RECLAIMING OUR LEGACY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SERVICE-LEARNING AND LEARNING ABOUT SERVICE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EDUCATORS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

TAMERA MOORE. Reclaiming our legacy: A qualitative study of service-learning and learning about service through the experiences of African American women educators in urban schools. (Under the direction of DR. GREGORY WIGGAN)

As the number of minority students in public schools increases in the U.S., the teacher workforce and administration remain majority White. Increased access to service-learning will help mitigate opportunity gaps that exist in marginalized communities. Service-learning combines academic coursework with volunteer community service experiences, which can be beneficial to in-service and pre-service teachers. Changing the structure of service-learning opportunities to include the voices of African American women is critical to expanding the structure of volunteer efforts, specifically within urban school environments. Using Seidman's In-Depth Interview Protocol, this research explored the experiences of African American women educators with service-learning and volunteering in local communities and schools. The study examined how Black women educators saw service-learning and volunteering as part of their identities. The findings indicate that service is central to their definitions of social justice work in education and beyond through the concepts of: (a) giving back, (b) serving, (c) family, (d) Black womanhood, (e) leadership and (f) spirituality. The results of this study illustrate how educators' lived experiences expand conceptions of service. The participants viewed service-learning as being crucial to student and teacher success in urban environments.

Keywords: service-learning, critical service-learning pedagogy, social justice, volunteerism

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Service-learning at colleges and universities immerses students in community-based volunteer experiences while awarding college credit (Hart, 2006, 2015; Mitchell, 2008; Weah et al., 2000). Participants in service-learning experiences are overwhelmingly middle-class college students who enter disenfranchised communities to serve people marginalized by the effects of race and social class (Hart, 2006; Mitchell, 2008; Weah et al., 2000). These student volunteers cycle in and out of marginalized communities, earning course credit while performing acts of service without sustained interactions with the community members (Anzaldúa, 1999; Hayes & Cuban, 1996). Such volunteer experiences reinforce traditional power structures, and erect "borders" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 101) that reinforce societal divisions that allow volunteer students to identify as privileged, thereby overlooking the need for a critical examination of the underlying causes of social problems (Mitchell, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Roschelle et al., 2000).

Critical service-learning pedagogy goes beyond traditional service learning because it focuses on inequality within communities being served. It offers an alternative to traditional service-learning yet remains largely centered around the experiences of privileged youth (Hart, 2006; Mitchell, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Weah et al., 2000). In a critical service-learning model, faculty teach critical service-learning courses to prepare students with a social justice orientation that transforms their view of the communities being served. How can marginalized youth be repositioned at the center of critical service-learning to help revitalize their communities and reform current models of service-learning that maintain traditional power relationships rooted in race and social class? Restructuring critical service-learning pedagogy around the lives of youth of color from marginalized communities to produce higher civic engagement in their own communities will embolden them towards "cultural action" for "liberation" and empowerment

(Freire, 1972, p. 177). Dewey (1916) argued "democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness," and he also declared democracy to be "the emancipation of the mind" (p. 193).

Statement of the Problem

The democratic principle of civic engagement is not being realized by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, or students of color who primarily remain in passive roles during community service interactions, rather than being recognized as heirs to a long tradition of community service within their communities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Weah et al., 2000). One problem with service-learning is the construction of service-learning as the domain of predominantly middle class, White college students. This paradigm creates an unsustainable model where volunteers enter urban school communities for short-term stints and leave immediately following their experience. It also ignores a tradition and history of volunteerism by African American women that have nurtured the souls and sustained the lives of community members. Tapping into the tradition of African American women and their dedication to volunteerism illustrates the importance of creating caring school environments in urban schools (institutional care) that are supportive of student learning and empowering to the communities that are being served (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

African American educational leaders have played an important role in facilitating supportive instructional environments for students (Hart, 2015). According to NCES data, African American principals represent 11% of the total number of principals in the United States (NCES, 2017). This number is slightly lower than the number of African Americans in the overall U.S. population, which is 13.4% (U.S. Census, 2019). When considering gender, women comprise 54% of all principals in the U.S. (NCES, 2017). African American women make up 7%

of all principals compared to African American men who make up 3.6% of all principals (NCES, 2017) (See Appendix A).

While African Americans do not comprise the majority of the principals in the United States, districts could do more to recruit from this population. In addition, understanding the traditions and historical knowledge of African Americans is a way to inform the practices in urban schools that have high numbers of African American students. According to NCES data, 15% of students were African American in 2017. The total percentage for all students of color combined was 52%, with Latino students comprising the highest percentage of this group at 27% (NCES, 2020). White students accounted for 48% of all public school students in 2017, which is expected to decrease by four percent in 2029 (NCES, 2020). This data illustrates changing demographics of public schools as the percentage of all students of color increases.

Significance of Study

This dissertation focused on the existence of volunteerism within the African American community prior to the 1960s, which is when most formal service-learning programs in institutions of higher education began. After the Kennedy administration created the National Service Corps, the new national emphasis on civic engagement in the United States was designed to increase volunteerism in impoverished communities (Martinson & Minkler, 2006). Revamped models of service excluded members of the lower socioeconomic communities being served and encouraged the entry of middle-and-upper-middle class volunteers. Communities of color that had been accustomed to sharing resources with one another for survival were now subject to the involvement of people outside their communities. Outsiders began to enter these communities as volunteers for the first time. History acknowledges the 1960s as the beginning of volunteer

service, or service-learning, while overlooking the long history of in-group volunteering that had been practiced for many generations.

This dissertation focused on African American women educational leaders in urban schools and their experiences with service learning. Generations of African American women have led and supported civil disobedience against discriminatory laws against Black Americans and other people of color. Historical evidence proves the many struggles of resistance mounted against racial discrimination. I chose to examine African American women educators because of their unique racial, gendered, and educational experiences within schools.

Understanding the experiences of African American women as community advocates and organizers is a recognition of the rich history of volunteering and service within this community. African Americans, as well as any allies who chose to align themselves with the African American cause, were always reliant upon one another. Service to community has always been a strong part of African American identity, as it points to the communal nature of interactions and relationships within the community. I argue that service-learning owes its roots to the long history of activism and volunteerism that existed within the African American community for generations long before the Kennedy administration implored large sections of the American population to serve.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American women leaders with volunteering. Service-learning models presume the origins of service-learning and volunteering to be in the 1960s with the beginning of formalized programs. This overlooks the rich tradition of volunteering within the African American community and among African American women. I conducted a qualitative study examining the contributions of African

American women principals and assistant principals in urban schools. These leaders pay homage to African American women educators who came before, including Septima Clark, Marian Wright Edelman, Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, Charlotte Forten Grimké, and Ida B. Wells. Each of the aforementioned Black women made strides for personal achievements, while advocating fiercely for the rights of others.

Research Questions

Service-learning must take into account the power dynamics during field experiences (Rosenberger, 2000). Reframing service-learning experiences within urban environments requires discouraging a savior mentality within volunteers and moving toward a community agency centered on strength and power (Weah et al., 2000). Power dynamics centered on Eurocentric values of individualism and competition ignore the rich history of African American women volunteers whose prioritization of communal values uplifts African Americans. The first research question considered this: (1) How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service-learning and volunteerism? This study has implications for schools seeking to document the importance of volunteerism in African American communities as the precursor to service-learning experiences that primarily take place in urban environments.

The second research question considered this: (2) How do African American women educators frame service-learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity? By examining the experiences of Black women educators with service and volunteerism, this study will contribute to an understanding of African American women educators as agents of change within urban school environments and communities. The outcomes of this study will help schools to understand the context of care from the perspective of African American women and how equitable learning environments motivate students. Furthermore, having a broader understanding

of the significance of volunteerism within the African American community broadens our understanding of service, service-learning, and the narrative surrounding this topic.

Definition of Terms

Traditional Service-Learning

Service-learning is defined as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112).

Critical Service-Learning

Critical service-learning differs from traditional service-learning because it examines the social issues underlying social, racial, and economic issues experienced by many people in marginalized communities (Mitchell, 2008; Weah et al., 2000). Critical service-learning prioritizes social justice as its end goal to eliminate marginalization of people in low-income and ethnic minority communities (Mitchell, 2008).

Volunteerism

Civic engagement is often used interchangeably with the term volunteerism, which refers to the act of formal volunteering in local communities.

African American

I use the term "African American" or "Black American" interchangeably to refer to Americans who are primarily of African descent. I specify primarily because it is estimated that approximately 75 percent of African Americans have multiracial heritages. However, within the confines of the United States, racial politics started by defining Black people by the "one-drop rule." Anyone who was determined to have at least one drop of Black or African ancestry was

defined as Black. These definitions remain with us as current U.S. Census definitions of African American have been expanded to include anyone from the Sub-Saharan region of the continent of Africa.

Objectives

This study examined how African American women leaders narrate their experiences with service-learning and volunteering and how service connects to their identities. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American women educators with service and volunteering. The following objectives guided the study's specific contributions:

- Understanding the perspectives of African American women educators as they narrated their experiences with service and volunteering.
- Examining the importance of volunteerism within African American communities that predates institutionally recognized service-learning programs that currently dominate urban school environments.
- Framing the experiences of Black women educators with service and volunteerism, and how they serve as agents of change within urban school environments.

Organization of Dissertation Chapters

The objectives above outline the contents found in Chapter one. The remaining dissertation chapters within this research study outlines its components. Chapter two is a literature review that summarizes previous research on service and service learning. The purpose of Chapter two is to explain the relationship between service-learning, service, and volunteering. In addition, Chapter two uncovers the need for additional research to examine the role of service

and volunteering within the African American community and its benefit to participants in formal service learning programs.

Chapter three discusses the research method used in this study. Seidman's In-Depth Interview Protocol was best to investigate the experiences of Black women educators who volunteer or serve their communities. The study looked at the participants and how their experiences reflect a rich tradition and history of volunteering within the Black community that is often overlooked by institutions conducting formal service learning programs.

Chapter four focuses on the major findings, themes, and subthemes that were revealed through the study. The research design of this study displays relevant quotes from participants based on emergent themes. Finally, chapter five is a discussion of the significance of each corresponding theme and the relationship to the research questions and theoretical framework. The theoretical framework of womanism is interwoven throughout the analysis of major themes. Chapter five concludes by providing recommendations for additional research needed on service and volunteering within the Black community to understand its contributions to the field of service learning.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one provided an introduction to the topic of service learning. It also stated the problem of service learning being seen as the domain of primarily White, privileged students, rather than acknowledging the rich history of volunteering with the African American tradition. The purpose of the research was to examine the experiences of African American educational leaders in urban environments. In order to do that, this research sought to answer two questions. This research asked: (1) How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism? and (2) How do African American women educators

frame service learning and volunteerism as an extension of their identity? In the second chapter, this research will explore the literature related to service and service learning.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on traditional service-learning, critical service-learning, and critical service-learning pedagogy. The major themes in the literature show how each form of service-learning relates to its basic tenets, which include course credit and voluntary acts of service. The second section of the chapter introduces the theoretical frameworks of womanism and feminism, which serve as the guiding lens for this study.

Traditional Service-Learning

Bringle and Hatcher (1995) defined traditional service-learning as "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meet identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content" (p. 112). This form of service-learning allows faculty whose disciplines are grounded in service to provide students with volunteer experiences that are connected to the course curriculum (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Bruce & Brown, 2010; Mortari & Ubbiali, 2021).

Four distinct stakeholders (institution, faculty, students, and community) converge around a particular need identified in a local community in the traditional model of service-learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Well-known, mainstream organizations tend to serve as the site for service-learning experiences for students (Robinson, 2000). College students assist with the provision of services, which is seen as their primary role instead of challenging societal structures that cause inequities (Robinson, 2000). The implementation of traditional service-learning projects is most often led by college faculty and their students, while the community members are on the receiving end of such efforts. This positions the two groups on opposite sides of the service-learning experience (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Bruce & Brown, 2010;

Mitchell, 2008). College faculty and students become the privileged service-learning volunteers, while the communities on the receiving end of their efforts are considered to be passive recipients. The value of service-learning experiences includes the promotion of social and moral responsibility, as well as the development of leadership skills (Kezar, 2002). Service-learning also incorporates a civic education component that connects to more traditional coursework (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Densmore, 2000; Kezar, 2002).

Traditional service-learning is a pedagogical response to inequities between communities that incorporates service into the mission of universities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Traditional service-learning is used primarily by faculty whose disciplines are centered around the practice of service, such as teaching and counseling, and by those faculty who wish to give their students more concrete volunteer experiences that connect to the course curriculum (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Bruce & Brown, 2010).

The role of students is to assist with the provision of services, instead of challenging societal structures that cause inequities (Robinson, 2000). Many traditional service-learning projects are implemented by college faculty and their students, while the community members are positioned as recipients of such efforts. This creates a binary that positions two groups on opposite sides of the experience (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Bruce & Brown, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). College faculty and students are positioned as privileged doers of service, while the communities on the receiving end of their efforts are considered to be passive recipients. Most faculty value the potential of service-learning experiences for the promotion of social and moral responsibility, as well as leadership skills (Kezar, 2002). Service-learning is also valued because of the component of civic education that is incorporated into traditional coursework (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Densmore, 2000; Kezar, 2002). Thus, the assessment of the effectiveness of

traditional service-learning programs is determined by the goals of the program, as well as criteria that will be used to evaluate such programs (Kezar, 2002).

Service-learning has made many positive benefits such as development of civic literacy, positive contributions to society, and individual growth of students (Hart, 2006; Mitchell, 2008). However, critiques of service-learning primarily concern how it fails to address the origins of the poverty that exists in many urban and rural communities that serve as community service sites (Hart, 2006). In fact, many service-learning programs overlook social and political aspects to focus on programmatic elements (Hart, 2006; Robinson, 2000). The effect of failing to incorporate social change into most programs is that communities where service is performed experience very few long-term benefits from volunteer efforts (Butin, 2003; Hart, 2006).

