DISSERTATION

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

WHO PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE LEARNING TRIPS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

WHO PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE LEARNING TRIPS

To make a service learning trip an effective learning experience, it is important to determine what, if anything, students are learning as a result of the experience. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to contribute to the understanding of the lived social and cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips.

The qualitative research method, with its focus on a social phenomenon and the meaning this phenomenon has to the people who participate in it, was used to study the lived experience of undergraduate college students participating in service learning experiences. This study used the phenomenological research methodology, with its focus on describing the essences of the lived experience. The specific research approach was hermeneutical phenomenology because of the interpretative, rather than strictly descriptive, nature of this methodology (van Manen, 1990). In this study, interpretation was used when analyzing the data, using Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning as the theoretical framework.

The primary method of data collection for this research study was through semi-structured interviews with eight participants who had participated in at least one service learning trip. Three major themes were revealed as a result of these interviews: *Social Learning Experiences, Cultural Learning Experiences,* and *Self-Learning.* The sub-themes that emerged for *Social Learning Experiences* were *Bonding* and *Developing Leadership Skills.* The sub-themes that emerged for *Cultural Learning Experiences* were *Reintegration Issues*, *Differences*

between Participants and Those Served and *Overcoming Differences.* The sub-themes that emerged for *Self-Learning* were *Changes in Perceptions of Others* and *Awareness of Privilege.*

A number of recommendations for practice came out of this study. These recommendations, which could be potentially useful to Student Affairs Personnel interested in implementing service learning trips, included ensuring that there is a formal reflection component in service learning trips, ensuring that service learning trip participants have some kind of responsibility around coming up with solutions to the problem that they are there to solve, ensuring that participants have ample opportunities to work with the other people involved in the project, including students from other schools, and ensuring that participants have the opportunity to interact with the people they are serving.

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I would also like to say a special thank you to the students who agreed to be participants in this study. Not only am I appreciative of the time you took out of your busy lives to talk to me, but I am inspired by your dedication to service. I truly believe that you have made, and will continue to make, the world a better place to live.

Thank you to all of my family members who supported me through this process. To my in-laws, John and Jane Langer: thank you for all of your support and for accepting me as a member of the family. To my parents, Ann and Keith Bienvenu: I appreciate everything you have done for me; you have been so supportive of me throughout this process, just like you have

been in every other step of my life. To my wife, Melissa: I don't know if I will ever be able to

explain how much your patience and support in this process meant to me. And to my son,

Joseph: This journey, which started before you were born, was probably unfair to you in many

ways. I know that you were too young to understand why Daddy had to spend so much time on

this. My only regret is that the time spent working on this is time I should have been spending

with you. You always seemed to understand when we explained "Daddy has to do his work". But

finally, Daddy's work is over. Now it is time to play!

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DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Alternative break is a specific type of service learning experience in which college students provide service in exchange for education about current social and cultural issues facing the host communities (Colorado State University Office of Student Leadership Involvement and Community Engagement, n.d., n.p.).

Cultural learning is the learning that occurs on a service learning trip as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that in which the student is usually a participant.

Experiential learning is learning through reflection on direct experience. In experiential learning, knowledge comes not from an expert who imparts knowledge through a lecture, but rather from active involvement in an experience. Learning occurs not only through the experience itself, but through the way we transform that experience into knowledge. A service learning trip is an example of an experiential learning opportunity.

Intercultural immersion experience is a specific type of service learning experience which "provides opportunities for students to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own as a means to challenge themselves to critically think about and better understand cultural differences" (Regis University Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions Center for Service Learning, n.d., n.p.).

Service learning is a type of learning that:

> …combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. (Learn and Serve America, n.d., n.p.).

Service learning trip is a broad term meaning a learning experience in which the focus is service learning. Alternative breaks (both curricular and non-curricular) and intercultural immersion experiences are types of service learning trips.

Social learning is learning that occurs on a service learning trip as a result of working with fellow participants and with those involved with the agency being served.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1980s, Alexander Astin created a developmental theory of student involvement. Astin's (1984) theory is based on the idea that students who are involved in both the academic and social aspects of college are more likely to gain a complete learning experience. Around the same time, a national movement was started to promote civic engagement initiatives on college campuses. This movement resulted in programs such as Campus Compact, which "promotes public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills" (Campus Compact, n.d.), and Learn and Serve America, which "supports and encourages service-learning throughout the United States" (Learn and Serve America, n.d.). Today, student involvement is widely viewed as an integral part of the learning process in higher education.

One of the ways that college students can become involved is through service learning. A survey conducted by Campus Compact (2009) revealed that 92% of the 731 member colleges and universities offered courses that incorporated service learning. Service learning is a way for students to implement what they have learned in the classroom in real-life situations. University faculty who implement service learning saw benefits for their students, which included an increase in student interest, development of problem solving skills, and an increase in learning skills related to a particular subject (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). College students involved in service experiences were more likely to have positive changes in awareness and attitude towards groups from different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). College students who volunteered also reported an increase in career-related skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The number of college students who volunteered increased from 2.7 million in 2002 to 3.3 million in 2005 (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2006). However,

more recent research indicated that volunteer rates for college students were dropping. In 2007, college students volunteered at a rate of 24.8 percent compared to 30.2 percent in 2005 (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2009).

There are several different types of volunteer experiences available to students on university campuses, including service learning trips. One specific type of service learning trip is the alternative break. Alternative breaks can be characterized as immersion experiences in which college students visit a community to engage in community service and experiential learning during their summer, fall, winter, weekend or spring breaks (Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., 2009). College students have a variety of alternative breaks from which to choose, including experiences that focus on social and cultural issues such as poverty, education, the environment, and the prevention, treatment and cure of HIV. This study sought to contribute to the understanding of undergraduate college students' experiences of participation in service learning trips.

Statement of the Research Problem

College students who have engaged in experiential learning techniques have found experiential learning to be a more effective way of learning than traditional classroom techniques alone (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994). Some research suggests that experiential learning should become a part of all college curricula (Cantor, 1995). Service learning trips, which can include alternative breaks and cultural immersion experiences, are a type of experiential learning engaged in by college students.

