reflexive process throughout my study and incorporated relevant insights into my findings to make readers aware of the particular perspectives I brought to the research and how my role as a researcher contributed to the context of the case and the findings I reached. To address the second trustworthiness criteria associated with critical theory, I again used triangulation; yet, rather than looking only for confirmation among the different methods, sources, and theoretical perspectives, I also looked for ways in which the data reflected different lived experiences. Identifying and analyzing such differences were essential for understanding how systems of privilege and oppression influenced participants’ development toward critical consciousness.

Collectively, these strategies enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of my study. It is important to acknowledge, though, that these strategies did not serve to eliminate challenges. Due to the relational nature of qualitative research in general and case study research in particular, the task of doing research was far more complex than implementing a series of technical methods (Glesne, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). As I interacted with participants, an array of challenges arose. For example, I found it difficult at times to balance the inherent power dynamics between my role as a researcher and participants’ roles as educators and students. Also, unexpected events occurred during class sessions for which I had not accounted in the research design—the lead
educator was grappling with health issues and a pivotal class session was cancelled due to a campus crisis, for example. Yet, my commitment to reciprocity and reflexivity allowed me to work through challenges. In effect, trustworthiness strategies provided a guide for producing rigorous, ethical research amidst uncertainties and complexities.

**My Positionality as a Researcher**

According to Jones et al. (2014), “*positionality describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic*” (p. 26). Focusing on the relational nature of positionality, Madison (2012) explained:

Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we [as researchers] direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to others* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others. We are not simply subjects, we are subjects in dialogue with others. (p. 10)

My positionality related to this study centers on three key areas: my social identities and sociocultural background, my own development toward critical consciousness, and my involvement with service-learning as both a student and an educator.

In terms of my social identities, I identify as a White, able-bodied, heterosexual woman from a lower middle-class socioeconomic background. Within a U.S. context, these identities—particularly my race—grant me privilege. As McIntosh (2004) explained, privilege affords me unearned advantages that allow me to feel at home in the world and escape the dangers that others endure. The privilege associated with my social identities, along with my experiences growing up in Topeka, Kansas, shaped my initial understanding of diversity. Although the capital city of Topeka lies less than 70 miles
from the metropolitan area of Kansas City, it has several characteristics of a rural Midwestern community. For example, many families live in or near Topeka for generations. As I was growing up, the world around me seemed stable and, at times, static. My parents passed down the beliefs and values they had learned from their parents, seeing little need for change or individual adaptation. Within my family, it was assumed that my primary language would be English, that I would be a devout Protestant, and that I would identify as a heterosexual female. Other sexual orientation and gender identities remained invisible during my childhood and were labeled as wrong during my adolescence. Race also remained invisible given the predominantly White neighborhood in which I lived and schools I attended. Overall, within my hometown culture, homogeneity was highly valued.

Through a range of high school experiences, though, I began to realize some of the limitations of my hometown and grew increasingly eager to step beyond my comfort zone. As I entered college at the University of Missouri-Columbia during the fall of 2000, I set out to achieve two overarching goals: become a health/science journalist and become open-minded. While my first goal stemmed from my involvement in yearbook and experiences in science courses throughout high school, my second goal stemmed from the stereotypes I feared I had inherited by growing up in a seemingly homogeneous environment. The negative connotation of such stereotypes compelled me to seek out experiences in which I could learn about people different from me. For example, I chose to participate in an interest group for first-year students that focused on cross-cultural journalism because it included an anthropology course, and I enrolled in a section of English that focused on Native American literature. Also, my college roommate was a
Black woman from an urban environment whose perspective on many issues—including the 2000 presidential election—differed from my own, so I focused on listening carefully to her perspective as we engaged in conversations. Although I was not yet aware of systems of privilege and oppression, I actively sought out opportunities to interact with diverse others and explore diverse ideas. In essence, my first year of college allowed me to begin developing toward critical consciousness.

My development toward critical consciousness continued through college and graduate school. Originally, my career goals involved writing health/science stories for a major magazine or newspaper. Yet, there typically were not enough health/science news events in Columbia, Missouri, to keep me busy as a student reporter, so I ended up reporting on a wide range of issues. By interviewing people from diverse backgrounds, I came to recognize the value of looking at issues from multiple perspectives and learned to seek out (rather than avoid) differences of opinion. Also, during college, I served as a peer advisor in Residence Life; through this role, I helped facilitate a first-year seminar course and co-curricular programs that promoted awareness and understanding of diversity, and I discovered a passion for helping build inclusive learning communities and fostering development among college students. Thus, I shifted my career goals toward the field of student affairs. At this point in my developmental journey toward critical consciousness, I recognized how different backgrounds and perspectives enhanced opportunities for learning. Nonetheless, I had not yet connected individual acts of discrimination I witnessed with larger systems of privilege and oppression.

Through my graduate coursework in Miami University’s Student Affairs and Higher Education program, I had the opportunity to deeply examine how systems of
privilege and oppression operate within collegiate contexts to create dominant and marginalized groups. Moreover, I engaged in substantive personal reflection regarding my own identities, relationships, and beliefs and values. With the help of supportive peers and educators, I gradually came to understand the structural nature of inequities, particularly related to access to and engagement in higher education. Once I understood the structural nature of inequities, I felt far better equipped to work with diverse students in my role as a student affairs educator. Finally, I felt able to not just hope for but also actively contribute to social justice. Being able to enact my emerging commitment to social justice struck me as more important for the type of educator I wanted to be and the world in which I wanted to live than any particular content knowledge I had gained throughout my educational experiences. As a result, I saw the ability to enact commitments to social justice—which my doctoral studies have led me to realize stems from critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973; Landreman et al., 2007)—as an essential outcome of college.

Based on my undergraduate and graduate educational experiences, I hold two core assumptions about how development toward critical consciousness occurs. First, I assume that interactions with diverse others are necessary—but not sufficient—for the development of critical consciousness. My ability to understand societal inequities at a structural level emerged only once I intentionally analyzed systems of privilege and oppression and studied how power works to legitimize some identities and ideologies while marginalizing others. Second, I assume that development toward critical consciousness depends in part on support from both peers and educators. That is, I believe development occurs through collaboration. Throughout this study, I consciously
and consistently monitored how these assumptions influenced my data collection and analysis. Although I do not believe it is possible to eliminate the influence of these assumptions, I do believe it is important to be transparent about them and willing to change them if or as the data warrant.

A final aspect of my positionality related to this study is my involvement in service-learning. Throughout my undergraduate experience, I engaged in a variety of community service experiences. For example, I tutored children at a local elementary school and participated in an Alternative Spring Break trip to Chicago that involved working for a community resource center. Although such experiences included reflection and discussion, none of them integrated doing service with analyzing larger social issues. For instance, I never stopped to consider why my fellow volunteers and I tutored only at particular schools. In this sense, the service experiences in which I participated as an undergraduate were not critical service-learning experiences. The different types of collegiate service experiences became clearer to me in graduate school when I took a seminar course focused on how to facilitate service-learning experiences. Through this seminar, I recognized some of the key limitations of my previous service experiences and began to consider how to design service experiences for undergraduates in a way that would allow them to reflect on systems of privilege and oppression. Subsequently, in my professional role with Miami’s University Honors Program, I incorporated service into several undergraduate seminars I facilitated. My experiences doing and facilitating service led me to see service-learning as a pedagogy that provided great potential for development but that also came with immense challenge. Some students would demonstrate development throughout the semester and eventually be able to connect their
service experiences to larger social issues while others students would end up, as Jones (2002) explained, “cling[ing] tenaciously to previously held…stereotypes” (p. 11). My desire to figure out how to help more students learn to let go of stereotypes and experience development through service-learning led me to this study.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described the methodology for this study on how dynamic interactions between undergraduate students and their learning environments influence their development toward critical consciousness. I first explained how interpretivism and critical theory, specifically CRT, provide the theoretical foundation for this study and how case study represents an appropriate methodology. I then explained how I collected data through multiple methods including participant-observation, document and artifact analysis, semi-structured interviews, and journal entries and how I analyzed data via narrative inquiry. Finally, I discussed how I enhanced the trustworthiness of this study, and I described my positionality as a researcher. These two final sections showed how I ensured the validity of this research regarding undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this case study was to examine how undergraduate students develop toward critical consciousness within the context of a critical service-learning course. To guide this study, I focused on addressing two specific sets of research questions including the following: (1a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments promote development toward critical consciousness? (1b) How do these types of interactions help students develop critical consciousness? (2a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments inhibit development toward critical consciousness? (2b) How do these types of interactions stall or interfere with students’ development toward critical consciousness? I grounded my methodology upon the respective tenets of interpretivism and CRT to co-construct knowledge with participants while attending specifically to how systems of privilege and oppression influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness.

Through narrative inquiry, I developed a thick description of the developmental ecology of the case (i.e., Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s\(^8\) section of LEAD 2100 offered during fall 2016 semester). Also, I identified common refrains regarding what helped students to see their social worlds and their societal roles as more complex than they originally thought. Guided by CRT’s tenet of counterstorytelling, I identified dominant narratives and counterstories (i.e., stories that served to counter conventional notions of race and

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\(^8\) All participants’ names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.
provide a more nuanced understanding of how race influenced students’ development within LEAD 2100) within each common refrain. Because the common refrains arose from and can only be understood within the specific context of LEAD 2100, I begin this chapter by describing key components of the developmental ecology of the course including the educators, students, and curriculum related to critical consciousness. Then, I discuss five refrains that resounded within the data regarding interactions that influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. The five refrains include the following: (1) bringing in background beliefs regarding the scope of the world’s injustice, (2) connecting with community members within real-world contexts, (3) dispelling the illusion of unity among racially and ethnically diverse peers, (4) moving from debating to dialoguing about social issues, and (5) focusing on individual efforts rather than collective action.

Throughout the findings, I include vignettes that describe not only how development toward critical consciousness occurred but also the contexts in which this development took place. The vignettes, which are denoted with italicized text, allow readers to vicariously experience the developmental processes I observed so that they can see, hear, and feel how students and educators interacted with one another and with their contexts. As Eisner (1998) noted, “One of the most useful of human abilities is the ability to learn from the experience of others” (p. 202). I use the vignettes to help meet the heuristic aim of case study research and engage readers in the process of learning from this research. To provide multiple perspectives on and angles of the scenes I describe in the vignettes, I integrate multiple data sources including field notes from participant-observation, students’ reflections from written assignments, and students’
comments. Also, I integrate description of both content and format of the course because, as Neumann (2014) explained, what students are learning as well as how they are learning it are important to educational practice.

Within the vignettes, I infuse my own voice at times to lay bare my involvement in the scenes and my role as storyteller. According to Britzman (1991), “the retelling of another’s story is always a partial telling, bound not only by one’s perspective but also by the exigencies of what can and cannot be told” (p. 13). Because my own identities and lived experiences inherently and unavoidably shaped my selection and description of scenes, I work to acknowledge—rather than ignore—my influence on the retelling of others’ stories. Similarly, when relevant to the scene at hand, I describe students’ social identities. Finally, I intentionally use past tense in the vignettes. Although I find present tense useful for creating engaging scenes, I agree with Jones, Holmes, MacRae, and MacLure (2010) that present tense tends to produce “a static or fixed account, one that is inattentive to the fact that all cultures are constantly changing” (p. 484). Thus, I use past tense in all vignettes to indicate that the scenes I am describing are time-bound and dynamic—all but guaranteed to happen differently in subsequent semesters.

Table 4.1 provides specific demographic information for the two educators who consented to participate in the study as well as the nine students who chose to participate in interviews. In effect, Table 4.1 identifies the individuals featured in the vignettes and whose narratives form a substantive basis for the findings.
Table 4.1

Demographic Information for Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Academic Major(s)/Minor(s)</th>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Wells</td>
<td>Lead Educator</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>African American/Native American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elon</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>Public Health and Public Policy</td>
<td>Master’s student</td>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Full Pell Grant recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashely</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Biology/Global public health</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>African American/African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Biology (Pre-medicine)</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Upper-middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Human Development &amp; Family Science</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Lower/middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Human Development &amp; Family Science</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lower/middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberley</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Multi-disciplinary Sustainability</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Low income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Business Marketing/Leadership</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Chemical Engineering/Food Processing, Leadership</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Asian, Vietnamese</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lower/middle class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. All names are pseudonyms. All demographic information is self-reported through an open-ended demographic questionnaire, though the titles of some academic majors and minors have been changed slightly to protect participants’ confidentiality.
The Developmental Ecology of LEAD 2100

Understanding how interactions between LEAD 2100 students and their learning environments influenced their development toward critical consciousness requires first understanding the unique sociocultural, political, and historical contexts of the course. Discussing contextual factors that influenced the nature of the course, Elon, the TA for LEAD 2100, explained:

There were factors that made the class tough, that made the semester tough…the instructor having some really serious medical problems was hard for me, and probably for the students, I would imagine. Missing a week of class because there was [a violent incident] on our campus hit the end of the semester hard, I think for everybody….This is probably one of the craziest political times in American history, and it was literally in our backyard. That I think would complicate most of the student engagement and probably affected me as well and Dr. [Wells].

As Elon’s reflection reveals, students’ development toward critical consciousness occurred within complex ecologies at the course, institutional, and societal levels. At the microsystem level, which involves face-to-face interactions that directly influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993), educators’ and students’ respective backgrounds and identities shaped how they engaged with and interpreted the various ecologies. In this section, I provide a rich description of the LEAD 2100 microsystem and situate this microsystem within the broader mesosystems and exosystems of Midwestern State University.

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9 All names of institution-specific places including the name of the institution itself and names of buildings and landmarks on campus are pseudonyms.
A Study in Contrasts: The LEAD 2100 Educators

I begin discussion of the LEAD 2100 educators with a vignette that highlights my observations during the first class session of LEAD 2100, which served as students’ introduction to the educators. I ground the vignette within my experience to remind readers that I am the narrator and that the observations stem from my particular positionality.

Vignette. As I waited for the city bus—my ride to Midwestern State University’s campus—I grabbed my iPhone out of my bag and pulled up the university’s app. Even after three years of attending classes and working at Midwestern State, I remained unable to navigate the large urban university’s network of nearly 600 buildings without the assistance of a map. Sticky with sweat due to the unusually warm temperatures for late August, I scrolled through the alphabetical listing of buildings to find the location of Smith Hall, where LEAD 2100 was scheduled to meet on Monday afternoons during Autumn 2016 semester. “Okay, it’s right across from the student center,” I thought to myself as I interpreted Smith Hall’s address. “That’s easy enough to find.” I slid my phone back into the front pocket of my bag as the bus approached. Finding the bus more crowded than usual for mid-afternoon, I jostled past fellow passengers to take an empty seat near the back.

Once I arrived at the student center, signs of a new semester caught my eye—a giant banner advertising Midwestern State’s annual career and internship fair ran down the side of the building, local banks staffed booths in the lobby, and groups of students donning Midwestern State athletic apparel enjoyed a late lunch. Laptops, not yet needed for homework assignments, remained tucked into purses and backpacks. As I walked
through the student center toward Smith Hall, I felt myself growing nervous. Reflecting
on the source of my nervousness, I realized that while I knew how to approach the first
day of a college course as a student as well as an educator, I was not quite sure how to
approach it as a researcher. “Is my attire appropriate?” I wondered self-consciously as
I re-evaluated the formality of my red-patterned-blouse, black-slacks outfit. “Will
students see me as an authority figure? What are the implications of them seeing me as
an authority figure?” I questioned silently. Working to push such questions aside, I
wandered past a small café area near the entryway of Smith Hall and made my way down
a short flight of stairs to a classroom in the basement.

No educators were in sight as I entered the classroom, but the Ted Talks
Education video featuring Geoffrey Canada\(^\text{10}\) that was projected on the screen signaled
to me that I was in the right place. “Dr. Wells never misses a chance to help students
think about educational inequities,” I thought, recalling my interactions with Dr. Wells
while completing a previous research project. I took a seat in one of the black plastic
chairs along the back wall and contemplated whether my 13-inch laptop would fit on the
small desk affixed to the right side. Opting for a small aqua-colored journal rather than
my laptop, I began taking notes while additional students filtered into the room. Two
individuals carried stacks of pizza boxes and food in Kroger grocery bags to the
rectangular table at the front of the classroom. A student seated to my right leaned over
and asked, “What’s the special occasion?” Knowing that Dr. Wells sees food as
essential for learning and for building community, I explained that I thought the food
would be a standard part of the class.

One of the individuals bringing in pizza dropped off a final stack of boxes at the table, walked to the computer station, clicked off the video mid-sentence, and noted that he could send the link to anyone who wanted it. “Dr. Wells is in prison right now, so I’m going to go ahead and get started.” If this comment garnered surprise or confusion from students, they hid their emotions well—displaying the poker faces of students not yet sure of their teacher’s expectations. Dressed in a navy blue checkered button-down shirt and dark gray khakis, the student introduced himself as Elon and explained that he was the TA for the course. After providing a brief overview of his academic background—noting that he completed his undergraduate degree at Midwestern State and now was a graduate student in Midwestern State’s College of Public Affairs and School of Public Health—Elon turned to the course syllabus projected on the screen. “Are you in the right place? Am I in the right place?” he questioned. Based on his serious tone, I could not decipher whether the questions were rhetorical or real. A few minutes later, Dr. Wells arrived. Walking to the front of the classroom, she announced that she just came from prison—not because she needs to be in prison but because she does work there with kids. She pointed to her cane and explained that she is now disabled because she almost died over the summer.

“Did anyone have a shitty summer?” Dr. Wells queried. A student raised her hand and, when Dr. Wells called on her, explained that her summer was shitty because she had to wake up at 4:50 a.m. and work 10-hour days. “My shitty beats your shitty,” Dr. Wells responded. “Like, almost dying is shitty.” Laughter and chatter among students ensued. Seemingly encouraged by students’ animation, Dr. Wells continued to discuss details of her health. She drew attention to the defibrillator that hung by her
waist and explained that she wrote “all the feedback” to the manufacturers of the defibrillator because the device had sometimes tried to shock her unnecessarily. This would count as the first of several critiques Dr. Wells would share about her healthcare. In this class session, though, the critique’s entertainment value outweighed its educational value. A jovial tone replaced the more serious tone Elon had set a few moments earlier.

Dr. Wells’s attire further set her apart from Elon. She explained, “I’m wearing my Miss Frizzle outfit”—encouraging students to recall the eccentric educator from the popular animated children’s television series The Magic School Bus. The outfit—composed of a black dress patterned with an earth-toned solar system, black leggings bedecked with a vibrantly colored periodic table, and white shoes imprinted with black chemistry symbols—represented how Dr. Wells wants others to interpret her pedagogy. She explained, “If I’m telling you my teaching method and I tell you that it’s Miss Frizzle…. [you] get that, ‘Okay, you’re out of the box. You wear crazy things. Your class is going to be multicultural.’” Articulating how she and Elon approach teaching differently, Dr. Wells noted, “I’m more performance than he is. He’s more like, ‘Here’s the data. Let’s talk about it.’ And I’m like, ‘All right, let’s get you guys motivated.’ It’s a different methodology.” Elon described the difference in terms of level of formality and structure. He explained, “I like to have a plan, like to have structure. That’s consistent with my background, all the things I’ve done, and [Dr. Wells] is very much off the cuff.”

**Dr. Wells, the lead educator.** Indeed, differences in Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s pedagogies are rooted within their different backgrounds and social identities. Dr. Wells identifies as an African American/Native American female who grew up in poverty in a
midsized Midwestern city. With a bachelor’s degree in Women’s Studies, a master’s degree in Higher Education, and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Midwestern State University, she is known on campus for her work supporting students from marginalized student populations, especially women, Black men, and students from Appalachia. Working to capture the impact of the type of holistic counseling she provides to students, she is in the process of collecting narratives from alumni whom she has advised over the years. “Whatever they needed, I was there for,” she noted as she explained the project. “I think I have like 100 responses. It’s pretty significant.”

Dr. Wells began her educational journey at Midwestern State with aspirations of becoming an astrophysicist and working at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), but coursework in women’s studies and sociology, in conjunction with involvement in social activism outside the classroom, prompted her to shift her career plans. “I was marching at the state house…about affirmative action, and I’m like, ‘This is my life,’” she explained. Activism has in fact become her life. Currently, she serves as the Director of Social Activism within Midwestern State’s Office of Student Life. Dr. Wells’s appointment to the director position aligned with a university-wide, interdisciplinary initiative to address poverty, which led to the creation of LEAD 2100. Reflecting on the origins of the course in 2012, Dr. Wells recounted:

I tried to look around to see at first, did other universities offer a course that was taking the student development piece, the service-learning, which I usually refer to more [as] civic engagement, and understanding poverty. Was anyone mixing all that together? A good witch’s educated brew. I didn’t see it. There weren’t really any models….there had been courses that dealt with sociology of poverty,
there’s leadership classes, but there was nothing that was really trying to bring that together at this phase. That’s what I was attempting to do.

Based on Dr. Wells’s affiliation with Midwestern State’s Department of Educational Leadership, the course became connected with a broader category of courses focused on organizational leadership within education but remained open to all undergraduate students. Although the university turned its attention to other critical societal issues such as global food security and infectious diseases in subsequent years, Dr. Wells continued focusing the course on poverty in general and rural poverty in particular while maintaining an emphasis on experiential learning. She explained:

If the charge is “How do we get students to understand poverty in a different way?” I think part of that is I grew up in poverty. It made sense that I want [students] to have an experiential learning component. You don’t know what it’s like unless you’ve been there. I wanted it to be rural because the data show us most people living in poverty are in rural areas.

A commitment to experiential learning represents a key intersection between her background and that of Elon’s.

**Elon, the TA.**  Elon, who identifies as a White, non-Hispanic male who grew up in Appalachia and is a full Pell Grant recipient, realized the value of experiential learning as an undergraduate student. While earning a bachelor’s degree in molecular biology, he participated in and provided leadership for civic engagement initiatives that Dr. Wells coordinated. In essence, his understanding of how to address social issues stems from firsthand experiences. Reflecting on his undergraduate experience, he explained, “I
started volunteering at a library here in [Collegeville][11]….really liked doing that, but I wanted to have a more formal program, formal relationship between [Midwestern State] and the library system, so I made one.” For inspiration, Elon looked to Carl Sagan’s description in Cosmos of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, which served as a hub of learning and collaboration. Eager to re-create a hub of learning and collaboration, Elon envisioned Collegeville’s well-established, community-oriented libraries as a place where university members could help meet children’s needs. He explained:

> It’s good that [the library] is a physical space that exists, and [kids] can come and hang out. It’s better if you have some healthy food that you can give them. It’s better if you can get some young people from the university in there to build relationships, build social capital, generate an interest in higher education. It’s even better, I think, if you can have some really exciting university affiliates coming in….It’s like, “Can you take the university, put it in a bottle, and open it up in the library space?”

After working to bring the university to local libraries throughout his undergraduate experience, Elon spent a year working with a Boys and Girls Club in a large metropolitan city in New Jersey.

Elon returned to Midwestern State during fall 2016 to begin pursuing master’s degrees in Public Health and Public Policy. Hoping to gain teaching experience to advance his career goal of working in a university setting, he was excited to meet Dr. Wells’s need of a TA for LEAD 2100. Nonetheless, given that he committed to serving

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[11] Names of geographical locations are pseudonyms, with the exception of Appalachia. The region of Appalachia is identified given that it represented an essential part of the LEAD 2100 content regarding rural poverty.
as a TA less than two weeks before the start of the course, he began the semester somewhat unsure of how to carry out his role—noting, “I have my own ideas, but I don’t want to conflict with what [Dr. Wells] has going on.” Another layer of uncertainty for Elon involved the course goals. He explained:

> It’s hard for me to discern what the desired outcomes are from an institutional standpoint because the name of the course is one thing and the subtitle of the course is a totally different thing. It’s supposed to be a team and organizational leadership course….That’s the name of the course. That’s what the students signed up for. The unofficial title of the course is [How to Address Poverty]. Although Dr. Wells seemed unconcerned by the mismatch between the official and unofficial titles of the course, Elon believed the mismatch would create challenges. Almost every student in the class, based on our first class, signed up for a leadership course. [Dr. Wells] is…teaching a poverty course. I’m somewhere in the middle, and now I feel like I’m in this position where I need to bridge between two expectations.

As a TA new to the course with a preference for formality and structure, Elon felt a responsibility to sticking to the official course description for LEAD 2100 in ways Dr. Wells did not.

**In Pursuit of a Leadership Elective and a Great Professor: The LEAD 2100 Students**

This section introduces the students enrolled in Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s section of LEAD 2100 for fall 2016. The vignette highlights students’ interactions with the
educators on the first day of LEAD 2100 and the ways in which they introduced themselves within the course.

Vignette. “What percentage of Americans have a college education?” Dr. Wells asked the group of LEAD 2100 students as she began what she referred to as the “Oprah-style give-away” part of class. After several students ventured guesses, Dr. Wells indicated that the student who guessed 30 percent came closest to providing the correct answer. She pulled a water bottle from her bag, acknowledged she had gotten the water bottle for free at one of the local medical centers, and handed it to the student as a prize. “What does this mean for policy?....Who should be making decisions?” Dr. Wells queried as she interjected commentary about her recent experiences with the healthcare system.

Continuing the “Oprah-style give-away” session, Dr. Wells asked, “What is the number of students in [Collegeville] public schools?” Using students’ first few guesses to establish a range for the correct answer, Dr. Wells noted that the number is higher than 25,000 but lower than 400,000. A student who offered 50,000 became the lucky recipient of Dr. Wells’s second free water bottle.

Transitioning into discussion of the course goals, Dr. Wells indicated that the course is intellectually challenging but not meant to make students anxious. She took a seat near the computer station and thus yielded the floor to Elon. Elon began by explaining, “You may not come up with answers in this class, but you may come up with better questions.”

“There’s no required text, but you will buy food for a class session,” Elon noted as he projected the first page of the syllabus on the screen. “We’ll create a sign-up
sheet.” As he scrolled down the syllabus to the list of assignments, the words “Weekly reflection papers” moved to the center of the screen. According to Elon, the reflection papers are meant to be relevant, interesting, and manageable. “Don’t turn in shit.” Dr. Wells added. She continued, “Leadership is about building community, so you should be quoting someone from class in your reflections.” Elon reiterated the no-bullshit policy for reflection papers. Both Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s liberal use of curse words struck me as rare but refreshing for a collegiate classroom. I learned later that the student seated to my right, Stephanie, agreed. Discussing Dr. Wells’s teaching style, Stephanie explained, “She communicates in a way that everyone can relate to her, and she’s funny and down to earth.” In a final effort to encourage students to take the weekly reflection papers seriously, Dr. Wells explained that students will gain transferrable skills from completing the papers. To illustrate her point, she noted that she had just come from a meeting that had required her to summarize material quickly and concisely. “Think about it as a skill set you’re developing for later in life.” Based on students’ neutral facial expressions, I suspected that the transferrable-skills argument—which seemed to be ubiquitous at Midwestern State—fell a bit flat.

After reminding students not to use their phones in class “because it is rude,” Elon moved to discussing the field trip, which would involve going to Appalachia. Amidst a pause in this discussion, Dr. Wells announced, “We didn’t do introductions. Back up, back up. That’s just awful.” She then motioned to the student seated in the upper left-hand corner of the semi-circular arrangement of desks to start the round of introductions. Seemingly well-versed in this first-day-of-class ritual, students took turns stating their name, major, class year, and reason for enrolling in the course. From the
introductions, I learned that nearly half of the 26 students enrolled in LEAD 2100 who signed informed consent forms for this research study were majoring in sports administration, which is housed within the College of Education. In turn, most students explained that they were taking the course to fulfill an elective for their sports administration major or, in some cases, to complete a leadership studies minor. Perhaps as to be expected, students by and large found their way to the course based on an interest in completing degree program requirements. Nonetheless, I noted that several students of Color indicated that their friends had recommended the course to them due to Dr. Wells’s teaching style. For these students in particular, Dr. Wells was a key reason for their interest in the course. I wondered if this helped explain why the course appeared more racially diverse than Midwestern State’s undergraduate student population. With only 5.5 percent of undergraduate students on Midwestern State’s main campus identifying their race as African American, a representative sample would have led to only one or two Black students being in the course. As the semester progressed, I learned that this course was indeed unique in terms of both its racial and ethnic diversity.

To conclude the introductions, Dr. Wells noted, “Your charge is how to bring the expertise you already have into this class.”

The ubiquitous appeal of leadership. Given LEAD 2100’s official title—Organizational Leadership—students interested in leadership populated the course. Regardless of their specific major, many students saw leadership as important for their future careers. Chad, who identifies as a White male, explained his reason for enrolling in the course:
I’m a first year, so I haven’t been here very long. I was in a program called [U-LEAD] that was kind of like a move-in early program, and we learned about different ways of being a leader, that sort of thing, and that’s how I found this class….

I needed some credits, because this first semester I’m mainly doing prerequisites, that kind of thing, so I needed to just fill up my schedule, and it sounded like no one looks at leadership and says, “Oh, that’s a bad quality” or “That’s not something I want.” The person in charge of [U-LEAD] emailed us and said, “Here’s this class if anyone’s interested.” I figured why not? I’m not sure what else I would’ve taken in place of it, so it’s just—I guess—the opportunity was there.

Sarah, who identifies as a White female, was also drawn to the course due to her interest in leadership, but as a senior, she had committed to completing a leadership studies minor and had taken previous courses related to leadership. Describing her decision to pursue a leadership studies minor and enroll in LEAD 2100, she noted:

I kind of decided on a leadership studies minor quickly because I found that I had about 15 extra credit hours that I needed to get in. I came in with 15 from postsecondary, so I had like 15 more hours to fill to get the required 120 hours for graduation, and I was running out of my major courses to take to do that, so I figured I might as well pick up a minor. I looked through the list, and leadership has always been kind of interesting to me, and I enjoy the background study of it. That’s kind of how I landed on that one, and I’ve really enjoyed it so far….this course fell under one of the categories that I still needed to fill a credit for.
I kind of researched all the courses, looked at their descriptions, saw this one, [it] sounded interesting, so that’s how I landed on this one.

Like Chad and Sarah, several students enrolled in the course with hopes of honing their knowledge and skills related to leadership.