Social change is important for increasing the efficacy of teachers in urban environments. Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) argue that ethnic minority youth face problems that when dealing with teachers who have limited experience with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors demonstrate the power of generating knowledge and solutions for students in these communities because of the separation that exists between the primarily middle class teachers and the urban communities in which they work (Carson & Domangue, 2013; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Service-learning is a potential conduit of increased empathy among teachers to reduce prejudice against students (Conner & Erickson, 2017). Furthermore, Connor and Erickson (2017) illustrate that traditional service-learning programs have the potential increase the likelihood that White participants will embrace social change. Whereas women of color who participate in service-learning already enter these opportunities with the motivation that they need to give back to their communities (Pearl & Christensen, 2017). The goal is to help all in-

service and pre-service teachers to understand their motivations for entering urban communities and see the value within these communities.

Service-learning opportunities should not only help in-service and pre-service teachers to understand their motivations for entering a community, but the structure of service-learning experiences should also help teachers to process their emotional state (Carson & Domangue, 2013). Participants in service learning opportunities will experience a range of emotions. By creating opportunities for participants to process these emotions collectively and independently, organizers of service-learning experiences can increase the likelihood that participants will apply the knowledge learned in future contexts (Carson & Domangue, 2013). At the core of these emotions is the care needed to motivate participants to get involved for "the common good" (Mortari & Ubbiali, 2021, p. 132).

By interweaving service-learning with a more critical pedagogy, this could serve as the impetus for changing service-learning programs to be more centered around social justice (Hart, 2006; Robinson, 2000). Critical reflection is a key component of helping all participants situate their experiences within the context of social change (Pearl & Christensen, 2017; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). Rather than continuing to focus on deficit language that mischaracterizes students and the communities from which they come, Pratt and Danyluk (2017) recommend closing knowledge gaps of privileged teachers who often have little contact or experience within the communities in which they teach. By involving educators in service-learning opportunities, the gap between theory and knowledge is reduced and educators are able to implement non-hierarchical structures within their classrooms to change power dynamics between students and teachers (Resch & Schrittesser, 2021).

Critical Service-Learning

Critical service-learning offers a critique of traditional service-learning based on the failure of most traditional programs to prompt students to look at the underlying social issues that are the root causes of the isolation and deprivation experienced in many marginalized communities (Mitchell, 2008; Weah et al., 2000). Critical service-learning utilizes an approach focused on social justice to address the injustices experienced by people in low-income and ethnic minority communities (Mitchell, 2008). By prioritizing the needs of members of the community being served over the needs of service-learners, the object is to promote true change.

While critical service-learning promotes an approach that addresses issues of inequality, this approach is centered around the lives of students who are predominantly White, middle class students working in communities that are primarily composed of people of color (Mitchell et al., 2012). This is significant because race plays a large role in socialization of individuals in the United States (Mitchell et al., 2012). The composition of service providers as predominantly White and service recipients as Black and Latino introduces power dynamics that are rooted in the historical interactions that have characterized interactions between different social groups over time (Mitchell, 2008). Exploring the historical contexts of interactions between different social groups is necessary to redistribute power by introducing multiple perspectives and understanding current interactions (Hayes & Cuban, 1996; Mitchell, 2008). Furthermore, framing communities from non-deficit perspectives challenges fixed narratives of communities and has the potential to create a more impactful experience for both community members and volunteers who need to have a deeper understanding of the communities they enter and the structural barriers with which these communities contend (Butin, 2005; Mitchell, 2008).

Expanding dialogue is necessary for shifting the narrative of community service, or critical service-learning, from the privileged as the helper and community members as passive recipients (Hart, 2006). Instead, institutions of higher education should engage the members of community agencies in the creation and implementation of service-learning projects (Mitchell, 2008). Framing the communities served as being needy implies that they lack valuable information or knowledge that can only be provided by more privileged outsiders who do not engage with them otherwise (Mitchell, 2008). Furthermore, this view gives more value or legitimization to the knowledge held by faculty and student volunteers, while the knowledge of community members is overlooked or ignored (Bruce & Brown, 2010). Collaborative relationships between college faculty, students and community members are evaded, thus maintaining traditional hierarchical power structures (Bruce & Brown, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). Maintenance of traditional power dynamics fails to equally involve community partners in the process, thus silencing their voices (Hart, 2006; Hayes & Cuban, 1996; Mitchell, 2008).

The established components of service-learning center around three components historically recognized by service-learning proponents: (1) opportunities for service created to enhance the community being served, (2) clearly linking what is learned and what is experienced, and (3) participants having the chance to reflect (Warren-Gordon et al., 2020). Each component is significant as a traditional tenet of service-learning, however critical service-learning pushes for intentional community partner engagement. Warren-Gordon et al. (2020) argued that service-learning projects should result in lasting social change. Without offering community partners the opportunity to provide their feedback, the process becomes one-sided and devoid of the foundation for lasting social change (Warren-Gordon et al., 2020).

Creating space for community partner input creates the foundation for the development of authentic relationships between students and faculty and members of the community within which they will be working (Warren-Gordon et al., 2020). This input from the local community could lead to community partners occupying non-traditional roles that could potentially position them for important decision-making, which is the agency needed for the empowerment of local communities (Warren-Gordon et al., 2020). On the other hand, faculty and students would need to adjust and become more intentional about occupying a role rooted less in traditional leadership (rooted in a colonial context), but instead reframing leadership and research in their minds and in practice (Dillon et. al., 2018; Warren-Gordon et al., 2020).

Examining Social Issues as Part of Critical Service-Learning

Critical service-learning prompts students to look at the underlying social issues that cause isolation and deprivation experienced by many members of marginalized communities (Mitchell, 2008; Weah et al., 2000). A social justice orientation is used to address the injustices experienced by people in low-income and ethnic minority communities (Mitchell, 2008). Prioritizing the needs of members of marginalized communities over the needs of service-learners promotes true change. The framework of critical service-learning promotes an approach that addresses issues of inequality, but it is still centered around the lives of students who are predominantly White and middle class students working in communities that are primarily of people of color (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Service-learners as predominantly White and service recipients as Black and Latino is problematic because it maintains traditional power rooted in the historical interactions that have characterized encounters between different social groups through time (Mitchell, 2008). Having service-learners explore the historical contexts of relationships between different social groups is

necessary to redistribute power by introducing multiple perspectives and understanding current interactions (Hayes & Cuban, 1996; Mitchell, 2008). Using non-deficit perspectives to challenge fixed views of communities has the potential to create a more impactful experience for both community members and volunteers who should develop a deeper understanding of the communities they enter and the structural barriers with which these communities contend (Butin, 2005; Mitchell, 2008).

Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy

Critical service-learning pedagogy expands the conceptualization of service-learning as a neutral experience to one that is teeming with social and political undertones. Traditional service-learning connects the curriculum of a course to community service explicitly through an organized volunteer experience (Hart, 2006). The goal is for the service provider and recipient to collaboratively design a service experience that will meet a need in the local community (Hart, 2006). Absent from this framework is an acknowledgement of societal structures that create the conditions where service-learning becomes necessary (Mitchell, 2007; Robinson, 2000). Critical service-learning has an overt social justice orientation that seeks to deconstruct systems of power, raise critical consciousness, as well as foster an awareness of oppression (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Mitchell, 2008; Rosenberger, 2000). It highlights how social domination plays a role in the lives of marginalized people and helps them to understand oppression and "name the world" (Freire, 1972, p. 86). Students engage in investigating the imbalance of power and social inequalities with the goal of taking direct action to resolve social inequalities (Bruce & Brown, 2010). Critical service-learning has the potential to transform volunteerism from charitable work to empowerment when it is examined critically (Hart, 2006). A critical examination explores the

identities of those participating in service-learning opportunities while seeking to deconstruct traditional systems of power.

Education should equip people with both the imperative and the means to liberate themselves and others from social oppression. This requires developing a "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1972) through which one can analyze social processes, particularly those which result in injustice and inequality. Local knowledge is essential to understanding and addressing social problems (Bringle, 2017). Thus, local informants do not merely study "subjects" but actively engage in all stages of the research process including "action" or intervention into the problem(s) under study. Critical theorists like Freire (1972) stress the importance of socially marginalized people interrogating and intervening into the conditions of their own marginalization.

Identity & Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy

The importance of recognizing identities within a service-learning context is significant. Critical service-learning pedagogy explores the dynamics of power between volunteers and community members (Hayes & Cuban, 1996). Critical service-learning highlights the negative connotations associated with the language used to frame the communities receiving help. Terms, such as "underprivileged" and "at risk" (p. 614) reinforce negative stereotypes about communities of color (Mitchell et al., 2012). On the other hand, college student volunteers are constructed as privileged persons who need to help repair communities of color (Anzaldúa, 1987; Mitchell, 2008). These fixed identities are problematic because they do not require college student volunteers to examine the underlying causes of social problems that exist in marginalized communities (Mitchell, 2008). Privileged students remain in the position holding most of the power (Brown, 2001). Furthermore, the identities of each group are stagnant, reinforced by

borders that separate groups (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hayes & Cuban, 1996). These borders represent dividing lines that separate volunteers from recipients and identify each based on their role in the process (Bruce & Brown, 2010).

In order to shift the narrative of community service, critical service-learning should be employed to dismantle notions of the privileged as the helper, and community members as passive recipients (Hart, 2006). Service-learning provides institutions of higher education opportunities to engage the members of community agencies in the creation and implementation of service-learning projects (Mitchell, 2008). Focusing only on a community's needs overlooks valuable knowledge within marginalized communities and focuses on more privileged outsiders who may not engage with the community otherwise (Mitchell, 2008). Minimizing the knowledge of community members and stakeholders, while giving more credence to faculty and student volunteers, is problematic (Bruce & Brown, 2010). Collaborative relationships between college faculty and students and community members are one way to disrupt traditional hierarchical power structures (Bruce & Brown, 2010; Mitchell, 2008).

Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy in Urban Schools

Critical service-learning as a *liberatory* pedagogy [emphasis added] is far from the pedagogy Freire posited (Freire, 1972). His theory existed to empower the underprivileged, freeing them from being passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1972, 1976; Eyler & Giles Jr., 1999; Mitchell, 2008). Yet many critical service-learning programs remain centered around middle-class college students who do not engage critically with the communities they serve. While part of the service-learning experience occurs in an academic environment, these programs must include a social justice component to be considered critical. Though advocating for a more critical perspective to be incorporated, critical service-learning pedagogy is still

centered around the needs of college students who are described as being more privileged (Mitchell, 2008).

A critical service-learning pedagogy will analyze the methods being used by service-learning courses currently to prepare student volunteers for their experiences. In addition, it will also refocus attention on the members of the community being served. While critical service-learning argues for more critical consciousness among volunteers, it too falls short of shifting focus away from more privileged volunteers to those being served (Maybach, 1996). We must see authentic representations and involvement of those on the receiving end of community service, or else the motives of those serving must be questioned (Maybach, 1996). A critical service-learning pedagogy can dismantle traditional service-learning models that silence people of color and poor people, while repositioning them as empowered and central to change in their community.

This study examined how African American women leaders are part of a community that historically approaches service and volunteering with a critical perspective. Furthermore, a post-critical service-learning perspective centered in an urban context argues for positioning historically marginalized groups, such as African Americans, at the center of these experiences. In this way, the "borders" (p. 101) that Anzaldúa (1987) spoke of can be crossed on the pathways to new identities that will be forged.

Border pedagogy encourages people to cross borders in order to form new identities while exposing the limitations of existing identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Hayes & Cuban, 1996). This process offers a counter-narrative to the view that communities of color are not empowered. Service is grounded in the traditions of communities of color and has been valued for a long time (Weah et al., 2000). Moving towards the liberation of poor communities and people of color will

allow them to become more self-reliant, rather than being solely dependent on outside volunteer efforts (Hart, 2006). Furthermore, critical service-learning argues for positioning historically marginalized groups at the center of these experiences.

Stevens (2003) argued that service is a long-standing tradition within the African American community as a means to uplift the community towards more advanced social progress. Stevens (2003) specifically discussed how Black women have service "instilled in a socialization process lodged in family life and other social institutions" (p. 26). This acknowledges the rich tradition of service within the lives of African American women, not only as a matter of obligation but as an honor. This study seeks to advance the idea of a long-standing commitment to service by Black women who historically incorporate service within their work as school leaders. Even though they are compensated financially for their work as school leaders, I argue that their sense of commitment to the African American community and society gives them greater purpose in the work they do.

Service-learning is uniquely defined by its focus on both the volunteer and the individuals within the community being served, while community service focuses entirely on the individual being served (Blankonson et al., 2015). Service-learning is also heavily consumed with the educational component in which students learn and receive credit for the work they do in communities (Blankonson et al., 2015). African American social thought incorporates elements of both community service and more current service-learning programs, and HBCUs serve as models of the communal values that exist within the African American community (Blankonson et al., 2015; Zlotkowski, 2011).

In a study of the impact of service learning on African American students at HBCUs, Blankonson et al. (2015) found significant impact on civic action and political awareness, as well

as social justice. Current students at HBCUs are immersed in communal and institutional missions that place service and volunteering at the center of students' experiences, already aligning with the values of the communities that students come from (Blankonson et al., 2015). As pillars of Black American education and the only institutions at one time to accept African American students fully, HBCUs offer insight into the values of African American people and communities. Many of these institutions incorporate service goals within their mission statements, thereby prioritizing the importance of service for African American students (Blankonson et al., 2015).