Several college campuses now give their students the opportunity to participate in service learning trips; in fact, in 2010, over 72,000 students participated in alternative breaks, and since

the mid-2000's "there has been a consistent increase in the number of colleges and universities with alternative break programs" due in part to "the institutionalization of volunteer service as an integral part of the college experience" (Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., 2013). Despite this fact, some literature suggested an apprehension about implementing service learning opportunities at the university level (Finger, Lopez, Baralus, Parisi, Rohs, Schmalzel, Miller, Kaur, & Reese, 2007). Part of this apprehension may come from a lack of understanding about the learning outcomes of student voluntarism (Rhoads & Neuruer, 1998). It is apparent that there is insufficient research for Student Affairs Personnel to refer to when trying to set service learning trips up in a manner that ensures that effective experiential learning occurs. Also, what little research that has occurred on this topic focused on individual or personal learning that occurred as a result of participation in service learning trips. However, learning about oneself in relation to the rest of the world is also important. Since participants of a service learning trip are given the opportunity to work with fellow participants in order to help solve a significant problem, it is important to know what they have learned about this experience. Participants of service learning trips are also given the opportunity to work with a culture or environment different from that in which they are usually a participant. It is important to know what they learn about that experience as well. Seeking knowledge about what students learn through a particular experience allows for the opportunity to make improvements to the experience and enhance the students' learning even further. Research is needed to better understand what social and cultural learning experiences occur for students as a result of participating in service learning trips.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to contribute to the understanding of the lived and co-constructed social and cultural learning experiences for college students who

participate in service learning trips. This study also explored the factors that motivated the students to participate in a service learning trip.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer two major research questions from the perspective of participating students:

- What are the perceived social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

- What are the perceived cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

Social learning experiences consisted of learning that was perceived to have occurred as a result of working and spending time with fellow participants and with those who work for the agency being served. The cultural learning experiences consisted of learning that was perceived to have occurred as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that in which the student is usually a participant.

In addition, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

- Why do students participate in service learning trips?

- What benefits do students perceive to accrue as a result of participating in service learning trips?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the understanding of the learning that occurs for students who participate in experiential learning activities (specifically, service learning trips) in college. This study focused on the social and cultural learning experiences of service learning trips, topics that have not been covered extensively in the literature. Service learning trips offer the potential for college students to learn in a unique way. These trips are experiential in nature and may offer the opportunity for students to engage in cultural and social learning experiences. However, service learning trips need to be run effectively in order to provide this type of learning to its participants. To make a service learning trip an effective learning experience, it is important to determine what, if anything, students perceive they are learning as a result of the experience. This information may lead to changes in how the service learning experience is implemented for the experience to be a successful one for each of the participants.

Definitions of Terms

This section provides the definitions for some of the relevant terms used in the study. Some of the terms (cultural learning, experiential learning, service learning trip, and social learning) are operational definitions of terms, while the others (alternative break, intercultural immersion experience, and service learning) are defined using websites of organizations that have a specific knowledge of the subjects being studied.

- **Alternative break** is a specific type of service learning experience in which college students provide service in exchange for education about current social and cultural issues facing the host communities (Colorado State University Office of Student Leadership Involvement and Community Engagement, n.d., n.p.).

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- **Cultural learning** is the learning that occurs on a service learning trip as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that in which the student is usually a participant.

- **Experiential learning** is learning through reflection on direct experience. In experiential learning, knowledge comes not from an expert who imparts knowledge through a lecture, but rather from active involvement in an experience. Learning occurs not only through the experience itself, but through the way we transform that experience into knowledge. A service learning trip is an example of an experiential learning opportunity.

- **Intercultural immersion experience** is a specific type of service learning experience which "provides opportunities for students to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own as a means to challenge themselves to critically think about and better understand cultural differences" (Regis University Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions Center for Service Learning, n.d., n.p.).

- **Service learning** is a type of learning that:

  > …combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. (Learn and Serve America, n.d., n.p.).

- **Service learning trip** is a broad term meaning a learning experience in which the focus is service learning. Alternative breaks (both curricular and non-curricular) and intercultural immersion experiences are types of service learning trips.

- **Social learning** is learning that occurs on a service learning trip as a result of working with fellow participants and with those involved with the agency being served.

Delimitations

Eight people were interviewed for this study. Seven of the participants were female while one was male. All of the participants identified themselves as White. Seven of the participants were undergraduate students in a small, Jesuit university in an urban area in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States, while one participant was an undergraduate student at a large, land-grant university in a mid-sized town in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Each of these participants had experienced at least one service learning trip (a learning experience in which the focus is service learning). For the purposes of this study, the term "service learning trip" could be broken down further into two different types of experiences, the alternative break and the intercultural immersion experience. While most of the service learning trips that were experienced by the participants were considered to be alternative breaks, one participant did participate in an experience that would be considered an intercultural immersion experience.

Limitations

This study was only able to describe the experiences of the specific participants of the specific service learning trips used for this study. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated, realities are:

> …apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. (p. 110).

The intent of this study was not to generalize. Lincoln and Guba (1986) stated, "the axiom concerned with the nature of 'truth' statements demands that inquirers abandon the assumption that enduring, context-free truth statements – generalizations – can and should be sought" (p.

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75). This was an interpretivist study in which the paradigm of inquiry involved "local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193).

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in this study:

- Using phenomenological methods was an appropriate methodological tradition for understanding the constructed lived experiences of the participants of this study.

- The information gathered from the participants through interviews illuminated the constructed experiences of the participants of the study.

- The experiences described by the participants reflected their own personal reality.

Researcher's Perspective

Prior to enrolling in a Ph.D. program, I spent five years as a volunteer coordinator at a mental health organization, matching volunteers from the community with volunteer opportunities within our organization, such as tutoring or mentoring children with mental health issues. Additionally, I have volunteered for several years as a tutor and mentor for underprivileged youth, and I believe that volunteering can be positive both for the participant and for the people or cause being served. I am interested in the field of student affairs, and I believe that many people have the opinion that undergraduate college students are in college simply to have fun and engage in behaviors that are often seen as immoral and unhealthy. I do not believe this perception is true for the majority of college students, and this view leads me to focus on the things I see as being positive about undergraduate education. I have not participated in a service learning trip, but I do have informed beliefs about what such an experience may involve for

college students. For example, I believe a service learning trip would potentially be a positive experience because it would allow the participant an opportunity to help make a positive difference in a community, while at the same time providing an experience he or she may not have the opportunity to participate in otherwise. One of the unique aspects of using a service learning trip as a volunteer experience is that since these are immersion experiences, the participants have the opportunity to be able to see first hand the difference they have made, as opposed to volunteer experiences where the volunteers only get to spend a day or two volunteering in a situation where it is difficult to see if one has truly made a difference in a person's life. Part of what I hoped to find out in my study is why undergraduate college students volunteer (or do not) for service learning trips, what these volunteer experiences were like for them, and how they perceived these experiences to benefit themselves, particularly in terms of social and cultural learning experiences.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviewed the literature related to college student involvement in the academic experience for college students. There was a focus on Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement. A specific type of college student involvement covered in this literature review was service learning. There was a focus on the personal development that occurs in college students who participate in service learning. Next, this chapter reviewed Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning (which was the major theoretical framework that informed my study) and the role that experiential learning plays in higher education. Experiential learning is considered a type of student involvement and a type of service learning. Specific types of experiential learning that were covered were alternative breaks and intercultural immersion experiences, as these were the types of experiences participated in by my subjects. Additionally, this chapter covered learning through social experiences and learning through cultural experiences, as both of these types of learning related directly to my research questions. The literature review concluded by discussing gaps in the literature, the latter used to point to and inform the need for the study.