**The connection to a charismatic professor of Color.** In contrast to Sarah’s approach of starting her search with a degree program requirement in mind, Jessica started her search with a professor in mind. Jessica, who identifies as an African American female, explained:

I took a women’s leadership class last spring with [Dr. Wells] and she teaches it. I just like the way that she teaches and the way that she interacts with students. Just like outside of the classroom, I like [Dr. Wells] as a person. I feel like…she exemplifies a lot of the things that I like as far as being involved in the community and being an advocate for those who don’t have a voice….

I looked her name up first to see if she was offering any classes this semester and she was; it was the poverty class. I was like, “I’m still learning more about poverty because I’m not completely informed about it.” I was like, “I’ll take her class.”

Chris, who identifies as an African American male, similarly explained, “I had heard good reviews from [Dr. Wells], and I found that a lot of the times in school it’s about the professor that you have and building that relationship with them, and I thought that was somebody that I could build a relationship with.”

Whether students knew Dr. Wells prior to the start of LEAD 2100 or met her for the first time as she walked into LEAD 2100 in her Miss Frizzle outfit, they expressed a
desire to learn about poverty from her. Despite the mismatch in expectations between the content students initially expected and the content Dr. Wells and Elon planned to deliver, all but one student remained enrolled in the course—a phenomenon that surprised me based on my previous experience as an academic advisor. The first set of weekly reflection papers showed students’ adaptability and willingness to shift their expectations after the first day of class. Many students wrote that they expected to learn more about poverty and its effects on families and communities. For example, one student explained, “I hope to gain more of a knowledge on what poverty is and the issues that go on in our world with poverty today.” Several students remained eager to learn about leadership but now couched this desire within the context of poverty. A student noted that she hoped to learn “to be able to lead when dealing with adverse situations or people or communities” by gaining knowledge about elements of poverty to which she might be blind. On the whole, the first day of LEAD 2100 had successfully hooked students and helped them see this class as a worthwhile investment of their time and effort.

#Woke: Critical Consciousness Within the Context of LEAD 2100

In this section, I provide an empirically based conceptualization of critical consciousness—one that stems from the learning outcomes the educators established and worked to help students meet within LEAD 2100. Through the vignette, I weave together Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s explanations of critical consciousness with the verbal and behavioral manifestations of critical consciousness I observed during the fifth class.

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12 I chose to give pseudonyms only to the nine students who kept weekly journal entries and participated in the series of semi-structured interviews, along with a few other students who played key roles in the scenes I describe in the vignettes, to allow readers to easily identify the central actors in the case study. Also, the use of pseudonyms for these students serves to acknowledge the amount of time and energy they invested in sharing their perspectives for the purpose of this research.
session, which provided the first substantive opportunity for students to work together to address a complex social issue.

**Vignette.** “I think critical consciousness means you’re, what do the kids say? Hashtag woke?” Dr. Wells explained. “It’s that you understand yourself better, that you understand someone else better, and you understand the world better.” From Elon’s perspective, becoming “woke” involves moving away from polarization. He explained:

> What I’m afraid of in terms of outcomes for students is blasting off about some issue on social media and feeling that that is the appropriate way to effect social change, let’s say. Whereas I’m of the opinion that effecting social change involves being engaged in your library system, being involved in local schools, understanding how your local food system works. It’s so much more than what I think you typically see from the extremely polarized folks, who would like it to be very simple. There’s no way to be polarized if you see something as complex. There’s no pole on a web, on a network. There’s no way to be at a pole there.

You really have to dig in and see what it looks like from different perspectives.

For both Dr. Wells and Elon, critical consciousness was more of a dynamic process than a static outcome—a way of consistently engaging with the complexities of social issues within a community. Being critically conscious meant thinking critically and collectively about how problems and solutions intertwine. Elon noted that critical consciousness allows students to examine an issue “like it’s a tree or something” to see “where the roots lead and where the branches lead” and how things interconnect.

Each week, as I engaged in participant-observation, I watched for signs of this type of examination of the issues at hand. While observing class sessions and reviewing
field notes, I asked myself, “Are students exploring where both the roots and branches lead? When working in groups, do they stand at poles or form networks as they share their perspectives and propose solutions?” During the first few content-laden weeks where educators’ and video narrators’ voices took center stage, discussion among students remained relatively sparse. But during week 5, students’ increasing familiarity with one another, combined with a highly interactive peer-led discussion activity, helped students grow more willing to share their perspectives. By the time Elon began facilitating a small-group activity midway through the class session, several students had already contributed questions and personal narratives to the discussion regarding food insecurity.

Returning from a break, students munched on snacks their peers had brought while stashing away their phones and resettling into their seats. Dr. Wells and two students wrapped up their conversation about an opportunity to work at the local Boys and Girls Club. A PowerPoint slide projected on the screen behind where Elon stood read “Case study: Barrenton” in red font. Elon raised his voice slightly to gain students’ attention and explained that Barrenton is a neighborhood adjacent to downtown Collegeville in which 60 percent of residents live below the poverty line. For further context, Elon noted that Barrenton has a high home vacancy rate and no major grocery stores. As he clicked the mouse at the computer station, a new PowerPoint slide indicated that students needed to assume the role of citizens of Barrenton and work in groups of seven to decide upon one specific action to reduce food insecurity in Barrenton. Elon explained that giving food to people would not be an acceptable solution because it represents a Band-Aid approach and noted that people who live in
Barrenton have a strong aversion to being on welfare. Students counted off by four and re-arranged their desks to form small circles with their groups. Moving my desk up a few inches to be within earshot of one of the groups, I began observing how this particular group planned to help solve Barrenton’s food insecurity issue.

“How about community gardens?” one student suggested.

“Maybe open up a grocery store in Barrenton?” another student proposed.

To advocate for the community garden idea, a group member discussed her experience helping grow a community vegetable garden on a recent university-sponsored urban immersion trip in which she had participated.

“How do we go about the educational process? Not everyone knows how to grow food,” a student noted. Other students followed suit by raising additional questions: “Where will they get the stuff?” .... “What about the change in seasons?” .... “How do we get people on board?”

Through deliberation, students decided community members could learn to grow food by using a computer at the public library to Google the process. In turn, they concluded—tentatively and somewhat haphazardly—that building a greenhouse could help address the issue of temperature fluctuations due to seasonal changes. And, to get people on board, they indicated that they would need to talk to the most influential person in the community, the equivalent of Detective Lou Toback in American Gangster. Not familiar with this character, I nonetheless understood that students saw the need to identify community leaders to help with implementing their proposed solution.

Seemingly satisfied with the solution of a community garden, the group grew quiet. The lull afforded the opportunity to overhear Elon’s critique of a nearby group’s
proposed solution, which also involved developing a community garden. “But there’s no protein,” a student in the group I was observing announced. “The community needs something substantive.” “Bring an Aldi’s to the community,” a student suggested in response. “We need to make the food affordable,” another student stated.

Amidst students’ conversation about how to make the food at a grocery store affordable, Elon joined the group and asked, “What are you thinking?” After describing their transition from a community garden to a grocery store, Elon said, “Let’s go back to your first idea. How would that work?” Elon reminded them that there is low home ownership in Barrenton and that community members may not be able to grow a garden on rental property. He then tempered this concern by noting that there are many benefits to a community garden. With Elon’s feedback in mind, group members proposed combining their ideas and recommending both a community garden and a grocery store.

As Elon meandered toward another group, a student questioned, “So we can’t do either a community garden or a grocery store?” He seemed to be under the impression that Elon had shot down both of their ideas. “It’s not that we can’t, but there are lots of obstacles,” a peer explained. The group remained immersed in the obstacles and undecided about a solution as Elon walked to the front of the room and asked for students’ attention.

The discovery of complex roots of poverty and the need for equally complex solutions. Throughout the semester, students became increasingly willing and able to recognize the complexities not only of social issues in and of themselves but also proposed solutions to such issues. In the final reflection paper for the course, a student explained:
I think that my understanding of social complexity has greatly changed over the semester. I found out that our community faces a lot of problems and many of the problems are hard to fix because they have so many sides to them. I found out that many of these problems need to have multiple answers just to be able to fix them.

Another student wrote:

I think my entire idea of poverty was enhanced this semester. Everyone knows about poverty but it takes really analyzing it in different aspects to realize it is so complex. Like before this class I may have been quick to say you need to give schools more money, that’s the reason we have these dropout factories. But it’s more complex than that.

In several cases, students provided specific examples of the intertwined nature of the social issues they had discussed in the course. For example, one student noted, “I never realized that our incarceration rates and system are so high and unsuccessful because of our broken education system.” Overall, students explained that social issues such as educational disparities, food insecurity, and drug use are not as simple as they had thought.

Even students whose lived experiences had provided them with firsthand knowledge of poverty explained that, as a result of LEAD 2100, they now saw poverty as more complex than they initially thought. Ashley explained:

I thought I knew what poverty looked like because I was from the inner city. Then looking at the class, the later parts, I don’t know if I grew up in poverty or not or if it was just in the lower [income] bracket. Poverty is more complex than
what we actually imagine it to be and until we analyze every single part of it, you really don’t know the true severity of your situation.

The course’s focus on rural poverty prompted several students to analyze how geographical context influences both the nature of and solutions to social issues.

Reflecting on differences between rural and urban poverty, Chris noted:

Some things that people value are different….like in [Appalachia] when they said your peak is in high school and they want you to stay at home and they want you to start family early and work in the paper mill, just the experiences that I’ve had with students…a lot of the time when I’m in these urban areas, when you talk to parents and you really get to know them, they don’t want their children to stay in the environment that they’re in.

Ashely contemplated how contextual differences that LEAD 2100 helped her see would influence how she interacted with patients in her future career as an OB-GYN. She explained:

I thought I had this spiel written out for how I would deal with the first teenage kid I had coming through my office who is pregnant. Then, after experiencing this, I’m like, “So what happens if they’re coming from rural America where they’ve been told that this is beautiful”….Coming from an urban background, I felt like I think I have that conversation to relate to, but I’m not going to always be in an urban background. It’s like, “How do I learn to talk to people from these variant backgrounds? Knowing that this is now a viewpoint in that world, how do I make sure they have the right information, but also realize I’ll have to still respect what their cultural views are?”
Students’ lived experiences with poverty provided opportunities for comparison and contrast across contexts, which showed the contextual nature of both the roots of and solutions to poverty.

**The debunking of myths about how race and social class intersect.** In addition to helping some students recognize differences between rural and urban poverty, LEAD 2100’s curriculum prompted students to think more complexly about interconnections between race and social class. Grappling with the interconnection during our second interview, Erica noted:

[Poverty] doesn’t seem like it’s Black and White because there are other poor people that exist. But typically—I don’t know. It makes sense, but then it doesn’t….I just know I’m learning more outside of my own experiences, I guess. I grew up with poor Black people so I’m seeing that there are other people that are poor other than Black people now by taking this class.

Chad, too, grappled with the interconnection between race and social class based on learning more about rural poverty. In our third interview, he explained:

Obviously in these rural towns and things, there’s a huge White majority. These people being some of the most dramatically affected in the country by poverty, it just made me question things. Generally, the White race is sort of seen as a very privileged race. I’m not sure how this affected my perspective, but it’s just interesting to think about that a lot of these people who are most strongly affected by poverty are White….It’s interesting because it’s just not how society portrays poverty. If you asked which race is most affected by poverty, you would never think of White people, when there really are all these sort of forgotten people.
Although students struggled to make sense of the fact that the majority of people who 
live in poverty are White, they nonetheless became more willing and able to avoid 
generalizations about what poverty looks like. As Kimberley noted, “It’s just the norm to 
think if you’re Black, you usually come from poverty, and if you’re White, you usually 
come from a suburban neighborhood, but at the same time, that might not always be the 
case.” Students also saw the need to critique information from the media. Ashely 
explained:

> When you hear most impoverished people live in rural America, I’m like, “No, 
that’s not true because on TV, it’s like it’s here in the hood.” Stuff like that. 
That’s where poverty is. Through the class, it helped debunk that view, and then, 
also help me see that light. Just because it’s being told to you in the 
media…doesn’t mean it’s actually true.

Signs of critical thinking appeared as students realized that their media-informed views of 
poverty were not the only or most accurate views of poverty.

**The realization that effecting social change requires more than wanting to help.** Seeing social issues associated with poverty as complex gave students pause about 
the role they could play in addressing such issues. In our final interview, Kimberley 
explained:

> You can’t just go into something with a specific idea and think you’re going to 
change it instantly….At first I thought I had the solution to some things, but 
there’s just a lot of parts and stakeholders and different sectors and a lot of things 
that have influence that just make it complicated for anyone to just go in and be 
like, “I’m just going to fix this issue, this inequality issue.”
Similarly, Sarah explained that she is less certain about how to start addressing inequities in society because she knows “how complex the inequities are now.” She elaborated:

In a way before taking this class, I felt like, “I can do this. I can do this.” Now after taking the class, I’m like, “Is that really helping those people? Do these people really want help?” That kind of thing, so just really understanding the complexities is like, “Now where do we start?” There’s so many different underlying layers and issues involved with this that I feel like my initial thoughts coming in were just scraping the surface of how to fix these problems….it takes a lot more know-how and just trying through trial and error to figure out what’s going to work out to really address these issues at the root instead of just at the surface.

Less certainty did not mean less willingness to help address inequities; rather, students explained that they now saw the importance of taking time to fully understand an issue. Chad explained:

Normally, you’d think if you want to help someone, it’s not a super tough job. You just find the problem and you do your best to fix it. I’m seeing more now how valuable it is to have this sort of background information…because otherwise, that’s what leads to these well-intended problems, these sort of failures at helping.

In essence, students realized that wanting to help was not the only criterion for developing effective solutions for social issues. As Elon had hoped, they had learned to follow the branches down to the roots.
Interactions That Influenced Development Toward Critical Consciousness

Among the 26 students who consented to participate in this study, along with the two educators and myself, interactions within LEAD 2100 occurred on multiple levels. Students interacted with course materials, groups of their peers, the educators, and myself while also interacting with broader aspects of the university and U.S. society. By using narrative inquiry to analyze the data I collected, I identified five refrains regarding how development toward critical consciousness occurred within LEAD 2100. These five refrains included the following: 1) bringing in background beliefs regarding the scope of the world’s injustice, 2) connecting with community members within real-world contexts, 3) dispelling the illusion of unity among racially and ethnically diverse peers, 4) moving from debating to dialoging about social issues, and 5) focusing on individual efforts rather than collective action. The sequence of the refrains follows the sequence of the curriculum in LEAD 2100 whereby the first refrain represents themes from the beginning of the course and the fifth refrain represents themes from the end of the course.

Ultimately, I found that within each refrain lay a complicated and contextual account of development. No one refrain offered an account of interactions that were universally effective—or, on the other hand, universally ineffective—for fostering development toward critical consciousness. In other words, the refrains did not fall cleanly or clearly into dichotomous categories of effective and ineffective interactions. Rather, each refrain offered an account of interactions that were effective in some cases. Thus, as I describe each refrain, I identify under what conditions and for whom the interactions at hand fostered development toward critical consciousness. I also identify important caveats and nuances to highlight the conditions and students for whom the
interactions proved less effective or unproductive for development toward critical consciousness. Within each refrain, I juxtapose dominant narratives with counterstories to illustrate how systems of privilege and oppression influenced the nature and influence of the given interactions.

**Refrain 1: Bringing in Background Beliefs Regarding the Scope of the World’s Injustice**

The first refrain focuses on how students made meaning of societal inequities as they began fall 2016 semester in LEAD 2100. The vignette, which includes scenes from the second and fourth class sessions, specifically describes how students made meaning of race and racism.

**Vignette.** “Let’s rock ‘n’ roll,” Dr. Wells announced to officially begin the second class session of LEAD 2100. Intent on building community within the course, she explained that if students could remember all of their peers’ names by the end of the semester, she would give them $20. For the most part, students sat in silence—seemingly unsure whether the offer of $20 was real. Dr. Wells explained that each week, the class would begin with the “Sweet-and-Salty” activity. Recognizing this as a common icebreaker with a myriad of other titles—“Highs-and-Lows,” “Roses-and-Thorns,” and “Happys-and-Crappys,” to name but a few—I knew that the general premise of the activity was to identify one positive experience and one negative experience from the previous week.

Dr. Wells directed students to state their name before launching into their “sweet” and “salty” experiences. “Sweet” experiences students shared focused on seeing family and friends during the weekend and having no Monday classes the previous
week due to Labor Day. A few students explained that their “sweet” involved securing an internship for the semester. Several students passed on the opportunity to share a “salty” experience, noting that nothing bad had happened during the past week. Other students described the misfortune they met when they found themselves caught in a thunder storm at the home football game without an umbrella. Complaints of getting wet garnered no sympathy from Dr. Wells. “What, you couldn’t look at your weather app on your phone before the game and see that it was going to rain?” she said sarcastically. Other salty experiences revealed common student concerns: not getting an internship, needing to prepare for the first round of midterm exams, and getting a parking ticket.

For her “salty” experience, Dr. Wells shared that she was recently called a “stupid n-----” on campus. “I’m telling you this because that’s the kind of world we’re living in….I’m so concerned for your generation,” she explained. “What are we doing as allies in this classroom when people throw these things around?” she asked as she concluded the “Sweet-and-Salty” activity and opened up the floor for discussion. A student who described his racial identity as “half White, half Black” and a student who identifies as African American shared stories of racial discrimination they had experienced in Collegeville. Their peers remained attentive but silent. Dr. Wells interjected, “Notice that it is two students of Color who have shared. No one from a dominant group has shared.” Students shifted in their seats and directed their gaze down toward their desks as they actively worked to avoid eye contact with Dr. Wells. Given that it was only the second week of class, I wondered whether any White students would answer Dr. Wells’s indirect request to discuss their experiences with racism. “How
prevalent is the taboo about race and racism in this classroom?” I asked myself amidst the unspoken tension.

Eventually, a student who identifies as a White male explained that he believes one of his friends is a “closeted racist” because his friend says racial slurs when he is around people he thinks agree with him. Positioning himself in opposition to his friend’s beliefs and behaviors, the student noted that he is working on calling out his friend. Dr. Wells thanked the student for taking a risk to share. After two more students shared their personal experiences with or observations of others’ experiences with racism, Dr. Wells issued a challenge to students. During discussions about the upcoming presidential election, she wanted students to ask their friends to explain their perspectives when they made racist comments. “To what extent are students willing and able to do this?” I wondered. “How will this class help them become willing and able to do this?” I wrote in my notes to link Dr. Wells’s challenge to my research questions.

Two weeks later during a case study regarding environmental injustice, the topics of race and racism re-emerged—now intertwined with issues associated with rural poverty. Midway through the class session, Elon introduced the first of two case studies. He explained that the first case study centered on a governmental decision to dump toxic waste in the poor, rural, predominantly Black community of Warren County, North Carolina. As Elon clicked the play button on the YouTube clip, the narratives of Warren county community members came to life. A Warren County resident explained the nature of the issue: “Because [Warren County] was basically politically impotent, and because it was a poor county, those made for conditions where the state thought that

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it wouldn’t be a problem putting a dump in.” Community members explained that a local Baptist church played a key role in helping community members unite and consider what God required them to do to work toward justice. Describing how the community organized to protest the state’s decision, a Warren County resident explained, “It was the first time in my history that I saw Whites, Blacks, and Native Americans in this county really come together and stand up.”

As the brief eight-minute video concluded, Elon drew students’ attention to the grassroots nature of the movement and asked students to consider the type of leadership involved in the movement. Chris stated, “Leadership in poor communities is really important because people take advantage of poor people.” Validating Chris’s point, Dr. Wells noted, “Some of you may want to quote Chris.” Dr. Wells’s statement seemed to serve as a reminder to students to take notes as many students picked up their pens and began writing in their notebooks. Another student explained that the issue of race was not there because Blacks and Whites came together for the issue. I noted the student’s omission of Native Americans when describing the Warren County protest and wondered how other students interpreted the video in terms of race relations. In students’ reflection papers on the class session, I read a version of Chris’s quote in a total of 16 papers; in heeding Dr. Wells’s advice to quote Chris, students by and large indicated that they believe that poor people are taken advantage of. The issue of whether Black people experience similar injustice often remained unaddressed or unclear. Although one student explained that “the Warren county case is an example of racial inequality,” another student wrote, “Racism was not an issue for the people of Warren County during this [environmental] crisis because they all were focused on the greater good.”
Collectively, students seemed far more ready to see and accept the systemic nature of socioeconomic injustice than of racial injustice. No one had denied racial injustice existed during the class discussion or in their reflection paper; yet, students eagerly clung to the message that Warren County community members came together despite racial differences.

Different socialization regarding racism. Many White students and students of Color alike entered LEAD 2100 with an awareness that racism exists. Yet, how they had developed this awareness differed based on their racial identity.

Prepared for, and increasingly aware of, the systemic nature of racism. When reflecting on experiences with racial injustice, several students of Color explained that they had had experiences in college that confirmed messages from their parents. Erica explained:

[My mom] always told me you’re going to have to work a little bit harder.
You’re going to have to work a little bit harder. I’m like, “Okay, girl. Whatever.” But when I got here [to Midwestern State], I understood exactly what that meant.

Erica came to understand what her mom meant through an experience during her first semester at Midwestern State in which a White classmate noted that students in a scholarship program did not deserve to earn scholarships based on their ACT scores. Recounting the experience, Erica explained how she responded:

I raised my hand, and I directed it at my professor and the entire class. I said, “Well, I am a product of [that scholarship program], and you can’t tell me that I don’t deserve to be here when I’ve been working my ass off since the sixth grade
while you’re thinking about milk and cookies and what you’re going to do.

People are asking you what school you’re going to, not if you’re going to school.
Those are two totally different questions….

In that moment, I was definitely made aware of my Blackness, and then being the only African American in a lot of my classes, being in spaces where I’m the only African American woman comes with its own things, I guess, comes with its own challenges. That was definitely a turning point for me because I’m like it’s my first semester here and y’all sitting here trying to tell me—even the professor because the professor asked a leading question.

Similarly, Chris described seeing the validity of his parents’ messages about racial injustice during his first year of college at another university in the region. Describing his process of deciding whether to join a predominantly White fraternity, Chris noted:

Somehow my dad found out about it. He got really angry. “[The fraternity members] are going to turn on you. They’re just using you like a token.” Stuff like that. I was like, “Nah, they’re cool. I don’t even think I want to join for real.” He’s like, “Nah, you don’t even want to be in that situation. You’re going to burn bridges, and they’re going to get real mad and they’re not going to like you anymore. They’re going to say you’re a n---- and all this stuff. That’s the only reason they want you around.” I was like, “All right. I don’t think that’s the case.”….

It came down to it, and I told them I’m not going to join. They were like, “Fuck you. I went out on a limb to get a Black guy in here.” All this stuff.

Chris added:
It kind of brought visually what people have always said about how White people really feel about Black people. I never really believed it. It gave a major example that came out of my life. It kind of just brought it to a visual and gave me my own experience.

In several cases, students of Color entered college with an abstract understanding of the systemic nature of racism, which had been cultivated through their parents’ messages. This abstract understanding became real and personal as they experienced racism firsthand on predominantly White campuses. As Jessica noted, “My eyes have definitely been opened to a lot of things that have been going on centered around race and my community, the Black community.”

_Taught that racism stems from isolated incidents of individual prejudice._ In contrast, White students sometimes described entering college with concrete but isolated examples of incidents their parents had labeled as racist. John reflected on a childhood experience involving race:

> When I was younger, I used to swim. Me and my sister swam on the same team, and one of our friends was Black. Our really good friends were there, and swimming against another team, one of the parents was yelling racist things at him. That was [the] first time my parents explained to me why that would be wrong to do, and how you shouldn’t let people do that either. Tell them not to.

John explained that his parents also communicated the message of not to say racist comments after interacting with family members from Alabama who, as he noted, “still hold on to some of the racist tendencies.” John noted:
When we’d leave, my parents would make sure I knew that I shouldn’t talk like that. That [my family members] weren’t bad people for it; it’s just that’s how they grew up and were raised, but they didn’t want me to be like that.

Other White students did not recall messages or memories of racial inequities. Sarah noted:

It just wasn’t really something that I thought we talked about…probably because most of the people that I lived with in my area were not different. We’re all middle class, White, basically in the same range. I don’t think it was anything that ever really got brought up until I came to college and started taking these classes for my leadership minor.

In Sarah’s case, previous coursework allowed her to enter LEAD 2100 with knowledge of the historical context of racial inequities. Reflecting on what she had learned about race from a leadership course she had taken the previous semester, she explained:

We watched this video. It was *The Race*, and both the White man and the Black man started at the same point. Then as they went on, the White man had his grandpa hand him a baton of all the money that he had where the Black man kept running into issues with poverty and drugs and jail time based off of his background and where he came from and his parents’ education and that kind of thing. It, I think, plays into having that historical context and seeing why these inequities exist.

This type of previous coursework was the exception among White students in LEAD 2100. As a result, most White students entered LEAD 2100 understanding racial inequities only on an individual level. Neither their parents nor their prior educational
experiences had led them to believe—or even suspect—that racism encompassed more than a few individuals’ prejudices. In response to hearing Dr. Wells share personal stories of times when she has experienced racism, John noted, “I do see [racism] some at home, but it’s just I didn’t think that much.” Moreover, when the topic of racism arose, White students often sought to distance themselves from people they saw as racist. Chad explained, “I don’t really understand things like racism….It’s about how you grew up, and I just didn’t grow up that way. I can’t really relate to those people.” Although they were willing and able to see racial injustice within the world around them, they remained unaware of how systems of privilege and oppression implicated them in broader manifestations of racism. Overall, for LEAD 2100 students who identify as White, the world was unjust on an occasional basis and as a result of other individuals’ misguided beliefs. When students saw racial injustice only or primarily on an individual level, they struggled to see how racism existed even when racially diverse groups interacted together peacefully.

**Meritocratic notions of social class differences within U.S. society.** Whereas students recalled messages and memories regarding racial injustice from childhood, they often explained that they were not aware of social class differences until college. Kimberly noted that she had been sheltered from poverty prior to college and thus was not aware of the issue of homelessness near Midwestern State even though she had grown up in Collegeville. She explained, “I had never seen it, ever, and my high school is down the street from here. But still, I never saw it.” Chad noted that “it’s tough to get a grip” on social class differences “when everyone around you is kind of the same as you.” He elaborated:
When I come from a middle-class kind of area, there aren’t a lot of super rich people and not a lot of extremely poor people, so it’s tough to get like a sense that this is a real thing in the real world, that the differences are there.

Even students whose lived experiences exposed them to poverty described a lack of awareness of social class prior to college. Jessica explained that although she grew up in poverty, she never noticed differences in social class in her hometown. Likewise, Ashely recounted:

Growing up in New York, you see the poverty of the inner city and all that stuff. It’s like technically, most people are at the poverty line or below the poverty line, but because of the way our day-to-day is, it just becomes a normal thing. You don’t really see too much outside of that.

Having become more aware of social class differences in college, students typically did not associate such differences with systemic inequities. Indeed, students often turned to meritocracy to explain the existence and inevitably of social class differences. Chad stated:

I think some people are going to have better-off lives than other people and I think that’s too much to expect to change that and it may not be necessary to change that, you know? Everyone deserves a certain minimum, a certain level of safety, security, that sort of thing, but if people can go beyond that, if people work hard, there’s no reason to hold someone back, there’s no reason everyone needs to be completely equal in my opinion, as long as no one’s getting left behind.

Discussing how she was making meaning of social class differences, Ashely explained, “I think for me now, class and socio-economic status just boil down to work ethic.” For
most students, the world—at least, the parts in which they had grown up—did not appear unjust in terms of social class as they began to learn about poverty in LEAD 2100.

**Poverty as a third-world phenomenon.** However, students whose parents had immigrated to the United States demonstrated awareness of socioeconomic injustice in developing countries. Stephanie, whose parents emigrated from Vietnam to the U.S. when she was young, explained:

> I have been to Vietnam many times and my family there, it’s very strange when you go to a less developed country and you see how certain things aren’t their main priority because they have to focus on the basic necessities. In Vietnam, my family would have to walk miles to go to school. Once you hit high school, if you didn’t have money, then you can’t go into the big city to further your education.

When reflecting on issues of injustice, Kimberley also described poverty in developing countries. Identifying her race and ethnicity as African and explaining that her parents are from the Ivory Coast, Kimberly explained:

> My freshman year of high school, there was an election in Ivory Coast, and then a war broke out. Then, after that, I just started researching the country more. I discovered that they’re the number one exporter of cocoa beans. Then, I saw that there was a lot of poverty…. I was just like, “How?” Because everybody eats chocolate, which is where cocoa beans come from, but they also have coffee. I was like, “If everybody’s eating chocolate, and it’s coming from here, why isn’t the place where it’s coming from benefiting as well? Or the people who are farming the cocoa beans, why aren’t they benefiting from it?”
Despite the ability to see poverty on a global scale, these students remained largely unaware of poverty within a U.S. context. As Stephanie explained, “In Vietnam, I kind of expect [poverty] and that’s just a normal way of life, but here it’s strange to see the statistics.” Students’ unfamiliarity with social class differences in general and the existence of poverty in particular within the U.S. led many to describe LEAD 2100 class sessions as shocking. Throughout the first few weeks as students examined topics ranging from education and health to environment and food security, students saw new ways in which the U.S. was unjust for people who live in poverty. Such topics often illustrated the intersections of race and social class; yet, students’ discussions gravitated toward and centered on social class. Among the racially and ethnically diverse class members, the systemic nature of racism remained unspoken for the most part.

**The privileging influence of enrollment in college.** Although students were willing and able to recognize injustices associated with social class, they found it challenging to relate to the lack of access to educational opportunities some students in the U.S. face. Chad noted:

I think just whenever you’re faced with something that you haven’t personally experienced, it’s tough to wrap your mind around….I’ve been told from so early on, like, I should go to college; I need to, if I can. It’s always been important to me, and I didn’t realize before how different that is for some people.

Ashely also expected to go to college from a young age. She reflected:

For me, I think college was always something that I knew I was going to [do], even though most of my friends, college wasn’t the thing in the back of their mind….I think the reason that was for me was because I knew with my mom, she
wasn’t able to go past middle school. It was like for me, I knew I had to. There was no other option for me.