A communal perspective, as opposed to an individual one, is a recognized strength within the African American community. Within groups of African American communities, observations of community groups, church groups, and fraternities and sororities and their volunteer efforts illustrate the importance of this value within the African American community. It is important to recognize the value of volunteering as a strength in the African American community instead of harboring deficit narratives that stigmatize African American communities (Zygmunt et al., 2018).

Decolonizing the Curriculum

Yep and Mitchell (2017) recommend decolonizing the curriculum first as a method towards decentering Eurocentric values and recentering the values of Indigenous peoples and other people of color. More specifically, the authors talk about how academic courses within ethnic studies serve as models of how to teach a curriculum that relies less on hierarchical structures and moves more toward empowerment (Yep & Mitchell, 2017). The authors referred to examples of classes that used intersectionality (including identities based on gender, race, dis/ability status) to examine the experiences of generations of people of color. Furthermore,

they recognized enslavement and forced domestic work as factors contributing to present-day inequalities (Yep & Mitchell, 2017).

These analyses provide important historical context to explain why societal structures have left African American, Indigenous, and other people of color in segregated working, housing, and employment circumstances (Yep & Mitchell, 2017), thus often predominating the present-day communities that are targeted by providers of community service. Ethnic studies curricula provide additional context to challenging structural oppression by prioritizing marginalized communities and their needs and asking all "to be respectful of and responsive to the needs of the community within the larger goal of social justice" (Yep & Mitchell, 2017, p. 301). The desired outcome is the development of a new narrative, a counternarrative, that gives agency to members of marginalized communities while deconstructing historical ways of interacting (Pak, 2018; Yep & Mitchell, 2017).

Learning is a recognizable foundation of service-learning projects and should be a call to become more enlightened to the continual collective and individual work and responsibility to end systemic oppression (Dillon et. al., 2018). Without valuing the learning that occurs in multiple contexts and from multiple traditions, the dominant Western ways of thinking will continue to permeate service-learning contexts, resulting in the continued marginalization of BIPOC individuals and ways of knowing (Kennedy et al., 2020). Overlooking the contributions of African Americans in curriculum has a long history in the United States (Wiggan, 2011). Service-learning curricula would benefit from understanding African Americans' contributions and agency. Wiggan (2011) argued that "black resiliency" (p. 26) has been evident from the earliest days of public schools when formerly enslaved people worked diligently to establish schools and universities in the American South to achieve progress. Specifically, it was the

everyday people who were doing much of the work, something that is often overlooked in favor of focusing on the larger leaders (Payne, 2007). The author further argues that ordinary people made important contributions saying, “If we are surprised at what these people accomplished, our surprise may be a commentary on the angle of vision from which we view them” (p. 5).

Instructional Leadership and Service-Learning

Increasing the achievement of students in urban schools is important to improve the outcomes for all students, particularly for African American students, whose academic performance is regularly compared to that of their white counterparts. Similarly, Indigenous students have been framed using narratives that eliminate the context of their experiences that include lack of resources, mistreatment, and being relegated to an insignificant place within the curriculum (Chambers & Spikes, 2016; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). These comparisons between the academic performance of students of color and white students historically use deficit narratives that blame students and families, rather than holding institutions and educators accountable for making changes to the environments in which students learn (Chambers & Spikes, 2016; Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). These ideals perpetuate existing hegemonic systems and uphold oppressive structures that are reproduced within schools (Davis & Museus, 2019). The result is an “educational debt” (p. 316) that costs students of color opportunities that limit positive academic outcomes for them in the future (Annamma & Morrison, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

To interrupt hegemonic systems of control, innovative approaches within education must be utilized by school leaders (Davis & Museus, 2019). Service-learning participation is one way to approach learning that will allow every student the chance to participate in civic responsibility (Blankson et al., 2015; Celio & Dymnicki, 2011; Martinson & Minkler, 2006). Learner empowerment is one result of participating in service-learning opportunities because it creates

self-efficacy in students (Gonsalves et al., 2019). More specifically, research indicates that the self-efficacy of ethnic minority students is higher after participation in service-learning opportunities (Davis & Museus, 2019; Gonsalves et al., 2019; Pearl & Christensen, 2017).

By shifting the focus of school improvement to the factors within schools that most impact achievement, schools can begin to implement the reform efforts necessary to change the state of education (Serdyukov, 2017). More specifically, leaders who exhibit the characteristics of successful school principals in urban schools embrace innovative ways to improve achievement for all. School leaders impact student achievement and any serious reform must consider the role of the principal in improving the outcome (Jacob et al., 2014; Ten Bruggencate et al., 2012).

Exhibiting Care

Exhibiting care is a crucial part of the learning process during service-learning that nurtures connection to others within the communities where service occurs (Kennedy et al., 2020). More asset-based approaches can be linked to a positive sense of belonging for students of color who choose to become volunteers since they will often be able to interact with the communities from which many may come (Pak, 2018). Community immersion through service-learning can reduce the isolation that many students may feel through the development of relationships (Nabors, 2019; Pak, 2018). By directly engaging and connecting to a local community of people, these students can strengthen their sense of self (Pak, 2018). Furthermore, students can be role models of how to be caring when encouraged to lead within service-learning experiences (Nabors et al., 2019).

Caring can also be exhibited within the context of research. In the next section, I explain the theoretical framework that serves as the guiding lens for the study. Taylor (1998) argued that

an Afro-centric perspective is central to womanism and requires a shift by the researcher in the approach to participants. Moving from traditional dispositions and notions of objectivity within the context of research toward more "progressive critical refection and interpretation" of participants' stories opens the research process to convey the stories of African American women in a way that benefits them (Taylor, 1998, p. 60).

Theoretical Framework

Womanism

Womanism is a theoretical framework that frames the identities and experiences of Black women as agents of their own social change (Brewer, 2020; Walker, 1983). It is a form of feminism that focuses on the experiences and outcomes of Black women. Womanism extends beyond the scope of traditional feminism and centers Black women's voices (Walker, 1983). The experiences of Black women, both as Black and female, must be acknowledged and valued as core knowledge that can contribute to an understanding of the world (Rodgers, 2017; Taylor, 1998). The dual consideration of both identities evolved into the theory of intersectionality in which Black women bring awareness to two highly politicized aspects of their identity without being forced to choose one or the other (Crenshaw, 1991). The unique identity of Black women was considered as early as the 19th century when Anna Julia Cooper (1892) stated:

> The colored woman of today occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period of itself transitional unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both. (p. 137)

Cooper (1892) recognized the precarious position of Black women contending with forces that prevented both gender and racial equity. Yet, Cooper's acknowledgement of Black women's position suggests that they maintained an active awareness. Black women possess expertise evident through their circumnavigation of traditional structures of power to establish healing through the creation of communities for people facing constant oppressive structures (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, the expansion of Black feminist scholarship legitimizes Black women as holders of valuable knowledge that is empowering to their communities (Collins, 1990). The needs of African American communities are central to the orientation of Black women caretakers.

Feminism

First-Wave Feminism

Feminist theory opposes the structures that create oppression based on class, race, and gender (hooks, 2000). Feminist theory explores the experiences of women by centering women's stories and lives. MacKinnon (1989) argued for "consciousness raising" as a collective awareness and redefinition of the lives of women by women (p. 84). The experiences of women are meaningful as defined by women collectively through understanding shared realities, specifically the dynamics of power between women and men (MacKinnon, 1989). The first wave of feminist theory espoused by White, bourgeoisie women focused solely on gender inequality. Second and third wave feminism offer critical perspectives that argue for the inclusion of race and class alongside considerations of gender inequality.

Second-Wave Feminism

Black women feminists align their development as feminists with the second wave of feminism. Uniquely positioned to identify discrimination because of class, race, and economic

oppression, Black women began to advocate for their needs because they were best positioned to do so. Unlike White feminists, Black feminists did not insist on separating from "progressive" Black men (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977). Racial unification was still a necessity for progress yet confronting gender issues was also an equally important priority. It is Black women's dual struggle against sexism and racism and the unfairness of being forced to choose which to confront (Combahee River Collective Statement, 2014). Faced with isolation, Black Feminists instead chose to organize in order to find community among other women who sought to challenge inherited systems of inequality.

Third-Wave Feminism

Third-wave feminism is often seen as the last emergence of a movement that should have the goal to end the oppression of women because of their sex (hooks, 2000). The third wave rose in the midst of the second wave, resulting from criticism about the lack of focus on multiple identities, rather than being created afterwards (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Emerging from third-wave feminism was a discourse, "an intersectionality" (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1990) to describe the multi-layered experiences of women of color, transwomen, and women with multiple identities.

Chapter Summary

Chapter two provided a summary of the important literature in the areas of service-learning and critical service-learning. Service learning is primarily concerned with the credit that students receive for performing acts of community service. On the other hand, critical service-learning asks students to look critically at inequitable social systems that have caused the conditions that make service-learning necessary. Furthermore, this chapter discusses service-

learning in urban schools. Since so much of service-learning concerns processing the various identities one holds, this section became even more prominent.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

Chapter two provided an overview of traditional service-learning and critical service-learning as well as an overview of studies that focus on both ideas. This chapter will provide an overview of the qualitative interview method used to interview participants. The interviews yielded rich, narrative information about the participants including their backgrounds, professional experiences, and experiences with volunteering. Each of the participants is a graduate of Outer Banks University (pseudonym). This chapter will also discuss the data collection methods and data analysis procedures.

Each part of this chapter connects back to the two research questions focused on the experiences of Black women educators with service and how this connects to their identity. The first research question sought to answer: (1) How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism? This study has implications for schools seeking to document the importance of volunteerism within African American communities as the precursor to service-learning experiences that primarily take place in urban environments. The second research question considered this: (2) How do African American women educators frame service-learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity? By examining the experiences of Black woman educators with volunteerism, this study examined how African American women educators prepare students to be agents of change within society. The next section discussed the qualitative interviewing methodology used for this study.

Methodology: **In-Depth Qualitative Interviewing**

The purpose of this study was to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with African American women leaders in education. Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing process consists

of three interviews with each participant. In the first interview, participants reflect on early life experiences within the context of the interview (Seidman, 2019). This research sought to understand how African American women leaders conceptualize service in their lives. The first interview sought key biographical events of each participant related to service. The second interview sought to reconstruct specific details about the life events of the participant that were shared in the first interview. In this interview, participants gave specific details about service and volunteering discussed during the first interview. The third interview created space for the participant to define what their experience meant to them (Seidman, 2019). The goal of this research is to determine the significance of service in the lives of African American women leaders in education.

Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing style focuses on the lived experiences of participants, while having the participants define the significance of those events. It is also a method for understanding a participant's experiences from their own point of view. This method guides participants through an interview process in which they reflect on their lived experiences and reconstruct those experiences. Finally, the process emphasizes the meaning of a participant's lived experience in context gained through the interview process (pp. 16-20). Each of these tenets provide the foundation for participant selection, interviewing, and analysis. My research sought to understand the lived experiences of African American women who hold leadership positions in education and the role of service in their lives. By interviewing current practitioners in the field, I sought to understand the lived experiences that impact them.

Recruitment

The recruitment goal for this study was to recruit three educational leaders who are African American women. Seidman (2019) notes that "participants who all experience similar

structural and social conditions give enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (Seidman, 2019, p. 55). Since each participant was interviewed three times, the data provided was rich enough to draw conclusions about their experiences with service and volunteering throughout their lives. To confirm that the selected participants met the defined criteria, they were asked to confirm that they graduated from Outer Banks University, that they identified as African American women, and that they currently work or have worked in a leadership position within education. Once these participants were identified and consented to participate in the study, the data collection began.

Participants

The participants for this study were selected using a purposeful sampling method. The goal of this research study was to understand the meaning of service and volunteering from the perspectives of African American women leaders in urban school environments. Merriam (2019) argued that purposeful sampling focuses on participants who can provide significant detail on the topic of study (p. 12). I selected African American women graduates of the master's program in school administration at Outer Banks University (pseudonym) in North Carolina. Outer Banks University maintains a robust alumni network, which maintains contact information for all of its alumni. I contacted the alumni through multiple means: phone, email, and social media. Each participant agreed to be interviewed. A brief biography of each participant is presented below.

Ms. Simone Caldwell, Principal

Simone Caldwell is a principal at Charles Taylor Elementary School in North Carolina. She was a middle school teacher for five years and has been a school administrator for twelve years. Each of her professional experiences has been in the same school district. Simone was raised by her grandparents and refers to them as her mom and her dad. Simone described herself

as resilient and said that her strength comes from her mother, who was a pastor at a local church. While her father was not particularly religious, he did not stand in the way of Simone's mother and her involvement with the local church.

Simone was born in New York and spent the early years of her life there. When she moved to North Carolina in the eighth grade, she experienced a culture shock. She described becoming very aware of race when she moved to North Carolina. She had an experience where she felt her teacher was overlooking her and not answering her questions. She said this made her feel invisible and she never wanted her students to feel this way. This was in direct contrast to how empowered she felt with her parents.

As a college student, she volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and got involved in service projects as an education major. This motivated her to create an environment in her classroom where students felt valued. It also inspired her to embark on service opportunities within her school. She served as the student council advisor, and she headed the Developing Educated Advocates who are Determined (D.E.A.L.) * (pseudonym) program in her school.

Ms. Francesca Davidson, Dean of Students

Francesca Davidson was born and raised in North Carolina. Francesca was raised in a household with both of her parents along with her three sisters. Her early school experiences were in private school before her parents transferred her to the local public school, an experience she described as "reverse culture shock." Francesca was always a high achiever in school, an achievement that she says she owes to her parents. Francesca's parents always encouraged her to do her very best in school. Francesca was raised with a strong sense of family and watched her parents volunteer in their church and community. Her parents led the marriage ministry at church

and were leaders of the youth ministry. She gleaned a lot of knowledge from her parents during those years, learning how to support others through volunteering.