College Student Involvement

Before moving to some of the specific types of college student involvement, it is important to understand the theories and effects of involvement for college students. The learning opportunities available for college students extend beyond traditional classrooms. Universities offer students numerous opportunities to become involved in activities on campus, in the surrounding community, and in communities hundreds of miles away from campus. However, not all students take advantage of these opportunities. A review of the literature can

provide some insight into the types of students who are involved in these types of learning activities. As Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005) have found, "what students *do* during college generally matters more to what they learn and whether they persist to graduation than who they are or even where they go to college" (p. 3). This section focused specifically on Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement and on some of the effects of involvement for undergraduate college students.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

According to Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984), student learning and personal development is directly related to the amount of the student's involvement in the academic experience. Involvement refers to the "quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 307). This type of involvement may include time spent on campus, time spent studying, extra-curricular activities, and interaction with faculty members and/or student peers. Astin (1993) found that "learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups" (p. 394). The quantity of energy invested refers to the amount of hours spent on the activity, while the quality refers to how much effort was put into this activity (for example spending three hours rereading the same set of notes as opposed to spending three hours searching for new information which helps with a more comprehensive understanding of the material being studied). Astin concluded that "overall academic development is proportional to the amount of time that students devote to studying, while growth in a particular area of knowledge or skill is proportional to the number of courses taken that focus on these same areas of knowledge or skill" (p. 394). On the other hand, "a wide spectrum of cognitive and affective outcomes is negatively affected by forms of involvement that

either isolate the student from peers or remove the student physically from the campus: living at home, commuting, being employed off campus, being employed full-time, and watching television" (p. 395).

One of the main tenets of Astin's theory is the idea that involvement should include active participation of the student in the learning process. In other words, learning goes beyond passively listening to lectures by professors. Service learning trips provide an opportunity for students to actively gain knowledge of a community by becoming involved in helping that community, which is the type of learning Astin is referring to when he discusses the effort students devote to the college experience. It is this type of involvement that allows students to gain knowledge that will accentuate the students' entire college experience.

One of the postulates of Astin's theory is that the effectiveness of a particular practice in higher education is directly related to the ability of that practice to increase student involvement. Service learning trips would not be as effective if they involved simply sending the students to hear lectures about the community in which they are visiting. By allowing the students to become actively involved in these communities, albeit for a relatively short period of time, a service learning trip increases the chances that effective learning will occur. It is through this active participation that students are able to become physically and psychology involved in the experience, thereby gaining knowledge that can be transferred to other aspects of the students' lives. Astin believes it is important to study not only the specific program activities, but also the time and energy the students spend on these activities when evaluating extra-curricular programs.

Characteristics of Involved Students

Pike, Kuh, and Gonyea (2003) gathered information from a stratified random sample of 1,500 undergraduates from across the nation who completed a questionnaire about the college student experience. Females, minorities, and students who planned to seek a degree higher than a bachelor's degree were found to be more likely to be involved than other students. These students tended to have more positive perceptions of the college environment. In this study, first-generation college students were less likely to become involved. Another study indicated approximately 41 percent of undergraduates participated in community service activities in 2003-04 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This study found that students of private not-for-profit 4-year institutions were more likely to participate in community service than students who attended public 4-year institutions. This study also showed that women tended to volunteer on activities such as tutoring or visiting nursing homes, while men were more likely to volunteer on neighborhood improvement projects. Another study by Astin and Sax (1998) examined data collected on 3,450 students who attend one of 42 institutions with federally funded community service programs. This was a longitudinal study that analyzed the students' answers to questionnaires. This research showed that those who have participated in service activities in high school were more likely to participate in service activities in college. Also, undergraduate students who were involved in religious activities were also more likely to be involved in service activities. Research by Serow (1991) has shown that some of the biggest factors supporting participation in volunteer activities for college students included a sense of satisfaction from helping others, becoming involved through a club, activity, or class, and a duty to correct societal problems. Another study (Jones & Hill, 2003) has shown that students who

performed required community service in high school were less likely to continue service in college than students who performed voluntary community service.

Effects of Involvement in Service During the Undergraduate Years

In studying the research regarding the effects of involvement on undergraduate college students, I hoped to understand more about the motivations and characteristics of students who participate in service learning trips. A longitudinal study on undergraduate students showed that service participation during the undergraduate years had a positive effect on the student's perception of how well the undergraduate college prepared the student for work, the student's aspiration for advanced degrees, and the likelihood that the student will donate money to their alma mater (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999). Other positive effects of volunteering included students who volunteer were more socially responsible (more committed to helping others in difficulty, participating in community action programs, participating in environmental cleanup, promoting racial understanding, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life), had a greater commitment to serving their communities, felt more empowered, and were more committed to education.

Another study on the connection between student involvement and mental health showed that undergraduate students within the 18-23 year age range who were a part of what they considered to be a supportive campus environment were more likely to be involved on campus (Ambler, 2006). The study indicated that involvement was a predictor of higher levels of mental health (using the mental health categories of flourishing, moderately mentally healthy, or languishing). Involvement can also be beneficial to the cross-cultural adjustment process for international students, as Duckworth (2002) found that undergraduate international students who

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were involved on campus positively benefited by creating and maintaining support networks, enhancing persistence with their studies, and dealing with constant change. There have been other studies that focused on student involvement and its benefits to minority students. For example, Gadja's (2008) study of student involvement and the role that it plays on persistence for undergraduate African American college men found that the participants believed that involvement on campus led to socially responsible leadership and opportunities to make a difference. These students believed these outcomes were crucial to their retention and success on campus.

Some research suggested student involvement in service activities may affect beliefs about organizational effectiveness. Wielkiewicz (2000) studied 288 male and 387 female college students from two universities. These students took the Leadership Attitudes and Beliefs Scale. The study found that students who volunteered in a service organization were more likely to have systemic rather than hierarchical thinking. Hierarchical and systemic thinking were measured by scales of how students think an organization is best run. Hierarchical thinkers believe that an organization should be run from the top down, with a structured hierarchy of command. They also believe that members of an organization should obtain information by seeking this information from the team member above them in the hierarchy. Systemic thinkers, on the other hand, believe that there are a variety of different ways in which an organizational member can obtain information. They are more open-minded about the way they obtain information and seem to be more complex thinkers. One of the implications of this study was that volunteering in a service organization leads to a more evolved way of thinking in regards to how success is obtained in an organization.

According to Astin and Sax (1998), among the effects of participating in service activities during the undergraduate years are enhancement of the students' academic development, enhancement of life-skill development, and increased sense of civic responsibility (which includes things like the students' commitment to serving the community, plans for doing volunteer work in the future, and the belief that an individual can bring about changes in society). The idea that participation in a service activity would actually lead to an increase in academic development is related to the ideas of experiential learning. In other words, academic learning can be enhanced by participating in an experience that leads to a deeper understanding of concepts. This notion also fits in with the ideas of student involvement, which state that the students who are involved in extra-curricular activities do better in the classroom.

Involvement may also have a positive effect on student persistence. Milem and Berger (1997) studied collected survey data from a longitudinal study of 1st-year persistence in college students. They found that students who were more involved on campus earlier in their college careers (during their first six to seven weeks of their first semester) were more likely to enroll at the institution in the subsequent term. Milem and Berger (1997) also found that students who were involved with faculty (i.e. talking with faculty outside of class, meeting with faculty during office hours) earlier in their first semester were more likely to enroll at the institution for the following semester. Endo and Harpel (1982) conducted another study that discussed the importance of student-faculty interactions. Their study found that student-faculty interactions have a positive effect on the students' satisfaction with their educational experience.