Students’ own experiences striving for and successfully attending college led them to admire students who demonstrated a desire to attend college despite facing obstacles. As students reflected on *Waiting for Superman*\(^\text{14}\), a documentary that highlights inequities in the U.S. educational system that students viewed during the first week of LEAD 2100, many students referred to Daisy’s story. For example, one student wrote, “It was so upsetting to see poor Daisy with her dreams of being a veterinarian stuck in a school where only three people graduate college-eligible yearly. I could not imagine being in a situation like that.” Another student explained, “During the film one character that impacted me was Daisy; she had the will power and dedication that I wish I had going into school….Living through poverty while trying to maintain an education must be really tough.” *Waiting for Superman* began to help students recognize their own educational privileges. Nonetheless, as the semester progressed, students continued to grapple with what it meant not to attend college. Discussing how to help students critique the ideology of meritocracy, Dr. Wells explained, “You’ve got to break through that college privileged space because they think that they’re working hard, and they don’t understand…their own ability to even work hard in this space is a privilege.” Class members’ collective educational privilege complicated their awareness of systemic social class inequities.

The developmental points of departure for learning about societal inequities.

By and large, students enrolled in LEAD 2100 did not need to be convinced that the world is an unjust place. While students of Color brought lived experiences with racial oppression, White students brought an awareness that racist incidents can and do happen. Yet, many White students had not yet grasped the pervasiveness and structural nature of racism, which interfered with their ability to see interconnections between racism and poverty. The course’s focus on poverty increasingly showed students societal inequities based on social class. Because such societal inequities appeared in fundamental areas such as education and health, students seemed quick to acknowledge the injustice of poverty. The privilege their collegiate education afforded them, though, made it difficult for many to recognize that individual effort alone did not grant students access to resources and opportunities.

Refrain 2: Connecting With Community Members Within Real-world Contexts

The second refrain focuses on how experiential learning aspects of the LEAD 2100 curriculum influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. The vignette highlights the panel discussion with five Midwestern State alumni that took place during the sixth class session and the field trip to Appalachia that took place during the seventh class session.

**Vignette.** As I walked through Midwestern State’s student center toward Smith Hall on a sunny mid-October day, I found myself weaving through police officers lining the sidewalks and bumper-to-bumper traffic on the street. “This must be because of Hillary Clinton’s visit,” I thought as I remembered seeing flyers around campus for the event. In the classroom, students who had arrived early chatted briefly about last night’s
second presidential debate and Clinton’s upcoming visit. One student noted, “I don’t like either candidate,” which seemed to be her peers’ cue to drop the subject and immerse themselves in scrolling through content on their phones. When Dr. Wells arrived, she asked students to re-arrange the desks into a horseshoe and directed five individuals to take seats at the front of the classroom. As the horseshoe formed and students took their seats, Dr. Wells turned to the individuals at the front and said, “Go ahead and introduce yourselves.”

After each individual shared a brief introduction, Dr. Wells began the panel discussion by asking, “How prepared were you for college?” Katie15, a Midwestern State alum who now works with legal issues regarding worker’s compensation at a law firm in her hometown, explained:

The science and math programs at my school were a joke. We would have like 3-5 math problems a night for homework. I mean like neighboring schools...not far from us would have 40 questions a night for homework and I never had homework through high school and I was taking advanced classes, so that was odd. When I got into [Midwestern State], doing all this work was kind of strange, and I was behind in science....I did political science and history, so it didn’t necessarily slow me down, but if I would have [come] here wanting to be a doctor, there’s no way. There’s just no way.

In contrast to Katie, Rachel explained that, though she is currently pursuing a master’s degree in social work, she had entered Midwestern State wanting to be a doctor. She, too, felt unprepared for science and math courses. She noted:

15 All names of panelists are pseudonyms.
I feel like the only thing that my high school prepared me for was writing and that’s only because my English teacher, Mrs. [Holden], who you guys will meet next week, is just incredible. Everything else, it was starting over, basically.

After other panelists shared similar stories of dismal high school academic experiences, Dr. Wells shifted the conversation toward panelists’ personal lives. “Let’s start with family first and then we’ll go into friends. If you don’t have siblings, you can talk about friends,” she nudged. Aaron, who earned both his bachelor’s and law degrees from Midwestern State and now works in labor and employment law, explained:

One of the things that I think has been difficult for me as I’ve gotten older is addiction is a huge problem in [Appalachia]. Both of my parents are alcoholics. I know that at a certain time of night each night I can’t call them or expect anything because they’re not going to be in a mind state where I can speak to them and have a real conversation and have their support.

I’m 27 and to some extent I feel like I’ve ... I mean I love my family to death. I’d do anything for them, but as far as having them as a source of someone to walk in their shadows and follow their path, I can’t really follow anything. I have to figure out this road by myself.

Themes of family members with disabilities or addictions ran throughout panelists’ narratives. Growing emotional, Rachel explained that she has not seen her brother in a while because he is a heroin addict. As panelists discussed the challenges their family members and friends faced, I found myself filled with a renewed appreciation for the importance of a college education for expanding students’ access to opportunities. Yet,

16 The name of this educator is a pseudonym.
based on my experiences growing up in a rural, lower-income community, I also understood the tensions several panelists described of leaving one’s hometown for such opportunities. Aaron’s description of his family telling him, “‘Oh, well, you think you’re too good now” when he decided to attend Midwestern State instead of a local university sounded all too familiar to me. Students’ reflections regarding the panel discussion showed that they, too, were considering how their experiences compared with those of the panelists. Some students described the panelists’ experiences as shocking and eye-opening while others explained that they resonated with experiences associated with being a first-generation college student.

During the field trip to Appalachia the following week, students gained an additional glimpse into the panelists’ lived experiences growing up in poor, rural communities. Packed into two white 15-passenger vans and a black SUV, we made our way south toward the rolling hills of Appalachia. As we arrived at the high school Rachel had attended, Rachel led the group toward Mrs. Holden’s classroom. With the green-and-purple walls adorned with literary images, the teacher’s desk doubling as a bookcase, and a large Cervantes quote informing students that “Only he who attempts the absurd, is capable of achieving the impossible,” the classroom manifested Mrs. Holden’s passion for English literature. Mrs. Holden greeted students and explained that she had been teaching for 14 years. “This is where God placed me,” she noted. Prepped by Dr. Wells to be gracious and engaged during the field trip, students began asking Mrs. Holden questions. Their curiosities appeared informed by the panel discussion the week before. “Are there any drug problems at the school, and if so, which drugs?” a student queried. Mrs. Holden explained that drugs represent the number one problem in the
community. Describing the community as “drug-infested,” Mrs. Holden noted that some of her students are “couch surfers”—continuously in search of a couch on which to sleep because their parents’ drug addictions have led to homelessness or unsafe homes.

“What’s the most difficult part of your job?” another student asked. “Apathy,” Mrs. Holden stated succinctly. Elaborating, she explained that parents in the community often do not want their students to do better than they did, so if they do not know how to read, they do not want their students to learn how to read. To combat the apathy students learn from their parents, Mrs. Holden explained that she works to help students believe that they can do anything—they just have to meet her halfway. Quoting from Stephen Chbosky’s Perks of Being a Wallflower\textsuperscript{17}, which students read in her class, she explained, “But even if we don’t have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there.” She emphasized, “These kids need to know they are every bit as valuable as a kid from [a wealthy suburb]….no offense to students who grew up in that area.”

Based on students’ reflection papers, Mrs. Holden’s messages provided the type of awakening Dr. Wells and Elon had hoped and planned for. One student explained, “My overall experience was definitely eye opening….I do not think my high school had that many problems, I could also be wrong and just oblivious to the issues going on.”

The value of making abstract issues real and concrete. Often described as “eye-opening,” both the panel discussion and Mrs. Holden’s question-and-answer session helped make unknown or abstract issues associated with rural poverty concrete. Reflecting on the panel discussion, one student wrote, “[The panel discussion] stuck out

to me because this was the first time that poverty became a real thing for me.” Similarly, John explained in our second interview:

It seemed more real to hear from the panel and stuff, like first-person accounts rather than the facts and statistics, because it sounds bad when it’s written, but when you hear the person’s account, that makes it more real and personable.

Several students noted that panelists’ first-person accounts helped them see the limitations and biases of what they had learned about social issues from the media. Kimberley explained:

Hearing [the panelists] speak and talk about all of the pregnancy and the heroin and the death was shocking….My idea of heroin was what I saw on TV, so basically, people in rich cities—upper town New York or something, after a party or before a party, they just—I don’t know, what is it? They insert heroin or however it works?…. I know it’s a drug, obviously, but I thought it was an expensive drug, so then mostly rich people were the ones who were using it.

The panel discussion illuminated the realities of heroin use for Ashley, too. She noted:

For [the panelists] to tell me that they come from a background where heroin is taking away moms and dads from children. I’m like, “Wait. Seriously? How come this is not what people are talking about more frequently?” You’re talking about marijuana use, but it’s like there are actually bigger drugs that are doing more damage to communities that need to be addressed more so.

Reflecting on how the panelists’ and Mrs. Holden’s first-person accounts influenced her learning, Sarah stated, “You could really see those issues through their eyes and the
words that they were saying. You could tell that it was something that really hit home for them.”

The ability of human emotions to spark empathy and suspend judgment.
The issues became real for students in part because they saw the effect of the issues on real people. Stephanie explained, “I think to actually see and hear people be emotional about these topics that we learned in class makes it more real and tangible because you actually see that it’s affected the lives of people that you know.” For several students, the emotional appeal of the first-person accounts enhanced their desire to help find solutions for the issues at hand. As she discussed her reaction to the panel discussion, Sarah noted:

Just knowing that [the panelists] are experiencing those things and knowing that everyone in their communities are experiencing those things, and really all over the world, people are experiencing those things, and it is so emotional and so important to them, really makes you want to kind of change and figure out what we can do to help solve those issues. With that personal level, it just kind of draws you in.

The emotional appeal also prompted students to reflect on how their own experiences compared and contrasted with those the panelists and Mrs. Holden described. In students’ reflections regarding the panel discussion as well as the field trip during which they met with Mrs. Holden, many students connected social issues to their own lives—a departure from the trend of reciting facts and figures regarding social issues. In effect, hearing personalized accounts seemingly gave students a model for sharing their own personalized accounts regarding issues ranging from their preparation for college (or, in some cases, lack thereof) to their experiences growing up in poverty or lower-income
households. Describing how the field trip to Appalachia helped her compare her own experiences with those of Appalachia community members, Erica noted:

I can’t imagine growing up there [in Appalachia]. How [Rachel] was saying how she’s biracial and how her sister had to deal with racial slurs and disrespects and bullying from athletes and stuff like that and she got really emotional about it. That reminded me of my personal experience based on race and ethnicity and how her experience as a Black woman in that space was extremely challenging….I literally couldn’t have imagined being who I am right now in that space.

Despite Erica’s insistence on not being able to imagine growing up in Appalachia, her ability to identify how context influenced Rachel’s experiences as a Black woman demonstrates that the field trip had indeed helped her imagine lived experiences that differed from her own.

Ashely, too, was familiar with the realities of poverty based on her experiences growing up in “the slums” of New York. However, the field trip helped her realize the importance of not generalizing her own experiences to everyone who lives in poverty. She explained:

My reality was what poverty looked like. Then, hearing about what was going on in other communities was one thing, but then going to actually see [Appalachia]…I’m looking at these places. Then, I’m just looking at the houses on the road. I’m like, “I’m from New York. We’re in the slums, but even our slums, they don’t look this bad.” I guess my community is openly identified as being poverty-stricken, but then, what do we say about this?....It’s like it’s finally
showing that poverty really does have different faces. To be honest, it’s like you can’t really judge a book by its cover.

Chris also explained that the field trip to Appalachia helped him realize the importance of not assuming poverty always looks the same or affects the same group of people. He shared:

[Visiting Appalachia] gives you the idea that even though we come from different places, people may still have similar backgrounds or similar…traumas in life. A lot of times, we mainly think of urban African Americans as poor. It seems like in the Appalachian areas, it’s mainly White people. That’s eye-opening. You don’t really [realize] people’s backgrounds. You shouldn’t just jump to conclusions all the time.

For students already aware of the realities of poverty, the panel discussion and field trip highlighted new layers and nuances of poverty.

The power of documentary videos to provide vicarious experiences. Although students most commonly attributed their ability to see the realities of social issues to the panel discussion and field trip in Appalachia, they also explained that documentary videos shown during class helped them see poverty firsthand. Stephanie explained:

I think the documentaries were as effective, if not more effective, than the field trip. I understand the field trip—being in person, actually seeing it—is crucial to building an understanding…but I think documentaries, you also can see the human emotion and that translates well.

Also identifying the documentary videos as effective, Ashely noted, “There are a lot of things that the professor might not necessarily speak on that you’ll pick up through the
Chad, too, explained that he found documentary videos “to be a powerful way of giving information,” though clarified that documentary videos and field trips represent two different formats and should not be treated as the same.

Perhaps because of the difference between the nature of documentary videos and field trips, the LEAD 2100 field trip proved particularly effective for illustrating the effects of rural poverty in Appalachia—a region geographically close to home for many students and within a short drive from Midwestern State’s main campus—while the documentary video of Poverty, Inc.\textsuperscript{18} played a key role in illustrating the realities of international poverty in developing countries. Discussing how he chose a documentary video regarding the topic of international poverty, Elon explained:

I knew that week was always going to be an examination of international attempts at combating poverty…it seemed like [Poverty, Inc.] would be the best way to start a conversation because you have to see and hear and have as much of a sensory experience of that as possible. Because it’s so different from our context here, and there’s nowhere that we can get that in [Collegeville], unfortunately.

To elaborate on his selection of Poverty, Inc., which critically examines global charity efforts, Elon recounted:

There was another [video] that I thought would be easier for [students] to digest, and it’s one that I had seen before, Living on a Dollar a Day\textsuperscript{19}, about some young White men who go to Guatemala and try to live on a dollar a day, and you know, they get jaundice, and it’s really hard for them. The takeaway from that is more

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“Wow, poverty in the developing world is very challenging.” It would be useful for the students to see that. I’m sure that they don’t appreciate what it looks like to be, for example, in a country without a developed health system. They don’t think about those kinds of things. But that’s just part of the lived experience of being an American. At the same time, I like [Poverty, Inc.] because it goes back to it’s my role as an instructor to challenge students, even if it makes them uncomfortable. The Poverty, Inc. film is challenging, especially for this group of students…, because what I got from the reaction was that in general they would have thought that any attempt to give money away, or give material goods away, or give your service away, as someone coming from the privilege of the developed world, would be a good thing.

As Elon had surmised from the class discussion regarding Poverty, Inc., the video challenged students to think differently about how to help address issues of international poverty. Reflecting on the video, Chad explained:

What I should do, that has become a lot murkier because the answer used to be a very simple, if you want to help, just go do something, you know? I almost thought, it doesn’t matter what you do…if it’s in the name of positive progress, then it’ll help in some way. Now I’ve seen a lot of examples of not only not helping but probably making things worse. Poverty, Inc. did a great job talking about that, where people do their church drives and other things, clothing drives, and I see those all the time. That’s something I had always assumed was just doing good in the world.
Kimberley also found specific examples in *Poverty, Inc.* helpful for understanding the complexities of providing international aid. She reflected:

I remember [the video] talked about I think it was a church in Atlanta that gave eggs to Kenya….They wanted to do it honestly just out of generosity to like supply them with eggs, but then in the long run, it wasn’t beneficial for the [Kenyan] economy because those farmers who had hens and stuff that were producing eggs went out of business because everybody else was just getting free eggs. Then I guess like people don’t really see—they see it as like “I’m trying to help.” But they don’t really see that it might not be the best way, but then that’s more something like you would need to do your own research on to see if, you know, what you’re donating will actually be helpful.

For Sarah, the video helped her see the importance of doing research before donating money or choosing to work for a non-profit organization. She explained:

It definitely changed my perspective as far as what I want to do and to be careful when looking into companies like that to make sure that they’re really working towards a good cause and they’re not affecting the country that they’re trying to provide help for in a negative way…. I guess just doing my research and looking into what they’re doing, where the money is going to, how that money is affecting—or the clothes or whatever they’re sending is affecting—the country that it’s going to. Is it positive? Is it negative? How can it be changed? That’s an option, too, if you can tell that company better ways to use their resources. That could be something, too.
In addition to showing the realities of poverty in developing countries, *Poverty, Inc.* offered concrete examples of instances where American’s good intentions ultimately harmed the country they were intending to help. Students often referred to these examples during class discussions as they grappled with understanding the roots of and effective solutions for international poverty. Ultimately, the video proved as thought-provoking as it was emotionally appealing.

**The developmental influence of experiential learning opportunities.** Although the field trip to Appalachia most directly fits contemporary conceptualizations of experiential learning within higher education, students’ reflections indicated that the panel discussion and documentary videos also provided experiential learning opportunities. Taken collectively, the experiential learning opportunities in LEAD 2100 facilitated students’ development toward critical consciousness by helping them see what poverty looks like and how it affects real people. As students encountered concrete examples of cultural norms and societal structures that contribute to poverty, students without lived experience with poverty began to recognize their social class privilege and the role they could play in addressing poverty. Chad explained:

I grew up in what I would call a nice neighborhood but not a very nice neighborhood so it just makes it very difficult to place myself kind of in the grand scheme of things, and I think that makes it hard for me to frame everything else….I think the more and more examples that we see help me to understand a bit more because like the different ways I see that I haven’t had to go through this, I haven’t had to go through this, it makes me understand more…of the privilege I’ve had or of how fortunate I’ve been in certain areas. I think that helps me kind
of define like, “Okay, I don’t need to be like worrying about myself. I can focus on helping other people because other people have it much worse.” I’d say…generally the better understanding I have of where I fall on that sort of spectrum and that helps me understand my role.

In turn, students who entered LEAD 2100 already understanding the realities of poverty began to see how systems of privilege and oppression related to race, social class, and nationality intersect. Referencing information from Poverty, Inc., Ashely noted:

With the class, it just helped further clarify who truly is being underrepresented, who truly is being underserved….To know that there are people in the world who are terminating their [parental] rights so their kids can have a better life out of necessity and we take it for granted. I think for here, it makes me re-evaluate, “Are we truly [in] impoverished situations in America?”

For many—if not most—students, their view of the world and their place in it expanded through engagement with LEAD 2100’s experiential learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, the personal accounts that panelists and Mrs. Holden shared focused students’ attention on individual actions and charismatic personalities. In some cases, the emotional appeal seemed to overshadow the connection to broader social issues. For example, as Kimberley reflected on the class’s interaction with Mrs. Holden during the field trip, I inquired, “When you think about Mrs. [Holden]’s role in the school, what is the role that she plays? What does it do related to poverty in your mind?” After a brief pause, Kimberley responded:

I don’t really think [Mrs. Holden’s role] addresses poverty. I feel like she’s just, she’s doing what she’s supposed to be doing. That’s her role. But at the same
time, she’s exceeding what she’s supposed to be doing…I don’t really see how it could relate to poverty because there could be a teacher like her at a school where there is no poverty. At least, I don’t think it relates to poverty.

For Kimberley, Mrs. Holden was an example of a caring, committed teacher but seemingly not a social change agent. Students found Mrs. Holden’s account of social issues in Appalachia engaging and informative, but they had not always or necessarily comprehended how her work to develop extracurricular opportunities for students and teach college-credit courses, for example, connected to the roots of poverty.

In addition, the panelists’ stories had reinforced the ideology of meritocracy for some students. Several students explained in their reflection papers regarding the panel discussion that working hard and having determination are key to helping individuals get out of poverty. One student noted, “If you have the will, then you will find a way out and on to a better life.” Another student explained that he learned that people who grew up in poverty can obtain a job and support themselves “with hard work and dedication.”

Structural forces related to both the roots of and solutions to poverty remained largely undiscussed and unexamined. The experiential learning opportunities in and of themselves did not help students grapple with the systemic nature of inequities. Although increasingly real and multilayered, social issues did not yet require social responsibility from many students’ perspectives. The issues remained isolated from their own communities and concerns.
Refrain 3: Dispelling the Illusion of Unity Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Peers

The third refrain focuses on social dynamics, particularly related to students’ racial and ethnic identities, that formed as educators worked to build community within LEAD 2100. In the vignette, I describe the nature of students’ interactions during the field trip to Appalachia, which took place during week 7 of the semester, and during the following week in class.

Vignette. Having discussed educational issues with Mrs. Holden and Rachel, stopped for a snack at a local fruit farm, completed a quick driving tour of a university’s local branch campus, found a high point from which to view Appalachia’s rolling hills, and visited a local historic theatre, the group of LEAD 2100 students and educators neared the conclusion of the field trip to Appalachia and arrived at Blue Blazin’ BBQ with large appetites. Students took seats at four large tables while Dr. Wells ordered appetizers. When she explained to a group of students the appetizers she had ordered, the students collectively looked at her in amazement and remarked that she had ordered too much food. Although Dr. Wells dismissed the concern at the time, she admitted she may have overdone it with the appetizers when the waitresses brought out plate after plate of food—providing each table with potato skins, chicken wings, stuffed jalapeno peppers, potato chips, and onion rings. “Oh well, I want them to have the experience,” Dr. Wells explained to Rachel and me. While waiting for the main course, some students fashioned a tiny football out of a small piece of paper and flicked it back and forth with their peers at a neighboring table. Students laughed and talked casually. For the first time all semester, their interactions appeared to be relatively uninhibited. Dr. Wells’s
belief that food builds community seemed to be coming to fruition. Nonetheless, the arrangement of tables did not allow for one large community; rather, because each table comfortably sat only six to eight people, students divided into four smaller groups. The students playing football formed two related groups while students seated at a table across from the football game formed a third group. Each of these groups was comprised predominantly of White students. Students in the fourth group, all but one of whom identify as students of Color, sat at a table in another section of the restaurant—out of earshot of the other tables. Dr. Wells and I exchanged brief observations regarding the group dynamics at the restaurant, noting the racially homogeneous make-up of most of the small groups but sharing excitement at seeing students growing more comfortable conversing with their peers.

After getting dessert to go, we piled back into the vehicles. I assumed my impromptu role as van driver, serving as a substitute for Elon whose graduate student commitments had required a premature departure from the field trip, and set out to follow Rachel and Dr. Wells back to Midwestern State’s campus. “Do you know any camp songs?” I heard one of my passengers ask. Someone spontaneously sang out, “The wheels on the bus go round and round.” To bypass the camp song question, I dusted off my service-learning facilitator skills and worked to engage students in reflection. “What was the highlight of the trip for you?” I asked as I worked to ease into the reflection. Most quickly responded, “This. The dinner.” Erica added, “But I also liked hearing from the teacher, Mrs. [Holden].” “How did the school experience Mrs. [Holden] described compare with your own school experiences?” I prompted. Ashely, Erica, and Jessica—all of whom identify as African American women—shared stories of their high
school experiences as they reflected on senior pranks, prom, and graduation. Recounting interactions with various teachers, they expressed gratitude for teachers who had been hard on them but whose tough-love strategies they felt accounted for their collegiate success. A lull in conversation prompted Erica to ask her fellow passengers, “Any of you all have fun stories from high school to share?” After a few seconds of silence, she followed up, “Are you all asleep already?” Hearing no response, she—and I—assumed sleep had set in among the other students. Although it remained early by college-student standards—not yet 10:00 p.m.—students seemed to have succumbed to the post-dinner slump. Or, perhaps they had reached their limit of interacting with classmates they did not yet know particularly well. Either way, the rest of the drive back to campus remained quiet.

During the following week, some students continued to cultivate community with their LEAD 2100 peers through both formal and informal experiences. Formally, several students fulfilled the course’s community service requirement by helping hand out candy and facilitate carnival-like games at a local community center’s Halloween party. Informally, students who rode in Rachel’s van for the field trip texted back and forth via a GroupMe. The combination of the field trip, community service, and GroupMe forum sparked lively conversation among some students as they waited for week 8’s class session to begin. Although some students continued the trend of working silently on their cell phones or laptops, several others chatted about the Halloween party at which they had volunteered. Suddenly, a student yelled out jokingly to a peer seated across the room to ask whether he was going to a neighboring university’s Halloween block party. Reference to the Halloween block party led to discussion of logistical details: tips about
how to gain admission and how to avoid getting one's car towed circulated throughout the room. As the conversation turned to complaints about the expense of buying a Halloween costume, Elon arrived carrying four blue grocery bags of food. His presence temporarily halted conversation and prompted Elon to remark, “It’s too quiet.” Working to fill the silence, Elon asked students to re-arrange their desks into a circle. “Make it narrower,” Elon directed. “No, because then we’ll be on top of one another,” a student remarked. Apparently sensing a challenge to his authority, Elon responded in a good-natured but serious tone, “No, overruled.” Students scooted their chairs forward to tighten the circle. Explaining that he brought food today because his dog had chewed up the sign-up sheet, Elon circulated a new sign-up sheet and gave students the go-ahead to get food. As students made their way to the table stocked with food and piled an assortment of fried chicken, fruit, and cookies onto their plates, conversation resumed.

After a class session in which students were unusually talkative—with more students contributing their voices to both educator-led discussions and student-generated side conversations—I walked to the front of the classroom to debrief with Dr. Wells and Elon for a few moments. Dr. Wells expressed excitement about students’ overall level of engagement in the class session, taking this as a sign that the field trip had successfully helped build community. I noted that, on the whole, students had seemed more engaged prior to the class session as well. As Dr. Wells motioned to the area of the classroom where many of the students of Color had sat together for the class session, she noted, “But I’m worried about the Beverly Tatum issue happening with the group over there.” Piecing together Dr. Wells’s comments regarding group dynamics during the field trip with my knowledge of Beverly Tatum’s scholarship, I surmised that the “Beverly Tatum
issue” referred to Tatum’s discussion of racial identity development in her book “Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations About Race. To explain the reference to Elon, whose academic background in science had not familiarized him with Tatum’s scholarship, Dr. Wells noted that she thought the students of Color were self-segregating. Without further discussion, Dr. Wells, Elon, and I made our way out of the classroom and dashed off toward our respective evening commitments.

The rarity, but necessity, of building community in a discussion-based class.

The field trip proved to be a turning point for group dynamics within LEAD 2100. The trip to and from Appalachia, along with the dinner at Blue Blazin’ BBQ, created unique opportunities for students to bond with their peers—unique not only due to the out-of-class context in which they occurred but also in the sense that they rarely occurred in students’ other courses. In the final reflection paper, a student explained:

I have never taken a field trip in college, and to be able to take one with a diverse group of people into an area that we all knew nothing about, definitely brought us all together. The car ride, the dinner, the theatre, it all got us laughing as a whole. Another student noted, “[The field trip]…gave the class an opportunity to really connect and get to know each other on more of a personal level because we were together for most of the day.” Discussing the difference in group dynamics before and after the trip to Appalachia, a student reflected:

The change in relationships [after the field trip] I felt made the rest of the semester go a lot better when it came to the discussion side of things. People were more than willing to communicate and let their side be heard on whatever
topic we were discussing from then on out, which really stuck out to me in this class.

Similarly, a student explained:

At the beginning of the semester, I was a little shy talking to the class; one of the main reasons for that is I didn’t want to get judged by fellow classmates. After the field trip to [Appalachia], things began to change. I realized how fortunate I was for what I have as well as realizing how judge-free our class really is. Overall, the field trip was a key event that allowed students to get to know one another better, which laid the foundation for more open discussion about social issues as the semester progressed.

Students also attributed the sense of community among class members to Dr. Wells’s teaching style. Chris explained:

The entire dynamic of the class is different than a lot of the classes that we usually take….Dr. [Wells] helps with that a lot, just by her enthusiasm about the class and her demeanor and how she talks. It makes it more comfortable to talk in the class. Although students more readily recognized the link between food and a sense of community during the dinner at Blue Blazin’ BBQ than in regular class sessions, a few students described how food enhanced their willingness to engage with their peers each week. Explaining how food helped make the classroom a safe space for her, Jessica stated:

When you can congregate over food, it just kind of makes you feel you’re at home. You have to think family dinner. When you have family dinner, it makes
you feel at home—being able to have those difficult conversations, it kind of sets the tone.

Ashely noted that she did not fully understand how food builds community until she read more about Dr. Wells’s philosophy on a university website and enacted the philosophy herself for student organization meetings she facilitates. She recounted:

I started actually bringing food to the meetings. I saw that it was easier for people to start talking to each other because even if you’re like, “Okay, pass me this.” Then, it goes from there on out. I didn’t realize that’s what Dr. [Wells] was saying until I actually saw it on the website, and I started doing it.

Dr. Wells’s commitment to building community through food as well as experiential learning opportunities ultimately created a classroom climate where many students were willing and able to interact with their peers and engage with new perspectives. In the final reflection paper, a student explained:

Now as we finish up this class, I find myself close with people I never thought I would be. There are people in the class I will now stay friends with even when it is over and the class brought many of us together. I think that as a whole we were able to take on group activities and make them into something we all were able to contribute to and everyone valued everyone’s opinions. That is something you do not find often in college. There [are] always debates, but ones that end badly. In this class we could all go head-to-head with each other, and at the end of it, be able to see one another’s views and leave it at that. There was never any hatred or mean words, just truthful opinions that in my eyes led us to be that close knit class.
Knowing one another better ultimately led to listening to and learning from one another.

**The “turbulent waters” of facilitating interracial interactions.** Yet, not all students described the community among the class as close knit. For example, Ashely noted that some students bonded more quickly and cohesively than others. In an interview shortly after the field trip, she explained:

> When we got on the field trip, it’s like people’s natural tendencies started to pick up again. It was just like the car I was in. Everyone was pretty quiet because I think we still hadn’t gotten to know each other. Then, you had other cars where it was instantaneous—just like, “We became comfortable. We clicked and whatever,” which is fine. Then, our car, it took a bit longer.

Ashely also observed that the bonding tended to occur among peers who shared racial identities. Reflecting on how students interacted during the field trip, she noted, “I made a joke. I’m like, ‘No matter where you throw a Black person, we’ll always find another Black person in the room. [We] could be on opposite ends, and we’ll somehow end up together.’” Dr. Wells also observed that subgroups formed during the field trip and anticipated that race might serve as a barrier to building community in the course. She noted, “We actually do have a critical number of students of Color, Latino, multiracial, etcetera. That’s something that could be a barrier, that they’re feeling that the rest of the class maybe is not where they need to be.” Indeed, some students of Color felt that the field trip surfaced racial biases among their peers, which were then amplified when the TA gave students the option to work in groups to complete the final project for the course. Reflecting on the group formation process, Jessica explained that she and several other students of Color chose to work together for the final project because no other
students had invited them to join their groups. She noted, “Even when we tried to not separate ourselves based on race, it kind of still happens.”