Francesca's career started as an elementary teacher where she remained for three years. She taught in an urban school environment. After three years, Francesca was accepted into the school administration program at Outer Banks University. Francesca described briefly reentering the classroom as a third grade teaching position after graduating with her master's degree in school administration. After that year, she was hired as an assistant principal. Francesca was an assistant principal for eight years and her contributions to service were strongest during her years as an assistant principal. She worked in a school that was the first in that district to implement an outdoor curriculum, which required many hours outside of the regular school day to ensure the curriculum was properly implemented.

Ms. Eve Smith, Teacher and Former Administrator

Eve Smith was also born in North Carolina and attended K-12 school in the state. Her earliest memories of volunteering were within the Baptist church of her youth. She started out ushering like many young Black girls in the South. She said that she felt important when she was able to help the pastor or the parishioners find their seat, or when she was able to attend to other requests. As she got older, Eve's family attended a non-denominational church, and she was able to expand her involvement in the youth group and as a volunteer in the nursery.

Eve had a non-traditional trajectory toward her career path as an educator. She started at Outer Banks University as an undergraduate student and left to enlist in the army after her first year in school. Eve reflected on how many people in her family had gone into the military. She said it was a career path that she never thought she would enter. Eve would eventually return to complete her bachelor's degree in education after leaving the army. She always knew she wanted

to be an educator and her determination inspired her to focus on completing the remaining three years of her undergraduate education. Eve's first job after completing her undergraduate degree was as a third grade teacher in a rural county in North Carolina. One of the first activities she did as a teacher was working at a local garden in the community. She volunteered to harvest the food, go to the farmers markets to help sell the food and recruit others to participate. She was drawn to volunteering in the garden because of how much access to healthy food it provided to families.

After five years as an elementary school teacher, Eve returned to Outer Banks to get her master's in school administration. She worked as an assistant principal for nine years until she decided to return to school to pursue a Ph.D.

Data Collection

Primary data for this study was collected through a three-part interview series with each participant according to the protocol in Seidman's (2019) "In-Depth Qualitative Interviewing" method. Semi-structured interviewing was used to collect information about participants' experiences with service and service-learning. Interview one provided a history of each participant's experiences with service, interview two provided specific details, and interview three allowed participants to reflect on the meaning of all the experiences shared. The interviews were semi-structured interview questions and lasted 90 minutes each. Interviews were conducted using a video meeting platform and recorded. Following each interview, the interviews were transcribed. Approval was obtained through the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Data Analysis

The researcher evaluated the experiences of African American women who are leaders in urban schools. The researcher used Seidman's (2019) In-Depth Interviewing method to conduct a three-part interview series with each of the participants. After the interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and examined for common themes related to the participants' experiences with service and volunteering to examine the specific language that pertains to each topic. I focused my analysis on the experiences of these African American women leaders in urbans schools and their experiences with service and volunteering.

Trustworthiness

The validity of this study was conducted through multiple means: triangulation, peer review, clarification of researcher bias, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions. The data for this research was gathered primarily from interviews with the participants in order to answer the proposed research questions and verify the findings. African American women in urban school leadership positions informed the data gathered from the interviews. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics was also included in this study to illustrate the presence of Black women in the ranks of school leadership and thus the potential to contribute to the body of knowledge about service and volunteering. Further statistics about the composition of the student body will also be included.

To triangulate the data, the researcher verified the information provided by participants with any documentation that exists. The goal was to collect and analyze evidence of participation in service and volunteering. For member checks, the researcher presented the findings of the study to participants to confirm whether the interpretations of the researcher resonated with the

participants (Merriam, 2019). Finally, peer review was used. Members of the graduate researcher's dissertation committee reviewed and provided feedback on the topic of study.

Limitations

The author considered factors that have the potential to impact the research. The sample size of this study will include approximately three to four participants. This is a relatively small sample size. However, Seidman's In-Depth Interviewing Protocol consists of a three-part interview process that allowed the researcher to spend adequate time with each participant. Another limitation is not being able to generalize research findings. This was a qualitative study that focused on the lived experiences of African American women. Each of these experiences is different and deserved individual analysis.

Subjectivity

Considering one's own subjectivities is important as a researcher because of how our views of the world impact the environments in which we conduct research (Milner, 2007). My research interests include service learning and the tradition of service in the African American community. My research acknowledges the impact of race because this factor is significant in my life and is evidenced as being impactful in the lives of other African Americans and their lived experiences (Hemelsoet, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007).
Milner (2007) centered race as an influential factor in the lives of people of color, acknowledging socioeconomic status (SES) as impactful, but prioritizing race as more significant in the experiences people of color encounter in educational contexts and outside of those contexts (p. 390).

My personal experiences were shaped by my upbringing in a strong community of working-class African American people that included family members and neighbors. My

personal experiences with a community that resisted oppressive conditions through hard work, education, and strong family bonds contributed to my positive outlook on my identity as an African American woman. I approach my research on African American women from a strengths-based perspective, particularly within educational contexts. It is important to me to contribute to the literature on African Americans in a way that considers strengths and possibilities, rather than just deficits.

The researcher identifies as an African American woman who centers the experiences of African American women. Conducting research on the lives of African American women raises questions of who possesses the rights to tell the stories of African American women (Milner, 2007). I argue that conducting research as a member of the community positions one to explore questions from a place of strength. Milner (2007) stated the need to move beyond "deficit discourses" (p. 390) that have dominated research. Establishing Black women as holders of legitimate knowledge creates spaces for moving in new directions. Others argue that originating outside of a community provides a more objective stance and strengthens the research.

Positionality

The awareness of racial identity for researchers is critical (Milner, 2007). This awareness of identity is not a fixed position and may change over time (Hemelsoet, 2014). Positionality involves a researcher's identities, perspectives, and ideals that converge to shape who they are (Hemelsoet, 2014). These identities are complex and often shift based on the context in which the researcher finds him or herself (Hemelsoet, 2014). Identity encompasses multiple aspects of an individual and expectations of neutrality are unreasonable because it implies the plausibility of leaving all of oneself at the door (Hemelsoet, 2014). In service-learning contexts, awareness of identity is critically important, as the volunteer is impacting the members of the community

being served (Butin, 2007; Hart, 2006; Mitchell, 2008). More specifically, the dynamic of racial interactions in service-learning contexts reinforces notions of privilege and disadvantage without analyzing the societal structures that create these contexts (Mitchell, 2007, 2008).

Chapter Summary

Chapter three discussed the methodology used to research the experiences of Black women educators with service and volunteering. It also discussed detailed information about each of the three participants. This study considered the following research questions: (1) How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism? The second research question considers this: (2) How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as an extension of their identity? The researcher used Seidman's In-Depth Interviewing method to collect data. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for particular themes. Next, appropriate validation methods were used to determine the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, the limitations of the study, subjectivity, and researcher's positionality as an African American woman were addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter three introduced Seidman's In-Depth Interview protocol (2019) to address two critical aspects of this study: examining the importance of volunteerism to African American women educators and how their identity as Black women positions them to serve as agents of change within urban school environments. The findings are based on the following research questions: (1) *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?* and (2) H*ow do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity?* The interviews revealed themes based on three interviews conducted with each participant.

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part one provides data from transcripts of interviews with each of the participants. Part two provides the six primary themes that emerged from the interview data. Womanism is the theoretical framework used to guide data analysis. By centering the knowledge of Black women, this study sought to affirm the contributions of Black women to the African American community and the schools they served through their chosen profession.

The interviews illustrated the tradition of service and of volunteering within Black communities and pre-dates the emphasis on service that began during the Kennedy administration to encourage civic engagement nationally. Black women have been the backbone of Black communities through their dedication to service. Data was organized according to the two research questions and categorized into major themes. The themes reflect the lived experiences of Black women educators who participated in volunteer and service opportunities.

The six themes that emerged were:

1. Theme 1: Giving Back: “The Greatest Gift”
2. Theme 2: Serving - “Going Above and Beyond My Job”
3. Theme 3: Family - “Creating a Foundation”
4. Theme 4: Black Womanhood - “See Me in Black”
5. Theme 5: Leadership - “It’s Empowering”
6. Theme 6 Spirituality - “Wisdom’s Beauty”

Part I: Review of Participants

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Pseudonym	Position	School	Age
Simone Caldwell	Principal	Charles Taylor Elementary School	45
Francesca Davidson	Dean of Students	Brooktown Academy of Fine Arts	39
Eve Smith	Teacher	Centerfield Elementary	50

Part II: Themes

Part two of this chapter presented emergent themes from the participants’ interviews. Participants provided their early and current experiences with service and volunteering based on the interview questions (see Appendix 1.1). They also provided details about their perspectives on the service of others that influenced their thinking and actions. Participants’ narratives provide rich descriptions and were used as the primary source from which themes were extracted. In order to be identified as a theme, all three participants had to share that experience. During the data analysis process, I arranged and categorized themes and grouped them according to the two research questions. I analyzed all interviews with all participants in the same manner

in order to consistently analyze each participant's feedback. After I analyzed the themes, I compiled information about the three participants (See Table 1). In addition, I used a counternarrative analysis to review the data for details that Black women educators shared to illustrate the cultural norms within the Black community pertaining to service (Mertens, 2014). The themes that emerged were aligned with the two corresponding research questions (See Table 2). Six themes emerged from the analysis of data from participants' interviews about their experiences with service and volunteerism.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes (Research Questions 1 & 2)

Theme	Description of Theme	Research Question
Giving back	Synonym to describe service & volunteer efforts	1
Serving	Secondary term used to describe volunteer efforts	1
Family	Descriptions of biological and chosen family*	1
Black Womanhood	How the lens of Black womanhood shapes perspective	2
Leadership	Formal leadership roles & tasks that focus on service	2
Spirituality	Religion & how service reflects spirituality	2

*Chosen families are the people to whom participants do not have a biological connection.

The themes above are reflective of interview data from all participants. Each participant was part of three interviews as outlined by Seidman's In-Depth Interviewing protocol (2019). The data was ripe with overlapping themes that were then compiled into a table (See Table 2 above).

Thematic Alignment by Research Question

This research considered two questions: (1) *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?* and (2) *How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their*

identity? The results of interviews with participants yielded rich data that I organized into themes. There were three primary themes for the first question and three primary themes for the second question.

Research Question One and Relevant Themes

Question 1: *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?* (See Figure 1)

Themes

- Theme One: Giving Back: "The Greatest Gift"
- Theme Two: Serving - "Going Above and Beyond My Job"
- Theme Three: Family - "Creating a Foundation"

Research Question Two and Relevant Themes

Question 2: *How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity?* (See Figure 2)

Themes

- Theme Four: Black Womanhood - "See Me in Black"
- Theme Five: Leadership - "It's Empowering"
- Theme Six: Spirituality - "Wisdom's Beauty"

This research study sought to understand how African American educators conceptualized and framed their experiences with service and volunteering. Figures one (1) and two (2) provide an illustration of the connection of each theme to the two research questions.

Interview data from all the interviews with each of the participants provided insight into their experiences with service and volunteering. Each educator has personal, professional, and observational experience in volunteer and service. According to Seidman's In-Depth Interviewing protocol, participants should be interviewed three times (Seidman, 2019). The first interview asked the participant to provide personal history data. During the second interview,

participants gave specific details about the experiences shared in the first interview. The third interview was an opportunity for participants to define the personal meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2019).

Figure 1

Themes and Subthemes (Research Question #1)

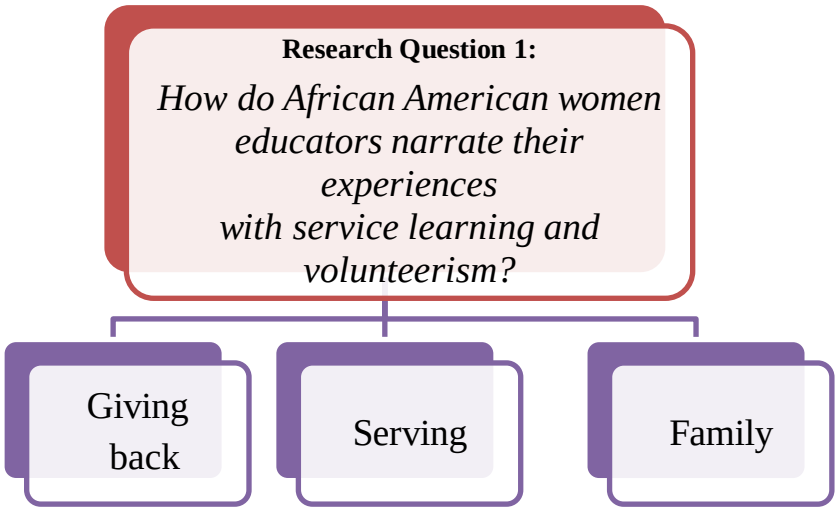
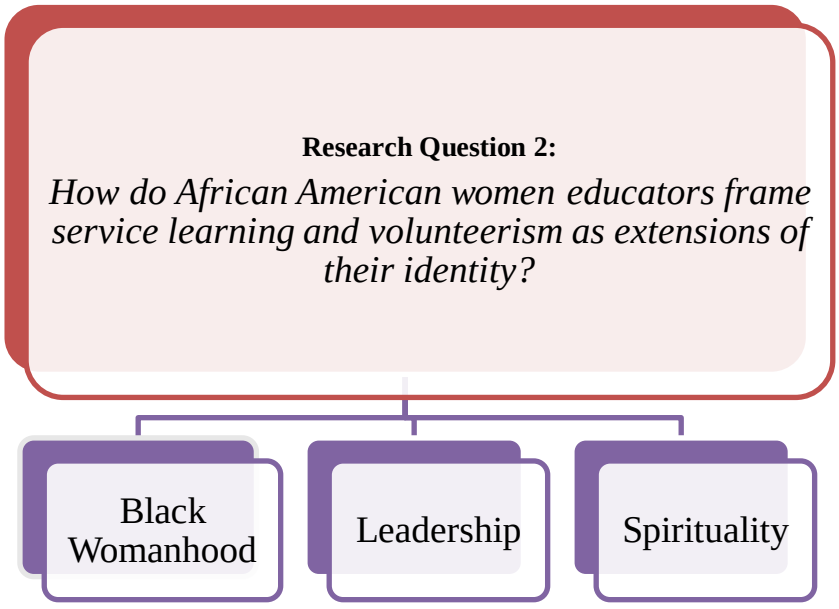


Figure 2

Themes and Subthemes (Research Question #2)



The three-part interview series allowed the researcher to spend considerable time with each participant. The interviews were semi-structured and allowed for specific follow-up questions for participants to gain more insight into how they perceive the role of service in their lives. The first theme that emerged was leadership. This code was applied to any sections of the interview data in which participants described service leadership experiences, decisions, and knowledge.