Involvement does not only refer to activities outside of the classroom. In fact, there are research studies that discuss in-class involvement. Sidelinger (2010) studied 346 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses, and found that students who have a sense of

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ownership over their learning environment show greater levels of in-class involvement. This sense of ownership can come from classroom activities that require students to interact with their peers and the faculty in a substantive way.

The idea that participation in a service activity would lead to an enhancement in life-skill development is also related to experiential learning. Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning relates to cognitive and personal development. One of the things that I was looking to discover was whether service learning trips can aid in this development by helping learners achieve a more holistic way of learning about the world.

There are many different ways that a college student can become involved on campus. At this point in the literature review, I will start to narrow the focus from the larger blanket-term of involvement to some of the specific ways that college students become involved.

Service Learning for College Students

Service learning is a specific way that college students can become involved on campus. There have been some informative research done on the topic of service learning. For example, Keen and Hall (2009) proposed that students who participated in a specific service learning program had increased levels of attention to social justice issues from their freshman year to their senior year. However, the statistical differences were not as great as the authors originally anticipated. When the authors studied the responses to the open-ended questions on the survey, they began to find that many students were stating that their level of attention to social justice was high before entering the program. The authors also speculated that it is actually the college experience in general, not experience in a specific service learning class, which may lead to an increase in attention to social justice issues.

Keen and Hall's (2009) research begged the following question: Is it possible to determine whether or not any specific service learning programs make a significant change to a participant's attitudes or beliefs? Any study which compares students who participate in these types of programs to those who do not may very well find differences (higher levels of knowledge of social justice, for example) for those who participate, but are these differences an outcome of the program or were these levels higher because these types of programs draw students who already have these competencies? Studies such as the one above that focused on longitudinal differences for participants of particular programs may come up with findings that indicate that there have not been any significant changes. However, this speculation brings up the question of whether this finding is a result of an ineffective program or just a result of participants who already had high competencies before entering the program. Also, even if significant differences are found, is it possible to know whether these differences are actually due to the program specifically or due to the experience of being in college generally?

At this point in the literature, I will focus on what the literature says about the effect that service learning has on personal development.

Service Learning and Personal Development

One of the important aspects of experiential learning is that it goes beyond academic learning to also incorporate personal development. Since my study related to the changes that participation in a service learning trip was perceived to have on a participant, it is important to study the literature on service learning and personal development. An article by Baxter Magolda (2000) on interpersonal maturity discussed the role that service-learning activities played in personal development. Her research was a 12-year longitudinal study of 39 participants. The

study began when the participants entered college and ended eight years after graduation. All of the participants went to the same university. Baxter Magolda's research found that one of the most important aspects of service-learning activities was reflecting on the meaning of these experiences with supportive peers. This research supported the literature cited earlier regarding the role that peers play in the learning process. Baxter Magolda's research suggested that this type of reflection can help a learner acquire an internal sense of self.

Research has shown that undergraduate students who participate in leadership activities show "growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values"(Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001, p. 1). Longitudinal data were collected from the results of questionnaires from 875 students from 10 institutions of higher learning. The study was conducted to find out whether participation in leadership education and training programs had an impact on educational and personal development. Attending alternative breaks was an example of a leadership activity.

Among the other findings in this study was the fact that engagement in service learning promoted greater civic responsibility (i.e. participating in community action programs, promoting racial understanding, influencing social values, influencing the political structure, becoming involved with environmental clean-up, and helping others who were in difficulty). Also, programs that encouraged faculty involvement through increased collaboration of academic and student affairs tended to have participants whose leadership skills grew. Finally, programs that encouraged self-reflection and evaluation of skills, values, and knowledge through the use of written journals had participants with greater leadership skills.

Batchelder and Root (1994) studied 96 students from undergraduate classes at a small, mid-western, liberal arts college. Half of the students were taking service learning courses while the control group took similar courses with the same instructors, but without the service learning component. Batchelder and Root's (1994) research indicated that the service learning students "demonstrated greater resolve to act in the face of acknowledged uncertainty and greater awareness of the multiple dimensions and variability involved in dealing with social problems" (p. 352). Giles and Eyler (1994) studied 72 undergraduate students who took a one credit community service course which combined seminars and field experiences. Participants in this course showed an increase in their belief that people can make a difference and an increase in their commitment to perform volunteer service the following semester. Participants also became less likely to blame social service clients for the problems they are going through, more likely to have positive perceptions of the people they worked with, and more likely to stress a need for equal opportunity.

Much of the research on service learning indicated that those who participated in service learning valued the experience. Survey data collected by Hunter and Brisbin (2000) found that students who participated in service learning viewed the experience positively. Miller (1994) found that students who participated in a content-related section of a large community service learning course rated the experience as being significantly more valuable than did non-participating students. The participating students also reported an increased ability to take concepts they learned in the course and apply them outside of the classroom. Markus, Howard, and King (1993) also compared students in service learning courses to students in traditional lecture courses, and found that the students in the service learning courses were more likely to report that they had performed up to their potential in the course. Another finding, one that was

similar to Miller's (1994) finding, was that students participating in service learning courses were more likely to report that they had learned to apply principles learned in the course to new situations. Participants also demonstrated a greater awareness of societal problems, an increased desire to find a career in one of the helping professions, and an increase in course grades and classroom learning. Markus, Howard, and King (1993) concluded that the "experiential learning acquired through service appears to compensate for some pedagogical weaknesses of classroom instruction" (p. 410).

Roschelle, Turpin, and Elias (2000) studied students who completed a Poverty, Homelessness, and the Urban Underclass course along with a Field Experience course designed to integrate community service with course content. The findings indicated that these students:

> make significant contributions to the community service organizations they serve. Not only do their students learn, but the organizations benefit from the knowledge the students bring. Furthermore, through service learning, many of the students develop a long-term commitment to social justice and continue to work for social change years after leaving the university. (p. 839).

Hunter and Brisbin (2000) also found that students who participated in service learning reported an intention to seek out other service opportunities.

Morgan and Streb (2001) stressed the importance of the type of service learning experience that students receive. Service learning is most effective if they are involved in projects in which they have a high degree of voice and ownership. Students who participated in these types of projects showed improvement in self-concept, political engagement, and tolerance towards people who are different from them. Hunter and Brisbin (2000) also discussed the importance of the quality of the service learning experience, finding that "faculty participation and classroom discussion appears to enhance the educational value of service learning experiences" (p. 626).