The group formation process also highlighted the TA’s lack of understanding of racial identity development. Having interpreted the issue of self-segregation from a place of racial privilege, Elon located the root of the issue in the actions of students of Color rather than the nature of the institutional culture. Rather than recognizing how racial dynamics on Midwestern State’s predominantly White campus often left students of Color in search of a peer group who would validate their perspectives and understand the realities of racism, Elon thought the students of Color were choosing to exclude themselves from their White peers. In Dr. Wells’s absence, he asked the students of Color who formed a group for the final project to create a more inclusive group. Jessica described her response to Elon’s request:

He was like, “Oh, I can’t let you guys work together, this is kind of like self-segregation”….It’s kind of mind blowing because we know that the conversation wasn’t had with a group of White students who were all working together, that they were self-segregating their selves because that’s normal. They are the majority, so it was like, “Oh, he probably didn’t think of them as self-segregating,” but because we’re the minority, he was like, “Oh yeah, they’re self-segregating.” It’s like, “Whoa, wait a second.” You take a step back and think about, “Wow, this is real.” This whole issue is really real.

Ashely also reflected on Elon’s request:

[Elon] used the term, because it was a group of minorities, “we self-segregate.”

Then, with that class, I think, after hearing him say that, I looked into my class to
see if that’s what I was doing….When he used the term “self-segregation,” I noticed it within the class in itself. We talk about complex issues that affect all groups, not just minorities in themselves. We are able to talk about it as a big collective, but then, when it comes down to who we actually interact with, everybody just ends up in their small groups. I don’t know, it feels sort of isolated in that sense. Then, it’s like we’re supposed to be talking about changing the dialogue and people seeing things from different walks of life. How are we doing that if we’re all still within ourselves?

Ashely continued:

With [Elon]’s comment, he directed it toward us as the minorities, which I thought was pretty uncalled for, instead of directing it with the class by and large. At the end of the day, if you tell a group of minorities they’re self-segregating, especially with our type of history, you’re just perpetuating the idea instead of entrusting who this actually needs to be addressed to, those doing it. You can’t say the people who were left behind are segregating themselves when they were actually left behind.

According to several students of Color, inclusion among class members was indeed a concern but was one that their White peers also needed to take responsibility to understand and address.

Acknowledging the different perspectives each educator brought to the course, Chris noted, “I could tell…self-segregation wasn’t [Elon’s] issue. I could tell that was [Dr. Wells’s] issue. Just how he was talking about it, he wasn’t very sure in what he was talking about.” Working to navigate the issue without the benefit of Dr. Wells’s
guidance, Elon contacted me for more context about Tatum’s scholarship and then emailed the students of Color who wanted to work together for the final project. He explained:

I am writing you to follow-up on our discussion after class today. First, I would like to apologize for how I handled our discussion. I regret the way I chose to start this dialogue with you, and I appreciate those of [you] who related your concerns with what I had to say. I should have addressed the topic with the class as a whole rather than with your group alone….

I hope that you understand this is my first time teaching a course, and that given that we talk about a range of very complex and challenging issues, I may not always be prepared to navigate the often turbulent waters we encounter. Although Elon had planned to honor the students’ desire to discuss racial dynamics with the class as a whole, he chose not to implement this plan given that Dr. Wells was absent for the rest of the semester due to a health issue. Consequently, the groups for the final projects remained racially homogeneous for the most part and racial systems of privilege and oppression on Midwestern State’s campus remained invisible for many White students. Capturing many students of Colors’ conflicting sentiments about the class community, Erica noted, “[The course] was an inclusive community. I felt my identity was valued and respected. However, I still felt excluded.”

The developmental influence of racial dynamics at a predominantly White, research-intensive institution. The general sense of community that developed within LEAD 2100 fostered critical consciousness by laying a foundation for open discussion about complex social issues and creating space for diverse perspectives. However,
educators’ efforts to help students get to know one another on a personal level and engage them in shared experiences did not lead to an awareness or critical examination of how systems of privilege and oppression affect group dynamics on campus. Given that many courses at Midwestern State were not as racially and ethnically diverse or as discussion-based as LEAD 2100, students and educators alike delighted in signs of even a basic sense of community. As one student wrote in the final reflection paper, “I could say that I knew everyone’s name [and] a little something about them by the end, and that is more than I could say for any other class I had the chance to be in.” In addition, students tended to equate inclusion with the absence of outward discrimination.

Explaining why he considered the class an inclusive community, Chad explained:

I don’t think anyone was out to make anyone else feel bad, no matter what background they come from. I think when we had discussions, things like that, it was just very respectful, so I thought inclusive was a good word for it.

The low standards for what constitutes an inclusive community, combined with the absence of discussion about racial dynamics within the course and the university, inhibited all students’ critical consciousness. The relatively superficial sense of community within LEAD 2100 led many White students to remain unaware of structural barriers to inclusion, which prevented their ability to become and serve as allies for their peers of Color. In turn, many students of Color recognized the structural barriers to inclusion but had to start from the place of educating their peers—and, in this case, their TA—about racism. Describing the reason she often must play an educational role, Jessica noted, “Even though people may seem like they’re educated on racism, they might not understand or realize that some of the things they say or do are racist in fact.
You have to bring those type of things to their attention.” Collectively, LEAD 2100 students remained in need of models for and experience with how to create genuinely inclusive communities among diverse populations.

**Refrain 4: Moving from Debating to Dialoguing About Social Issues**

In the fourth refrain, I highlight students’ engagement in discussions about various social issues that arose as students examined poverty in particular and societal inequities in general. In the vignette, I describe two key discussions: one that occurred during the eighth week of the class as students reflected on the field trip to Appalachia, and a second one that occurred during the ninth week of the class as students explored inequities they observed while completing the required community service experience.

**Vignette.** To prompt discussion regarding the field trip to Appalachia, Dr. Wells announced, “Talk about what happened last week. I’d like to see you string together the panel with the landscape.” After a student briefly commented about the landscape by noting that she noticed broken down cars and decrepit houses along the sides of the road, discussion turned toward racial dynamics in Appalachia. Erica noted, “I’m unapologetically Black.” Dr. Wells asked, “Do you think you could be that there?” Erica quickly responded, “Yes, because I don’t let anyone tell me who to be.” Seeming to consider the question further, she added, “But I didn’t grow up in Appalachia.” Dr. Wells explained that she is careful in spaces like the Appalachian community we visited because, as she stated, “My performance of Blackness isn’t as important as my aliveness.” With a note of frustration in her voice, Erica stated, “But you shouldn’t have to choose.” Dr. Wells validated Erica’s sentiment but noted, “The reality is that you sometimes have to choose.” Addressing the class as a whole, Dr. Wells explained, “As
“much as you guys think we’ve changed, there are still areas that are unsafe.” “Other folks?” Dr. Wells asked. “Everyone should have something to say.”

Discussion about the U.S. educational system shifted into a lively debate when a student noted his surprise at hearing Mrs. Holden say during the field trip that parents sometimes encourage teen pregnancy. Referencing various experiences related to teen pregnancy that panelists and Mrs. Holden had shared during the previous two weeks, students continued to circle back to one particular experience in which a high school football player from the Appalachian community was considered manly for impregnating multiple girls. As students grappled with the issue of how to prevent teenage pregnancy, they noted the lack of access to birth control and inadequate sex education within the Appalachian community we had visited. “Education is gendered,” Erica noted.” After Dr. Wells interjected to remind students to be taking notes, Erica explained that it is manly to father children but not manly to do well in school.

Dave, a student who identifies as male and plays a varsity sport at Midwestern State, noted that the football player had “made a few mistakes,” which drew looks of astonishment from several women in the room. In unison, several women said, “What?!?” Another male student commented, “It’s obviously a joke.” Making the discussion more personal, a female student invited her male peers to explain whether they felt empowered to have sex in high school and, if so, whether they practiced safe sex. Personal anecdotes intertwined with societal analysis until Melissa, a student who identifies as female and also plays a varsity sport at Midwestern State, focused the discussion on an issue that seemingly held great relevance for her peers—the effects of
pregnancy on involvement in collegiate athletics. Wondering if students had perhaps veered off topic, I observed a palpable increase in students’ energy.

“If I were to get pregnant, my life would be over,” Melissa stated. “My coach would say, ‘Bye.’” She contrasted this outcome with that of a prominent Midwestern State football player whose kid was recently photographed at training. “His life was fine,” Melissa noted calmly. Students began talking over one another, each working to make a point. Raising her voice to be heard, a student announced, “Go [Melissa]! Represent the women in the room.” “Find me a woman who has a child and is still playing. I’ll give you $5 if you find one,” Dr. Wells interjected. As some students grabbed their phones, apparently in search of a current female athlete with children, Dave stated, “Melissa’s point is invalid.” Several female students audibly disagreed with Dave’s statement, which prompted Dr. Wells to explain, “This is civil discourse. Go ahead, [Dave].” Before Dave had a chance to continue, Ashely cautioned, “Choose your words wisely because they’re going to jump on you.” Dave explained that if Melissa were to get pregnant, she would essentially be kicking herself off the team. He added that the male athlete to whom Melissa referred makes millions of dollars so his kid is well taken care of. After a few more heated exchanges during which various female students asked pointed questions, Dave left the classroom—not returning for the remainder of the class session.

Noting that the discussion was clearly causing some emotion, Dr. Wells advised, “You have to know how to self-regulate passion during civil discourse.” In an apparent attempt to demonstrate self-regulation, students lowered their voices but continued debating male and female roles regarding childrearing. To bring the debate to a close,
Dr. Wells discussed the historical context of women’s rights and asked students to reflect on the dinner during the field trip. Explaining that she is a senior, Melissa noted that she has never talked with people in a class the way she has in this class but felt comfortable sharing her perspective during the just-concluded debate because she knew her peers could handle it. Nonetheless, she added, “I hope everyone, especially the guys, know that I wasn’t trying to attack anyone.” She thought that perhaps she should text Dave to make sure he was not offended.

The following week, the issue of college access again sparked civil discourse. Not on the official agenda, which Elon had constructed after learning Dr. Wells would be unable to attend class, the issue of college access arose as students reflected on their experiences volunteering at various community Halloween parties. A student noted that the kids at the Halloween parties kept asking the Midwestern State volunteers if they were football players and cheerleaders—a line of questioning she felt indicated that kids saw Midwestern State primarily, if not exclusively, as a place to play sports. Ashely explained that most minority students are taught that going to Midwestern State’s main campus in Collegeville is unattainable. Another student, who identifies as an African American male, confirmed Ashely’s point and explained that he had attended a regional campus before transferring to Midwestern State’s main campus. The reference to a regional campus prompted several students to share experiences in which their high school guidance counselors had advised them to set their sights on a regional campus or a local community college. Chris shared that he comes from a different place than many African Americans because both of his parents attended Midwestern State. He explained that he never knew people did not go to college while growing up because he always saw
the success story. In turn, Erica explained that she was admitted into a college preparation program in the sixth grade and, from that point forward, knew that she had to “stay on the straight and narrow” to keep her scholarship to Midwestern State. While both Chris and Erica emphasized the importance of early exposure to college, Kimberley explained that lack of early exposure had provided her with motivation to attend college. Contextualizing her perspective, she noted that neither of her parents attended college but she had wanted to attend college to be a role model for her little sisters.

Unlike the previous week in which I had observed students vying for air time and validation, this week students appeared to grant space for their peers’ narratives to unfold. Pauses bracketed each narrative, which allowed students to find and form connections before continuing the discussion. Without much prompting from Elon, students stayed focused on exploring the issue of and solutions for lack of access to college. Students who had rarely, if ever, ventured to speak during the previous eight class sessions offered accounts of their own experiences gaining access to college. Rather than rushing to agree or disagree with proposed solutions, students acknowledged that parents, high school guidance counselors, and college recruiters all have a role to play in increasing college access for kids such as the ones with whom they had interacted during the Halloween parties. Seemingly satisfied with the nature of the discussion, Elon concluded by noting that he was happy students had been able to have a “robust conversation” about their service experiences even though they had volunteered for only a few hours.

The tendency to prove one’s point rather than listen to other perspectives.

As students became better acquainted and gained greater exposure to social issues with
each subsequent class session, they became more willing to vocalize their perspectives when presented with the opportunity to do so. Reflective of many students’ academic interests in sports administration as well as their recent life experiences, the social issues that sparked the most discussion often related to athletics and college access. But even when students found the discussion topic relevant, they found it challenging at first to figure out how to listen to one another and consider diverse perspectives. Reflecting on the exchange between Dave and Melissa regarding gender inequity among college athletes who have children, Kimberley noted:

I feel like [Dave] didn’t really understand where [Melissa] was coming from. She was just basically saying that if pregnancy does happen, it takes two to make a child. Only one person would technically negatively be affected by it, and I guess that’s what she was trying to say, but that’s not really how he took it.

But then I also feel like from that conversation, a lot of the guys, they were saying, “Yeah, I understand,” but they always had a “but” reason to have an excuse for it.

While Kimberley observed that her male peers were not understanding her female peer’s perspective, Ashely observed that the reverse was also true. As Ashely explained, the women “ganged up on [Dave] without listening to what he was saying.” She elaborated:

One person is talking about how physiological changes are going to affect their performance. Another person is talking about the market and the brand of this person and not being exploited. It’s like two different conversations, and then no one is listening to each other.
Reflecting on how the exchange between Dave and Melissa demonstrated students’ difficulty engaging in civil discourse, Elon explained:

To me, it wasn’t a particularly healthy debate that they had….One line that sticks out to me was when [Dave] said, I think he said, “Your point is invalid.” What her point was was going back to the previous couple of examples, questions we were talking about. I mean, in that context, her point could not have been invalid. Nor could it have been valid. She was expressing how she felt about what she perceived to be an inequality based on her own experience….if she feels so strongly about what she’s saying, and you feel so strongly about what you’re saying, simply telling her that “It’s not a one, it’s a zero” is not going to get anywhere.

Like Elon, Dr. Wells agreed that students initially struggled to engage in civil discourse. From her perspective, this stemmed from students’ limited experience with and exposure to civil discourse prior to college. She explained:

I think we don’t do speech and debate in K-12, sort of embedded in social studies, anymore. I think that’s part of the problem with lack of exposure, or getting into what does that mean to say something and hold back and listen. That skill just doesn’t seem to be there. People get really riled up about something, and then, “I hate you. Don’t talk about that.” Then, they’re gossiping about that. Then, they put it on Twitter. Then, it’s just a mess. I’m like, “That’s ridiculous. Let’s disagree, and be okay with that.”

Due to the level of emotion associated with students’ comments and the point-counterpoint nature of the exchange, many students characterized the discussion
regarding gender inequity in college athletics as an “argument” or “debate.” As John noted, “It just seemed like everybody was locked in place and not really trying to change [their mind] but make everybody else change their mind.” In addition, some students saw the need to take a side. Jessica stated, “I definitely sided with the females just because I could consider myself a feminist at times.”

The ability for peers to show one another a broader, more complex world.

Although several students chose to stick to their own perspective or disengage from the exchange between Dave and Melissa, most students nonetheless noted that they found the discussion respectful. For example, one student wrote in the final reflection paper, “Each side respected the other on what they had to say. This moment just sat with me well because I have never had class like this before where I could express how I truly felt, and ask the uncomfortable questions.” In addition, several students explained that this exchange enhanced their understanding of gender issues. In the final reflection paper, a student wrote:

I had never thought about the fact that if a female athlete get[s] pregnant, that she would end up being kicked off the team and have their scholarship taken away. It seems unfair when compared to a male athlete where nothing would happen if they had a kid on the way.

For Sarah, the exchange made the issue of gender inequity more concrete. She explained, “It was kind of like, ‘Okay, this is how it plays out in real life and these are all the different aspects of it.’ Instead of it just being a broad social issue.” Similarly, Kimberley noted:
The discussion just pretty much verified what goes on in the world….What [Melissa] was saying in class, that while the girl has to take care of the child, and it’s her responsibility as much as it is the guy’s responsibility, he could just blow it off and it also happens in the real world. That was just a prime example.

As Sarah’s and Kimberley’s comments attest, peers’ perspectives often served the same function as that of the Midwestern State alumni who served on the panel: to provide real examples of social issues. Students also identified the type of exchange between Dave and Melissa as more the exception rather than the norm for class discussions. Reflecting on class discussions throughout the semester, Sarah stated:

I think that people were really trying to understand each other, where they were coming from. Every once in a while, it would get a little bit more debate-y, but definitely still very open and understanding of the other person’s perspective.

Chad also noted:

I think whenever things did get passionate or whenever there were very differing opinions, people sort of took the approach of listening. I didn’t see a lot of times where someone would make a point, then someone else was listening, and they seemed ready immediately to counter the point. They weren’t listening for these sort of flaws; they were just listening to what other people had to say.

Although students did not immediately or always listen to one another, they increasingly demonstrated the ability to consider perspectives that differed from their own as the semester progressed.
Students described the opportunity to listen to a range of perspectives on social issues as particularly useful in broadening their understanding of the world around them. Kimberly explained:

I have…never been in a class where you really talk about what’s going on in the world regarding inequality. I’ve had classes that are focused on the inequality, but people don’t really share. It was actually really interesting to see people’s points of view.

Recalling a specific point of view that she found interesting, Kimberly continued:

One of the students in the class, I remember, she said that where she grew up, the teachers didn’t really push her or encourage her, either. Mostly since she was White, seeing that come from her, to me, was different…It’s not something you usually hear, or at least something that I usually hear. I feel like being in the class just made it more realistic, as to everybody’s different situations.

In the final reflection paper, students also pointed to specific points of view that contributed to their understanding of social issues. One student explained:

One comment made during [the] semester that changed my perspective is when we were discussing race and how punishment or repercussions is different [for] people of Color compared to White people. [Erica] mentioned that even though every college student does the same things on the weekend, such as drinking and smoking, the only parties to be shut down are Black students’ [parties]. I have seen racism and heard it all around me before, and it has always really upset me that people still are racist, but this really put into perspective of how differently
anyone of Color is treated….It really made me think about why this happens and why law enforcement or anyone in general thinks they can get away with it.

Referencing the class discussion regarding college access, Ashely explained how the discussion helped open up people’s eyes to new perspectives:

You start to hear how different people have different ways of getting into school. Then, the people had to admit it. They didn’t know it was like that for other people because [they] always knew it to be one way, one way only. I guess because of the class, it was like probably some people’s first wake-up call to it all.

For Stephanie, listening to new perspectives during LEAD 2100 prompted her to consider how people’s backgrounds influence their perspectives. She explained:

I’m trying more to understand where other people are coming from when we discuss certain topics. If someone does something and I don’t agree with it, now I like to try to understand where they’re coming from, and what their background is and how that influences their decision making or words.

In effect, the range of perspectives shared during LEAD 2100 allowed students to realize that their own perspective was only one of many ways to view social issues. The recognition of the incompleteness of their own perspective in turn encouraged them to engage with other perspectives. Chad explained that he felt other perspectives were making his understanding “more comprehensive, rather than just like a bubble.”

The art of intentional facilitation of class discussion. Students’ ability to engage with and see the value of other perspectives stemmed in part from Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s facilitation of class discussions. Students found Dr. Wells’s facilitation style provocative. As Ashely explained, “She has no bounds so she will ask those questions
that need to be asked and without any fear. Then, people will read off of that and just answer it directly.” Also, Jessica noted that in contrast to other professors with whom she has interacted, Dr. Wells “knows how to be okay in those uncomfortable positions and how to make [students] feel comfortable.” Elon’s style, though less bold than that of Dr. Wells, was no less intentional. Although he explained that he found the process of getting students to open up and talk about social issues on a personal level challenging, he took specific steps to help students move beyond the tendency to regurgitate information. Discussing his approach to facilitating class discussions, Elon explained:

I try to get at the heart of the matter by probing students to consider—they normally would start out by stating their opinion and then I try to probe them to see if they can get an understanding or relating where that may come from, what types of things they were considering when they did that evaluation….I don’t know that I always do the best job of doing that, but that is my approach. To uncover layers, see if I can work with them to peel things back and be like, “Where is this coming from?”

Despite Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s intentionality, each of their respective approaches created challenges for sparking dialogue among students in some cases.

Some students found Dr. Wells’s boldness intimidating. Meanwhile, some students found Elon’s seriousness unengaging. Describing how Dr. Wells’s approach influenced her decision of whether or when to contribute to class discussions, Sarah stated:

I think Dr. Wells talks a lot about how intelligent she is on the subject and how much she does know on the subject. I think a couple of times she’s mentioned,
“You can try to argue with me, but I know more.” It makes me uncomfortable to really say something…I’m one of those people who won’t start an argument unless I know I’m right. I’m not about to bring up an opinion or start anything without knowing that I’m 100% correct. Knowing that she knows more, I’m just like, “I’m going to sit over here and wait for you guys to talk about it.”

While Sarah framed Dr. Wells’s expertise as a reason to remain silent in class, Ashely explained that she sometimes chose to remain silent because she did not sense confidence in Elon’s questions. She stated:

When he asks us a question, it’s like you don’t hear the confidence and assurance in the question. Then, the question is just awkwardly presented instead of it, just being like, “This is the question at hand”….He has really good questions. It’s just the way he asks the questions. I, personally, I’m like, “Yes, I’m not answering the question,” because the question is just like, “I’m not engaged anymore. My interest is lost.”

In different ways, each educator struggled at times to strike a balance between demonstrating confidence in their own ability to make sense of complex social issues and cultivating students’ confidence in their ability to provide valuable perspectives to class discussions.

The unspoken granting of authority to those deemed diverse. Challenges associated with who possessed the authority to speak on various social issues also arose among peers. Several White students explained that they preferred to listen during class discussion because their own backgrounds did not allow them to contribute to their peers’ learning. Sarah stated:
It’s kind of hard for me to make comments in class…because a lot of the times I
don’t feel like I have a lot to contribute because I fall in the middle most of the
time. I don’t really have extreme experiences with anything, so that’s kind of a
difficult thing for me. I feel like I don’t really have a whole lot to add a lot of
times to the group discussions. Where there are some students who have had very
diverse experiences than the rest of the class, and I feel like they have a lot to
share. It’s interesting for me to hear what they are sharing, but I feel like the stuff
I’m sharing is very general. Most of the people in there are sharing that, too, so I
don’t really have much to contribute as far as that goes.

Like Sarah, several White students routinely chose not to contribute their perspectives to
class discussions. As Chris noted, “It’s a lot of times where we’re in class and it’s only
the people of Color [who] have something to say.” Elaborating on the limitations of this
dynamic, Chris stated:

Sometimes people are afraid to talk about certain issues because they don’t want
to be offensive, but even if they are offensive, that’s still the way you think.

Whether or not you say it or not, it’s still going to be offensive. But I’d rather
know how people think about the issues because clearly not all people think the
same way I do, and that’s how you problem-solve and that’s how you find
solutions instead of just taking shots in the dark.

In some ways, the racial dynamic that emerged during class discussions indicated a subtle
but significant move toward critical consciousness among White students because it
showed a willingness and ability to recognize the limitations of their own perspectives
and the value of others’ perspectives. Also, White students’ preference for listening
allowed space for students of Color to engage in the process of counterstorytelling whereby they provided perspectives that challenged conventional notions about race and racism. Nonetheless, as Chris’s comment highlighted, the racial dynamic also served to limit examination of both the roots of and solutions to social issues. Biases that contribute to societal inequities remained unspoken in many cases, and solutions for complex social issues seemed most relevant to only certain racial groups.

The developmental influence of discussion among diverse peers. Class discussions in LEAD 2100 illustrated three important points for facilitating critical consciousness. First, discussions that took the form of a two-sided debate tended to encourage argumentation rather than dialogue and short-circuited the process of considering diverse perspectives. Second, the way in which students made meaning of their own and others’ authority influenced their willingness to contribute to class discussions. Those students who perceived the authority of professors and/or peers as substantially greater than their own often remained silent. Finally, students’ struggle to engage in interracial dialogue made it challenging for the full complexity of social issues to emerge through class discussions. Educators’ intentionality proved essential but ultimately insufficient for navigating the social dynamics associated with class discussions. For class discussions to facilitate critical consciousness, students needed the metacognitive ability to reflect on and monitor their own participation—an ability that LEAD 2100 did not purposefully cultivate.

Refrain 5: Focusing on Individual Efforts Rather Than Collective Action

In the fifth refrain, I discuss how the LEAD 2100 curriculum cultivated students’ knowledge and abilities about leadership that affects social change. The vignette begins
with insights students gained from an article assigned for the second class session, which framed the way students approached the topic of leadership for the rest of the semester. Then, the vignette jumps to the last class session in which students gave oral presentations regarding a leader or group they had selected to profile.

**Vignette.** Given students’ expectations to learn about leadership during LEAD 2100, Elon set out to provide examples of leadership related to poverty. He explained:

> In any of these examples, I think you’re going to see people that were leading an effort, leading a cause. I think it’ll be really interesting for students to think about, “How did that person go about it, and what kinds of leadership skills did they demonstrate, or were they lacking?”

True to his plan, Elon often centered class activities, discussions, and reflection prompts on aspects of leadership within the course content at hand.

To begin the trend of leadership case studies, Elon assigned students to read an NPR Education news story regarding Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg’s $100 million donation to Newark public schools for the second class session. Although Elon prompted discussion about the news story in the last few minutes of class, students met his questions with hesitancy. I wondered silently, “Is it too early in the semester for students to venture forth perspectives? Or is it too late in the nearly three-hour class session for students to delve into discussing such a complex issue? Did students read the material?” For whatever reason, Elon’s plan for students to debate whether increased school funding would improve educational outcomes fell flat. Nonetheless, students’ weekly reflection papers showed greater engagement with the issue of leadership related

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to educational reform. Referencing information from the news story, most students reflected on the lack of community involvement in the Newark school reform initiative.

One student captured the sentiment of many of her peers when she wrote:

From the start, this project faced difficulties as a result of not enlisting or even informing the community members about the school reform. Additionally, many key players such as the parents, principals and teachers from the school district were excluded from the conversation.

Another student noted that “complications arose...because of the idea of representation.” She elaborated:

The people of Newark felt as though decisions were being made on their behalf without their actual knowledge or input. This is an issue because the decisions being made with what to do with the money were decided by the more powerful individuals instead of the ones that will actually be affected by it.

Overall, students concluded that money alone—even $100 million—was not sufficient to improve Newark’s public schools. Working with community members was also essential, they explained.

Throughout the semester as students analyzed the work of individual leaders—Majora Carter’s initiative to “Green the Ghetto” in the South Bronx, Lisa Roberts’s efforts to run a food pantry in Appalachia, Mrs. Holden’s development of a theater program at the high school where she teaches, to name but a few—they praised signs of


community involvement and firsthand experience with issues. Reflecting on Carter’s efforts to foster environmental justice in the South Bronx, a student explained:

She is able to cause change since she has been affected by these environmental factors growing up in the South Bronx....Communities in poverty need leadership. Not just people who are trying to help because they feel bad, but people who have been affected by the community and are willing to be involved in order to make changes.

“In contrast to Zuckerberg,” students would often comment or write, this leader “understood the community’s needs and interests.” In effect, students used Zuckerberg’s leadership in the Newark school reform case as an example of how not to address social issues. Instead, they turned toward leaders they met via videos or the course’s experiential learning opportunities to see where to start and how to lead.

Although students understood the importance of a leader working with community members, they often approached leadership as an individual rather than a group phenomenon. Yes, they liked the idea of a group coming together to address a social issue, as they had seen community members in Warren County, NC\(^2\), do. And yes, they appreciated working in a group with their peers to develop solutions for the Barrenton food insecurity case study. But when presented with the option to profile a leader or organization working to combat poverty for their final project, students gravitated toward individual leaders.

During the final class session as students presented their leadership profiles, I learned about Lyndon B. Johnson’s efforts to wage the “War on Poverty” during his

presidency, Mother Teresa’s missionary work in the slums of India, and Nadia Lopez’s founding of a public middle school to enhance education for underprivileged students in Brooklyn, NY. I also became acquainted with the local leadership of one student’s mom and another student’s family friend as well as the international leadership of Hanan Al Hroub and Ellen Gustafson. Each of these presentations highlighted how one person effected change. Given the brevity of the presentations, I often found myself marveling at what the person had accomplished but remaining unclear how they had accomplished it. Although Elon had encouraged students to be respectful of their peers and ask insightful questions, many students defaulted into silence after each presentation—allowing one student to ask consistently, “What made you choose [person X]?” Students showed little to no signs of curiosity regarding how leaders effected social change.

A few groups broke up the trend of profiling individual leaders by focusing on non-profit organizations. After one group discussed a wide array of projects that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) coordinates, Elon asked group members, “How have they been successful with so many moving parts?” A group member explained that there are individuals who chair each initiative but the chairs communicate with one another. “Useful example,” I thought to myself. “Do students recognize how individual leaders work within organizations such as the NAACP?” I couldn’t tell whether students’ silence indicated boredom or the end of a long semester, or maybe both or another reason altogether. Whatever the underlying reason for students’ silence, the series of presentations continued without further discussion. Presentations about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a microlending organization called Kiva, and the Love Haiti non-profit also raised issues of
organizational leadership, though students’ questions directed attention to what each organization did more so than how they did it. By the time Elon announced, “You’re dismissed,” students had seen presentations regarding seven individual leaders and four organizations. Yet, it remained unclear to me what insights they had gained about leadership to effect social change.

The inspirational influence of seeing individuals involved with their communities. “My understanding of social complexity has changed in that I have learned the importance of leadership,” a student wrote in the final reflection paper. She continued:

Through studying [for] the final project, learning from Dr. [Wells], or Mrs. [Holden], I truly began to grasp the idea that without leaders, and many of them, [e]ffecting change will be a difficult thing to accomplish. I think, though, through this class and the leaders that I saw, I was given confidence and hope that there are people out there fighting, advocating, and working toward a better world. This class showed me that someday, too, I can be one of those people.

Many students agreed that LEAD 2100 provided clear examples of leadership, which inspired them to be more actively involved in their communities at least in the future. One example students often described was that of Dr. Wells’s community involvement. Stephanie explained:

I think Dr. [Wells’s] community involvement helps me broaden my thinking because she’s actually out there getting things done, talking to people in the community and engaging the kids or teaching out at the prison, and she feeds kids, and it’s very inspiring to know that she’s not just all talk….I think her
involvement gives us ideas of what we could do to get involved in the community.