The next section arranges these themes according to the research questions in a table format (see Table 3). The research questions and corresponding themes remain the same, however, the information is organized into a different format. There are three themes for the first research question and three themes for the second research question.

Table 3

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

Research questions	**Main Category**	**Themes**
(1) *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?*	Educator's experiences	Giving back - "The Greatest Gift" Serving - "Going Above and Beyond My Job" Family "Creating a Foundation"
(2) *How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity?*	Educator's identity	Black womanhood - "See Me in Black" Leadership - "It's Empowering" Spirituality - "Wisdom's Beauty"

Themes For Research Question One

The first three themes help to answer the following question: *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?* Three primary themes emerged from participants' interview data. First, participants talked about giving back to those around them. They also talked about how they served the communities in which they lived and worked. Finally, family was a theme that each of the participants discussed when reflecting on the significance of service learning and volunteerism. In the following section, I give an in-depth analysis of each theme.

Theme One: Giving Back: "The Greatest Gift"

I asked each of the participants, "What terms do you use to refer to service?" All three participants said that "giving back" was a term they used to describe their volunteer efforts. It is important to note that participants used this phrase when talking about actions they took in service of others, as well as to talk about how they have witnessed others giving of their time, talents, and gifts.

Eve Smith, an elementary teacher, reflected on her earliest memories of what it meant to give back:

> My earliest memories of giving back are because I'm the oldest child... So, I learned very early to take care of people. As I moved into being an educator, I think that's the greatest gift that I can say I've given in terms of giving back because kids just need someone at school that loves them. You can see a child being walked to the door being called all kinds of expletives. And then they see you and you hug them and give them breakfast and welcome them into the fold. You can't beat that return. You know, to be able to understand what that child just went through and how you're going to undo that negativity in order for them to even dare to have an attempt at having a good day.

Francesca Davidson, Dean of Students, remembered the example her parents set when it came to giving back. Her strong connection to her family shaped her view of the long-term impact of giving back to others:

> My parents definitely instilled in us the importance of doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. They decided that it was going to be a good idea for them to be youth ministers. It was out of a need. It was out of necessity, like, you know, someone needed to do it. And they felt like at that particular time it was them. And to this day, I see the impact that they had on those children because these are like 30-year-olds now and we run into them often because we're all still kind of here in this area. And they still remember my dad as "Mr. Fred."

Simone Caldwell, a principal, also knew how widespread the impact of giving back could be. COVID-19 took an especially hard toll on her as a principal in a building where most of her students remained online when school reopened following the pandemic. Of her 600 students, 200 remained online for distance learning. She shared that it was difficult not to have her students in the building to fill it with life. I interviewed her during the summer, and she reminisced on how she used her position as principal to promote reading goals in her school.

> I think about the girls' book club that I started. Oh, my gosh. They were so excited just to see African-American authors. It gave me so much joy to see our girls. It was mostly Indian girls and to see them so excited at this African-American female author, you know, to come speak to them who looks like their principal. And so, I went back to my purpose and my calling. There are lots of white authors out there. They've (the students) got to be exposed to so many more authors. Right. So, this is why I love being a woman of color and leading in my position. I'm going to introduce them to Black authors. And it started out as I wanted to have it just for African-American girls and I thought this is not going to fly...So it was open to everybody. And so, I had five different books, children's books, all

> by Black authors. And so, I met with the girls, introduced them to all the different book titles, gave them a little snippet of each, and they voted on the ones they wanted. I wanted to make sure that they have a voice and choice. And so, they chose two books. We met every Wednesday from twelve to one o'clock during their lunch hour and we discussed the book. And then at the end, we surprised them. I had the author join us for a virtual visit.

Theme Two: Serving - "Going Above and Beyond My Job"

The second theme that emerged from interview data was service. This theme is primarily related to research question one: *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteering?* Each participant identified service as being important in their lives - both in their own work and the work they witnessed others doing.

Simone Caldwell, the elementary school principal, was influenced by her mom- a pastor. Simone reflected on how people would call her mom in the middle of the night to seek her mom's advice. She remembered those whispered words of advice that her mom would share with the people who called. That example influenced her feelings about service and her relationships with staff members long after they've left her school:

> It's just those connections, those deep, authentic connections with those that you're around. It's just service, but it's also those relationships, you know. I have a teacher who no longer teaches for me. She was a kindergarten teacher and she left to go teach in China last year and oh, gosh, I love her. So, two months ago, her mother-in-law died. So, she had to come from China. And she texted me. She said, "I just want to see you." And I went over to her home because she actually lived with her mother prior to going to China and I just sat with her family. I just talked with them; you know. So, to me, that's going above and beyond just my job. You know, it's being able to be there for her. But just to talk about her teaching experience in China, you know. So, it's serving and it's just being there.

Francesca Davidson, Dean of Students, discussed how service was a priority in the urban schools she worked in as an assistant principal, prior to her current position:

> Based on my experience and especially working in. Lower performing schools such as Jan Jacobs Elementary* (pseudonym). We had a lot of responsibilities tied to the grant and the funding...So we had to log a certain number of hours quarterly in certain service aspects, both inside and outside of the school. And with each of those experiences, I would say not only myself, but the staff and students and families involved took the right thing away from it. And we kind of recognized the value that it brought to the school and to us also.

Eve Smith, currently an elementary teacher, reflected on how service could be an element of empowerment for African Americans:

> I'd like to see more service and volunteering rather than being the recipient of service or volunteering in the Black community. I think that it is very rewarding to give back and serve. You know, I think people have to find a service that's good for them. Like, I know my strength is hospitality. So, if I'm going to serve people, it's normally going to be through some type of food service or having meals for them or something like that. So, I wish that there was a way to explore the many opportunities for volunteering and serving rather than just going to serve in the food line.

Theme Three: Family - "Creating a Foundation"

When asked about the influence of family on their service and volunteer efforts, each of the participants reflected on the memories from childhood and their own nuclear families they have created as adults. Each participant shared memories of family members who were examples of what it meant to serve or give back. They also talked about the impact of experiencing the generosity of their families and watching the influence their family had on the local community.

Finally, participants shared experiences about the families they have created as adults and the role that service continues in their family units.

Francesca Davidson's family was heavily involved in the small Baptist church she grew up in. Francesca and her three sisters started serving because of the example of their parents. The Dean of Students remembers her parents were youth ministers at the church. Francesca's dad was also a member of the men's ministry, and both her parents were involved in the marriage ministry. They are still married to this day and have strongly influenced Francesca's own nuclear family. Francesca and her husband have been married for almost ten years. They have a daughter who they want to grow up seeing positive examples of involvement as well. Francesca said:

> We saw our parents so busy, and they got us involved. Growing up in a predominantly Black congregation as Black children, I think was very important because we were able to actually see what a functional biblically sound, progressive, community-oriented body of Black church goers looked like. It meant everything and it definitely played a big role in our foundation, and we still call it home. It is still home for us. And we know there's a place for us there if we decide to ever get physically involved. I mean, because we're always going to be involved in the work there just by virtue of us having been members for so long.

Eve Smith, a teacher, says her grandparents were the first examples of serving other people in her life. She watched them cook for others and use food as a way to serve other people:

> My grandparents had thirteen kids, but they made it work. I just remember food. It was a part of being at my grandparents' house. I just love the idea of hospitality and the smile it puts on people's faces that you've taken the time to make something beautiful that tastes amazing for them. Second to giving back to school and kids, my second greatest fulfillment is serving people through food.

Simone Caldwell, an elementary principal, knew the value of true love from family. She was raised by her grandparents and refers to them as her mom and dad. While her dad respected God as a higher power, he wasn't particularly religious or involved in any formal activities at the church. On the other hand, her mom was a pastor whose duties often extended beyond daytime hours.

> As a child growing up in the home with her being a pastor, you would hear the phone ringing at 11, 11:30 at night or 12 o'clock at night. And I would hear her praying for someone, or I would hear her talking through, trying to whisper, you know, in confidentiality. But, you know, I would hear her trying to coach different people through whatever life experience they were going through at the time.

All three participants were strongly connected to family members who served the community in meaningful ways. Francesca saw how much time her parents spent at their local church serving on committees and mentoring others. Eve witnessed her grandfather use food to serve others, and this impacted how she uses food to reach other people. Finally, Simone watched her mom serve in her role as pastor. Though her dad wasn't very religious, he respected his wife's decision to get involved and showed Simone the importance of reverence for spirituality while independently living your life.

Themes For Research Question Two

The next three themes help to answer the question: *How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity?* Three additional themes emerged from participants' interview data related to identity. Participants talked about their identities as Black women. Next, they talked about leadership in the schools in which they worked. Finally, spirituality was a theme that each of the participants discussed when

reflecting on service learning and volunteering as extensions of their identity. The next section, I provided a discussion about the importance of the next three themes.

Theme Four: Black Womanhood - "See Me in Black"

For all three participants, their identities as Black women emerged as a clear theme that impacted the way they served their local communities. Starting in their early years, Black womanhood influenced the alliances they formed, and it developed into the lens through which they viewed the world.

Simone Caldwell is a principal at an elementary school in North Carolina. She is aware of her identity as a Black woman and leveraged her experiences to influence the children in her building. She reflected on who shaped her identity as a Black woman:

> My most vivid memory was this African-American lady named Ms. Clemmens, and she had a little shop in Tree Top, North Carolina. Everybody knew in the Black community this is where you took your children to get tutoring support with their homework. I think my mom knew she wouldn't be able to help with the homework and things. And, you know, you pay Ms. Clemmens whatever you can. But Miss Clemmens is going to help. And I just have that vivid memory of this African-American lady just giving back in the community. You know, that made an impression on me. You know what? I have become like a Miss Clemmens in the workplace where kids kind of just like to have a very safe place.

In that moment, I could witness Simone's face soften as she came to the realization that she provided safety for the children in her building. She realized the value the Black women in her life provided as she was growing up and she took that inheritance and shared it with the children in her life.

Francesca understood her worth and developed the same tenacity that she witnessed in her own mother years earlier. Francesca and her family moved to a predominantly White high

school and immediately began to notice how teachers were treating her negatively. Francesca described herself as a shy child and she wasn't always comfortable with speaking up. She had an instance in high school where the counselor said Francesca should aim lower in terms of the college she chose. Not only did Francesca ignore this advice, but she went to a college that is consistently highly ranked. In that time her mom came to the school more to meet with teachers and served as an advocate for Francesca. This later influenced Francesca's own practice as the Dean of Students:

> For instance, I just started my new job on Monday, and there are already a few areas that I know that need to be addressed outright, that people have just kind of been overlooking. It was a situation that came up with a student because summer school was in session, and it needed to be addressed. So, you know, that's a part of my job. So, I addressed it with the student. And, you know, the outcome was great. I'm not one to toot my own horn. Being a Black woman, having to work harder, having to prove myself, having to validate that. Despite what you saw on my resume when you decided to hire me, I'm actually capable of doing that. I've done it before multiple times, and I didn't need any guidance. I didn't need you to hold my hand. That's not what I'm here for. So let me do what you hired me to do.

Francesca was very confident in her decision to help the student in question. She said that after she helped the student, the principal and other staff members seemed surprised that she knew how to act independently without much guidance. The responses of the other staff members never seemed to shake Francesca's faith in herself. As she recounted the story, she remained very composed processing what it meant to be a Black woman who served in schools. She discusses having to be aware of how others perceive you and how that might dictate your choices.

> I know that won't be the first time that I'm going to run into that. So, I'm prepared. But again, it's just really having to show and prove. It's a lot of showing and proving and a lot of remaining composed. Because if you respond in a certain way, then you're giving them what they thought. You know, they're like, oh, ok. See me in Black because that's what I am all day, every day. Nothing about that is going to change. But I just don't like to give people that. I don't like to give people what they expect of me because of what I look like.

Eve Smith has a wealth of experience as an educator. Eve enlisted in the army after two semesters at Outer Banks University. She said she never intended to join the army, but so many of her uncles had joined that it felt like the best option for her. Eve said she always knew she would return to school to finish her bachelor's degree. She was in the army for three years from 1991 to 1994 and worked a series of odd jobs for another four years before returning to Outer Banks University in 1998. Eve was able to finish her bachelor's degree in education in three-and-a-half years.