Service Learning Counter Theories

Although much of the research about service learning discusses the positive effects that it has on participants, not all research findings put service learning in such a positive light. Sullivan-Catlin (2002) discussed some of the pitfalls of service learning, which included "logistical issues, student resistance, a lack of connection between the service experience and the course curriculum, stereotype reinforcement, and a sense of hopelessness" (p. 48). There was additional research that seemed to back Sullivan-Catlin's (2002) finding that stereotype reinforcement is a potential pitfall of service learning. Jones (2002) wrote about the inequalities between the privileged college students and the under-privileged clients that they serve, and how service learning experiences can reinforce negative stereotypes. Dunn-Kenney (2010) also found evidence that a service learning experience can strengthen cultural and social biases. Hondagnue-Sotelo and Raskoff (1994) studied the written assignments of students who participated in a community service learning project which was part of an introductory sociology course. Among their findings was the "most serious and most frustrating problem that we detect in the students' papers is the tendency to reach unwarranted, often racist conclusions based on selective perceptions" (p. 250). Boyle-Baise (1999) believed while service learning experiences can do some positive things in terms of creating an awareness of cultural diversity and the harm of stereotypes, many of the service learning participants still did not delve deep enough into the nature of inequality. Hui (2009) worried that "service learning has the potential to mis-educate students if they walk away from the experience with essentialized notions of the communities with whom they worked. In essentialism, one attributes one aspect of another person's identity as the sole cause for that person's behaviors and make totalizing generalizations about the world as a result" (p. 23). Coles (1993) discussed some of the potential hazards to people undertaking

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service work either as a career or as a long-term volunteer commitment. These hazards included weariness, resignation, cynicism, arrogance, anger, bitterness, despair, and burnout.

Lewis (2004) believed that the short-term nature of many service learning projects makes it impossible for them to create social change. Butin (2003) stated that "service learning has promoted much good will among those doing the actual service learning, but there is considerably less evidence that service learning has provided much benefit for the recipients" (p. 1678). Butin (2003) also wrote about the power struggle between those doing the service learning and those receiving the services, and felt that service learning "reinforces conservative assumptions that relatively isolated actions of caring individuals can overcome societal problems and that it is the servers who bring the solutions and that such solutions are assimilationist by nature" (p. 1682). Other issues that Butin (2003) brought up included the difficulty of assessing service learning programs and the "limited empirical evidence for defining and articulating best practices that foster meaningful and substantive student outcomes" (p. 1687). Zlotkowski (1996) discussed the difficulty in implementing an effective service learning program at the university level where a tendency to cater to a one-size-fits-all approach to service learning has held the field back. Cermak, et. al. (2011) studied international service trips as a form of service learning and found that these type of experiences "are creating a noteworthy ethic for social change but are failing to create understandings of how to enact this change" (p. 15).

Loeb (1994) studied college students who were involved in service and students who had specifically chosen not to be involved in service. Although Loeb's (1994) research was not intended to disprove the benefits of service learning, the reasons that certain students specifically chose not to be involved in service were informative. These reasons included: the desire to focus

on wealth as an educational goal, an individualistic attitude, a reluctance to speak up about issues, and ethical detachment in the classroom.

Literature reviews are used to inform a study, and it is important to provide the counter-theories as well. In this study, I looked for occurrences of some of the things that were mentioned in this section, such as stereotype reinforcement, strengthening of cultural and social biases, weariness/despair/burnout, etc. This section of the literature review was particularly helpful for my discussion on Recommendations for Practice. The literature that was critical of some service learning programs was used to inform my recommendations for best practices for service learning trips.

At this point in the literature review, I will further narrow the focus to a specific type of service learning, experiential learning.

Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning

The major theoretical framework that guided my study was Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning. Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning is an integrative theory that focuses on the role experience plays in the learning and development process. One of the tenets of this experiential learning theory is that humans are naturally curious beings with a desire to learn. Kolb's theory states one of the best ways to learn is through human experience.

Experiential learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The transformational process through which this type of learning occurs comes in the way of four forms of knowledge: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Knowledge from concrete experience comes in the form of direct, personal involvement in experiences that allow a person to relate to others. An example of concrete experience knowledge that may occur on a service learning trip is the opportunity to meet and get to know residents of a neighborhood whose houses have been destroyed by a hurricane. Reflective observation knowledge comes in the form of using observation and reflection to understand the meaning of an experience. An example of reflective observation knowledge on a service learning trip is a reflective group exercise in which participants discuss their thoughts about the experiences of the people whose houses have been destroyed. Knowledge from abstract conceptualization comes in the form of using thought processes to develop ideas and concepts. An example of abstract conceptualization knowledge that may occur on a service learning trip would be the formulation of specific ideas about how to help the residents of the neighborhood that has been destroyed; not only short-term help, but in the long-term as well. Finally, active experimentation knowledge comes in the form of using practical applications to change a situation. An example of active experimentation would be the participants of the service learning trip not only helping in the recovery efforts by helping to clean-up and restore the neighborhoods, but deciding to pursue a career in a helping profession to help alleviate poverty in the long-term. In fact, research showed that Kolb's experiential learning theory can be used effectively in career exploration (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988).

One of the most important components of Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning is the idea that learning occurs in a four-step, interactive cycle. Figure 2.1 shows the four-step cycle and how it relates to the two different types of learning: concrete-abstract learning and reflective-active learning. The next section of the literature review will discuss this cycle and its relevance to my study.
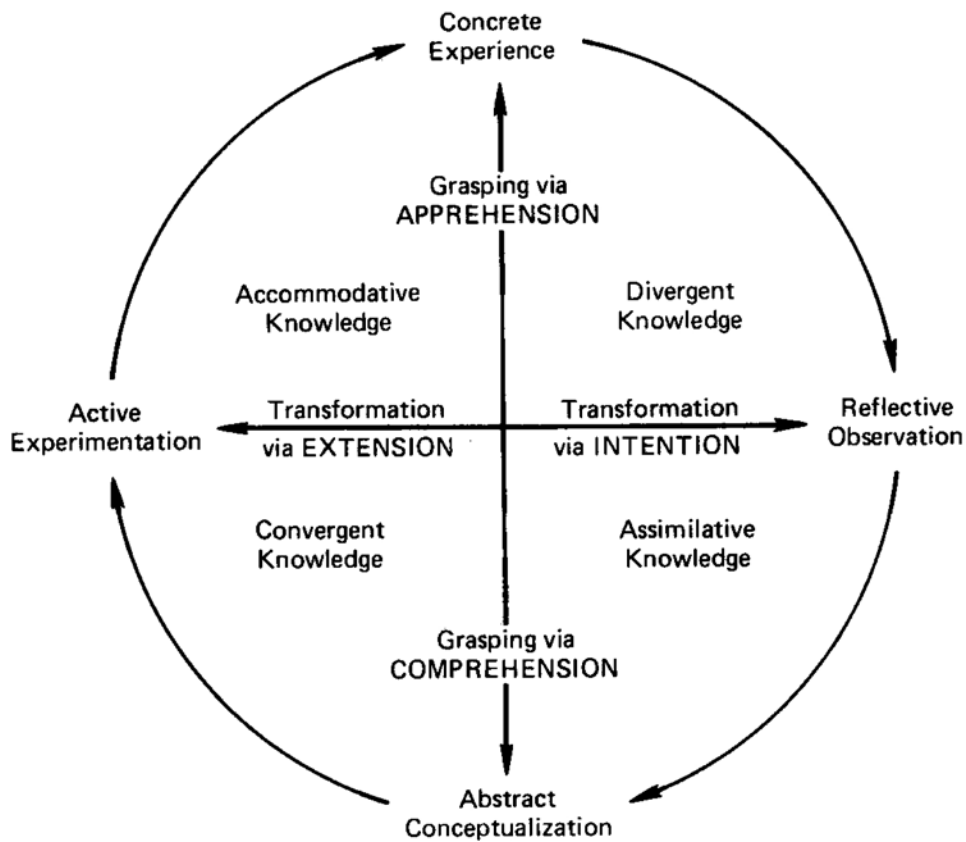
Figure 2.1. Structural dimensions underlying the process of experiential learning and the resulting basic knowledge forms (Kolb, 1984, p. 42).