Similarly, John described Dr. Wells’s influence on his learning:

It was just like amazing to see somebody be that involved in their community and put so much time and effort into [not] just her community but also teach other people about how they can do the same. That makes me want to be more active.

From day one of the course, students drew upon not only Dr. Wells’s example but also her resources to become involved in their communities. In the first weekly reflection paper, a student explained:

The first lecture of class Dr. [Wells] had mentioned how we could get involved (not just doing the required community service), but to actually make a change. So that day in class…I submitted my application to the [Office of Social Activism] website where I then received emails the next day about time slots and days for the volunteer opportunities.

Midway through the course, Ashely remained unsure how to be a social change advocate, but she noted:

The one thing I do know is if I do end up staying in the [Collegeville] area, that through Dr. [Wells] at least, I can find my way into helping out the community. It’s like at least I learned where I can find a niche to make a difference.

In effect, Dr. Wells helped several students want to address social issues and also take steps to do so.

In addition to Dr. Wells’s example, several videos shown during class sessions helped students see that an individual can successfully contribute to and help effect social
change. During the second round of interviews, participants frequently referenced Majora Carter’s “Greening the Ghetto” initiative as influential. In a 2007 TED Talk, Carter addressed her audience directly and explained:

I watched nearly half of the buildings in my neighborhood burn down. My big brother Lenny fought in Vietnam, only to be gunned down a few blocks from our home….I grew up with a crack house across the street. Yeah, I’m a poor Black child from the ghetto. These things make me different from you. But the things we have in common set me apart from most of the people in my community, and I’m in between these two worlds with enough of my heart to fight for justice in the other.

Carter’s fight for justice included building a small park as the first stage of a greenway movement in her South Bronx community. Describing the origins of the greenway movement she initiated, Carter stated:

I wrote a one-and-a-quarter-million dollar federal transportation grant to design the plan for a waterfront esplanade with dedicated on-street bike paths. Physical improvements help inform public policy regarding traffic safety, the placement of the waste and other facilities, which—if done properly—don’t compromise a community’s quality of life.

Although Carter’s fast rate of speech made it difficult to digest all the details of the greenway movement in the South Bronx, students picked up on a broader message: Carter’s efforts helped improve her own community. Erica noted:

I thought [Carter’s initiative] was really cool, how she started this thing and she is still actively involved in it…you know, she didn’t switch up. She recognized
where she came from, and she used her testimony to legitimize her leadership, and being actively involved in the solution to the problem that plagued her neighborhood.

I thought that was really cool because a lot of times when you grow up in these neighborhoods, you grow, move on, and you don’t look back, for a lot of people. She didn’t do that. That was inspiring for me because, of course, I’m not the type of person to switch up or forget where I come from.

Reflecting further on Carter’s leadership, Erica explained, “She took a little segment of access and exposure. She took a little segment of it and made a huge difference in her community. I guess you don’t have to necessarily…solve the whole problem.” For Sarah, Carter’s TED Talk helped her connect the course content to her desire to learn about leadership. She stated:

I remember after watching that video really finally being able to tie into leadership, which is the reason why I took this class for my leadership minor. I remember thinking what an amazing leader this person was and how passionate she was about the topic and really understanding the area and living there and working towards bettering it. I remember finally being able to really, really tie that into leadership.

Throughout vivid examples, students recognized how an individual person set about the work of addressing complex social issues.

**The sense of uncertainty that comes with seeing the challenges of creating contextualized, long-term solutions.** As students wrestled with the complexity of social
issues, they in turn grappled with the type of leadership necessary to enact and sustain solutions. Chad recounted:

If you’re trying to clean up a neighborhood and you’ve never been to the neighborhood, then you can’t expect to understand fully the situation, and so you’re not really the person to make decisions about how that’s going to be handled. I think the fact that these people who aren’t exactly involved in these negative situations are trying to correct them, it’s a good thing obviously, but it’s not going to be very efficient or effective at all if they don’t take advice from people who are in these areas and who are getting firsthand experience….you need to create a connection I think between the people with the resources and the people with the experience.

Reflecting on how to solve educational inequities, Sarah also discussed the importance of firsthand experience with the issues. She explained:

I don’t know how we could fix [educational inequities], but I think it starts by the people who are making decisions to come and see these issues. Because I’m sure they know that they exist, but until you actually…experience it for yourself, how can you make the decisions for them, without knowing exactly what their issues are?

For Erica, studying the War on Poverty that Lyndon B. Johnson led during his presidency helped her realize the difficulties associated with addressing an issue over time.

Discussing insights she gained from the final few weeks of LEAD 2100, Erica explained:

I was just thinking how things shift depending on leadership. Like the focus of the country or the university, for example. Things really shift depending on
leadership. I thought that because certain leaders have certain priorities and initiatives….

If we declared a war on poverty and did it the right way, whatever the right way is—I don’t know, just hypothetically speaking—and if every leader had the same goal and cared as much about the war on poverty as other leaders did, I feel like we would be in better shape. But since different leaders come in with different initiatives, stuff gets Xed out—all of the work that has been done in the past. They want to go back and redo something or get rid of something, instead of just sticking with it and seeing it evolve. You’re not going to see change right away.

In effect, students began to recognize that well-intentioned individuals—even those in positions of power—faced substantial barriers to creating long-term change.

On one hand, seeing the limitations of individual leadership, in conjunction with the complexities of social issues, encouraged students to seek out more information about social issues before addressing them. Chad noted:

I think the important thing is just to educate yourself before trying to step in on something. I think most people sort of skip that step; they see an issue and they immediately want to jump in and help without understanding it fully. I think this [course] is sort of an intro. to the process of that, to the process of learning about issues, and it almost just shows you this idea that you can’t skip this step.

On the other hand, the limitations prompted some students to feel overwhelmed and unsure what they could do to help address social issues. When prompted to discuss how LEAD 2100 was helping them think about their roles within society, interview
participants often responded similarly to Kimberley who noted, “I’m not sure. I’m not sure.” Likewise, Chris responded, “I haven’t really thought about it. It’s overwhelming. You seem like a raindrop in the bucket, but it’s hard to think about where to even start with something as massive as this.” In addition, Erica explained her struggle to know what role to play:

I struggle with…being optimistic and being pessimistic, honestly, because it’s just like…“No one cares!” But then you do have people who care because there are people actively trying to do things, but then trying to come up with a solution, it just seems to be literally almost impossible. I don’t know what it’s going to take to figure it out, or if someone has come up with a solution. Because there’s so many layers and different things, different layers to this problem. Just like any problem, I guess.

She continued:

I’m like, “I know where I come from and I want to do something to make a difference.” But there’s so many layers to this problem. I don’t even know where to start with it. Me being one person, I literally have no idea where to start with it.

The uncertainty of where to start stalled students’ willingness and ability to move from discussion to action.

The struggle to see beyond examples of others’ individual leadership. Even though the LEAD 2100 curriculum included examples of individuals working within and through organizations to effect social change, students tended to focus on individuals’ efforts without exploring how such individuals were connected to broader organizations.
For example, there was little to no discussion of Dr. Wells’s role as director of the university’s Department of Social Activism, Mrs. Holden’s responsibilities as a board representative for the teacher’s union, or Majora Carter’s process of obtaining a grant from the Department of Transportation. Moreover, the focus remained on how others effected social change, not on how students themselves could effect social change. Thus, by the end of the semester, students continued to struggle to understand what part they could play in creating a more just society. For example, throughout all three interviews, Sarah struggled to see how her career in business could allow her to address societal inequities. Although the Poverty, Inc. documentary video had prompted her to think more carefully and critically about donating money to various corporate-sponsored causes, she noted that the only way she could make a direct impact would be to work for a non-profit organization. In other cases, students seemingly deferred the task of leadership to other individuals. John noted that community members in the South Bronx “need people like Majora Carter.” Also, in reflections regarding the field trip, several students advocated for more teachers like Mrs. Holden. Overall, the call for leadership was often passively stated, an indication that students did not yet situate themselves as individuals capable of providing the needed leadership. Nonetheless, the examples of leadership within LEAD 2100 allowed students to clearly and consistently refrain from offering simplistic solutions disconnected from community members’ experiences.

**Conclusion**

Thinking about components of LEAD 2100 that helped students broaden their thinking about their role in society and social issues, Elon explained:
I don’t think that you can take any of [the] components in isolation. I don’t know that any of them would’ve worked that well without some of the others to supplement….You have to have the narrative type of critical thinking that we do in our discussions and that [students] do in their reflections. But I think they’ve been well served by supplementing that with some of the nuts and bolts that they’ve got from the [newspaper] articles and the content they see….So, having the lectures and discussions, the reflections, and certainly being able to experience those things outside of the classroom context, I think it’s all—I don’t know that I would’ve picked one.

Indeed, multiple interactions between students and their learning environments coalesced to influence development toward critical consciousness.

Hearing from parents and educators that injustice exists at a societal level, experiencing concrete realities of social issues, building community with diverse peers in order to engage in dialogues rather than debates, and seeing examples of effective leadership contributed to students being #woke, as Dr. Wells would say. These interactions served to promote critical consciousness among all students, but the degree to which and ways in which they promoted critical consciousness varied based on students’ social identities. Many students of Color entered LEAD 2100 having already heard messages regarding the systemic nature and historical roots of injustice whereas many White students entered LEAD 2100 familiar with injustice only as an individual and isolated phenomenon. Consequently, messages in LEAD 2100 that emphasized the systemic nature and historical context of societal inequities influenced White students’ development toward critical consciousness more so than that of students of Color.
However, experiential learning opportunities such as the panel discussion and field trip to Appalachia, which showed students concrete realities of issues associated with rural poverty, substantially influenced the development of students of Color by helping them see and analyze complex intersections between race and social class. Experiential learning opportunities were also developmentally productive for White students but tended to provide a basic introduction to societal inequities rather than a chance to engage in intersectional analysis across systems of oppression.

Building community with diverse peers was a necessary precursor for all students to be able to broaden their thinking through class discussions; yet, racial dynamics associated with Midwestern State University’s predominantly White campus climate made the process of building community easier for White students than for students of Color, which left issues of exclusion and marginalization within the LEAD 2100 class and at the university largely unexplored. In effect, the social interactions associated with building community with diverse peers required students of Color to navigate systems of privilege and oppression while continuing to mask such systems for White students. Finally, seeing leaders effectively address social issues helped all students recognize that working toward social change is possible. Nonetheless, only those students who identified with communities experiencing inequities saw themselves as individuals who would be able to effect social change and they remained uncertain of where to start such efforts. As the findings indicate, promoting development toward critical consciousness is not possible through a one-size-fits-all approach.

In turn, interactions that stalled or interfered with development toward critical consciousness took a variety of forms. Overall, sociocultural norms regarding the taboo
of discussing race and racism, especially on a societal level, and that emphasized individualism left many students in the dark about the nature of societal inequities and the roles they could play to address them. Also, Midwestern State University’s institutional culture interfered with LEAD 2100 students’ development toward critical consciousness by establishing a low bar for what constitutes an inclusive classroom community. Given that a class in which students knew their peers’ names and did not experience overt discrimination represented an inclusive community at Midwestern State, more substantive examination of and work toward inclusion went unrealized. Thus, systems of privilege and oppression remained invisible to students who were not aware of such systems prior to enrolling in the course. The difficulty of overcoming pervasive sociocultural norms, which made inequities both on campus and within society seem normal and natural, within a three credit-hour, semester-long course proved a key barrier to fostering students’ development of critical consciousness.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Reviewing the existing literature base regarding cognitive and moral development, King (2009) explained, “Researchers have a solid foundation on which to ground understanding of what develops, and can now build on this foundation to better understand how students develop” (pp. 615-616, emphasis added). For the field of higher education and student affairs, the question of how students develop is essential to address so educators know how to help students broaden their understanding of themselves and their social worlds. Wildman (2007) noted:

Descriptive accounts [of developmental patterns] may simply verify what we have long taken for granted: that intellectual growth, like student motivation, for example, is yet another complicating but largely uncontrollable factor in the education process. What is needed is a more coherent storyline showing the interconnections among learning, development, and instruction. (p. 18)

Through this study, I sought to generate this more coherent storyline by listening carefully and critically to students’ and educators’ narratives regarding the developmental processes associated with critical consciousness. By focusing on how students developed within a particular undergraduate educational context, I purposefully looked for the ways in which learning, development, and instruction interconnected. Although critical service-learning served as the particular mode of instruction in this study, it represented a contextual factor, not the driving force. In other words, I did not set out to study critical service-learning as an instructional practice per se. Rather, I set out to study how
development toward critical consciousness happens (or, in some cases, does not happen) when instruction is designed intentionally to foster critical consciousness. Within the case I studied, the educators intended there to be interconnections among learning, development, and instruction—which allowed me as a researcher to move beyond the question of whether interconnections existed and instead focus on addressing the questions of what particular types of interconnections existed and how they functioned. In this chapter, I first provide a summary of the findings, which include a detailed description of the developmental ecology of the selected case (i.e., Dr. Wells’s and Elon’s section of LEAD 2100 during fall 2016 semester) as well as five key refrains that resounded within the data. Next, I interpret the five key refrains based on the research questions and in relation to existing literature. I also offer implications for educational research and undergraduate educational practice. Finally, I articulate the limitations and strengths of this study.

**Discussion of Findings**

I used case study methodology to examine two key sets of research questions: (1a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments promote development toward critical consciousness? (1b) How do these types of interactions help students develop critical consciousness? (2a) What types of interactions between students and their learning environments inhibit development toward critical consciousness? (2b) How do these types of interactions stall or interfere with students’ development toward critical consciousness? I defined *interactions* broadly to encompass both direct and indirect engagement with people and materials related to the case I selected. Prior to addressing the two key sets of research questions, I first provided a
thick description of the developmental ecology of LEAD 2100. Through the thick
description, I highlighted the key characteristics of educators, students, and the
curriculum, which formed the basis of interactions that took place within the case and
that influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. Table 5.1
summarizes the key characteristics of each component of the LEAD 2100 developmental
ecology.

Table 5.1

**Summary of Developmental Ecology of LEAD 2100**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Ecology Component</th>
<th>Description of Component</th>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Study in Contrasts: The LEAD 2100 Educators</td>
<td>Lead educator who created the course and refined it over multiple semesters; graduate teaching assistant in first year of master’s program</td>
<td>• Different racial, ethnic, and gender identities&lt;br&gt;• Distinct academic backgrounds and disciplinary interests&lt;br&gt;• Firsthand experiences with poverty&lt;br&gt;• Shared commitment to experiential learning in general and critical service-learning in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Pursuit of a Leadership Elective and a Great Professor: The LEAD 2100 Students</td>
<td>26 undergraduate students enrolled at Midwestern State University’s main campus</td>
<td>• Relatively diverse in terms of racial and ethnic identities&lt;br&gt;• Range of majors, but nearly half were pursuing majors in sports administration&lt;br&gt;• Only two first-year students&lt;br&gt;• Drawn to the course due to academic interest in leadership and/or based on desire to take a course with the lead educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Woke: Critical Consciousness within the Context of LEAD 2100</td>
<td>3 credit-hour, undergraduate-level course offered through College of Education; met weekly for 2 hours and 40 minutes</td>
<td>• Focused on rural poverty&lt;br&gt;• Highlighted complexities and interconnections associated with social issues such as access to education and food insecurity&lt;br&gt;• Intentionally aimed to foster critical consciousness, which was conceptualized as a dynamic process necessary for leadership&lt;br&gt;• Included multiple experiential learning opportunities (e.g., field trip, community service experience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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24 Although a total of 27 students were enrolled in the course, only 26 chose to participate in the study.
As I collected and analyzed data regarding the components of the LEAD 2100 developmental ecology, I identified five refrains that collectively address the research questions and comprise the findings for this study. In Table 5.2, I summarize how the five refrains address the research questions. The far right column of this table links the findings of this study to areas of literature from Chapter 2 so that readers can identify how the findings fit with and extend current scholarship regarding students’ development. As Table 5.2 shows, the developmental influence of interactions was conditional and contextual. Thus, a given interaction did not only or always promote—or only or always inhibit—development toward critical consciousness. I explore the complexities of how interactions influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness in the sections that follow. In these sections, I discuss the conditions and contexts in which the key interactions highlighted in each refrain promoted and/or inhibited students’ development toward critical consciousness.
Table 5.2

Summary of Findings Regarding Interactions that Influenced Development Toward Critical Consciousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refrain</th>
<th>Key Interactions</th>
<th>Promoted Development Toward Critical Consciousness When…</th>
<th>Inhibited Development Toward Critical Consciousness When…</th>
<th>Area(s) of Literature to Which Findings Contribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1-      | Bringing in Background Beliefs Regarding the Scope of the World’s Injustice Students’ social identities with socializing experiences (e.g., discussions with parents) | • Socializing experiences emphasized systemic nature and historical context of societal inequities | • Socializing experiences focused on isolated examples of individual prejudice  
• Socializing experiences obscured differences based on social identities and/or occurred within homogeneous environments  
• Educational privilege reinforced myth of meritocracy | Personal Characteristics  
- Personal histories  
- Social identities  
- Current developmental capacities |
| 2-      | Connecting With Community Members Within Real-world Contexts Students’ lived realities with others’ lived realities shown through LEAD 2100 curriculum | • Concrete examples showed complex realities of social issues and challenged stereotypes within media  
• First-person accounts from diverse individuals appealed to students’ emotions and sparked desire to effect social change | • Charismatic personalities and engaging personal stories focused students’ attention on individual effect of rather than structural nature of societal inequities  
• Emotional appeal overshadowed need for critical analysis | Developmental Process  
- Balance of challenge and support  
- Accommodation of new perspectives |
| 3-      | Dispelling the Illusion of Unity Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Peers Students’ diverse racial and ethnic identities with predominantly White institutional context | • Formation of a basic sense of community created a space where students felt comfortable sharing diverse perspectives | • Formation of racially homogeneous subgroups prevented interracial interactions  
• Issues of inclusion within the class were not addressed with all students and were not linked to systems of privilege and oppression  
• Institutional culture established low standards for inclusive communities | Developmental Context  
- Microsystem interactions  
- Mesosystem interactions  
- Exosystem interactions |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refrain</th>
<th>Key Interactions</th>
<th>Promoted Development Toward Critical Consciousness When…</th>
<th>Inhibited Development Toward Critical Consciousness When…</th>
<th>Area(s) of Literature to Which Findings Contribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4-      | Moving from Debating to Dialoguing About Social Issues | Educators’ facilitation styles with students’ perceptions of and abilities to participate in civil discourse | Peers felt comfortable sharing personalized examples of and perspectives on social issues | Discussion took the form of a two-sided debate in which students sought to prove their own points rather than consider other perspectives | Developmental Process  
- Accommodation of new perspectives  
- Salience of social identities  
Developmental Context  
- Microsystem interactions  
Time (historical) |
| 5-      | Focusing on Individual Efforts Rather Than Collective Action | Students’ perceptions of leadership with LEAD 2100 curriculum | Clear examples of leadership inspired students to be more actively involved in their communities | Socialization toward individualism obscured examples of organizational leadership and collective action | Developmental Context  
- Microsystem interactions  
- Macrosystem interactions |
Refrain 1: Bringing in Background Beliefs Regarding the Scope of the World’s Injustice

The first refrain highlights how students’ social identities interacted with key socializing experiences to influence their readiness to see and analyze systems of privilege and oppression, which represents a key aspect of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973; Landreman et al., 2007). In particular, students’ racial and ethnic identities shaped the types of messages regarding injustice they heard from parents and educators while growing up. These messages tended to promote development toward critical consciousness when they emphasized the systemic nature and historical context of societal inequities. In contrast, when these messages focused on isolated examples of individual prejudice, obscured differences based on social identities, or occurred within homogeneous environments, they tended to inhibit development toward critical consciousness. Although interactions with others from different backgrounds and those with different beliefs and values often provided an impetus for discussion about injustice, it was the way that adults helped students during their childhood and adolescence make meaning of such interactions that proved key to development toward critical consciousness.

Socializing experiences that prime students for critical consciousness.

According to Hardiman and Jackson’s (1992) racial identity development model, a series of interactions and events that culminate to contradict the dominant worldview prompt both White and Black students to “begin to understand and recognize racism in many of its complex and multiple manifestations” (p. 28). But based on LEAD 2100 students’ prior experiences with and background beliefs regarding injustice, interactions and events
that expose students to the realities of racism do not necessarily allow students to see the structural nature of racism. Only those participants whose parents or previous educational experiences had alerted them to the structural nature of racism recognized how particular interactions and events fit within racial systems of privilege and oppression. For example, Chris was able to see the structural nature of the racist incident he experienced during fraternity recruitment given his father’s fear that White fraternity members were using him “like a token.” Unlike other LEAD 2100 students such as John, whose parents had discussed racism in terms of a specific individual’s behaviors or beliefs, Chris learned to view racism as a pervasive societal inequity based on his parents’ discussion of racism as deeply engrained within society. Thus, when Chris experienced racism during college, he saw it as an example of a broader issue rather than an isolated incident. In Sarah’s case, she had been socialized to see racism at the individual level due in part to her experiences growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood, but previous collegiate coursework that focused on the historical context of racism had helped her begin to see the structural nature of racism. The different sources of messages that shaped students’ understanding of racism fit with Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016b) findings from a study examining contemporary meanings of race among college students. Based on interviews with 40 racially and ethnically diverse undergraduate students attending large public research universities on the U.S. West Coast, Johnston-Guerrero found that students of Color often made meaning of race based on experiences with race whereas White students and some Asian American students tended to make meaning of race based on learning about race through collegiate courses, trainings and programs, or relationships. The findings from the LEAD 2100 case study
build upon Johnston-Guerrero’s research by showing that messages that emphasized the structural nature and historical context of racism, regardless of their source, promoted students’ development toward critical consciousness by helping them see how particular incidents and experiences represented a broader issue within society.

The need to see beyond one’s own experiences and isolated incidents. The findings discussed in the first refrain also build upon Pizzolato’s (2003) research regarding high-risk college students’ development of complex ways of making meaning by showing how students’ social identities intersect with their sociocultural environments to influence development. Whereas Pizzolato found that lack of privilege based on one’s social identities such as race, ethnicity, and social class fostered development, this study suggests that development of more complex ways of making meaning is influenced not only by one’s social identities but also by the messages one hears about the cultural significance of such identities. In other words, one’s social identity is not the only factor related to students’ ability to see and analyze systems of privilege and oppression. Relatedly, the findings within the first refrain indicate that experiences with and examples of oppression alone are not sufficient for preparing students to understand how privilege and oppression operate at a societal level. Rather, students need to recognize that oppression can and does exist at a societal level in order to see that specific behaviors and beliefs represent more than isolated incidents. This finding aligns with Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016b) observation that students who are able to make meaning of race as power and thus recognize race as “directly tied to historical and contemporary forms of power and oppression (at multiple levels)” (p. 831) are able to see how race operates in complex ways.
The need to see beyond isolated incidents, in conjunction with the pattern of many White students entering LEAD 2100 unaware of the structural nature and historical context of societal inequities, suggests a different sequence for multicultural education than the one Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) described in their framework for promoting development of White racial consciousness. Although Ortiz and Rhoads’s framework recommends that educators help students understand the socially constructed nature of culture and learn about diverse cultures before expecting them to analyze the privileged position of White culture, the findings from this study suggest that helping students see and analyze systems of privilege and oppression represents an essential component of understanding the socially constructed nature of culture. Thus, preparing students to learn, live, and work within multicultural communities requires first ensuring that all students recognize group dynamics at a societal—not just individual—level. This finding provides empirical support for the developmental effectiveness of the curriculum for the Intersectional Dialogue Program that Claros, Garcia, Johnston-Guerrero, and Mata (2017) described. Claros et al. (2017) explained, “Although many dialogues and diversity conversations in general start with personal experiences and move out to broader structural issues, we took the opposite approach to place intersectionality’s focus on intersecting structural and systemic oppressions at the center of the dialogue” (p. 48).

Yet, as the second refrain of the LEAD 2100 case study shows, it remains important to provide concrete examples of injustice at a societal level. The challenge becomes helping students move to the societal level without making issues seem so abstract that they lose clarity and relevance.
Refrain 2: Connecting With Community Members Within Real-World Contexts

The findings within the second refrain help confirm Freire’s (1973) belief that the development of critical consciousness requires a curriculum focused on concrete, authentic issues that connect to students’ daily realities. Through reflection papers and during interviews, LEAD 2100 students often explained that course activities and assignments that provided clear, engaging examples of current social issues helped broaden their understanding of themselves and their social worlds. Some of these activities and assignments such as the field trip to Appalachia and the community service experience at a local Halloween party fit contemporary conceptualizations of experiential learning. Yet, other activities and assignments students described as real and concrete—the discussion with panelists from Appalachia and the Poverty, Inc. documentary video, for example—fell on the periphery or outside of what many of today’s collegiate educators would classify as experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). Discussing the nature of experiential learning, Kolb (2015) noted, “The emphasis is often on direct sense experience and in-context action as the primary source of learning….it is thought of as an educational technique like service learning, problem-based learning, action learning, or team learning” (pp. xviii-xix). Yet, the less conventional forms of experiential learning in LEAD 2100, which also helped students broaden their thinking, suggest that it is the psychological basis of experiential learning—not the particular form experiential learning takes—that promotes development toward critical consciousness.

**Experiential processing of information as a driver of development.**

According to Epstein (1994), “people apprehend reality in two fundamentally different ways, one variously labeled intuitive, automatic, natural, non-verbal, narrative, and
experiential, and the other analytical, deliberative, verbal, and rational” (p. 710). While the experiential system for knowing “encodes reality in concrete images, metaphors, and narratives,” the rational system for knowing “encodes reality in abstract symbols, words, and numbers” (Epstein, 1994, p. 711). Also, as Norris and Epstein (2011) demonstrated through their efforts to construct a reliable scale to measure experiential ways of thinking, the experiential processing system comprises three affective-based components including intuition, emotionality, and imagination while the rational processing system is a more unified system that is logic-based. The findings from the case study of LEAD 2100 provide empirical support for the importance of experiential processing of information for the development of critical consciousness. Students routinely reported that readings, videos, and guest speakers that provided emotionally appealing examples and narrative accounts of social issues allowed them to better understand themselves in relation to their social worlds. Students’ reports suggest that it is not experiences per se that facilitate development but rather the opportunity to use the experiential processing system to make sense of information. In other words, experiences such as doing service and participating in field trips in and of themselves are not necessarily the drivers of development toward critical consciousness; rather, it is the emotions, concrete examples, and personal narratives associated with experiential learning that are more likely to influence behavior than the abstract knowledge associated with passive forms of learning (Epstein, 1994, 2003). This finding supports Langstraat and Bowdon’s (2011) claim that “emotions…are in fact integral to the development of critical consciousness” (p. 9). In addition, this finding helps address Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016b) call for more research “to better understand how learning could become more of an experience versus just something
cerebral” (pp. 842-843). Importantly, students’ reports indicate that students need not suffer injustice themselves to gain experience with injustice.

Students’ ability to better understand themselves in relation to their social worlds through emotions, concrete examples, and personal narratives is also consistent with existing literature that cites the importance of personalized interactions within service-learning. For example, Jones et al. (2011) found that “face-to-face interactions and the opportunity to develop relationships with people living with HIV/AIDS made a deep impression on participants” (p. 33). Such face-to-face interactions and relationships helped participants “put a face to AIDS” (Jones et al., 2011, p. 33) in the same way that the panelists in LEAD 2100 helped put a face to rural poverty. According to Rhoads (2000), “personalized interactions contribute to the caring self because such interactions challenge students to explore ‘otherness,’ which is vital to a self rooted in a concern for others” (p. 43).

The difference between emotions that spark judgment and those that also invite action. The findings within the second refrain also show nuanced differences in emotions that stem from experiential learning opportunities designed to help students explore others’ social worlds. Students’ descriptions of how the LEAD 2100 panel discussion and field trip influenced their thinking indicate that the ability to empathize with others did not automatically or necessarily move them to action or allow them to see how they are implicated in the inequities others experience. Although Mustakova-Possardt (1998) found that empathy fostered individuals’ abilities to demonstrate concern for social justice, the findings from the case study of LEAD 2100 indicate that empathy was not sufficient for fostering critical consciousness. In this regard, the findings lend
evidence to the distinction between empathy and compassion that Langstraat and Bowdon (2011) described in their review of scholarship in service-learning and Critical Emotion Studies. Drawing upon Nussbaum’s (2001) work in educational philosophy, Langstraat and Bowdon (2011) explained:

Compassion…entails both judgment and action, unlike empathy, which may result only in a judgment (e.g., “I feel bad for that person,” versus, “I feel bad because this is unjust and I am going to act to change that injustice.”). Hence, while both compassion and empathy require the capacity for fellow-feeling, compassion demands forms of ethical appraisal and action not necessarily inherent to the feeling of empathy. (p. 7)

LEAD 2100 students’ tendency to demonstrate empathy more so than compassion for those who live in rural poverty helps confirm the significant association between empathy and experiential knowing that Norris and Epstein (2011) found.

The challenge of cultivating compassion through the experiential learning opportunities in LEAD 2100 suggests that compassion involves an intricate mix of affective and cognitive components, which fits with Williams’s (2008) discussion of compassion. According to Williams, two cognitive barriers inhibit individuals’ willingness and ability to demonstrate compassion. Discussing the first barrier, Williams (2008) explained that compassion “is cognitively mediated by the belief that persons unnecessarily and unjustifiably suffer” (p. 10). Thus, if individuals believe that someone for whatever reason deserves the suffering they are experiencing, they will not be inclined to demonstrate compassion. The second cognitive barrier to compassion relates to perceptions of likeness and difference. According to Williams (2008), “compassion
will be inhibited in proportion to the degree that we separate ourselves from the other—physically, emotionally, cognitively and metaphysically” (p. 12). Although the experiential learning opportunities in LEAD 2100 mitigated the first cognitive barrier by helping students see concrete examples and hear narratives of undeserved suffering, such opportunities did not fully address the second cognitive barrier. Students continued to see themselves as separate from those who grew up or currently live in rural poverty, even those who graduated from the same institution they were currently attending. This finding points to the need to better understand how educational practices influence students’ perceptions of likeness and difference.