She taught elementary school for five years before deciding to become an administrator, a decision she pondered as early as undergrad. Eve found herself back at Outer Banks University, a prestigious public institution, for her master's degree graduating in 2008. Eve worked as an assistant principal for 14 years. She decided to return to teaching this year, a conscious decision she made, while pursuing her Ph.D. Her mind reflected back to those early years of her career when her identity as a Black woman defined her pursuits as an educator:

> I remember when I first became an assistant principal, and we had these affinity groups. And I remember we wanted to take them (the students) to DC just to expose them, because I remember a little (Black) girl telling me that her goal in life was to be a teenager working at Subway. And I was like, OK, well, now. So, I wanted to really get her out of Jolt, North Carolina and get her to D.C. That was really close to us. That was a four-hour trip. And so, I just

> remember making sure that the kids could afford to go. And we had several fundraisers and I just really reached out to the community, letting them know the purpose of the trip. I was just thinking so creatively, even thinking down to when money should be due the first and the fifteenth. You know, I'm just trying to raise money for scholarships- asking teachers and the more affluent parents to pay more. All thirty five of them were able to go.

Working hard on behalf of students was central to the reflections of each of the Black women educators I interviewed. Eve, the teacher, and former administrator, talked about just how hard she has worked on behalf of her students. She reflects on how hard Black women often have to work to maintain balance:

> I think that the whole attention on mental health and social care is easier for Black women to say no now. Whereas before you just had to keep going and keep taking it. You know, after reading in a book years ago that Black women were the mules of society and that's how it feels 90 percent of the time. Now we have an out, you know, that I can say, hey, I just need a mental health day or, I'm feeling overwhelmed. People still have a hard time processing that. I just think they respect it, you know, because I've had people say to me, oh, my God, you have everything together. I'm like, 'Have you ever written a 40 fucking page paper in one weekend?' Well, you know, people don't see your gifts and your strength. They don't ever imagine that you as a Black woman could be suffering, you know. So now I make it a point to let people know. If someone asks how I'm doing. I don't feel that I have to say I'm doing great. If I'm feeling shitty, I can just say I'm not doing well. And that's not to the world, but to my circle, you know, and usually if I'm not feeling well, I don't go to work. If I don't want to do something, I don't do it. And I don't care what people think anymore.

As a principal, Simone is often invited to present at various events. She, like Eve, also identified with figuring out when she was about to overcommit. She had to make the tough decision about whether or not to present at an event with a local organization:

> I even think about an organization that I'm a part of. It's called to Slices of Life* (pseudonym) for women who have been in destructive relationships or abusive relationships. And I even think about particularly for women of color, you know. This year, I decided not to present anything because my plate was way too full.

For each of the women, there were many opportunities to get involved, however, they had to decide which opportunities were worthwhile for getting involved. Often getting involved meant sacrificing a part of themselves to prioritize someone else.

Theme Five: Leadership - "It's Empowering"

Leadership was a persistent theme as each of the participants discussed service learning and volunteering in the context of their identity. Each participant graduated from Outer Banks University in North Carolina and has spent part of their career as a school administrator. Formal leadership roles and informal leadership opportunities became extensions of their value systems.

Simone Caldwell, an elementary principal, knew that going above and beyond, even when she didn't have to, was the right thing to do. She used her leadership role to give others more opportunities within the district.

> I remember my staffing administrator and she's such an advocate for principals. She knows how much we have on our plates at any given time. And so, she emailed me and two of my other colleagues and said, why do you post positions where you are just going to transfer someone from within your building to that position? She's like, 'Just tell me who the person is you're going to transfer.' And we said, we really appreciate you trying to take care of us and not have to have us do the extra paperwork. But from an equity lens, I feel passionate about posting the positions because if we don't post the positions, then how will we ever know what was out there? So how will we know if we don't post? How would ***we*** have known that the opportunity was out there and particularly as a woman of color? You know what I'm saying? Like, I just think that transparency has to be there. We don't know what opportunities we missed out on. Does that make sense? So, I feel very passionate about that. There's a lot of work to be done.

Simone took hiring the right people as a serious part of her job. Even if it took her longer to find the right person, she was willing to put in the extra time. Simone's mom was a pastor, and her dad was an hourly employee in the same district where she was a principal and her smile glistened when she talked about her dad. It was most important to her that she lived life according to the principles her dad taught her. When I asked Simone how it felt to be a decision maker, she said:

> It's [decision-making] extremely empowering, but at the same time, I still know there's a lot of work to be done. It makes me feel very happy. And I know my dad is very proud of me. He does not waste a breath or minute on people. He tells everyone he knows, "My daughter is a principal at one of the largest elementary schools." So, he's very proud of me. But I still know there's a lot of work to be done.

Eve Smith's interviews revealed that she was a hands-on leader who cared deeply for the children she worked with. Her passion for education was reflected in the care that she gave each child:

> I never want a child to feel unwanted. I think there are a few other things I would add to it that may be synonymous, but I think the word is rejection. Rejection is a part of life, but I never want another child to feel rejected based off of someone else's negative, false, or uninformed opinion of them. Unfortunately, that happens a lot in education. That happens a lot to children of color. It happens a lot to children who may not be of color but are disenfranchised in some way. And those children get written off and you look up and you see those children, either they pull themselves up despite their circumstance or they fall prey to those circumstances. And I've seen that a lot in my time. I can look on the news and see young men who've made poor choices that are currently locked up that I worked with personally. And that's hurtful. And I would say along the way, they probably had some experience because of either a mistake they made or because someone may have felt like their best efforts weren't good enough, where they were given a "no" or told they couldn't do something, or something just didn't turn out in their favor and the door shut.

Eve worked tirelessly to expose her students to so many opportunities through a community garden, getting to know their parents, field trips, and even having some of her students come over to eat dinner and play with her personal children.

Francesca Davidson took leadership to another level by making an extra commitment to the special needs students at her school by creating an environment that was sensitive to their needs:

> The exceptional children's department was under my umbrella, and I did a lot of work with the Special Needs. I did a lot of work around getting specific resources and different things created in their rooms, like we moved towards being more sensory aware and creating more sensory appropriate spaces in our classes, classrooms, specifically those where we had students on the lower end of the autism spectrum. And so therefore they experience at the elementary level because you're still figuring that out. You're still figuring out what that's going to look like for them and what their triggers are, what it will look like on a daily basis, whether it's going to manifest in some type of behavior or some type of meltdown. So, we worked really hard to create. And then you have a range of students in those rooms. So, you have students who maybe consider more high functioning, who are ready to learn and who are going to grasp things a lot quicker versus those who are not. So, we worked with an organization to help us figure out how to divide out the spaces in our rooms to create more sensory appropriate kinds of settings in the classroom. So, for instance, we did a project with the Autism Society where we had some lighting…We brought in certain things to have that done. That was on a Saturday. So, it was voluntary because they provided the resources and helped us to kind of set it up. But I would say those are some of my more memorable volunteer experiences because it's with another population of students who can often get overlooked.

Leadership was defined by the participants as those larger tasks and goals that many people often think of when they think of traditional leadership. Sometimes it is taking a little more time to search for the perfect candidate. At other times, it is just making sure students know

you care. Finally, leadership can be coming in on a weekend to make adjustments to the physical classroom space of special needs students.

Theme Six: Spirituality - "Wisdom's Beauty"

The final theme under question two related to each participant's perspective on the role of spirituality in their lives. Spirituality is involvement in formal religious activities, as well as an awareness of oneself as a spiritual being.

Eve's perspective illuminated a unique perspective about why volunteering at church may offer a natural starting point for so many:

> I know that in the church, you know, you can gain access to those types of activities for free. There wasn't a barrier. They weren't money-based service opportunities. And so, because we were not in the Brownies or Girl Scouts or anything like that- We couldn't afford that. So, the church, I think, is just more easily accessible for people.

Eve sounded like many Black girls whose initiation into service in a church context happens after they jump into their first pair of itchy stockings, slide on a pair of black, patent leather shoes and march proudly around the church as an usher. The novelty of it all quickly wears off as the girls realize how much work caring for congregants is. Eve reflected on chaotic event getting dressed for church quickly became as the women in her house dashed around looking for the right thing to wear:

> And then for us, it (ushering) was an issue because we couldn't afford what they wanted you to wear... It was a stress point for my mom, because now I got to get her some comfy stockings and buy these shoes. And, you know, because coffee was the color...And, you know, just having to get that and get all the stuff in a decent time. And we didn't have a car. So, it was just a lot of stress around it. And yet it was out of choice. If I had to do it again. I mean, I liked it at the time, you know, walking people down, you know, the rules of the church.

Spiritual experiences can range from the beautiful chaos that helps us find our place to the calm that resonates within the inner being. There was no doubt in Simone's mind that she was supposed to be the principal of an elementary school. She was so invested in the culture of school, and she managed to also be involved in the local community and in the lives of her children. Simone continued to reflect on why she became a leader in the first place and there seemed to be a spiritual aspect to her choice.

> I really believe that each one of us, we have a predetermined destiny, a purpose for our lives, and I know that this was my calling. My purpose for life was to get back in this way by being in the education profession. And when you feel and you know, it's your calling, you never really get stressed by it because you know that you're doing the work that you work hard to do.

Like Simone and her confidence in her choice to become a school principal, Francesca reflected on her entry point into education. Though she is a Dean of Students now, she began with the American Teaching Cohort* (pseudonym).

> I believe in and the divine order, you know, as a believer, but I believe that God, in his divine order and purpose in life, carved out for me a plan that I didn't even foresee going through the American Teaching Cohort. You know, I'm thinking, ok, I'm coming out of college. I had no educational background experience, no training. I needed to figure out what to do with myself because my parents were like, you need to figure out what to do with yourself. And I get this money and I'm going to go to law school. That was my initial plan. But becoming a part of the organization and seeing the communities that they were serving. But the fact that they were serving these communities and totally kind of missing the point, missing the bigger picture, that it wasn't just in terms of what we can offer these kids K-12 with our presence at that time, with our white presence, because there were more people who were not of color in the organization. It just really seemed backwards to me. And I thought to myself, there's no way that this is actually what it looks like. You know, it can't look this way in the educational system and what I found out is that it does look that way, you know. So, the American Teaching Cohort* (pseudonym) was really just providing

> a service to public education, to charters. They were just providing bodies, but no sustainable effort outside of those bodies.

Francesca recognized the need and wanted to serve beyond the two years required. Her strong Christian upbringing in a two-parent household shaped her decision to enter education. While she hadn't initially planned to do this, she began to evaluate her decision through the lens of spirituality and where she was supposed to be. Likewise, Simone also was influenced by her mother's role as a pastor. Though her dad was not a member of the church, he respected the mom's decision and gave her space to live out her spiritual purpose. Finally, Eve developed her caring skills in the church context. She continued into adulthood hosting events at her house. She led a group of women in a Life Group, which is a group organized on similar characteristics (i.e., gender, geographic location, etc.). The group met regularly at someone's house and there was usually food present. For each of the women, though spirituality didn't dominate, it was a strong theme and foundation.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presented the major findings of this study on service-learning and African American women educators according to the two research questions: (1) *How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteering?* and (2) *How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as an extension of their identity?* Part one of this chapter gave an overview of each of the three participants. Part two of this chapter presented primary themes drawn from participants' interview data, which was collected using Seidman's In-Depth Interviewing protocol (2019). In the next chapter, the discussion of findings will provide a richer analysis of the major themes.

Chapter Five will also integrate womanism and feminism into the study's findings. Finally, this chapter will make recommendations for the direction of future research in this area.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

> "Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time." (Marian Wright Edelman, 2014)

Service-learning programs formally began in the U.S. under the Kennedy administration, but service and volunteering have a rich history in the Black community. It is a rich tradition of care within the African American community and often led by African American women. Through two questions, I examined African American women leaders and their experiences with service. The first question asked: How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism? In other words, during participant interviews, I was interested in how they talked about service and volunteering. The second question asked: How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as extensions of their identity?

Review of the Study

This study investigated how service-learning and volunteering is embedded in the experiences and identities of African American women leaders. This study focused on three participants- three African American women graduates of the master's program in school administration at Outer Banks University (pseudonym) in North Carolina. The study utilized Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing process. There were three interviews with each participant. The first interview reflected on the early life experiences, the second interview reconstructed specific details about the life events shared previously, and the third interview created space for the participant to define what their experience meant to them (Seidman, 2019). The interviews generated rich data for analysis.

In the previous chapter, I presented six primary themes that emerged from the interview data: (1) Giving Back: "The Greatest Gift," (2) Serving: "Going Above and Beyond My Job," (3) Family: "Creating a Foundation," (4) Black Womanhood: "See Me in Black," (5) Leadership: "It's Empowering," and (6) Spirituality: "Wisdom's Beauty. These six (6) themes provide a foundation for the discussion of my findings. The first research question encapsulates the first three (3) themes: giving back, serving, and family, while the second research question encapsulates the second three themes: Black womanhood, leadership, and spirituality. In this chapter, I discuss and analyze the findings using the lenses of Womanism and Feminism. In addition, I will provide suggestions for future research studies.

Research Question One

The interview data yielded three themes related to the first research question. The three themes are as follows: (1) Giving Back: "The Greatest Gift," (2) Serving: "Going Above and Beyond My Job," (3) Family: "Creating a Foundation." I used womanism and feminism to discuss each theme presented in this chapter.

Theme One: Giving Back, "The Greatest Gift"

Service-learning is a very specific term to describe activities that take place within communities. Volunteering, on the other hand, is the formal act of performing a service within a community. What separates service-learning from volunteering is that it is a course for which students receive credit. What unites the two is the act of giving back. In the Black community the communal response to needs within the community may or may not be a formal program. It could take the form of neighbors helping one another, church giveaways, family and friends banding together to bridge gaps and meet needs. The educational leaders who participated in this

study believed that they were involved in service in ways that were often overlooked or unrecognized.