The Learning Cycle

Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning is based on the idea that there is a four-step cycle consisting of two different types of learning: concrete-abstract learning and reflective-active learning. Concrete-abstract learning is how individuals obtain information from their experiences. Reflective-active learning is how individuals process that information. During experiential learning, individuals make decisions about how they are going to obtain and process information in order to solve the issues that occur in the learning process.

The four-step cycle by which individuals proceed through the learning process are made up of four specific components: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. Individuals engaging in concrete experience are experiencing learning in an intuitive manner. Individuals engaging in abstract conceptualization are experiencing learning logically. Individuals engaging in reflective observation are experiencing learning in a reflective manner; in other words, they are intellectually considering the problem and developing different ideas about the best way to handle the problem (when I use the word *problem* in this context, I am referring to the learning problems that naturally occur as a part of the learning process). Individuals engaging in active experimentation are attempting to solve the problem through actively experimenting with the different ideas that they came up with in the reflective observation stage of the learning cycle. Each of the four components of experiential learning will be used at some point by learners. It is up to the learner to determine which of the four components are most appropriate to use for the problem being encountered. Experiential learning is a cyclical process by which all four of the components are moved through in order to solve a problem. The cycle starts with concrete experience, and then moves to reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and finally ends with active experimentation. Svinicki and Dixon (1987) created a modified version of Kolb's cycle in which "concrete experience becomes experiencing; reflective observation becomes examining; abstract conceptualization becomes explaining, and active experimentation becomes applying" (p. 144). Svinicki and Dixon wanted to modify the model so that the four steps of the cycle are renamed with action verbs that describe the activity of the learner at each step. This allowed the model to be better applied by teachers looking to concentrate on the experience of the students.

Another aspect of Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning is how it relates to integrated learning. Integrated learning is "conceptualized as an idealized learning cycle or spiral, where the learner 'touches all the bases' – experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned" (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001, p. 241). Again, an experiential learner not only experiences all four components of learning in a cyclical manner, but is able to use these components to effectively solve an issue based on what has been learned by this process. This cycle, and the ability to use these different modes according to what the situation dictates, allows for a holistic learning experience. By integrating the different aspects of each of these components, development in learning ability will occur.

The reason that the learning cycle in Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning was relevant to my study is that one of the things that I hoped to find in my research was examples of where each of these types of learning had occurred with the participants of the service learning trips. Another important component of Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning is the four distinct learning styles that occur for those engaged in experiential learning.

Learning Styles

Kolb (1984) theorized that there are four distinct learning styles that may occur during experiential learning. Learners who prefer concrete experience and active experimentation are called accommodators. These learners like to be actively involved in new experiences. These learners are most likely to be effective at adapting to changing situations. Accommodators like to carry out plans.

Learners who prefer concrete experience and reflective observation are called divergers. Divergers are good at discovering the meaning of experiences. Divergers have the ability to view things from several different perspectives. These learners are most likely to be effective at coming up with new ideas. Both accommodators and divergers are often seen as being good with people.

Learners who prefer active experimentation and abstract conceptualization are called convergers. Convergers typically have good problem solving and decision making skills. Convergers are most likely to be effective in situations in which there is only one answer to a problem. Convergers are analytical people who prefer technical tasks to working with people.

Learners who prefer abstract conceptualization and reflective observation are called assimilators. Assimilators are more focused on ideas and concepts than on people. Assimilators like to work with theories that are based in logic. Assimilators are often good at creating theoretical models.

Another crucial aspect of Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning is the concept of conversational learning.

Conversational Learning

One of the important components of experiential learning is the concept of conversational learning. Conversational learning is "an experiential process of learners constructing meaning through their collective experiences through conversation" (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005, p. 413). There are five dialectics of conversational learning: apprehension versus comprehension, reflection versus action, epistemological discourse versus ontological recourse, individuality versus relationality, and status versus solidarity. The dichotomy of apprehension versus

comprehension is directly related to that of concrete knowing and abstract knowing (concrete knowing is apprehension, while abstract knowing is comprehension). The dichotomy of reflection versus action is related to intension versus extension (intension is learning from an experience, while extension is acting on this learning). Epistemological discourse versus ontological recourse is related to doing versus being. Epistemological discourse involves naming the concepts that occur as a result of conversations. Ontological recourse involves coming back to these concepts as a way of making meaning out of these concepts. Individuality versus relationality is related to the concepts of inside-out versus outside-in. In other words, individuality is the way in which one personally takes in a life experience, whereas relationality is experiencing life as it relates to other people. People express their individuality by taking what is inside and letting it out, whereas relationality is experienced by letting outside forces (the opinions and ideas of other people) in. Finally, status versus solidarity is related to the concepts of positioning and linking. These concepts refer to how one fits in a group. Status refers to one's position in a group, whereas solidarity refers to the way in which one is linked with others in the group.

There are three major assumptions about conversational learning: 1) humans are naturally curious beings who are continuously seeking to learn, 2) the differences in viewpoints that often occur as a result of conversation add to this curiosity and desire to learn, and 3) conversations in which our opinions are heard and respected provide the best learning experiences (Wyss-Flamm, 2002). These assumptions can relate to the reflective aspect of service learning trips, and how a well-run service learning trip can lead to deep learning. The first assumption that humans are naturally curious beings with a desire to learn seems to be especially true of students who are seeking a higher education. Although there are several different motivations for attending an

institution of higher education, with career attainment being one of the major motivations, one motivation is simply the desire to learn.

Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning was the major theoretical framework that I used to inform my study. Now that I have discussed Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning in a broad manner, I will narrow my focus to experiential learning in higher education.

Experiential Learning in Higher Education

Not only is there extensive literature about experiential learning in general, but also literature regarding the role that experiential learning plays in higher education. Some research suggested that experiential learning should become a part of all college curricula (Cantor, 1995). One of the key attributes of experiential learning is that it makes learning more relevant for the learner. Cantor believed that this component of experiential learning led to more cognitive development. Another important component of experiential learning is the active role that learners take in their learning. Experiential learners are more responsible for their learning. Cantor also suggested that experiential learners were more likely to enjoy the learning process. Additionally, Cohen and Kinsey (1994) found that students who engaged in projects using experiential learning techniques had a greater appreciation for their projects and found experiential learning to be a more effective way of learning than traditional classroom techniques alone.