The lack of critical examination when seeing is believing. Despite the value of experiential learning to students’ development toward critical consciousness, the findings from this study highlight two key limitations of experiential learning. First, experiential learning prompted a seeing-is-believing mentality among students, which masked the need to critically examine information presented through experiences. Overall, students accepted the perspectives that the educators, panelists, and documentary narrators shared at face value without wondering about the contexts that gave rise to the perspectives or considering the need for supporting evidence. The only time I observed students question the basis or validity of information was during a student-led discussion regarding one of the few academic journal articles assigned as reading for LEAD 2100. I did not observe such questioning arise during the LEAD 2100 experiential learning opportunities, which suggests that students may not have been socialized to evaluate information they gained through experiences in the same way that they have been taught to critique findings from academic journal articles.
The lack of attention to the basis or validity of information presented during the LEAD 2100 experiential learning opportunities also reflects students’ primary reliance on the experiential system of knowing to process information from such opportunities. As a result, information appeared “self-evidently valid” and thus did not seem to require “justification via logic and evidence” (Epstein, 1994, p. 711). This points to the need for educators to find ways to activate the rational system of knowing during experiential learning opportunities to help students not only gain a feel for course concepts but also engage in critical analysis of course concepts. For example, Carducci and Rhoads (2005) described how to select media and craft discussion questions to help students develop “the ability to critically analyze and decode messages embedded in various media productions” (p. 3) and to engage in practices that advance democracy and the pursuit of social justice. The findings from this study help validate Epstein’s (1994, 2003) assertion that the experiential system can easily override the rational system and points to the need for educators to intentionally design activities and assignments that require students to use both systems.

The difficulty of seeing societal structures through personal experiences. A second key limitation of experiential learning that this study highlights is the challenge of addressing the structural nature of inequities through personal experiences. Although the experiential learning opportunities in LEAD 2100 engaged students in better understanding lived realities that differed from their own, they often kept students’ attention focused on individuals rather than broader societal systems. For example, through the panel discussion, students realized how heroin addiction affected families and friendships but did not see what societal factors contributed to epidemic levels of heroin
use in the U.S. Similarly, through the field trip to Appalachia, students learned about how rural poverty affected Mrs. Holden and her students but did not see what educational policies influenced teaching and learning within the school district. Thus, Dr. Wells and Elon carefully sequenced experiential learning opportunities with other activities and assignments that showed how specific experiences fit within broader societal systems. Nonetheless, because students found the specific experiences particularly appealing and engaging, they tended to hone in on the specific experiences and sometimes interpret them out of context. Striking a developmentally effective balance between helping students see personalized, concrete examples and identify the systemic roots of social issues proved challenging via experiential learning. This finding fits with Claros et al.’s (2017) discussion of the Intersectional Dialogue Project. Even though the three-week curriculum for the project began in a similar way as LEAD 2100 by highlighting inequities within the U.S. education system, “students struggled to maintain a focus on institutional and systemic intersecting oppressions” (Claros et al., 2017, p. 51) in subsequent weeks when facilitators asked them to think about individual experiences.

The finding that LEAD 2100 students struggled to make sense of inequities on a societal level through activities that focused on personal experiences extends literature that emphasizes the importance of combining experiential learning with reflection (e.g., Egart & Healy, 2004; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolb, 2015). In particular, it shows the need to develop reflection prompts that encourage students to contextualize experiences and identify the societal systems and structures that give rise to experiences. This finding also aligns with Mayhew and Fernández’s (2007) research regarding pedagogical practices that contribute to social justice learning, which involves developing “awareness,
knowledge, and skills centering the relationships among agency, society, power, and inequality” (p. 62). Investigating various pedagogical practices in five courses at a large Midwestern university, Mayhew and Fernández (2007) found that “students were more likely to report achieving social justice outcomes when the course content included a societal systemic approach” than when the course used “less sociological approaches to understanding contemporary societal problems” (p. 74). In addition, the authors found that, regardless of course content, discussions of diversity and opportunities for reflection significantly contributed to students reporting gains in self-awareness and understanding of diversity issues. The case study of LEAD 2100 helps confirm the importance of both content that focuses on the societal level of social issues and pedagogy that involves discussion and reflection for the development of ways of making meaning necessary for social justice. Also, it overcomes a limitation of Mayhew and Fernández’s study by triangulating students’ reported gains with educators’ perspectives and the researcher’s observations.

Refrain 3: Dispelling the Illusion of Unity Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Peers

While the second refrain surfaces nuances regarding processes and outcomes associated with experiential learning, the third refrain highlights intricacies of how peer communities form and contribute to development. Through the third refrain, both the benefits and challenges of facilitating effective interactions among racially and ethnically diverse peers on a predominantly White campus emerge. A basic sense of community was necessary to encourage LEAD 2100 students to interact with one another and share their perspectives during class discussions. Given the compositional diversity of students
in terms of race and ethnicity, this basic sense of community helped promote students’ development toward critical consciousness by laying a foundation for dialogue across difference. Yet, when this basic sense of community was not sufficient for helping deconstruct institutional barriers to inclusion, it served to inhibit students’ development toward critical consciousness. The interaction between the classroom community and broader campus climate played a key role in whether students were willing and able to not only appreciate diversity but also recognize and critique inequities within their own campus communities.

**Sense of community as a foundation for critical consciousness.** Influenced by hooks’s (2003) *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, Dr. Wells intentionally sought to help students in LEAD 2100 get to know one another so that they would take risks to engage in the vulnerable and challenging task of discussing complexities associated with rural poverty. Similar to the educators in Quaye’s (2012) study on facilitation of racial dialogues, Dr. Wells saw the establishment of a sense of common ground among students as an essential precursor to open and respectful dialogue. Yet, while Quaye’s study suggests the use of ground rules as a way to prepare students for difficult dialogues, the case study of LEAD 2100 shows other ways of building connections and respect among students. Rather than asking students to explain their expectations for one another to set ground rules for how students would interact and behave during LEAD 2100, Dr. Wells and Elon asked students to bring food for their peers for one class session. In addition, the LEAD 2100 educators designed weekly activities and assignments that required students to listen to and draw upon one another’s perspectives. For example, they expected students to reference peers’ comments from
class discussions in the weekly reflection paper assignments. Moreover, students often explained that they felt comfortable being themselves because Dr. Wells was visibly comfortable being herself, which she demonstrated through actions such as wearing her Miss Frizzle outfit on the first day of class and sharing examples from her personal experiences. Even without explicit ground rules, students with both dominant and marginalized identities described LEAD 2100 as a safe space to share their perspectives.

Although LEAD 2100 students used the term safe space, the type of classroom environment they described fit more with what Arao and Clemens (2013) termed brave space. Concerned about the conflation of safety with notions of comfort and lack of challenge, Arao and Clemens (2013) explained:

We propose revising our language [as educators], shifting away from the concept of safety and emphasizing the importance of bravery instead, to help students better understand—and rise to—the challenges of genuine dialogue on diversity and social justice issues. (p. 136)

According to the authors, brave spaces emphasize controversy with civility, allow for emotions to arise during dialogue, encourage reflection on challenges that require stepping beyond one’s comfort zone, and probe assumptions about what respectful dialogue looks like in practice. Given that the techniques Dr. Wells and Elon used to build community within LEAD 2100 focused on helping students form authentic relationships with one another so that they could engage in—rather than be safe from—controversial discussions, such techniques gave rise to the characteristics of brave spaces. Thus, students did not shy away from or demonstrate resistance to controversy when it arose. The findings within the third refrain suggest that a sense of community in which
students know one another well enough to delve into situations and discussions that spark discomfort provides an important basis for development toward critical consciousness.

**The difficulty of crossing racial and ethnic borders in class.** Nonetheless, the third refrain also indicates that the sense of community that formed within LEAD 2100 was not sufficient to foster meaningful and substantive interracial interactions among students. Although students learned one another’s names, bonded over food each week, interacted informally through experiential learning and co-curricular events, and engaged in open dialogue, they interacted primarily with peers of the same race. The brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) that educators cultivated within the classroom did not allow students to feel willing and able to form social connections and engage in informal interactions across racial differences. Because students felt more comfortable with peers of the same race, they tended to form subgroups with those peers when opportunities to independently assemble arose such as the choice of which van to ride in for the field trip to Appalachia and which table to sit at during the dinner at Blue Blazin’ BBQ. Such informal interactions then recreated issues of racial balkanization given that they served to reinforce—rather than work to address and break down—barriers to inclusion on Midwestern State’s predominantly White campus.

As a result, characteristics such as cross-cultural interaction, immersion, border crossing, and dialogue across difference—which research shows help foster critical understanding of one’s own and others’ identities (Jones & Abes, 2013)—did not fully materialize in LEAD 2100. Describing how the process of border crossing influences development, Jones and Abes (2013) explained that this process entails reflecting on interactions with people whose identities and worldviews differ from one’s own, which in
turn fosters the “creation of new frameworks for understanding how the world works” (p. 235). In LEAD 2100, the formation of racially homogeneous subgroups allowed for only temporary and relatively superficial opportunities for border crossing with one’s peers. Because LEAD 2100 students of Color reported that they had faced many of the barriers to social engagement that Hawkins and Larabee (2009) described in their discussion of the developmental needs and challenges of first-year racially and ethnically marginalized students attending predominantly White institutions, many sought to build community with fellow peers of Color both inside and outside of class. In turn, White students in LEAD 2100 remained largely unaware of the marginalization students of Color experienced at Midwestern State. Lack of explicit attention to the racial dynamics at play on Midwestern State’s campus led to a maintenance of the status quo in terms of peer networks within LEAD 2100.

The limited interaction across racial boundaries in LEAD 2100 supports Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau’s (2009) finding that “students in more racially heterogeneous classrooms do not have significantly higher proportions of interracial friendships” (p. 185). The group dynamics among LEAD 2100 peers also help explain why meta-analyses have indicated that interpersonal interactions with racial diversity are more effective than curricular and co-curricular diversity experiences at promoting cognitive development (Bowman, 2010b) and civic engagement (Bowman, 2011). Even intentional efforts to build inclusive communities within curricular and co-curricular diversity experiences may fall short of achieving the developmental potential of interactions across difference when the broader campus climate does not reinforce and sustain such efforts. As Jones and Abes (2013) explained, “Although diverse campus
climates that allow for interactions across difference might contribute to developing more openness to diversity, these same campus climates often perpetuate systems of oppression through microaggressions” (p. 236). The case study of LEAD 2100 suggests that a campus climate in which microaggressions are prevalent creates barriers to interactions across difference, which in turn inhibits the development of critical consciousness by limiting students’ opportunities to examine and critically reflect on how their own lived experiences compare and contrast with those of others.

**The limitations of a low bar for inclusion.** The findings of this study further suggest that the campus climate of a large predominantly White, research-intensive university can inhibit students’ development toward critical consciousness by establishing a low bar for what constitutes an inclusive community within an undergraduate course. Because students entered LEAD 2100 largely unfamiliar with the nature of discussion-based courses and used to being in courses with mostly White peers, educators focused on basic elements of building community such as helping students learn one another’s names and encouraging active participation during class sessions. From the educators’ perspectives, seeing students form relationships with any of their peers was a sign of progress in terms of building community.

The low bar for forming community within a course led many students in LEAD 2100 to describe the course as inclusive due to the absence of overt discrimination, disrespect, or conflict. But, as Erica noted, even though the class itself felt inclusive, students of Color still faced issues of exclusion given that many of their White peers asserted that race did not matter on campus despite recognizing examples of racism within the broader society. White students’ claims that race matters within society but
not within the LEAD 2100 context is consistent with Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016b) finding that White students in a study regarding the meaning of race tended to assert that race matters but not to them personally. As Johnston-Guerrero explained, students who made this assertion framed race negatively and worked to distance themselves from others who were racist by noting that they themselves did not take race into account.

LEAD 2100 students’ conflation of inclusion with the absence of overt discrimination points to the need to reconceptualize inclusion, as Watt (2015) suggested doing through the Authentic, Action-Oriented, Framing for Environmental Shifts (AAFES) method. Whereas traditional programs for inclusion help “raise awareness of the social problems facing a marginalized group, they do not require deconstructing the system nor necessitate that those with dominant identities situate themselves within the social problems” (Watt, 2015, p. 27). But through the AAFES method, institutions can focus inclusion efforts on dismantling systems of oppression. An institutional culture that defines inclusion as the elimination of systemic inequities can position critical consciousness—not just appreciation of diversity—as a necessary skill for students to gain.

Refrain 4: Moving from Debating to Dialoguing About Social Issues

Despite the shortcomings of the community that formed within LEAD 2100, the educators’ community-building efforts nonetheless proved essential for engaging students in dialogic education that involved collaboratively analyzing and generating solutions for social issues. Although students initially engaged in debate, which inhibited development toward critical consciousness by focusing students’ efforts on proving their own points, they began to engage in dialogue as they grew more familiar and comfortable
with their peers. Their willingness and ability to engage in dialogue in turn promoted development toward critical consciousness by helping them listen to and learn from multiple perspectives. This finding lends support for the sequencing of the first stage of Zúñiga et al.’s (2007) framework for intergroup dialogue in which diverse groups of students engage in face-to-face discussions regarding societal inequities. According to Zúñiga et al., the first stage involves creating a safe space for participants to share their thoughts and experiences. In addition, this initial stage involves distinguishing between debate and dialogue, which the current study suggests is necessary given LEAD 2100 students’ initial tendencies to debate with one another.

**The developmental value of deliberative politics.** During the discussion regarding gender inequity within collegiate athletics, which represented one of the first substantive exchanges among class members, students engaged in what Carcasson and Sprain (2012) described as adversarial politics—an approach to addressing social issues “that relies on having opposing sides competitively make arguments and appeals to mobilize broad audiences, build strategic coalitions, or appeal to institutional decision makers in support of their preferred policy options” (p. 18). Given that adversarial politics is a common form of communication within partisan politics (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012), it was pervasive at a national level during the fall 2016 semester as presidential candidates vied for election. Students seemingly sought to replicate this approach in their early exchanges within LEAD 2100. However, Dr. Wells’s emphasis on the need to self-regulate emotions while discussing controversial topics, along with Elon’s commitment to surfacing the complexities of social issues, helped students move away from adversarial politics and toward deliberative politics.
According to Carcasson and Sprain (2012), deliberative politics involves community members coming together to “consider relevant facts and values from multiple points of view, listen to one another in order to think critically about various options before them, and discover and work through underlying tensions and tough choices” (p. 20). In LEAD 2100, students’ discussion of how to increase college access for students from marginalized communities took the form of deliberative politics. Students’ use of deliberative politics during the latter part of LEAD 2100 shows that it was both developmentally possible and productive for educators to help students move away from making competitive, either-or arguments and toward listening to and considering multiple perspectives regarding societal inequities.

The still-invisible systems of privilege and oppression amidst dialogue across difference. The fourth refrain also surfaces the limitations of dialogue across difference for development toward critical consciousness. Although students became better able to appreciate multiple perspectives, which allowed them to think more broadly about the roots of and solutions to complex social issues, they did not specifically or intentionally examine systems of privilege and oppression. For example, many students recognized that different high schools provided different levels of resources for college preparation, but the degree to which they understood how systems of privilege and oppression contributed to different levels of resources remained unclear. Comments regarding how race, social class, or gender dynamics within U.S. society contributed to inequities arose occasionally or sporadically during discussions but did not consistently appear within students’ weekly reflection papers.
This finding proves concerning in light of the nature of the LEAD 2100 curriculum, which included several examples from Leonardo’s (2004) list of acts, laws, and decisions that illustrate the structural nature of racism. Rather than focusing on examples of White privilege, which can serve to conjure up White guilt that blocks critical reflection and keeps students focused on individual racist practices (Leonardo, 2004), the LEAD 2100 curriculum provided examples of structural inequities such as lack of educational opportunities for students living in poor communities, colonization of third-world nations, and unethical medical research that harmed participants of Color. Although such examples avoided the problems associated with the discourse of White privilege, they did not successfully help students who entered LEAD 2100 unaware of the structural nature of inequities shift their attention from the individual to the societal level.

Similarly, although Dr. Wells and Elon frequently asked students to consider which community members possessed the power to influence decision-making processes, students rarely applied this question to their own classroom community. The way in which power shaped who spoke and who remained silent during class discussions or who was perceived as credible and who was met with doubt or disapproval went unexamined. As a result, students did not intentionally identify or challenge dominant perspectives. Although several White students often chose to yield the floor to their peers of Color, whom they deemed to be better able to contribute diverse perspectives to class discussions, they did not critically reflect on what this choice meant and how this choice was associated with their racial identities. Also, they did not recognize how the perspectives of peers of Color represented counterstories. They appreciated hearing a
perspective different than their own but did not consider how such a perspective served to critique societal norms.

This finding extends Johnston-Guerrero’s (2017) research on the dynamics of racial authority among students of Color in two main ways. First, it shows the ways in which the themes from Johnston-Guerrero’s study related to how students perceive racial authority apply to and operate within a racially diverse college course. In particular, the dynamics within LEAD 2100 confirm that in contexts where personal experience is a valued source of knowledge, students who see themselves as having less experience with racial discrimination defer to those perceived to have more experience. As Johnston-Guerrero (2017) explained, at institutions “that had compositional diversity with high percentages of Asian and White students, [the] perceived experts in experiencing race were Black and Latina/o students” (p. 78). Whereas Johnston-Guerrero found this dynamic among a sample of 31 undergraduate students of Color, with overrepresentation of Asian American participants, the findings from LEAD 2100 suggest that this dynamic is also apparent among groups that include White students. Second, the findings from LEAD 2100 highlight ways in which this dynamic regarding racial authority influences students’ learning and development. In terms of benefits, it helps validate students of Colors’ knowledge and affirm the value of their voices, which Baxter Magolda (2004b, 2009) identified as a key form of support for development of self-authorship. Also, by creating space for students of Colors’ perspectives, this dynamic allows students to examine diverse perspectives, which scholars consistently identify as important for complex ways of making meaning (e.g., Jones & Abes, 2013; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016b; King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009). Yet, this dynamic
also posed challenges to learning and development by not encouraging some students, particularly those who identify as White, to develop authority regarding issues of race and racism and by placing the burden of bringing diverse perspectives into discussion on students of Color.

In addition, LEAD 2100 students’ perceptions of authority regarding societal inequities in general and racism in particular extends Erkel’s (2015) discussion of how to apply CRT to conversations about race. Although Erkel discussed the importance of creating space for counterstories, the case study of LEAD 2100 indicates that it is also necessary to explain how power shapes what count as counterstories and how counterstories function. The findings from the fourth refrain also suggest the need to help students consider power dynamics associated with classroom discussions. For example, as Applebaum (2003) explained, students must recognize how one student’s freedom of expression can constrain or silence others. Dialogue across difference that did not foster students’ awareness of how systems of privilege and oppression influence the legitimacy of perspectives fell short of fostering students’ development toward critical consciousness.

Refrain 5: Focusing on Individual Efforts Rather Than Collective Action

The fifth refrain intersects with the first and third refrains by highlighting how the pervasiveness of students’ socialization toward individualism inhibits development toward critical consciousness. Students often clung to and sought out examples of individual leaders within the LEAD 2100 curriculum, a finding that helps explain how “Western values associated with individualism often result in dominant narratives that highlight individual achievements of exemplary leaders…and do not equally honor the
communities and people who worked alongside these leaders” (Dugan & Velázquez, 2015, p. 110). Although students in LEAD 2100 found examples of individual leaders such as Majora Carter who initiated the “Greening the Ghetto” initiative in the South Bronx inspiring, they increasingly saw the limitations of individual effort as they became more aware of the complexity and interconnectedness of social issues. Not knowing how to overcome the limitations of individual effort served to halt, rather than activate, students’ willingness and ability to effect social change. John expressed a common sentiment among LEAD 2100 students when he noted, “It just seems there’s so much to do that…it’s hard to decide where to start.”

The need to emphasize examples of organizational leadership and collective action. Given students’ socialization toward individualism, they often failed to recognize how individuals worked within organizations and as part of communities to effect social change. This finding is consistent with Kardia and Sevig’s (2001) discussion of how individualism within U.S. society poses barriers to social justice education. By focusing on individuals in and of themselves rather than individuals’ relationships and roles within organizations or communities, LEAD 2100 students tended to see the ability to contribute to solutions for social issues as possible only for individuals with extraordinary talents and levels of commitment. Although they admired individuals such as Dr. Wells and Mrs. Holden, they did not understand how such individuals worked toward social change. They also did not necessarily see themselves as able to create change within communities that differed from the ones in which they currently lived or resembled the ones in which they grew up. This lack of understanding of how to work toward social change,
especially outside of their own communities, forestalled the process of moving from identifying the roots of social issues to enacting solutions for social justice.

This finding aligns with Hernández’s (2012) research regarding the developmental process for activism. Based on interviews with seven students who identified as Mexican American women who were politically active, Hernández explained that participants’ ability to engage in activism and create substantive change involved learning how to find common ground and develop shared goals among various student organizations. LEAD 2100 students’ difficulty in recognizing how to develop and enact solutions within organizations and communities also supports Owen’s (2016) claim that community reflection and dialogue for action represents a particularly complex level of critical reflection. As Owen (2016) explained, community reflection and dialogue extends beyond personal reflection or even group discussion by transgressing “organizational and contextual boundaries in order to invite shared understanding and commitment to action” (p. 45). In this study, students’ orientation toward individualism proved a pervasive barrier to understanding and addressing inequities at a societal level and thus a significant deterrent to development toward critical consciousness.

**The tension between knowledge and confidence.** In addition, the fifth refrain indicates that there is an inverse relationship between knowledge about social issues and self-confidence to effect social change. As LEAD 2100 students gained more knowledge about issues associated with rural poverty, they became less confident in their skills and abilities to address such issues. This finding extends Broido’s (2000) research regarding how students become social justice allies by suggesting that a given curricular or co-curricular experience may not simultaneously increase students’ information about social
justice issues and their self-confidence to serve as social justice allies and advocates. Although students who identified as social justice allies in Broido’s study discussed the importance of both being more informed and being self-confident, students in LEAD 2100 explained that it was more difficult to be self-confident when they were more informed.

This case study thus raises the question of how to build students’ self-confidence in their ability to effect social change. According to Avolio and Hannah (2008), self-confidence to develop a specific ability or skill in a specific context or leader role—what they termed developmental efficacy—can be built through four strategies including the following: (1) experiences that challenge the adequacy of a person’s current ways of making meaning, (2) role modeling or vicarious learning that provide examples of successful leader development, (3) feedback that emphasizes one’s potential to develop, and (4) experiences that tap into one’s “individual interests, positive feelings, and intrinsic motivation about a particular area of development” (p. 338). Given that many students in LEAD 2100 demonstrated relatively low levels of developmental efficacy despite the educators’ use of all four strategies to some extent, the findings from this study suggest that building developmental efficacy to effect social change represents a particularly complex task. Educators may need to more intentionally match certain strategies to certain students’ needs. Also, additional strategies beyond the four that Avolio and Hannah described may be necessary. As Domingue and Neely (2013) discussed, preparing students to take action is a key challenge of education for social justice.
Implications

When considering the impact of research, Richardson (2000) asks: “Does this [work] affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?” (p. 254). I kept these questions in mind throughout the research process as I hoped to produce research that positively impacts research and practice within higher education and student affairs. Readers must be the ultimate judges of whether or to what extent this research is meaningful and useful. Eisner (1998) explained, “In qualitative case studies the researcher can…generalize, but it is more likely that readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work” (p. 204). Eisner’s statement serves as a reminder that transferability—not statistical generalization—is the goal of qualitative case studies. Describing the transferability process, Eisner (1998) explained that readers “must recognize the similarity…between one situation and the next and then make the appropriate inference” (p. 198). Although readers must decide how to use the results of this research for their purposes, I hope to initiate the conversation by describing several implications of this study for educational research and practice.

Implications for Research

This study holds implications for the types of research processes that scholars use as well as the types of research questions scholars ask regarding college student development. In terms of research processes, this study highlights the benefits of using multiple methods to collect data. In particular, interviews with educators can provide the opportunity to enrich and contextualize theoretical conceptualizations of developmental constructs such as critical consciousness. Understanding how educators define a
construct within a given context can help researchers ask more tailored questions during interviews and make more informed observations during fieldwork. Also, combining participant-observation with document analysis and in-depth interviews can allow researchers to use intertextuality to more accurately interpret data. As Gubrium and Holstein (2009) explained, “intertextuality refers to the ways in which the meaning of a text is shaped by the meaning of other texts” and “is a way of saying that individual accounts owe much of their structure and meaning to other accounts” (p. 185). For example, because participant-observation allowed me to become familiar with the accounts of societal inequities students read in articles, watched in documentary videos, and heard from panelists and guest speakers, I was able to understand students’ comments during interviews in richer, more nuanced ways. When Erica referenced “the film that we watched…about the friends and neighbors food pantry” to explain how food insecurity affects families, I understood how Erica’s account of food insecurity reflected the narratives from the film. In effect, using participant-observation in combination with in-depth interviews and document analysis allows researchers to more clearly and fully see the sociocultural influences on students’ development.

Combining participant-observation with in-depth interviews and document analysis also allows researchers to balance the aims of interpretivism and critical theory. Collecting data via interviews and student-created documents such as class assignments offers the opportunity to stay close to students’ ways of making meaning while collecting data through participant-observation provides the ability for researchers to incorporate their own ways of making meaning into the research process. Through multiple methods, researchers can better situate their perspective on students’ developmental processes.
alongside participants’ perspectives. Although using multiple methods requires additional time and energy to collect and analyze data, it has the potential to substantively enhance the rigor and value of the research.

This study also shows the importance of studying how development occurs within higher education at the microsystem level—that is, within settings where individuals engage in activities, roles, and relationships that directly influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993). Although research regarding college student development often foregrounds the individual rather than the microsystem, due in part to reliance on individual interviews to collect data (Patton et al., 2016), the use of participant-observation in this study highlighted the inextricable links among students’ and educators’ behaviors and thought processes. For example, Elon’s emphasis on avoiding polarization and Dr. Wells’s desire to engage students in civil discourse intersected with and influenced students’ decisions of when and how to contribute to class discussions. Interpreting students’ participation in class discussions without understanding how educators’ facilitation established the boundaries for and norms of class discussions would have led to an incomplete, if not inaccurate, portrait of students’ development. The value of using the microsystem as the unit of analysis helps address Mayhew and Fernández’s (2007) question about whether there is a better choice than using the student as the unit of analysis for understanding practices and outcomes related to social justice education. Based on this study, the microsystem appears to be the better choice.

The importance of studying how interactions with a microsystem influence students’ development holds two important implications for research regarding college student development. First, it suggests that studying groups of students and educators
who are engaged in a common learning experience—rather than random samples of students who have little to no interaction with one another—is necessary to better understand the sociocultural aspects of development. Such groups may include (but certainly are not limited to) seminar courses, co-curricular activities that extend over multiple weeks, or residential learning communities. Second, the importance of microsystem-level interactions for students’ development suggests the need to use data collection and analysis methods that allow researchers to attend to group dynamics. Using participant-observation or focus groups, along with in-depth individual interviews, and analyzing data at an individual and group level can help researchers gain a more complete understanding of how development occurs within higher education.

This study also surfaced key challenges associated with studying students’ development using case study methodology. In particular, it showed the difficulty of co-constructing meaning with students regarding developmental processes. Moving beyond what students know (i.e., content) to how students know (i.e., structure) represents a well-known challenge within developmental research because content is far more visible and accessible to students than is structure. For example, students can explain what position they take on a social issue easier than they can discuss how they arrived at that position (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). However, this challenge is amplified when researchers seek to better understand not only how students know but also how they learn to know in those ways (i.e., metacognitive reflection on structure).

In this study, I needed to help students move from describing what they learned about a topic in LEAD 2100 to how they made meaning of the topic and then how the course helped them make meaning of the topic. Conducting such a multi-layered
interview in a 45- to 60-minute timeframe required me to constantly make decisions about when and how to make the next move. In several cases, I felt like I was overly structuring the interview interaction and thus not meeting the constructivist-based goal of allowing students to decide what information was most relevant and important to share. This challenge suggests that research regarding developmental processes requires substantive interactions between participants and interviewers on multiple occasions to allow for the rapport necessary for participants and researchers to be able to co-construct meaning. Also, researchers may need to be prepared to scaffold students’ metacognitive reflection abilities by asking questions that call for description of new insights before asking questions that require reflection on the process that led to such insights.

A second related challenge may arise when studying developmental processes within the context of large research-intensive universities. In such a context, students may equate educational effectiveness with opportunities for engagement. For example, because the discussion-based, experiential nature of LEAD 2100 was unique when compared with other undergraduate courses at Midwestern State University, students described activities they found particularly engaging as especially effective at broadening their understanding of themselves and their worlds. Certainly, literature indicates that engagement is a key component of educational effectiveness (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010), but I often wondered if students’ excitement at being engaged obscured finer points of the interconnections between learning and development.

For example, during interviews, students rarely discussed the weekly reflection papers without prompting. But when prompted, students explained that the opportunity to reflect on class sessions and discussions was important to their learning. Erica noted:
The weekly reflection papers are annoying, but I think they’re necessary to help you contextualize and soak up everything that we’ve been learning about and working on. I literally hate doing these papers, but it’s definitely a necessity to get the full effect of the entire class. It’s one thing to have discussions in a group, but it’s another thing to actually dig in your own head and take some time to think about it.

The benefits of the weekly reflection papers would have remained largely theoretical had I used a more pure form of constructivist interviewing and remained focused only on the aspects of the course on which students initiated discussion. This challenge, along with the first one, indicate that researchers need to strike a careful balance between the goal of allowing students to introduce topics they find most relevant and meaningful for their development with the goal of understanding how specific factors influence students’ development.

In terms of research questions, this study provides the basis for several areas of future research. First, it opens the door for additional inquiry regarding how educators’ ways of making meaning shape students’ development toward critical consciousness. Although this study allowed me to explore two educators’ ways of making meaning, it would be helpful to examine this question with a broader group of educators with varied academic backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives. This line of research will allow scholars to identify the ways of making meaning of one’s role as an educator, interactions with students, and institutional contexts that underlie education aimed at fostering critical consciousness.
Second, this study provides a model for conducting in-depth case studies to examine how other commonly used, frequently lauded educational practices such as study abroad and senior capstones influence students’ development. Continuing to study developmental processes within specific educational contexts stands to enrich understanding of how learning, development, and instruction interconnect. Third, while the focus of this study was not specifically on an analysis of how gender operates in the development of critical consciousness, results point to the need for future research in this area. Finally, this study begs the question, “How do students use critical consciousness to effect social change?” In other words, it raises the question of how students apply critical consciousness outside the class and to social issues they face. Ethnographic research in which scholars observe students in multiple settings and longitudinal research in which scholars follow students over time are both important for further examining how students develop toward critical consciousness.