I asked each participant how they would refer to the efforts or acts they perform in service of others. Each of the participants used the term "giving back." They also used the term "service." Each participant explained "giving back" and service as acts that were voluntary, unpaid, and that benefited the community. Service-learning programs should recognize how marginalized communities have always taken care of one another before formal programs were created to bring in volunteers. I argue that "giving back" is the way that Black communities have supported one another through service just as formal service-learning and volunteer programs implement models of service.

Simone's motivation to give back started early in her career when she was a teacher. She wanted to imbue within her African American young girls a sense of identity and self-worth. Of that time, she said:

> I was teaching eighth grade social studies and I noticed that a lot of my African-American girls were just in very bad situations at home...As a teacher, I was like, I really want to do something beyond, you know, my normal job of coming in teaches social studies every day. I want to do something to connect with these young ladies to address some of the identity issues, as well as to foster leadership with them, because it was about trying to help them find a purpose in life so that they will have a reason to make better choices and see things that are bigger than themselves.

Theme Two: Serving - "Going Above and Beyond My Job"

The first and second themes are interconnected as both comprise the essence of volunteering. Theme one focuses on giving back, a term used by each of the participants during their interviews. Theme two focuses on serving, a second term that is synonymous with giving

back and volunteering. Each of the participants was a graduate of Outer Banks University, a prestigious institution in the southeastern United States. Each started their career as a teacher and subsequently transitioned into school administration. Each participant felt she had contributed above and beyond what was required. Even though they were compensated for their jobs, there were tasks each woman performed that were not required of them. They did these acts of service because they wanted to reach the broader community.

Francesca remembered being at the first school in her city to have an outdoor curriculum. The planning team dedicated may hours of their free time to plan before the curriculum was implemented:

> But prior to that, as a school, we had monthly kind of lead-ups to that particular day. So, we had to come in on Saturday to meet and discuss the plans, to outline the blueprints. We had to do a walk through. We had to hold parent meetings and get buy-in from the community. And also, during the school day, we would have to take the students out to the area and kind of teach them etiquette and help them to understand what was getting ready to happen.

Francesca spent a considerable amount of time outside of the regular school day and on weekends preparing for the outdoor curriculum to be implemented at the urban elementary where she was an assistant principal.

For Eve, a current teacher pursuing a Ph.D., she reflected on a time of serving when she was a principal. She felt that serving the parents was an indirect way to serve students. For her, serving was performed through individual acts of kindness for families:

> I remember a time that a parent didn't have money for food, and I had her to meet me at Parker's Grocery Store* (pseudonym) and I just bought her groceries for a couple of days. And at the time, I was her kids' administrator, and she just could not believe that I did it. She kept saying 'thank

> you,' through tears. 'I just can't believe you did this for us,' and that was the reward. I mean, even if she had merely said thank you. I was like, 'Oh, it's my pleasure to do it.' You know- to make sure they had food for a couple of days.

Eve's act of serving ensured that a family had food for a few more days. This gesture was something not required by the school and Eve used her personal money to pay for the groceries. It was not a purchase for which she was reimbursed.

Simone, too, went above and beyond the requirements of her job. She recognized the tenuous position of African American women serving in leadership and the many factors they must balance. Circumstances may arise that require educators to take a stand on a particularly controversial issue. Simone wondered how her life could be structured to take a stand without worry for the future:

> I talk to my colleagues because it's like a heavy burden I feel like I carry because it is so much that needs to be changed where our society is very flawed. And particularly, the principalship and being an educator. It's hard to also have a life of service beyond serving as an educator. It's really difficult. And I think one of the things I've taught my children and my colleagues who I trust in my circle is I want to get to a point where I don't really have any bills. If something were to happen, where I spoke out and there was retribution, retaliation, I could live my life simply. Does that make sense? Because those are the kind of risks that our ancestors took.

The Black women leaders in this study were cloaked by the "contrary instincts" (Walker, 1983, p. 236). As described by the author, "contrary instincts" refer to conflicting values that present two different and seemingly contrasting ideas. How can the women in this study consider the work for which they are paid as service? It is a notion that seems contradictory but became clear upon examining the rich descriptions the women provided of how they consistently went

above what was required to serve students. The hard work extended by each of the participants was instilled in them by their families.

Theme Three: Family - "Creating a Foundation"

In the interviews, the participants noted the importance of their family in developing their commitment to service and volunteering. Their family members were the first volunteers they witnessed. There is a long tradition of serving in the Black community. Francesca's earliest memories of volunteering were tied to the small, Baptist church of her youth. Her parents were leaders in the church and passed the tradition of leadership to their daughters.

> I would say we were fortunate to be in a church that didn't just talk. They actually put a lot of action behind this. And we're very involved in the community. And so that's what opened up opportunities for us to be as involved, especially when it came down to involvement within the context of a church. And then, of course, the time that we spent in church and being a part of the church ourselves. Also, our parents were a very big part of developing the actual structure and the youth ministry at our church. I feel like that was really what was expected of us because we were always referred to as the four girls. And this is Fred* (pseudonym) and his daughters. That was kind of hanging over our heads. It was the expectation and I'm glad that we didn't crumble underneath it.

As Francesca explains, through her parents' involvement in a local church, she was exposed to quality service-learning opportunities. The youth ministry was a central place where she and her siblings were able to connect their service to the community. Similarly, Simone explains the value of service that her family instilled in her. She explains this in the context of her experience growing up in the church. As a public servant, Simone notes the importance of trust.

> Seeing her [mom] lead as the minister taught me the importance of confidentiality. If somebody shares something with you and they ask you not to share, you don't need to break their trust. I really learned

> about trust. And also, just to see her lead as a minister also taught me about the importance of wisdom.

Simone's point underscores the importance of creating trust and using wisdom when engaging in service. Like Simone, Eve also has high quality experiences in service. She primarily volunteered at her church serving the small, informal communities of people in groups called Life Groups. Eve felt that her work was an example for her personal children. Eve has two boys- one who is in high school and the other is an adult in his twenties. She discussed the importance of being an example of service for her family:

> I think it's been really good for my kids to see. I think in my legacy they would know that their mom was a true educator. Like I really gave back and wanted to pour into people. You know, most people describe me as having a heart for people and I really do in everything that I do. You know, through the life groups [at church], it was always preparation and Chris was here with me. You know, we're going to move this around and he's bringing this to help me set the table. You know, he saw me prepping the food. You know, it was all he knows...the money we earn money as educators is never enough. The things that I do are purely from my heart. And I know that the people I serve know that.

Similar to the other participants, Eve had a strong sense of the need to serve others. As illustrated here, the families of each participant had a long tradition of doing service work in their communities. All the women in the study were members of church groups that did extensive community work. This was something they grew up seeing and learned to value. Service was part of what it meant to be family and the broader community was viewed as extended family. In the tradition of Black womanism, these participants viewed themselves as matrons of their direct families, as well as their communities (Walker, 1983). Living in the U.S. they were also accustomed to social and civic activities surrounding their communities. Their families emphasized the importance of serving their communities and helping to create needed

social change. Most of these women's parents lived through the Civil Rights Movements and they were exposed to the ideals surrounding social struggle and progress. As such, they were grounded in the notion that they must serve in order to make their families and communities have better opportunities. As Black women, this was part of their identities.

Research Question Two

Theme Four: Black Womanhood - "See Me in Black"

From an African feminist perspective, Black women should be central figures in an analysis of their lives (Collins, 1990). The African-centered feminist thought theorized by Collins (1990) rejects norms that idealize a "mythical norm" (p. 554) of family founded on Eurocentric notions of their personhood. Black women are multi-faceted and have experiences that inform their lives. As such, Black women have ways of understanding the world that consider both their gender and their race concurrently (Collins, 1990). Collins (1990) recognized Black women as "agents of knowledge" (p. 553) who resist and defy forces of oppression, such as those related to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Collins (1990) also argued that "Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people" (p. 553). Furthermore, Collins (1990) recognized the actions of Black women as the building blocks of empowered communities. The significance of these communities, according to Collins (1990) is that they became places of rest for Black women needing a respite from the interconnected systems of discrimination they will inevitably encounter.

Each of the women interviewed mentioned her Black womanhood as critical to her identity and the service work she does. Whether it was connected to outside perceptions of their race and gender, or an internal awareness of their identities, they spoke openly about their

experiences. “See me in Black,” was excerpted from an interview with Francesca. When she discussed going beyond what was expected of her, which is a form of service, she talked about how surprised her new principal acted afterwards. Francesca completed a task to help a student without being asked. She chose not to divulge the specific details of the task because of confidentiality. However, Francesca knew from experience in previous school settings how to get the student the help that was needed. What Francesca remembers most is the surprised response she received from her principal. Francesca said, “First of all, we're black and we're women. We already know there's already a stigma. There's just a whole lot that comes with it.” Francesca had a strong awareness of how others perceived her, but she did not let that change her work ethic. She continued, “It’s just having to show and prove a lot. It’s a lot of showing and proving, and a lot of remaining composed…if you respond a certain way, then you're giving them what they thought. They're like, ‘Oh, ok.’ Yeah, see me in black because that's what I am all day, every day.” Francesca did not want to compromise her hard work ethic because others doubted her abilities, or because they were surprised at how high she could achieve.

That work ethic for Francesca started very early in her academic career. She was a high achiever in high school, and she mentioned that as an African American young woman, she experienced, “the struggles of being a high achieving person of color and being in classrooms where people don't look like you.” Francesca’s mom had to intervene on several occasions where students and staff tried to send signals that she was not well received as a high achiever. Her strategy was to form an alliance with the only other African American girl in the academically gifted classes:

> It was myself and Marsha Turner* (pseudonym), the other black girl. We became really close friends. We actually went to university together. I unfortunately haven't kept up with her, but we pulled each other through all of our AP classes and so forth because she already had a history at West Branch High* (pseudonym). She had been there. She went to middle school with all of the kids...And we just really latched on to each other. So, I definitely feel like God had her there for a reason. I mean, I feel like I would have done what I needed to do, but it would have been a lonely struggle.

Francesca recognized that being one of a few Black women in her high school, as well as in the schools in which she worked, was difficult. Francesca said, "It feels very heavy often. I think there's a great expectation. And then I think there's also sometimes too much expectation and it's hard to navigate both of those spaces."

Francesca connected to a perspective that Walker (1983) said leaves the world to consider Black women in a very specific light. Walker (1983) argued that in the past Black women were considered, "the mule of the world" (p. 232). Black women were caught between being beautiful souls who were in captivity and being worked beyond what would be considered reasonable for most people (Walker, 1983). Francesca's acknowledgement that there was an expectation of working beyond one's capacity for African American women illustrated this point.

Simone saw the connection to her identity as a Black woman as being embedded within the experiences of other Black people. She did not use her position as a well-respected principal within the community to separate herself from other African Americans. In fact, of her two nominations as principal of the year, she was determined not to let those nominations make her lose focus on the work that needed to be done in her community. Simone is very much connected to the broader struggle for freedom in the African American community:

> Looking back to recognize that you can't move forward without being able to give is service. Also in the Black community, to me, it means understanding the whole concept of "Ubuntu," I am because you are. Service in the Black community means we will be better. We will continue to be stronger together. We can't advance or improve without giving of ourselves and seeing the issues and challenges that lie ahead of us that are bigger than just us. Like it's bigger than me. I give and I serve because there are some large, global issues within the African-American community that need to be addressed. That's beyond Simone Caldwell. There are issues that affect our children, that affect our families, that affect our communities. And in order to address the issues, we have to have a service heart. And so, I do that. I'm currently the secretary of City Allies Over Racism* (pseudonym) and it is the anti-racist organization that seeks to disrupt inequities and to address racial disparities in all different fields, whether it's education, health care, law enforcement. And so that truly brings so much joy in my life!

Simone's words embodied Hill's (1990) discussion of the redefinition of power by Black women. Hill (1990) said, "through daily actions African-American women have *created* alternative communities that empower" (p. 554). Through her work as a principal and her volunteer efforts in the community, Simone created a community with others around her to address the needs collectively.

Eve said that the evolution of society on the topics of mental health has shifted her perspective of how much she can reasonably give in service to others. She said, "It is easier for Black women to say 'no' now, whereas before you just had to keep going and keep taking it." Eve's recognition of what was expected and what she gave contributes to our understanding of the choices Black women have to make to survive. From a womanist lens, Walker (1983) argued that everyday women embodied true artistry through simply living. She said, "This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work Black women have done for a very long time" (p.

241). Walker acknowledged that Black women became artists by surviving to see another day (Walker, 1983).

Theme Five: Leadership - "It's Empowering"

Simone's reflection of being an African American woman principal meant that, "I never wanted to get really caught up in that because I don't want the chase of trying to get an award, title, or accolade to deter me from the work." Because of her leadership in schools, Simone was asked to present to other educators at a national conference

> I was asked last week to speak at a national conference on technology. I'm so inspired because I want to be able to tell my story about how when it comes to technology, I really don't give myself enough credit. I'm always like, 'I'm so bad with technology.' But they've asked me to present at this national technology conference. But I think the beauty of the story is I was a person who just really doesn't see myself as a tech, not technologically savvy person. But I was able to do some really cool things with my teachers this past school year with Explore education [a computer program]. I am so excited! I have it on my calendar for tonight. I'm creating my presentation. I get to submit it to them, and they review everything. And I'm so excited to share. If just one person walks away with [thinking] 'Ok, I can do that,' then it's successful, right? Because there's another Simone out there like, oh, I'm so scared about technology. But if one person can get inspired from this presentation, it's been successful.

Simone also initiated leadership within her neighborhood. The homeowner's association said it wanted to be more equitable in hiring contractors, however, they said they were having trouble finding a Black landscaper, so she intervened:

> I looked and finally I connected with some people and found a black landscaper. So, he's just been waiting for an opportunity. It's going to be great. So, everything that I do, I have a purpose...I want to do it right. I'm not going to join some random group even if I feel a little bit inspired by, like I said before, clean environment, or environmentalism. And there is a racial lens with that.