Although my research focused on undergraduate students, there was research suggesting that experiential learning can have an effect on graduate students. Rocha (2000) collected survey information on 72 recent graduates of a Masters of Social Work program. She found that the students who engaged in community work along with their classroom activity were more likely

to engage in political activity and social change after graduation than the comparison group who did not engage in community work as a supplement to their classroom activity. The community work that the MSW students engaged in was considered to be a form of experiential learning.

Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning suggests that learning should be more than just rote memorization and passive learning through listening to lectures or reading books. This research stated that effective learning needs to be active and should be made up of different components. These components include knowledge, reflection, judgment, and action (Mentkowski and Associates, 2000). This learning does more than just improve academic performance, but also is useful for a career, personal and social development, and citizenship (Mentkowski and Associates, 2000).

One of the most important components of experiential learning in general and service learning trips specifically is the process of group learning that occurs with these experiences. Ignelzi (2000) discussed the importance of moving from constructing a sense of meaning through other people to constructing a sense of meaning through the self. Group work was a useful tool in making this transition. Group work and group discussions allowed learners to move from learning about the world through the views of others to creating an individualized understanding of the world. One of the factors that occurred in this type of learning was the fact that students who work in groups may be at different stages in this process. It is important that all views get heard, and it may even be advisable that students are encouraged to develop their own views.

There are two specific types of experiential learning experiences that I focused on in my study, alternative breaks and intercultural immersion experiences. The next two sections of the

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literature review will discuss the role that these types of learning experiences play in experiential learning.

Alternative Breaks as Experiential Learning

One issue that needed to be addressed is whether or not alternative breaks actually are a form of experiential learning. Can alternative breaks in general be considered experiential learning? After all, alternative break programs are relatively brief learning experiences, as most of these programs are only a week long. Although alternative breaks are normally a relatively brief experience, they are typically an immersion experience, meaning an experience in which the participants completely immerse themselves in the experience and briefly become a part of the culture and the experiences of the group they are serving. Also, there is no specific time frame to which an experiential learning experience must adhere. There are things that must be considered when running a short-term experiential learning experience. For example, Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) called for student affairs program managers to construct short-term experiential learning experiences in a way in which all four of the learning styles of which students may belong (accommodators, divergers, convergers, and assimilators) may be accommodated quickly. It is important that students from each of these learning styles have learning opportunities, but in the case of alternative breaks and other short-term experiential learning opportunities, it is important that these needs be met in a timely manner since there is not a lot of time for this learning to occur.

Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens (2003) wrote about student-centered pedagogical strategies for educating students and preparing them for moral and civic responsibility. These pedagogies include service learning, other experiential education (such as

internships and fieldwork), problem-based learning (work around coming up with solutions to a real world problem), and collaborative learning (when students work together in teams on projects). Alternative breaks can potentially relate to any of these pedagogical strategies. Alternative breaks have some of the same components of service learning, such as "combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content" (Learn and Serve America, n.d., n.p.). Alternative breaks also have components of experiential education in that participants learn through direct or hands-on projects or activities (Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., 2012). Alternative breaks are also a form of problem-based learning, because students are given the opportunity to work together to come up with a solution to real world issues, such as poverty, environmental issues, or homelessness. Finally, alternative breaks are a form of collaborative learning because students have the opportunity to work together as a team to help solve an issue facing a particular community. It is clear that much of the literature on experiential learning can be directly related to alternative breaks and the purposes that these opportunities serve for both the community being served and the learning of the student participants.

The research on alternative breaks specifically has been relatively scarce. A literature search for alternative breaks indicated that when these programs were first being established on college campuses in the early 1990s, there was some initial interest in studying them. However, this interest seems to have waned more recently. This lack of research left some obvious gaps in the literature, which will be discussed later.

Despite the limited amount of research on alternative breaks, there have been some important studies on this topic. It is clear in reviewing the literature that there are several

community issues that could be addressed with the help of volunteers. As a result, there is an abundance of potential community projects available for alternative break participants. However, many of these communities were lacking in civic engagement (Bohon, 2007).

Much of the literature on alternative breaks focused on the importance of alternative break endeavors, both for the community being served and for the alternative break participants (Finger, et. al., 2007). Some of the studies addressed the logistics of implementing an alternative break experience. One such study focused on the need for a reorientation process for students upon returning to campus after the experience (Bohon, 2007). Studies showed that students often experience a re-entry crisis upon returning home from an alternative break (Ivory, 1997).

The literature also suggested a need for justice-oriented, social-learning experiences in which participants gain knowledge about themselves and about the community being served (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). These types of experiences should be implemented in a way that allows for the learning differences of participants. Despite a general dearth of current literature on learning outcomes of students on alternative breaks, there were some studies that focused on this topic. A study by Rhoades and Neururer (1998) focused on these learning outcomes as they related to understanding of self, understanding of others, and understanding about community. This study found positive qualitative learning outcomes of the participants which included learning about cultural differences, learning about community issues, and learning related to the participant's sense of self.

One of the major aspects of alternative breaks that has been explored is best practices for successfully implementing an alternative break program. Finger, et. al. (2007) discussed the components of a successful program, which include rigorous planning sessions, cooperation

between student participants and faculty team members, and a diverse participant team. According to the authors, the team should be diverse in terms of ethnicity and cultural background, gender, and grade level. Bohon (2007) discussed the role that participants who varied in background, age, and ethnicity played in exposing students to diversity. Many alternative breaks offer the opportunity to experience diversity through the clients and programs they will be serving as well.

Another component of alternative breaks that has been studied is the benefits of alternative breaks, both to the community and the participants. The literature cited several different types of communities who have been able to benefit from alternative breaks. These included clean-up and rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Finger, et. al., 2007), domestic violence shelters, teen centers, and food banks in Virginia (Bohon, 2007), a camp for low-income youth in a large Midwestern city (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004), and repair work on houses in a poor, rural area of South Carolina (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). Other examples include a homeless shelter in Georgia, a bird sanctuary in Florida, a Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and a community center in Virginia (Ivory, 1997).

Benefits to the participants included gaining perspectives on a different culture (Finger, et. al., 2007), as well as increased self-confidence and an ability to bond not just with the other participants but with those whom they are serving (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). Another benefit of alternative breaks is that it is an experiential learning experience that allows its participants to become fully engaged with the culture or issue with which the participants are working. Kolb (1984) stressed the importance of learning experiences that involve transactions between the person and the environment. Alternative breaks allow this type of learning to occur for its participants.

It was clear from the extant literature that alternative breaks are a form of experiential

learning (Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., 2012; Boyle-Baise & Langford,

2004; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998;

Finger, et. al., 2007; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). Table 2.1 below summarizes some of the

components of Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning and how they relate to alternative

breaks. The next section of the literature review will discuss intercultural immersion experiences

and its relationship to experiential learning.