**Implications for Higher Education Policies and Practices**

In addition to holding implications for research regarding college student development, this study holds several important implications for higher education policies and practices that aim to prepare students for their roles and responsibilities within diverse democratic communities. With regard to departmental and institutional policies and practices, this study highlights the need for a multi-course curriculum that progressively scaffolds students’ development toward critical consciousness. Although students made visible strides toward making meaning of themselves in relation to their social worlds in more complex ways in LEAD 2100, many completed the course still unsure how they could address the structural nature of societal inequities. Indeed,
students’ uncertainty about what actions to take and how to implement solutions actually represented a developmental achievement of LEAD 2100 because it indicated an increased awareness of the root causes of societal inequities. Yet, given that LEAD 2100 served as an elective that did not fit into a cohesive curricular sequence at Midwestern State, students often did not have the opportunity to engage in additional coursework that helped them develop and implement structural solutions for the root causes that they now were able to see. By clearly and intentionally connecting a course such as LEAD 2100 to a broader series of courses, departments and institutions can better ensure that undergraduate students graduate with the abilities necessary to not only critically examine social issues but also intentionally enact solutions. The Earth Sustainability Series at Virginia Tech, which involves interdisciplinary coursework over four semesters, provides a model for a developmentally sequenced undergraduate curriculum within a research-intensive context (Bekken & Marie, 2007). In addition, the interdisciplinary writing curriculum at Miami University that Haynes (2004) described shows how to sequence courses to help students progressively “see themselves as knowledge producers and potential agents for change” (p. 76).

This study further shows the need for departments and institutions to distinguish the concepts of intercultural understanding and critical consciousness. Both concepts relate to the ability to live and work effectively within diverse communities, but each has a distinct focus and gives rise to different outcomes. For example, LEAD 2100 students’ development toward intercultural understanding allowed them to demonstrate empathy for those who live in rural poverty but did not automatically equip them with the ability to analyze systems of privilege and oppression. In turn, students’ development toward
critical consciousness allowed them to critique policies and practices related to issues such as college access but did not necessarily help them connect with individuals experiencing those issues. In essence, departments and institutions need to recognize that intercultural understanding and critical consciousness represent distinct aims so that they can develop targeted policies and practices. Courses and co-curricular experiences that focus on helping students relate to diverse others can be appropriately designed, implemented, and assessed for the aim of intercultural understanding while courses and co-curricular experiences that focus on helping students examine and address inequities at a societal level can be appropriately designed, implemented, and assessed for the aim of critical consciousness. In contrast to Ortiz and Rhoads’s (2000) multicultural education framework, this study suggests that students can work simultaneously toward demonstrating intercultural understanding and critical consciousness. This finding opens up the opportunity to help first-year undergraduate students not only begin developing the ability to interact effectively with diverse others but also begin recognizing systems of privilege and oppression.

Specific to the aim of critical consciousness, this study points out the importance of continuously helping students move to the societal level and structural nature of inequities. In LEAD 2100, many students’ belief in the myth of meritocracy and socialization toward individualism kept their attention focused on the individual level of social issues and social change efforts. Thus, students tended to hear stories of individuals pulling themselves up by their bootstraps or individuals serving as sole leaders of social change even amidst narratives intended to highlight systemic inequities. Reflecting on how to address the myth of meritocracy, Dr. Wells described the
importance of educating students on the historical context of contemporary social issues.

She explained:

The easy thing [for students to see] is like, “My parents worked hard for me.”

They get that. Maybe grandma, but anything outside of family, they don’t get that it contributes to, or even how White privilege works.…

For me, I can never make it personal; it’s about the data. It’s something that I’m personally very passionate about, but you got to make it about the data. You tell the stories of folks, and this is what they did, and this is why you have this, or how redlining works….Redlining in [Midwestern city], as an example, of how to cut off urban areas and have them financially suffocate themselves, and how that was intentional. Some people’s wealth or ability to access suburbs was already preplanned.

LEAD 2100 activities such as the Barrenton food insecurity case study also prompted students to move to the societal level and structural nature of inequities by expecting students to work with others to address root causes of social issues. Other strategies that Dr. Wells and Elon used to help students move beyond the individual level included selecting documentaries that situated personal narratives within broader systems such as schools and non-profit organizations; asking students probing questions regarding the basis of their perspectives; and requiring students to research the community contexts for the community service experience. Resource and power mapping provides an additional way to help students move beyond the individual level. According to McGarvey and MacKinnon (2008), resource mapping involves “gathering information about social, economic, or political problems and identifying community resources to address them”
(“Resource Mapping,” para. 1), while power mapping focuses on identifying “who has power to change the situation and make a plan of action” (“Power Mapping,” para. 1). Based on the findings from this study, the key is to frame both issues and solutions as dependent upon the interconnections among systems rather than the products of individual effort.

With regard to policies and practices for individual courses, this study suggests that the incorporation of some form of experiential learning is essential to fostering undergraduate students’ development toward critical consciousness; yet, this study also helps broaden the definition of what commonly counts as experiential learning. Although a required community service experience was one way that LEAD 2100 educators engaged students in experiential learning, it was not the only way or even the primary way students were able to experience how course concepts applied to real-world contexts. Panel discussions with community members, a field trip to a nearby community, and documentary videos also allowed students to immerse themselves—whether physically or vicariously—in what it means to live in poverty. In this study, the quality of the experience proved more influential in students’ developmental processes than the form of the experience. Based on this finding, educators should focus less on whether their course fits within a particular category of experiential learning and more on how their course includes experiences that provide concrete examples and highlight the human emotions associated with course concepts. In other words, educators seeking to foster development in general and development toward critical consciousness in particular should return to the roots of experiential learning. As Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning cycle indicates, it is experience in and among the world that serves as the basis of
reflective observations and abstract conceptualizations, which in turn serves as the basis for action; such experience need not stem from one specific activity to foster learning and development.

For service-learning courses in particular, this study provides a model that allows students to engage and wrestle with the complex realities of societal inequities without potentially harming communities as they do so. Avoiding the potential for harm to communities and negative learning outcomes through service-learning requires students to be developmentally ready to build mutual relationships with those whom they are serving. Yet, in courses that require students to begin serving relatively early in the semester, students may enter service relationships unprepared to personally develop from the experience and meaningfully contribute to the community (Jones, 2002; Jones et al., 2005; Rhoads, 1997; Sharpe & Dear, 2013). This study shows how to help students become developmentally ready to more fully and justly engage in service-learning and thereby meet the outcomes of critical service-learning, which include understanding how specific service experiences connect to larger social issues (Mitchell, 2008). In particular, this study indicates the effectiveness of using critical narratives through forums such as panel discussions and documentary videos to help students vicariously experience issues that they will encounter in service settings. In terms of panel discussions, key criteria for promoting development toward critical consciousness include a strong relationship between the facilitator and panelists, panelists with whom students can relate and who represent diverse experiences and identities, and discussion questions that highlight the emotions associated with the issues at hand. In addition, it is important to choose documentary videos that balance presentation of individuals’ stories with
illustration of the complex power dynamics within societal institutions and organizations. Ultimately, this study highlights the value of helping students gain experience with and make meaning of societal inequities within a classroom setting before asking them to immerse themselves in a service setting.

Finally, this study reveals the need for educators to be well-prepared not only to explain content regarding complex social issues but also to facilitate the dynamic process of learning about complex social issues. According to Zúñiga et al. (2007), content refers to conceptual frameworks, literature, empirical data, and personal narratives while process refers to “the intrapersonal and interpersonal reactions, interactions, and reflections stimulated by experiential learning or exploration of controversial issues or hot topics” (p. 21). As the findings from this study show, attending to the process of learning within a racially and ethnically diverse educational context specifically requires identifying and working to deconstruct barriers to interracial interactions. Intergroup dialogue provides a model for how to attend to both what (content) and how (process) students are learning about complex social issues. To scaffold both the content and process of intergroup dialogue programs, Zúñiga et al. (2007) proposed a four-stage conceptual framework in which the stages “build upon one another and sequence the movement in intergroup dialogue from group beginnings to exploring differences and commonalities to dealing with hot topics or difficult questions to considering or taking action” (p. 26). For example, the content goal for the first stage focuses on clarifying the meaning of dialogue while the process goal for the first stage involves establishing the foundations for honest and meaningful dialogue among group members. Zúñiga et al.’s framework provides concrete steps educators can take to ensure that students’
interactions with one another support, rather than detract from, the aim of fostering critical consciousness. Similarly, the findings from Quaye’s (2012) study regarding strategies educators used to facilitate racial dialogues offers specific ways to attend to the dynamic process of learning within racially and ethnically diverse groups.

The findings from this study further indicate that educators need to be aware of how their own interactions with students influence development. As Watt (2015) argued, educators need to become conscious scholar practitioners who “commit to listen deeply/actively to multiple voices and competing views, to think critically about their own identities, beliefs, values and positionality, to participate authentically and intentionally in difficult dialogues, and to be open to personal development” (p. 32). To foster development toward critical consciousness, educators must also engage in the process of enhancing their abilities to enact critically conscious beliefs and values. As Jones and Abes (2013) noted, “students cannot be expected to do the difficult work of understanding the influence of systems of privilege and oppression if educators have not engaged in their own meaningful exploration” (p. 229).

**Strengths and Limitations**

As with all research, readers should consider the results of this study in light of both its limitations and strengths. One limitation relates to the recruitment of students to participate in the series of three semi-structured interviews and the process of keeping a weekly journal for the purposes of this study. Although nearly half the LEAD 2100 students indicated that they were taking the course to fulfill an elective for the sports administration major, none of these students chose to participate in interviews or keep a weekly journal. Thus, the interviews and weekly journal entries—which collectively
represent a substantive source of data—do not reflect the perspectives of students who were drawn to the course primarily if not exclusively to complete their bachelor’s degree program requirements. Rather, the interviews and weekly journal entries reflect the perspectives of students who chose to take the course as part of a leadership studies minor and/or who were drawn to the course given that Dr. Wells was teaching it. This selection bias represents a limitation in the sense that participants who provided data via interviews and weekly journal entries may have had more motivation to and interest in developing toward critical consciousness than their peers. The findings may not fully apply to students with less motivation and interest or to courses that represent a curricular requirement rather than an elective.

Also, this study is limited based on my own positionality. My own background, identities, and lived experiences inherently focused my attention on certain aspects of the course and gave rise to particular ways of interpreting and presenting the data. Although I engaged in reflexivity throughout the study to remain aware of how my own positionality was influencing the process of data collection and analysis, the findings nonetheless represent only my own perspective. Collaborating with a team of diverse researchers to collect and analyze data would have strengthened this study. Related to this limitation, the findings do not fully incorporate Dr. Wells’s perspective. I was not able to complete the final interview with Dr. Wells because she was hospitalized at the end of fall 2016 semester and passed away a couple months later. Because the final interview was designed as a way to check my findings, the absence of this interview from my dataset means that the findings may not fully or accurately reflect Dr. Wells’s perspective regarding how LEAD 2100 students developed toward critical consciousness.
Finally, the findings are limited to how students demonstrated signs of critical consciousness within a classroom context and do not reflect whether or how students demonstrated signs of critical consciousness in their co-curricular and off-campus experiences. As a result, it remains unclear if students were able to apply and enact the ways of making meaning they were developing in LEAD 2100 in other contexts.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a methodologically rigorous, in-depth analysis of how a racially and ethnically diverse group of undergraduate students developed toward critical consciousness. By incorporating perspectives based on class observations and interviews with educators, this study overcomes limitations associated with students’ self-reports of their development. The incorporation of multiple types and sources of data provides a rich, nuanced portrait of how psychological and sociocultural factors collectively influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness. Also, the incorporation of multiple types and sources of data helped me as a researcher better see and live with the inherent tensions between interpretivism and critical theory. Because I could ground my interpretations of experiences not only on students’ accounts but also educators’ accounts as well as my own observations, I was able to figure out how and when to use my perspective to complement participants’ perspectives.

Moreover, by intentionally and carefully exploring the link between learning and development, this study holds direct implications for educational practice. In particular, it highlights specific ways in which collegiate educators can help students broaden their understanding of the roots of and solutions for complex social issues. The implications that arise from this study are tailored to a 15-week, semester-long undergraduate course at a large research university, which represents a common context in which higher
education administrators and educators work. As a result, the implications are more readily and recognizably transferrable than those that stem from studies of students’ development in broader or less common contexts.

A final strength of this study is its ability to show how students make progress toward desired learning outcomes. By focusing on how students develop complex ways of making meaning of themselves in relation to their social worlds, this study helps explain why students do—or in some cases, do not—reach the ways of making meaning necessary to address societal inequities within higher education. In essence, this study shows not only whether certain educational activities and experiences are effective but also the conditions under which they are effective. Such rich, contextualized information shows the importance of seeing a fuller portrait of an educational experience before evaluating or classifying it as effective. For example, by highlighting that compositional diversity within a course does not automatically lead to interracial interactions, this study can help administrators and educators avoid the tendency to too quickly embrace or dismiss any particular policy or practice aimed at promoting diversity on campus. As the findings show, how students learn is essential to what they learn.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the broader significance and implications of this case study regarding how undergraduate students developed toward critical consciousness within a critical service-learning course. Also, I described some key limitations and strengths of the study. Taken as a whole, this chapter shows the ways in which this study contributes to the field of higher education and student affairs and the knowledge base regarding college student development. Although readers’ use of the findings will
ultimately determine the extent to which this study fulfills its aim of helping educators and institutions better foster critical consciousness, this chapter allows researchers and educators alike to see opportunities for application. In the next chapter, I conclude with a postscript to honor Dr. Wells, who made this research possible.
Chapter 6: Postscript

When Dr. Wells unexpectedly passed away while I was still in the midst of writing my dissertation, I found myself in uncharted territory as a qualitative researcher. Suddenly, the data I had collected and analyzed throughout LEAD 2100 took on new meaning. Photos I had taken, interviews I had recorded, and field notes I had written not only served to inform educational policies and practices but also to memorialize the passion and pedagogy of a beloved educator. “How do I use this data to honor Dr. Wells? To help her colleagues, students, friends, and family heal? To carry on her legacy? How do I do all of this while maintaining confidentiality?” I asked myself.

Unsure of how to proceed, I returned to the data in search of insights about what Dr. Wells would want me to do. An excerpt from our first interview for this study provided guidance.

Coming to the end of our hour together, I asked Dr. Wells, “Are there aspects of who you are as an educator or other aspects of the class that we haven’t talked about that you think are important?” She responded:

I think that I will talk about my theory of the Alice-in-Wonderland effect, which I haven’t copyrighted, but feel free to put in a quotation with a citation to me. I talk about the Alice-in-Wonderland effect. You go into something thinking that you’re going to put all this stuff into it, sort of like with service. “I’m going to do all this stuff for this little kid and they’re going to look up to me.” The Alice-in-
Wonderland effect is, you go in with that lens and you come out the better person. You come out totally changed.

Dr. Wells had begun gathering evidence of this Alice-in-Wonderland effect among students whom she advised. “What I’m doing is collecting these narratives on where [students] are now based on their touchstone, not so much with me, but the advising that I was giving,” she explained. “I want them to talk about, ‘What was the impact of having someone like me give you holistic counseling?’ … I’m hoping to see a lot of Alice-in-Wonderland effects.”

The findings from this study help show how LEAD 2100 students experienced the Alice-in-Wonderland effect. But I, too, came out of the experience “the better person”—a more careful listener, a more thoughtful participant-observer, and a more confident scholar. “Talk about that,” I believe Dr. Wells would say. “What was the impact of having someone like me give you unconditional access to my course?” she likely would add. In this postscript, I share my narrative of the impact of Dr. Wells’s participation in this study. It is my hope that my narrative serves to pay tribute to all that Dr. Wells gave to me as a researcher and to show you as a reader the power that arises when educators and researchers collaborate to examine developmental processes.

“It’s Hard to Define Swag”

During our first interview as I worked to better understand the roots of Dr. Wells’s pedagogy, I prompted her to discuss how her educational and professional background influenced her teaching. She noted, “I had a lot of professors who weren’t very good. I was like, ‘I never want to be them.’” For Dr. Wells, not being like other
professors involved dressing in a way that showed students she cared about teaching. She explained:

I don’t ever want to be “Corporate America.” I’d rather have a professor who dresses like Bill Nye the Science Guy or Neil Degrasse Tyson. They’re interesting dressers because they’re scientists, but they’re interesting people. I’d rather it be like that. Dressing like that you care about yourself, and your presentation….I think it adds to my material is fresh and my dress is fresh.

Not being like other professors also involved being approachable. Reflecting on the notion of approachability, Dr. Wells noted:

That’s a very interesting sort of thing, how are you available? Are you open? I think it’s very interesting when students feel like they can come and talk to you about all kinds of stuff. I think when you dress the part with the performance piece and you act a certain way in class, you’re the professor people always ask for a letter of rec….You become that person. I’ve been that person a lot, so I know I’m doing something right.

Based on my observations during the first day of class and my first few interviews with student participants, I knew that Dr. Wells became that person almost instantaneously for many students. And yet, how this happened remained a source of great curiosity for me as a researcher. “How can other professors become that person? What verbal and non-verbal cues signal approachability?” I wondered.

“How do you express that approachability and openness?” I asked Dr. Wells, hoping she could help me know what to listen and watch for as I continued my research. She responded, “It’s hard to define swag. It is hard to define.” Indeed it is, I thought.
Leaving space for elaboration, I waited for Dr. Wells to offer a definition. Instead, she shared a memory from her own dissertation process that clarified the question with which I was wrestling. She recounted:

> When I was writing my dissertation on the African American males class as a retention model, [one of my dissertation committee members] asked me, “Is it the work or is it you or is it both?” He said, “What you need to know is, ‘Is it those three different options?’ It’s okay if it’s just you, but you need to know that that’s the case.” My thing is, “Is it the dynamic that draws students in? Is it me? Or, is it the work?” I don’t know.

There it was: one of the most enduring questions regarding education. How much does the educator herself account for student success? I, too, did not know the answer at the time. But because I had gained clarity on and renewed curiosity about the question, I was able to pay keen attention to how Dr. Wells’s undeniable swag influenced students’ development toward critical consciousness.

Swag remained hard to define but proved essential to capture as I sought to better understand how development occurred within LEAD 2100. Watching for and inviting multiple perspectives on the nature of swag and its role in collegiate education yielded richer, more personalized and nuanced data. It led me to see the importance of describing the Miss Frizzle outfit Dr. Wells wore on the first day of class, the “Oprah-style give-away” approach she took to student engagement, and the delight she found in ordering platefuls of appetizers for students. It also led me to look for Elon’s version of swag. Elon’s version was not as palpable as Dr. Wells’s, but through careful and consistent observation, I came to see that Elon’s stories about his newly adopted dog, his passion for
Collegeville’s library system, and his intentional selection of documentaries to show in class also generated an aura of approachability and openness. Ultimately, the challenge of defining and describing swag pushed me to continuously recognize and probe the deeply relational nature of collegiate teaching and learning.

Go All In

As the required community service experience for LEAD 2100 approached, Dr. Wells reminded students, “You have to wear a costume. It’s part of the experience.” Remembering her college-aged audience, she added, “But no sexy costumes. Your costume needs to be kid-appropriate.” Students expressed few concerns about this request. I, on the other hand, had several concerns. “Are there kid-appropriate costumes for adults?” I questioned given my total lack of experience dressing up for Halloween beyond age 12. “Does the requirement to wear a costume apply to me as a researcher? Should it apply?” I contemplated, thinking that perhaps I could take field notes in a quiet corner while wearing jeans and a t-shirt. But Dr. Wells had made wearing a costume seem so imperative that I quickly moved from looking for a way out of the requirement to deciding what to wear to the Halloween party I had signed up to attend as part of my participant-observation for this study. After mulling over various options, I settled on dressing up as Snow White. “With my dark hair and pale complexion, I think I can pull this off,” I thought. “And, a classic Disney princess surely meets the ‘kid-appropriate’ criterion.” Still in researcher mode, I began Googling images of Snow White to identify the specific details of her attire. “Okay, I need a white-collared dress with a blue bodice and a yellow skirt, a red ribbon for my hair, and low-heeled shoes.”
The night of the Halloween party, another wave of concerns hit me. “What if kids don’t know who I’m supposed to be? Which pair of shoes best completes the outfit? Will my turquoise notebook for field notes ruin the look?” I pondered, now committed to looking as much like Snow White as possible. Glancing at the clock, I took one last look in the mirror, grabbed my coat and car keys, and headed out the door. When Dr. Wells saw me at the Halloween party, she exclaimed with surprise, “Oh my God, Kari! You win! You’re the perfect Snow White.” Not quite sure how to interpret her surprise, I responded, “Well, you said we needed to wear a costume, so I decided to go all in.”

Throughout the course of the evening as I helped chase down bean bags and hand out candy for one of the games, I occasionally found a little girl tugging on my yellow skirt. “I’ve always wanted to meet Snow White,” one girl whispered to me shyly. “You’re her favorite Disney princess,” the mom of another girl explained as she snapped a photo. Through such interactions, I came to better understand what Dr. Wells meant when she said that wearing a costume was “part of the experience.”

As it turned out, the costume was as necessary for the research I was doing as it was for the community service we as a class were providing. I would not have been able to fully appreciate the effect of the community service had I dressed casually and taken notes inconspicuously. And, I would not have been able to so vividly remember both the challenges and benefits that accompany the need to step beyond one’s comfort zone to meet a course requirement. In effect, I would have remained removed from the participants’ worlds I was working to better understand. But my decision to go all in for the Halloween party helped me enact my commitment to understanding both educators’ goals and students’ experiences. Positioning myself near the observation end of the
participant-observation continuum had worked well for classroom contexts. Yet, when it came to the experiential learning activities within LEAD 2100, I needed to move toward the other end of the continuum to become more of a full participant. As Dr. Wells understood so clearly, the best way to understand a world different than the one in which you live—whether as a student or a researcher—is to experience it firsthand. And, as Dr. Wells understood even better, the best way to pursue any project is to go all in.

**Use Your Voice Without Apology**

Near the end of our second interview, Dr. Wells turned the conversation toward her passion for women’s leadership as she reflected on Melissa’s and Dave’s debate regarding gender inequities in collegiate athletics. Dr. Wells explained:

I was very disappointed in how apologetic [Melissa] was. I wanted her to be unapologetic. I wanted her to be like, “This is what I say, and this is what I mean.” I was disappointed in the fact that it seemed she wasn’t confident….There’s still that gendered thing around. I wish that she wasn’t graduating because I’d make her take my women’s leadership class. Describing gender dynamics she often experienced while teaching, Dr. Wells continued, “Women typically always enter arguments and say, ‘I’m sorry, but…’ or ‘Da, da, da, da. Oh, I’m sorry.’ Stop it. Say what you have to say and mean it, even if it’s wrong.”

As Dr. Wells broadened her reflections to leadership within U.S. society, she noted:

The women are still silent and absent. I think that’s reflected in politics, like local and state politics. Look at governors. How many women governors are there compared to male governors?….but women are getting more degrees. Women are more educated than the other group. It doesn’t make any sense to still be that
way. That bothers me. I think that’s why these decisions are continuously being made about women’s bodies without really women’s consent. By consent, I mean their vote or representation. I think that that comes out in a classroom where it’s discussed-based and whose voice that you hear. If you hear a female voice, she might be apologetic.

At the time, Dr. Wells’s commentary struck me—partly because I, too, had felt a sense of disappointment when I heard Melissa apologize for the perspective she shared in class and partly because I, too, had often felt the need to apologize for saying what I had to say. I realized that the “gendered thing” that tends to exist within academia in general and at large research universities in particular had eroded my confidence and quieted my voice. As I reflected on my experience in a Ph.D. program, I recalled routinely questioning whether I could or should lay claim to any sort of expertise within my chosen field of higher education and student affairs. On a daily basis, I wrestled with the urge to downplay the quality of my professional knowledge and skills and minimize the importance of my research. I was allowing myself to stay silent and absent. But Dr. Wells’s insights about gender dynamics and commitment to women’s leadership reminded me that it should not be that way.

For me, Dr. Wells modeled how women can use—in fact, need to use—their voices without apology. By interacting with Dr. Wells, I realized that when I spoke and wrote as a scholar, I tended to leave others with the impression that I was not confident in my perspective, even when I had formed my perspective based on lived realities and careful thought. “Stop it. Say what you have to say and mean it, even if it’s wrong,” I now hear her say when self-doubt threatens to dilute the claims I want to make or
perfectionism serves to impede my completion of a scholarly project. Dr. Wells’s insistence that being silent is far worse than being wrong helped empower me to engage more authentically in the research process and contribute more fully to the field of higher education and student affairs. The voice I am able to use to communicate the results of this research is stronger and clearer because of Dr. Wells’s influence.

“You Really Can’t Do Something by Yourself”

Throughout our interviews, Dr. Wells spoke often of the importance of working and learning within community. By community, she meant a group composed of individuals both past and present with common goals and collective responsibility for social change. Reflecting on students’ tendency to cling to ideals of meritocracy, Dr. Wells noted, “We teach history so poorly that you don’t realize that women need to always be thinking about Alice Paul and Lucy Burns. They need to be thinking about Ida B. Wells and being grateful there.” For Dr. Wells, an in-depth understanding of history helped cultivate community by helping individuals realize how their efforts became possible due to their predecessors’ accomplishments. Dr. Wells encouraged students not only to find connections with their predecessors but also to form partnerships with their present-day peers. As she described the course goals for LEAD 2100, she explained that she sought to help students learn to think critically and solve problems “in community” because “you really can’t do something by yourself. That’s not a thing.” She added, “To really do any type of real social change, you have to join or get other people to join you.” This steadfast commitment to community represented a defining feature of Dr. Wells’s work as an educator and lay at the heart of her willingness and ability to be “that person”
who influenced multitudes of students. This steadfast commitment to community also led to our collaboration for this research.

After selecting LEAD 2100 as the case for this research, I arranged to meet with Dr. Wells to gain informed consent and discuss various details of the research process. For the meeting, Dr. Wells invited me to her home. When I arrived, I found her working at the kitchen table with Rachel, whom I learned would help lead the field trip for LEAD 2100. Large sheets of paper with notes about civic engagement initiatives lined one wall. Dr. Wells explained that she and Rachel were developing plans for the upcoming academic year. As I began nervously discussing my study, Dr. Wells stopped me on occasion to consult with Rachel and discuss how to connect my rather abstract ideas for data collection to specific aspects of the course. From that meeting forward, this study became a reality because of Dr. Wells’s willingness to join with me and get others to join with me.

I never set out to do research by myself, but Dr. Wells’s sense of working and learning within community helped me frame and engage in collaboration in new ways. When Dr. Wells explained that she based her pedagogy on bell hooks’s trilogy of *Teaching to Transgress*, *Teaching Community*, and *Teaching Critical Thinking*, I saw the importance of immersing myself in bell hooks’s work even though I had grounded my literature review on Freire’s scholarship. When co-curricular opportunities for LEAD 2100 arose throughout the semester, I realized the value of carving out time to attend even though I had more than enough data with which to work. And, when Dr. Wells’s death brought me to my knees, I found the courage to reach out for support even though I feared others would see me as weak. In each case, the sense of community that Dr. Wells
advocated helped me resist norms within higher education that often lead to insularity. Working in community ultimately allowed me to build upon—rather than repeat or repackage—existing scholarship and to experience the humanity of qualitative research. Certainly, I could not have done this type of research without educators and students granting me their time and insights. But more significantly, I could not have done this type of research without being surrounded by others past and present who share a deep commitment to college student development. As Dr. Wells would say, doing this type of research by yourself “is not a thing.”

**Wait for the Full Effect**

Discussing the Alice-in-Wonderland effect, Dr. Wells noted, “Part of an instructor’s patience is the willingness to wait to see it, maybe not during class and not right after.” She continued, “You have to invest and not see a return on investment right away and not be frustrated.” Because the Alice-in-Wonderland effect takes time to materialize, I am only just beginning to be able to identify and articulate the ways in which Dr. Wells’s investment in my research influenced who I am as a scholar and what I can contribute to the field of higher education and student affairs. As I hope this narrative conveys, her influence already has been extensive. But I ask you, the reader, also to be patient and know that the return on investment is still on its way. This dissertation is but one modest yield from Dr. Wells’s passion and pedagogy. When it comes to the task of ensuring higher education prepares undergraduates with the willingness and ability to address societal inequities, I am now all in and ready to say what I have to say unapologetically. Through my research, I will continue working and
learning within community to carry on Dr. Wells’s legacy. May the Alice-in-
Wonderland effects continue.
References


295


Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Study Information Sheet for Faculty & Staff:
Contextualizing How Undergraduate Students Develop Critical Consciousness

Project Overview:
You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project that seeks to better understand how undergraduate students enrolled in a service-learning course develop the capacity for critical consciousness. For the purposes of this project, critical consciousness refers to a complex ways of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that students demonstrate through behaviors such as exploring diverse perspectives on social issues, analyzing root causes of social inequities, and taking responsibility for helping address social problems.

Kari Taylor, a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program, will facilitate this project. Previously, Kari has taught service-learning courses for undergraduate students. She also has completed research for a national study that examined how undergraduate students made meaning of their collegiate experiences and made progress toward achieving a range of liberal arts learning outcomes.

Why Should I Participate?
By participating in this project, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your facilitation of the service-learning course. Such reflection can help you gain greater self-awareness as an educator and deepen your understanding of effective pedagogical strategies for helping students think more complexly about themselves and their relationships with diverse others. Moreover, this project can enhance other educators’ understanding of how students develop the skills and abilities necessary to understand and address pressing social issues.

What Does Participation Involve?
Through this project, I will seek to understand the learning and development process in a variety of ways including observing class sessions, conducting interviews, and analyzing relevant course documents. As the instructor of the course, your participation involves the following:

- Allowing me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding class sessions. In some specific cases, I may request permission to audio or video record parts of a class session in order to ensure I capture the complexities and nuances of group dynamics. These recordings, along with my notes, will be used solely for the purposes of addressing my research questions.
- Participating in three one-on-one interviews. Each interview will be conversational in nature, and I will invite you to decide what information is most relevant and useful to discuss.
Interview #1: This interview will take place at the beginning of the semester and will last approximately one hour. Through this interview, I will seek to better understand key factors that influence students’ learning process in the course.