Showing her leadership, Simone went out of her way to try and connect people in her neighborhood with a local Black landscaper. Her skills as a principal were particularly effective with her homeowner's association. She was able to use her connections to find a landscaper who was also looking for work. Her leadership in this area showed her commitment to service even within her neighborhood.

Like Simone, Francesca showed her leadership skills through her service. She was an assistant principal and a dean of students. Her school was the first in the district to implement an outdoor curriculum using funds from a local grant. Several volunteers came out to help them develop the outdoor space, as well as the curriculum. Francesca had to talk with a few of them after they were condescending towards staff and students. She explained:

> I think that people think that when you are in what is considered to be a low performing environment, that everybody, including the adults, are dumb. It's like, no, you have some of the smartest people who want to work in these environments because they know that they have something to offer and they're here because they've chosen to be. And you don't have a bigger picture of why the school's letter grade* may be what it is. It's not because of something that happened last night. Right. So, yeah, I do think that there are often very low expectations and also some kind of shock and wonder. And when you come in and it's like, 'Oh, they know how to do this?' ...You're here to supplement what it is that we already have. You're not coming in on this white horse.

**Note: Schools in the district received a letter grade based on several criteria: student attendance, test scores, and ratings. The result is a letter grade from A to F that is supposed to indicate the quality of the school.*

Francesca was invested in the schools in which she worked and found it harmful to have outside volunteers come in and treat the staff as if they were not skilled. She used her leadership to educate volunteers on appropriate dispositions for interacting within urban school environments.

In addition to being volunteers, these educators were also compelled to serve because of their strong spiritual beliefs.

Theme Six: Spirituality - "Wisdom's Beauty"

All the participants that were interviewed for this study reflected on the importance of spirituality in their practice of "giving back" and service. Each of them had origins in the Black church and witnessed communities of faith in which Black people were giving to one another. Walker (1983) refers to Black women as "saints" (p. 231). The author recounts the extensive suffering experienced by women of African descent in the U.S. - with sexual abuse during and after slavery, being forbidden to read, and having their children sold away from them (Walker, 1983). She asks, "How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century…?" (Walker, 1983, p. 233).

Through the participants' interviews, I argue that their indomitable spirit thrives through their essence of giving to others. The Black women educators in this study went above and beyond in service to their students. Their involvement in service is a gift of their mothers, grandmothers, and other family members.

Francesca's parents were leaders in the church - leading the marriage ministry and the youth group. Their impact was seen through the adults who were once in her parents' youth group. Francesca recalled that they shouted, "Mr. Fred!" excitedly when they unexpectedly encountered her dad around town. Of her parents' reasons for volunteering, Francesca said, "Someone needed to do it!" Her parents were the first example of volunteering to positively impact children's lives. Service is something she chose as a career years later.

Francesca's grandmother, Mary, was also an example of giving back. She cooked dinner for the pastor and his wife every Sunday, an example of creating community and caring within

her community. At those dinners the pastor talked about how much her grandmother did for the community through the Missionary Board. Francesca recalled her mom getting her and her sisters actively involved in the community too: “As we got older, my mom always kept us in something community-based where we were up on a Saturday at food banks. Things of that nature, like Goodwill.” She recalls Saturdays spent sorting and stacking, evidence of the importance of service to the lives of Black women.

Like Francesca, Simone Caldwell, a principal, remembers the example set by her mother. Her mother was a pastor, and she gave so many hours to the church listening to people, serving people, and giving back. While her dad was not committed to the church in the same way, his high regard for her mother endorsed his belief in the importance of spirituality. Years later, when Simone became an educator, she was criticized by an assistant pastor for working on the sabbath. Simone’s mom immediately spoke up to advocate on behalf of her daughter arguing that Simone’s profession as an educator was a service profession. Simone recalled, “If you're doing good; if it's not to serve your own self, it's ok. So, it made me start to feel good, especially so I don't have any regrets.”

Eve Smith, a current teacher and former assistant principal, also recalled church as the foundation of her youth that led her to her service as an adult:

> We had our little duties like ushering or doing an Easter play or something like that just to make sure we're tied closely to our church community, not necessarily doing too much out in the community. I remember just service within the church and the non-denominational churches. As I've gotten older, that's when there was more room to teach a class or lead the youth group or work in the nursery or something like that. And I eventually started to lead a women's group in my home, which were called Life Groups, which is a way of service in that particular church.

The sainthood of Black women is an important aspect of womanism that Walker (1983) identified. She argued that Black women's spirituality "was so intense, so deep, so *unconscious*, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held." For Black women in the U.S. in earlier centuries, they held unrealized potential that was never expressed because it was illegal (Walker, 1983). Walker said when they died, they took those unexpressed gifts with them. However, the author gives us hope when she said the realization of those gifts will actually come through the next generation (Walker, 1983). In my research, Francesca, Simone, and Eve carried the dreams of their mothers and grandmothers to the fullest potential. Simone realized this during her second and third interviews. Simone's mother shared details with her about struggling with confidence as a woman. Simone said:

> When she was much older, she told me that sometimes she struggled with her confidence, you know, and she would rely on Bible stories. She actually shared it very much later on in her life. I think I was in my late thirties and that was one of the first times she shared that, you know? Had she had our education, she would have done things differently. And just about how her life ended up. It meant a lot to me. And it helped me to realize, again, the sacrifices that my mom had made as well. But it was important that she did. It was meaningful to me that she shared that vulnerability with me. I think when I first heard that, I thought about what she could have been and what she was. Even though she was so impactful and so powerful and so full of such strength. It's kind of like that dream deferred. And I think that may also be the thing that fills me. She didn't get to, but I get to.

Simone recognized her mother's sacrifices and unrealized dreams. Her mother was a woman that was born and raised in the American south. Lawful discrimination impeded upon the lives of Black women in ways that differ from the discrimination experienced presently. Black women leaders are the realization of their grandmother's and mother's dreams. Francesca, Simone, and Eve lead schools and teach children of all backgrounds, something their mothers

were not permitted to do. Simone is a principal; Francesca and Eve have been assistant principals. Each of their family members became the first examples of the "justice-oriented dispositions" (p. 198), or empathetic responses towards family and children, that each participant would adopt in their own practice as educators (Butler, Coffey, & Young, 2021). This justice is the "beauty of wisdom" that Simone said her grandmother passed down to her.

Implications of the Study

Recommendations for K-12 Schools and Universities Implementing Service-Learning Programs

This research highlighted themes that were extracted from interviews with each of the participants. The recommendations in this section come from the analysis of the participants' responses. Through the study, there are three primary recommendations surrounding: Community Partnership; Shifting Power Dynamics; and Culturally Responsive Service-Learning. These areas are addressed below.

Community Partnerships

Based on the findings of the study, there is a greater need for schools [K-12 and post-secondary] to form partnerships with communities. These partnerships are important because they help service learners understand the communities they are working with and to create better solutions. Through these partnerships, service providers can develop a better understanding of the communities being served, develop a culturally responsive curriculum that will be implemented by those participating in service learning opportunities, and help to shift power dynamics within these communities. In traditional models of service-learning, the service provider comes in and provides services as an outsider and sometimes with little specific expertise on the individual needs, as well as the social context. In the model being suggested

here, partnerships should be developed with communities so that the most effective service can be provided. In this sense, those who are in the communities should be viewed as experts (knowers), and their knowledge should help inform planning and delivery of services being provided. To do this well, there also needs to be a shift in the power dynamics.

Shift Power Dynamics within Service-learning Opportunities

Currently, in service-learning opportunities outside volunteers enter marginalized communities to perform volunteer and community service. To shift power dynamics, people from within the communities being served should be provided the chance to lead. Each of the participants interviewed discussed the acts of volunteer service they performed. They also discussed others in the Black community who were giving back. Simone reflected on the role Ms. Clemmens played in tutoring students in the community. She was an older Black woman who parents brought their students to for tutoring. Simone felt that she in some ways had evolved into being a Ms. Clemmens through her work in a local school as a principal.

Eve, an elementary teacher working towards her Ph.D., was a former assistant principal. She discussed how there needed to be more opportunities for students to serve. Francesca, a former assistant principal, and current dean of students, often had to wrangle volunteers to serve in the urban high schools in which she worked. She noted there were many volunteers in the elementary schools where she served as assistant principal. She discussed having to help volunteers understand the worth that existed within the buildings in which she worked. She said volunteers would often enter with a mindset that they were coming to save the students inside. Francesca refuted the deficit thinking of that mindset to assert the agency of the people in the building. She discussed how much talent and passion existed within the walls of the schools prior

to the entry of the outside volunteers. In addition to the changes in the power dynamics, teacher education programs should better align with the needs of communities.

Culturally Responsive Service-Learning

Colleges and universities that organize service-learning opportunities within local schools should develop culturally relevant curricula to educate their volunteers before they enter local communities to serve. Simone created a curriculum after the death of George Floyd because she knew so many of her staff members were impacted by the incident.

> We had a voluntary equity collaborative that was formed at my school, and it was all volunteer. People came as they wanted to. They talked a lot more about equity than they did Black lives. To be honest, I think a lot of people saw Black Lives Matter as political or they had a negative connotation of Black Lives Matter...I think they felt more comfortable discussing racial equity and social justice than the Black Lives Matter movement in and of itself...because it's such a hot button issue to them.

Simone, an elementary school principal, used the nationwide protests after the death of George Floyd to educate her staff on Black Lives Matter, a group they perceived as controversial. Simone made the opportunity voluntary to encourage more staff members to attend. Though most of the staff chose to focus on diversity at the topical level, through general discussions of social justice and racial equity, she felt the equity collaborative expanded their understanding. It also challenged them to approach topics that they previously were not openly discussing.

Service-learning must become more grounded in the experiences and needs of the communities they serve, and teacher preparation programs must become more culturally responsive to these needs. Service-learning provides preservice teachers with the opportunity to

learn and be exposed to diverse communities. This should be done systematically across teacher preparation programs. It might also help with the effectiveness of these teachers in the classroom, as well as improve teacher turnover in low-income and urban schools.

Conclusion

Dismantling traditional power structures within service-learning has the potential to shift programs away from traditional hegemonic structures that exclude marginalized people. Findings demonstrate that the Black women educators in this study valued service as extensions of their identities. Future research should consider ways to restructure service-learning programs to produce higher civic engagement among all participants and shift longstanding narratives. Service-learning programs should incorporate more community based perspectives to ensure that every voice is heard. Black women educators can provide critical insight because they hold valuable knowledge that has sustained and nourished communities throughout time.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the themes and recommendations that were extracted from the interviews with each of the participants. First, each of the six themes below was analyzed through the theoretical lenses of womanism and feminism:

- Theme One: Giving Back: “The Greatest Gift”
- Theme Two: Service - “Going Above and Beyond My Job”
- Theme Three: Family - “Creating a Foundation”
- Theme Four: Black Womanhood - “See Me in Black”
- Theme Five: Leadership - “It’s Empowering”
- Theme Six: Spirituality - “Wisdom’s Beauty”

The chapters also provided recommendations to help improve the effectiveness of service-learning. If service-learning is to be truly transformative, all stakeholders must be involved from the very inception to the implementation and delivery of all services.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS OF K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

	All public school princi-pals	Male					Female				
		Total	Latino, regard-less of race	White, non-Latino	Black, non-Latino	Other	Total	Latino regard-less of race	White, non-Latino	Black, non-Latino	Other
All public schools	298	690	277	623	239	171	672	245	624	346	181
Age											
Less than 45 years	585	463	203	408	177	101	509	170	444	199	106
45–54 years old	662	482	166	425	133	99	570	168	490	227	116
55 years or more	631	414	98	360	98	95	513	123	473	173	85
Years of principal experience											
Less than 2 years	509	343	115	315	107	58	469	154	409	154	100
2–3 years	511	363	121	309	99	69	403	138	324	160	68
4–9 years	618	456	187	395	167	99	541	137	480	212	90
10 years or more	583	417	125	378	97	114	465	122	430	185	95
Highest degree earned											
Bachelor's degree or less	213	135	†	122	27	†	160	33	146	52	†
Master's degree	682	591	229	538	193	136	630	210	585	234	153
Education specialist or professional diploma	570	406	131	367	113	62	502	98	459	200	71
Doctorate or first professional degree	415	261	61	216	100	84	332	114	240	167	79

† Not applicable.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2015–16.

Table A1: Demographic data about the total number of principals by gender, race, age, years of experience and level of education.

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

(Introductory questions)

- What is your name, age, and position?
- What school district do you currently work with? How long have you worked here?
- What other districts have you worked with?
- Tell me about the communities that your students come from.

Research Question #1: How do African American women educators narrate their experiences with service learning and volunteerism?

- What are your experiences with service and volunteering?
- Tell me a story about your students and how you convey the importance of giving back.
- Tell me a story about a parent that you have formed a good relationship with?
- What is your involvement at school with volunteers?
- Provide me an example of something that you learned from your family that helped you in your career as an educator.
- Can you share a memorable experience from when you decided to become an educator? How did it develop?
- Where do you draw inspiration for serving the community?

Research Question #2: The second research question considers this: (2) How do African American women educators frame service learning and volunteerism as an extension of their identity?

- How would you define service?
- What are your earliest memories of service and volunteering?
- What do you think service and volunteering means in the Black community?
- How do volunteers contribute to your school's program?
- What can students learn from you about service and volunteering?
- Do you all do any training on cultural competence with volunteers?
- What has being a K-12 school educator taught you about yourself?
- How can volunteers empower students?
- Do you use volunteers or service to support the learning of students?