Interview #2: This interview will take place approximately midway through the semester and will also last approximately one hour. In this interview, I will ask you to share your perspective on how interactions in the classrooms and at service sites are influencing students’ willingness and ability to broaden their understanding of themselves in relation to diverse others.

Interview #3: This interview will take place at the end of the semester and will last approximately 30 minutes. I will share some of my preliminary findings to make sure they ring true to you. You will also have a chance to provide additional insights for the project.

Safeguards for ensuring the privacy, confidentiality, and proper use of data are summarized on the attached informed consent form.

When Will the Research Project Take Place?
The research will take place throughout Autumn 2016 semester.

Informed Consent
The attached informed consent form details the circumstances you agree to in participating in this project. Please read the form carefully and contact the researcher if you need further information prior to deciding whether to participate. **Should you decide to participate, please sign and date the consent form and return it to Kari Taylor ([Researcher’s Email Address]; [Researcher’s Campus Address]).** You may withdraw from participating in this project at any time. Thank you.
Study Information Sheet for Student Participants:
Contextualizing How Undergraduate Students Develop Critical Consciousness

Project Overview:
You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project that seeks to better understand how undergraduate students enrolled in a service-learning course develop the capacity to address social issues. For the purposes of this project, this capacity involves a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world such as being able to analyze the root causes of social inequities.

Kari Taylor, a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program, will facilitate this project. Previously, Kari has taught service-learning courses for undergraduate students. She also has completed research for a national study that examined how undergraduate students made meaning of their collegiate experiences and made progress toward achieving a range of liberal arts learning outcomes.

Why Should I Participate?
By participating in this project, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences in this service-learning course. Such reflection can help you maximize your learning in this course and provides you with the opportunity to share your perspective regarding effective teaching and learning strategies. Also, this project allows you to contribute to educators’ understanding of how students develop the skills and abilities necessary to understand and address pressing social issues.

What Does Participation Involve?
Through this project, I will seek to understand how students develop the capacity to address social issues in a variety of ways including observing class sessions, conducting interviews, and analyzing relevant course documents. As a student, you can choose to participate in two different ways:
Participation Option A:
- Allow me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding your engagement in class sessions and at your service site. In some specific cases, I may request permission to audio or video record parts of a class session in order to ensure I capture the complexities and nuances of group dynamics. These recordings, along with my notes, will be used solely for the purposes of addressing my research questions.
- Provide me with copies of select assignments you complete for this course.
This option will require no additional time commitment beyond your participation in this course.

Participation Option B:
- Allow me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding your engagement in class sessions and at your service site and provide me with copies of select assignments you complete for this course (same as Option A).
- Keep a weekly journal (which you can do via video, audio, blog, email, etc.) in which you record key interactions you experience and messages you encounter regarding social issues.
• Participate in three one-on-one interviews. Each interview will be conversational in nature, and I will invite you to decide what information is most relevant and useful to discuss.
  o Interview #1: This interview will take place at the beginning of the semester and will last approximately one hour. Through this interview, I will seek to better understand who you are and what your expectations are for this course.
  o Interview #2: This interview will take place approximately midway through the semester and will also last approximately one hour. In this interview, I will ask you to reflect on how you are making sense of interactions with others at your service site and messages you encounter regarding social issues.
  o Interview #3: This interview will take place at the end of the semester and will last approximately 30 minutes. I will share some of my preliminary findings to make sure they ring true to you. You will also have a chance to provide additional insights for the project.

This option will require a total of approximately 5-6 hours of your time throughout the semester. If you choose to participate in this option, you will receive a $50 Amazon gift card.

Safeguards for ensuring the privacy, confidentiality, and proper use of data are summarized on the attached informed consent form.

When Will the Research Project Take Place?
The research will take place throughout Autumn 2016 semester.

Informed Consent
The attached informed consent form details the circumstances you agree to in participating in this project. Please read the form carefully and contact the researcher if you need further information prior to deciding whether to participate. Should you decide to participate, please sign and date the consent form and return it to Kari Taylor ([Researcher’s Email Address]; [Researcher’s Campus Address]). You may withdraw from participating in this project at any time. Thank you.
Appendix B: Informed Consent Forms

Informed Consent Form for University Faculty or Staff Participants

[Midwestern State University] Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Contextualizing How Undergraduate Students Develop Critical Consciousness
Researcher: Kari B. Taylor
Sponsor: Dr. Susan R. Jones

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
This project aims to provide a better understanding of how undergraduate students enrolled in a service-learning course develop the capacity for critical consciousness. For the purposes of this project, critical consciousness refers to a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that students demonstrate through behaviors such as exploring diverse perspectives on social issues, analyzing root causes of social inequities, and taking responsibility for helping address social problems.

Procedures/Tasks:
As the instructor of the course, your participation involves the following:

- Allowing me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding class sessions. In some specific cases, I may request permission to audio or video record parts of a class session in order to ensure I capture the complexities and nuances of group dynamics. These recordings, along with my notes, will be used solely for the purposes of addressing my research questions.
- Participating in three one-on-one interviews. Each interview will be conversational in nature, and I will invite you to decide what information is most relevant and useful to discuss.
  - Interview #1: This interview will take place at the beginning of the semester and will last approximately one hour. Through this interview, I
will seek to better understand key factors that influence students’ developmental process in the course.

- **Interview #2:** This interview will take place approximately midway through the semester and will also last approximately one hour. In this interview, I will ask you to share your perspective on how interactions in the classrooms and at service sites are influencing students’ willingness and ability to broaden their understanding of themselves in relation to diverse others.

- **Interview #3:** This interview will take place at the end of the semester and will last approximately 30 minutes. I will share some of my preliminary findings to make sure they ring true to you. You will also have a chance to provide additional insights for the project.

I anticipate that your participation will require a total of 3-4 hours in addition to the regular time you spend teaching the course.

**Duration:**
The research will take place throughout Autumn 2016 semester.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with [Midwestern State University].

**Risks and Benefits:**
By participating in this project, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your facilitation of the service-learning course. Such reflection can help you gain greater self-awareness as an educator and deepen your understanding of effective pedagogical strategies for helping students think more complexly about themselves and their relationships with diverse others. Moreover, this project can enhance other educators’ understanding of how students develop the skills and abilities necessary to understand and address pressing social issues. There are no risks for this project beyond those associated with daily life.

**Confidentiality:**
Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- [Midwestern State University] Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.
Incentives:
If you agree to participate in and grant access to your course for this study, you will receive a $100 gift card for a professional development goal or social justice cause of your choice.

Participant Rights:
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at [Midwestern State], your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at [Midwestern State University] reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation, you may contact Kari Taylor at [Researcher’s Contact Information].

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact [IRB Staff Member] in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the consent form
I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

AM/PM

Date and time

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

AM/PM

Date and time
**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of person obtaining consent</th>
<th>Signature of person obtaining consent</th>
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Date and time [ ] AM/PM
Informed Consent Form for Student Participants

[Midwestern State University] Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Contextualizing How Undergraduate Students Develop Critical Consciousness
Researcher: Kari B. Taylor
Sponsor: Dr. Susan R. Jones

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
This project aims to provide a better understanding of how undergraduate students enrolled in a service-learning course develop the capacity to address social issues. For the purposes of this project, this capacity involves a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world such as being able to analyze the root causes of social inequities.

Procedures/Tasks:
As a student, you can choose to participate in two different ways:

Participation Option A:
- Allow me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding your engagement in class sessions and at your service site. In some specific cases, I may request permission to audio or video record parts of a class session in order to ensure I capture the complexities and nuances of group dynamics. These recordings, along with my notes, will be used solely for the purposes of addressing my research questions.
- Provide me with copies of select assignments you complete for this course.
This option will require no additional time commitment beyond your participation in this course.

Participation Option B:
- Allow me, in my role as a researcher, to observe and take notes regarding your engagement in class sessions and at your service site and provide me with copies of select assignments you complete for this course (same as Option A).
• Keep a weekly journal (which you can do via video, audio, blog, email, etc.) in which you record key interactions you experience and messages you encounter regarding social issues.

• Participate in three one-on-one interviews. Each interview will be conversational in nature, and I will invite you to decide what information is most relevant and useful to discuss.
  o **Interview #1:** This interview will take place at the beginning of the semester and will last approximately one hour. Through this interview, I will seek to better understand who you are and what your expectations are for this course.
  o **Interview #2:** This interview will take place approximately midway through the semester and will also last approximately one hour. In this interview, I will ask you to reflect on how you are making sense of interactions with others at your service site and messages you encounter regarding social issues.
  o **Interview #3:** This interview will take place at the end of the semester and will last approximately 30 minutes. I will share some of my preliminary findings to make sure they ring true to you. You will also have a chance to provide additional insights for the project.

This option will require a total of approximately 5-6 hours of your time throughout the semester. If you choose to participate in this option, you will receive a $50 Amazon gift card.

**Duration:**
The research will take place throughout Autumn 2016 semester.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with [Midwestern State University].

**Risks and Benefits:**
By participating in this project, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences in this service-learning course. Such reflection can help you maximize your learning in this course and provides you with the opportunity to share your perspective regarding effective teaching and learning strategies. Also, this project allows you to contribute to educators’ understanding of how students develop the skills and abilities necessary to understand and address pressing social issues. There are no risks for this project beyond those associated with daily life.

**Confidentiality:**
Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
• Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
• [Midwestern State University] Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
• The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

**Incentives:**
If you agree to participate in Option B, which involves completing brief weekly journal entries and participating in three interviews, you will receive a $50 Amazon gift card.

**Participant Rights:**
You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at [Midwestern State], your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at [Midwestern State University] reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

**Contacts and Questions:**
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or if you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation, you may contact Kari Taylor at [Researcher’s Contact Information].

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact [IRB Staff Member] in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

**Signing the consent form**
I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.
Please indicate your choice of participation options:

- **Option A**: Allow the researcher to observe your engagement in class sessions and at your service site and review select course assignments

- **OR**

- **Option B**: Allow the researcher to observe your engagement in class sessions and at your service site and review select course assignments + complete brief weekly journal entries and participate in three interviews

**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.
Appendix C: Interview Protocols for Educator Participants

Introduction for Each Semi-Structured Interview

- Greet the participant, thank him/her for participating, and put at ease.
- Provide faculty/staff member a one-page written description of the study.
- Make sure faculty/staff member has signed informed consent form and agrees to audio recording of the interview.

- Highlight:
  - My role as the interviewer (i.e., facilitator of reflection)
  - Audio recording of the interview
  - Voluntary participation (the faculty/staff member can refuse to answer or end the interview at any time)
  - Confidentiality
  - How interview data will be used and by whom
  - Use of pseudonym (ask the participant to provide a pseudonym)
  - Time commitment for the interview
  - Opportunity for questions at the end

- Reintroduce the purpose of the study verbally and describe the purpose of the interview.

Interview #1: Mapping the Developmental Ecology of the Case Study Context

[45-60 minutes]

- My main goal for this interview is to better understand the multiple layers of context that influence students’ development toward critical consciousness in this course. We’ll begin with the most immediate contexts or environments including the classroom, service experience, and off-campus field experience and then discuss broader layers such as university and U.S. cultures.

- Classroom Context
  - What brings you to this course?
  - Tell me about your educational philosophy.
  - What does successful learning look like for this class?
  - What do you hope students take away from this course? How do the course activities and assignments help students gain these take aways?
  - How do you expect students to interact with you during class sessions? How do you expect students to interact with one another during class sessions?
  - Based on the student surveys, what are some key characteristics of the group of students enrolled in the course this semester? Where do they seem to be starting in terms of their understanding of poverty and social forces that affect their lives?
• **Service Context**
  - Please describe key features of the service site for this course.
  - What is the nature of the partnership between this course and the community service agency?
  - What roles do students play at the community service agency?

• **Off-campus Field Trip Context**
  - Please describe key features of the off-campus field trip for this course.
  - What is the nature of the off-campus field trip?
  - How do students interact with community members during the off-campus field trip?

• **Exosystem Contexts**
  - Thinking beyond the immediate course environments, what other groups or organizations influence the goals for this course and how you teach this course?
  - For each group or organization the educator identifies:
    - What is the nature of this group/organization?
    - How are you connected to this group/organization? What role do you play in this group/organization?
    - How does this group/organization influence the course?
    - Potential Follow-ups:
      - In what ways does this group/organization support your goals for the course? In what ways does this group/organization create barriers or challenges to your goals for the course?
      - In what ways does this group/organization support how you teach the course? In what ways does this group/organization create barriers or challenges to how you teach the course?

• **Macrosystem Contexts**
  - Thinking now at a broad societal or cultural level, what aspects of U.S. society relate to the goals for this course?
  - For each aspect the educator identifies:
    - Can you tell me more about this aspect? How does it relate to the goals for this course?
    - In what ways does this aspect support your goals for the course? In what ways does this aspect create barriers or challenges to your goals for the course?
    - In what ways does this aspect support how you teach the course? In what ways does this aspect create barriers or challenges to how you teach the course?
Interview #2: Honing in on Mesosystem Interactions
[45-60 minutes]

- My main goal for this interview is to better understand how students’ interactions in the classroom and during the recent field trip are influencing their understanding of themselves in relation to society.
- Review course goals and connect them to critical consciousness. Are there other relevant course goals I have not discussed?
- From your perspective, where are students in terms of meeting the course goals?
- How have you seen students make progress toward the course goals thus far this semester?
- How have you seen students struggle to make progress toward the course goals thus far this semester?
- What aspects of the course are helping students broaden their thinking about their roles in society, their connections with others who are different than them, and/or the complexities of social issues?
  - How is that aspect helping students broaden their thinking?
  - How did your expectations for that aspect compare with how that aspect worked in practice?
- What aspects of the course have posed barriers or challenges to helping students broaden their thinking?
  - How has that aspect posed a barrier/challenge?
  - How did your expectations for that aspect compare with how that aspect worked in practice?
- Probe about specific aspects if necessary:
  - Panelists of alumni from Appalachia
  - Field trip
  - Community service experience
- Overall, what aspects of the course have most significantly contributed to students’ ability to broaden their thinking?
- Overall, what aspects of the course have most significantly interfered with students’ ability to broaden their thinking?

Interview #3: Member Checking Preliminary Findings
[45-60 minutes]

- My main goal for this interview is to discuss some of preliminary findings with you and questions I still have about factors that are influencing students’ learning in [LEAD 2100].
- Ask educator to complete grounded survey. Discuss their responses and notes.
- Grounded Survey Instructions: Please rate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. You will have the opportunity to discuss
your responses during the interview, so please feel free to make notes as you complete the survey. Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

- Personal Background and Previous Experiences
  - I feel an obligation to help others within my community succeed.
  - While growing up, I remember hearing messages about the “playing field” in society being unequal for certain groups of people.
  - I believe that race should not matter in terms of how people are treated but that it does matter within today’s society.
  - I believe that my role as an instructor is to challenge students, even if this makes them uncomfortable at times.

- Community within [LEAD 2100]
  - Students developed a personal connection with most of their peers in [LEAD 2100].
  - [LEAD 2100] was an inclusive community in which students with diverse identities and backgrounds felt valued and respected.
  - In class, I often felt that students were engaging in debates about issues more so than working to understand one another’s perspectives on issues.
  - When people expressed strong emotions during class, I wanted to stop the discussion of the issue at hand.
  - During class discussions, I often felt that students were not fully expressing themselves out of fear of offending someone.
  - As an educator, I expected students to have clear and accurate answers to questions I posed.

- Learning Process within [LEAD 2100]
  - Students made clear connections between concepts they learned in [LEAD 2100] and their academic, career, and/or personal goals.
  - Students seemed shocked or surprised by many of the issues discussed in class.
  - The focus on rural poverty prompted students to think about racial issues in society.
  - The documentaries in [LEAD 2100] were as effective as the field experience to [Appalachia] in terms of helping students see what it really means to live in poverty.
  - When discussing examples of how to create positive change within a community, students most often referred to Majora Carter’s “Greening the Ghetto” initiative in the South Bronx.
  - Over the course of the semester, students became less certain about how to start addressing inequities in society.
  - As an educator, it was important to me that students recognize and respect my expertise related to poverty.

- University Context
  - The 2016 presidential election seemed to influence students’ thinking about inequities within society.
  - From my perspective, diversity and inclusion initiatives at [Midwestern State] help students address inequities within society.
- I am familiar with several undergraduate courses at [Midwestern State] that include field trips.
- When students describe interactions they have had in college with people of different racial identities and backgrounds, they most often discuss interactions with international students.
- I often hear students talking about social issues at [Midwestern State].

- What is missing from the grounded survey in terms of your experience in the course?
Appendix D: Interview Protocols for Student Participants

Introduction for Each Semi-Structured Interview

- Greet the participant, thank him/her for participating, and put at ease.
- Introduce myself and my dissertation research study. Provide student with a one-page written description of the study.
- Make sure student has signed informed consent form and agrees to audio recording of the interview.
- Highlight:
  - My role as the interviewer (i.e., facilitator of reflection)
  - Audio recording of the interview
  - Voluntary participation (the student can refuse to answer or end the interview at any time)
  - Confidentiality
  - How interview data will be used and by whom
  - Use of pseudonym (ask the participant to provide a pseudonym)
  - Time commitment for the interview
  - Opportunity for questions at the end
- Reintroduce the purpose of the study verbally and describe the purpose of the interview.

Interview 1: Understanding Relevant Student Characteristics
[45-60 minutes]

- My main goal for this interview is to get to know you and better understand how you see yourself and the world around you. In the first half of the interview, I’ll ask you to reflect on your background and some key experiences you had while growing up. Then, in the second half of the interview, I’ll ask you to discuss current or recent experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Questions/Areas for Discussion</th>
<th>Possible Follow-up Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Background:</td>
<td>• What do you see as your key talents and strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about yourself.</td>
<td>• What activities or topics most interest you? How do you currently engage in these activities or with these topics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is important to you? What beliefs and values help you make decisions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations for the Course:</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell me about how you chose to take this course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What excites or interests you about this course? What do you hope to gain by the end of this course?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What aspects of this course do you anticipate will be challenging for you? In what ways do you expect those aspects to be challenging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you hope this course contributes to your understanding of poverty?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background Related to the Course:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of your background and previous experiences seem relevant for this course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What previous experiences do you have related to service or service-learning? In what ways have those experiences shaped how you view service? From your perspective, what are the main goals of service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What previous experiences do you have related to poverty? In what ways have those experiences shaped how you think about poverty?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Identities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please take a few minutes to fill out the demographic questionnaire (see page 309). We will use your responses to guide the next section of the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your earliest memory of differences based on these types of characteristics? What information did you learn about those differences at that time? How does this memory compare or contrast with your current understanding of those differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your earliest memory of differences based on [gender, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, ability]? What information did you learn about those differences at that time? How does this memory compare or contrast with your current understanding of those differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there other aspects of your background, identity, or previous experiences that you want to discuss?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Developmental Capacities & Moral Motives

- What has been your most significant learning experience during college so far?
- What was the nature of the experience?
- In what ways was the experience significant to you?
- How did you make sense of the experience?
- How did the experience affect you?

- People often describe college as an opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. In what ways do you hope to grow personally during college? In what ways do you hope to grow professionally during college?
- If you were to work on one change in yourself, what would it be?
- If you were to learn one insight about society and the world we live in, what would it be?
- If you were to improve one way you interact with others, what would it be?

- Usually college is a place where you encounter people who differ from you based on different backgrounds, beliefs, values, etc. Have you interacted with people you perceive as different from you?
- If so, what have these interactions been like?
- How have you made sense of these interactions?
- How have these interactions affected you?
- Have you had any interactions that have been uncomfortable or difficult for you?

- Students sometimes report that they face difficult decisions during college. Have you had to face any difficult decisions?
- If so, what was the nature of the decision?
- How did you work through the decision? How did you negotiate the different perspectives regarding the decision?
- Has there been any time when what you wanted and what others wanted from you conflicted? If so, what was that experience like for you? How did you work through it?

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25 This portion of the interview is adapted from the interview protocol for the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education. See Baxter Magolda and King (2007, 2012) for more details regarding the Wabash National Study.
Overall, how do you think your college experience has affected you?  

How has your college experience influenced how you see yourself, others, and the world around you?  

How has your college experience influenced how you make decisions?  

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: ______________________________

Please respond to the following questions. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to address for the purposes of this study.

1. Please list your academic major(s) and minor(s).
2. What is your year in school?
3. How do you describe your race and ethnicity?
4. How do you describe your gender?
5. How do you describe your sexual orientation?
6. How do you describe your socioeconomic status?
7. Please briefly describe the neighborhood/community in which you grew up (or where you consider your hometown).
8. Please provide any other details about your personal background and identity that you see as relevant to your involvement in this course.

Interview 2: Mapping the Student’s Developmental Ecology  
[60 minutes]

My main goal for this interview is to better understand how you are learning to make meaning of societal inequities and how aspects of your personal background and the course are helping you learn. I am also interested in understanding how other experiences you have had thus far this semester are influencing your learning.

- This interview is not meant to be a teaching evaluation. I believe that each student learns differently; thus, it is important for me to know from your perspective what is helping you to learn.
- While there are a wide range of knowledge, skills, and abilities you may be learning in [LEAD 2100], we’ll be focusing in particular on your knowledge, skills, and abilities related to societal inequities.

- Ask participate to complete free-write exercise. Provide participate with a white sheet of paper with the following instructions at the top:  

-
Take a few minutes to review your journal entries and reflect on your experiences in [LEAD 2100] thus far.

Then, please take a few minutes to describe what you have learned about inequities in society (i.e., differences among groups of people in which one group has less access to resources such as education, healthcare, and safety than other groups) this semester. You are welcome to use images as well as words in your description, and you do not need to write in complete sentences. Write and/or draw whatever comes to mind.

- Probe as necessary to get to the leading edge of students’ meaning making. Possible probes include the following:
  - How do societal inequities relate to you?
  - During the first few class periods, [Dr. Wells] often encouraged the class to consider who is making decisions about social issues such as education reform. We often concluded that “rich, White guys” were making the decisions. How are you making sense of this information?
  - In Majora Carter’s Ted Talk “Greening the Ghetto,” she noted that “race and class are extremely reliable indicators as to where one might find the good stuff, like parks and trees, and where one might find the bad stuff, like power plants and waste facilities” [3:14-3:21]. How are you making sense of this information?
  - During the discussion regarding the field trip, class members discussed gender dynamics within sports and the broader society. How are you thinking about that discussion?
  - Overall, what is new or different about how you are thinking about societal inequities now from when you began this course?
  - What has stayed the same about how you are thinking about societal inequities?

- Mapping Activity
  - Provide the student with address labels that list the following aspects of [LEAD 2100]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desire to learn about poverty</th>
<th>[Dr. Wells’s] community involvement</th>
<th>Sweet-n-Salty activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire to contribute to/make a positive impact on my community</td>
<td>[Elon’s] community involvement</td>
<td>Comments during class from peers whose perspectives are similar to my own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personal experiences related to the course</td>
<td>[Dr. Wells’s] teaching style</td>
<td>Comments during class from peers whose perspectives are different than my own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personal experiences based on my race and ethnicity</td>
<td>[Elon’s] teaching style</td>
<td>Readings or videos assigned as homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personal experiences based on my social class</td>
<td>Focus on rural poverty</td>
<td>Weekly reflection papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My religious/faith/spiritual beliefs</td>
<td>Course topics (e.g., education, health, environment)</td>
<td>Panel of [Midwestern State] students/alums from Appalachia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community and culture in which I grew up</td>
<td>PowerPoint slides discussed during class</td>
<td>Off-campus field experience (i.e., trip to [Appalachia])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My prior experiences interacting with people who are different than me</td>
<td>Videos watched during class</td>
<td>Community service event (i.e., helping with a Halloween party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to compete with my peers for a spot in a graduate/professional school or a job</td>
<td>Having food during class</td>
<td>Women’s Soccer game class tailgating event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about how to be successful personally and professionally</td>
<td>Peer-led discussion activities</td>
<td>Time frame for the course (i.e., once a week for 2 hours and 45 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Categorize the labels into the following four categories:
  - Aspects that are helping broaden your thinking about your role in society, your connection with others who are different than you and/or the complexities of poverty
  - Aspects that are making it difficult to understand your role in society, your connection to others who are different than you, and/or the complexities of poverty. [If necessary, explain that these aspects may make you uncertain about your role in society, may have generated anger or guilt about others who are different than you, or made poverty seem too simple.]
  - Aspects that are not influencing how you think about your role in society, your connection with others who are different than you, and/or poverty.
  - Aspects that do not apply to you

- Notes: (1) Fill free to use the extra labels to make duplicates if a certain aspect fits into more than one category for you and if there are other aspects that are influencing your learning. (2) You can use the reading/video list if you want to specify certain readings or videos. (3) Arrange the labels so that aspects are related are close together on the page and aspects that are distinct are separated on the page. Also, feel free to draw arrows or lines to show relationships among aspects.

- Ask students to explain and discuss the aspects on each page. In collaboration with the student, decide which page to start with.
• Overall, which aspects are affecting your learning about societal inequities the most? In what ways are these aspects affecting your learning about societal inequities?

• Wrap-Up:
  o Thank the participant for his/her time.
  o Collect the participants’ journal and mapping activity worksheets.
  o Remind the student of the final interview, which will occur during December 5.

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**Interview 3: Mapping the Student’s Developmental Ecology (continued) and Member-Checking**  
**[60 minutes]**

• My main goal for this interview is to better understand how the final few class sessions influenced your thinking about complex social issues. Also, I want to discuss some of preliminary findings with you and questions I still have about factors that are influencing students’ learning in [LEAD 2100].

• What have been some key insights you gained from the final few class sessions? What led you to those insights? If necessary, probe for aspects related to:
  - Personal characteristics
  - Class content
  - Class format

• Also, probe as necessary for aspects that have broadened their thinking as well as aspects that have made it difficult to better understand their role in society, interactions with diverse others, and the complexity of social issues.

• Overall, what is new or different about how you are thinking about societal inequities now from when you began this course?

• What has stayed the same about how you are thinking about societal inequities?

• What aspects of your personal background and/or the course affected your learning about societal inequities the most? In what ways are these aspects affecting your learning about societal inequities?

• Ask student to complete grounded survey. Discuss their responses and notes.

• Grounded Survey Instructions: Please rate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements. You will have the opportunity to discuss your responses during the interview, so please feel free to make notes as you complete the survey. Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree.
  o Personal Background and Previous Experiences
    - I feel an obligation to help others within my community succeed.
    - I have at least a basic understanding of the historical context regarding poverty within the United States.
    - While growing up, I remember hearing messages about the “playing field” in society being unequal for certain groups of people.
    - I believe that race should not matter in terms of how people are treated but that it does matter within today’s society.
Community within [LEAD 2100]
- I developed a personal connection with most of my peers in [LEAD 2100].
- [LEAD 2100] was an inclusive community in which I felt that my identity was valued and respected.
- In class, I often felt that my peers and I were engaging in debates about issues more so than working to understand one another’s perspectives on issues.
- When people expressed strong emotions during class, I wanted to stop discussing the issue at hand.
- I often found myself worrying that I would offend someone if I shared a question or comment in class.
- I felt comfortable saying “I don’t know” to questions or issues raised in class.

Learning Process within [LEAD 2100]
- I have a clear sense of how the concepts I learned in [LEAD 2100] relate to the goals I hope to achieve after I graduate from college.
- I was shocked or surprised by many of the issues we discussed in class.
- The focus on rural poverty prompted me to think about racial issues in society.
- The documentaries we watched in [LEAD 2100] were as effective as the field trip to [Appalachia] in terms of helping me see what it really means to live in poverty.
- Majora Carter’s “Greening the Ghetto” initiative in the South Bronx was the most useful example we saw in [LEAD 2100] of how to create positive change within a community.
- After taking [LEAD 2100], I am less certain about how to start addressing inequities in society.
- The educators’ knowledge of issues related to poverty intimidated me.

University Context
- The 2016 presidential election influenced how I am thinking about inequities within society.
- From my perspective, diversity and inclusion initiatives at [Midwestern State] help students address inequities within society.
- The field trip to [Appalachia] for [LEAD 2100] is the only field trip I have taken for a course in college.
- When thinking about interactions I have had in college with people whose beliefs, values, and perspectives are different than my own, I most often recall interactions with international students.
- I often talk about social issues with my peers at [Midwestern State].

What is missing from the grounded survey in terms of your experience in the course?
• Ask student to complete research information form.
  o Instructions: Please complete the following information to help me as a researcher ensure your confidentiality and, if desired, to stay in touch with you as my research proceeds.
  o What is a fake first name (i.e., a pseudonym) you would like me to use when referring to you in my research findings?
  o Is there any information you have shared with me during interviews that you would be worried about your peers or the educators in [LEAD 2100] finding out? If so, please explain.
  o Are you interested in hearing more about my research findings after I have completed my analysis? If so, please list your contact information.

• Wrap-Up:
  - Thank the participant for his/her time.
  - Collect the participants’ grounded survey and research information form.
  - Give the participant the $50 Amazon gift card as an incentive for their participation.
Appendix E: Journal Entries Prompt and Template

REFLECTION PROMPT

Based on your full range of experiences this week including those inside and outside the classroom as well as those with social and mass media, describe an interaction you have had with others or a message you have encountered that has prompted you to think about inequities in society—that is, differences among groups of people in which one group has less access to resources such as education, healthcare, and safety than other groups.

• What was the nature of the interaction or message?

• When and where did the interaction occur or when and where did you encounter the message?

• What did you learn from the interaction or message? How does the new insight fit or not fit with your current understanding of inequities in society?

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

Feel free to reflect in whatever way works best for you. Some ideas include:

• Highlighting a specific part of your weekly reflection for ESHESA 2570, or
• Sending a weekly email to Kari (taylor.2564@osu.edu), or
• Writing some notes in a notebook, or
• Creating voice memos with your phone, or
• Filling out the chart on the back of this page

The goal is to record some ideas that we can discuss in a second interview for this research study. I anticipate that you will need to spend no more than 10 minutes per week recording your ideas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brief Description of Interaction/Message re: Inequities in Society</th>
<th>Type of Inequity</th>
<th>When/Where You Encountered the Inequity</th>
<th>What You Learned About Inequities in Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g., Some schools are considered “dropout factories.”</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Waiting for Superman documentary during first class session</td>
<td>Dropout factory = school where over 40% of students don’t graduate on time. Still wondering about what causes a school to be a dropout factory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