Table 2.1. Relationship of experiential learning to alternative breaks

Components of Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning	Relation to Alternative Breaks
Four learning styles: accommodators, divergers, convergers, assimilators	Short-term experiential learning experiences (such as alternative breaks) should include ways in which all four of the learning styles of which students may belong can be accommodated quickly (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998).
Participants of experiential learning learn by doing	Alternative breaks have components of experiential education in that participants learn through direct or hands-on projects or activities (Break Away: The Alternative Break Connection, Inc., 2012).
Learning experiences should involve transactions between person and environment	Alternative breaks allow its participants to become fully engaged in the culture/issue with which participants are working (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Finger, et. al., 2007; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998)

Intercultural Immersion Experiences as Experiential Learning

Jakubowski (2003) stated that "immersion field trips, as one type of service-learning, give students a break from the norm, and provide instructors with a way of linking subject matter in courses to the social world in which we live" (p. 27). Fairchild, Pillai, and Noble (2006) studied students who participated in a study abroad program, which is one of the most well-known types of intercultural immersion experiences. The researchers found that participants "reported overwhelmingly positive changes in their attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of aspects of multiculturalism" (p. 400). Gilin and Young (2009), in their study of students in a graduate social work program who participated in a 10-day international study trip, found that participating students reported an increase in cultural sensitivity and awareness, and "a deeper understanding of what is involved in working with clients who are members of cultural groups other than their own" (p. 42).

Much of the research on intercultural immersion experiences involved best practices for a successful experience. Canning (1995) discussed the importance of authenticity when going into a culture with which you are not familiar, and mentioned openness, the ability to admit lack of knowledge of the culture, and a willingness to ask questions as important components of establishing authenticity. Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1993) discussed their study of an intercultural immersion program designed for students at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks who were studying to be teachers. Most of these future teachers were white and middle-class, but many of them were going to be working with students in very small high schools in remote Eskimo and Indian villages. Noordhoff and Kleinfeld (1993) concluded that one of the components that made this immersion experience successful was encouraging the teachers to become visible and involved in the community in order to make connections with students and

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families outside the classroom and to better understand the culture of the people they were serving. Marxen and Rudney (1999) discussed the need for a reflective component. "Immersion into culturally diverse settings causes feelings of disequilibrium. Growth takes place when students discuss and reflect on their experiences and are able to move from assimilation to accommodation" (Marexen & Rudney, 1999, p. 62). Although there has been some research on best practice methods for intercultural immersion experiences, Sleeter (2001), speaking about programs for teachers preparing to teach in multicultural schools, called for more research because some logistical questions still remain about these types of experiences. Among these issues were the appropriate length of the immersion experience, the kinds of settings that work best, and the impact that immersion experiences have on participants when they enter their profession. In terms of appropriate length of intercultural immersion experiences, DeLong, Guem, Gage, McKinney, Medvedevik, & Park (2011) caledl for experiences that can accommodate students who do not have the time or resources to commit to longer intercultural immersion experiences.

McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2012) studied graduate students in a U. S. master's-level counseling psychology department who participated in one of two international immersion courses which would have the students traveling to a country either in the Middle East or in Asia from 12 to 17 days depending on the experience. The researchers in this qualitative study discovered several themes in the course of their interviews, including *increased social awareness, personal transformation, increased sense of social responsibility, affective/experiential learning* (which included the sub-themes of *being there-learning through the experience, reflection and dialogue, and emotions associated with experiential learning and awareness*), and *learning from cultural differences.* The participants found that spending time in

a foreign country "gave them opportunities to learn from cultural differences, ultimately increasing the social and global awareness required for multicultural sensitivity" (p. 365). The participants discussed the experiential learning component of the experience, including the reflection and dialogue components, as crucial in raising their critical consciousness regarding cultural differences.

Experiential Learning Counter Theories

There were some research studies that came to more cautious conclusions about the effects of experiential learning. One of the criticisms of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory had to do with the idea of experiential learning occurring in a sequential cycle. Seaman (2008) believed that since there has not been enough research conducted to prove that learning occurs in this type of cycle, caution should be used when designing educational programs using Experiential Learning Theory as its basis. Jeffs and Smith (1996) also cautioned against assuming that learning occurs in this type of cycle when they state that the stages actually "overlap and interconnect; the order alters; and we may pay more attention to some aspects than to others" (p. 41). Miettinen (2000) felt the theory is an inadequate interpretation of John Dewey's model of experiential learning, and he felt that Kolb's model is "epistemologically highly problematic and cannot be generalized as a way in which people learn and gain understanding of the work and of their own possibilities in it" (p. 70). Ord (2009) felt that Kolb's four stage cycle ignores a major aspect of Dewey's work, the fact that learning comes from the experience of understanding and influencing the world around the learner, and this experience in turn influences and changes the learner. Holman, Pavlica, and Thorpe (1997) believed "that learning does not necessarily occur in a cycle to be effective" (p. 145).

Another critique comes from Quay (2003), who called for "further theorization of the relationship between reflection and concrete experience, beyond the basic fact of the existence of this relation" (p. 111). Mayer (2004) criticized activity-based learning methods, such as experiential learning theory, for not emphasizing cognitive activity, which he believed was the best way to engage in meaningful learning. Finally, Gosen and Washbush (2004) stated that while there was literature that did support the idea that experiential learning wass effective, most of those studies did not meet high research design and measurement standards.

One criticism specifically of intercultural immersion experiences came from Cramer, Ryosho, and Nguyen (2012) who stated that these type of experiences "can sometimes have a circus-like quality in that students are coming to watch/observe the locals/foreigners perform for them but not to spend time being genuinely engaged with those communities" (p. 9). Cramer, Ryosho, and Nguyen (2012) also cautioned instructors of intercultural immersion experiences against exercises that promote stereotypes or that concentrate strictly on the deficiencies of the host community.

The intention of my literature review was to see how the literature on experiential learning in higher education, specifically in the form of alternative breaks and intercultural immersion experiences, informed my study. It was clear from the literature review that experiential learning is an important component of learning in higher education (Cantor, 1995) that is more effective than traditional classroom techniques alone (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994). Experiential learning is especially effective when reflection is involved (Mentkowski & Associates, 2000), and when group work is used (Ignelzi, 2000), especially in ways that allow for collaborative learning and problem-based learning (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003). Alternative breaks should be justice-oriented, social-learning experiences in which

participants gain knowledge about themselves and the community being served (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). Alternative breaks are beneficial because they allow participants to gain perspective on a different culture (Finger et. al., 2007). Intercultural education experiences can lead to an increase in attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of multiculturalism (Fairchild, Pillai, & Noble, 2006) and an increase in intercultural sensitivity and awareness (Gilin & Young, 2009).

The literature review reveals two specific aspects of learning that could occur during service learning trips, learning through social experiences and learning through cultural experiences. Based on the literature review, it made sense to focus my study on two major aspects of learning, the social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips and the cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips. The next two sections will discuss the type of learning that occurs through these types of experiences.

Learning through Social Experiences

Much of the research on experiential learning focused on the individual aspects of learning (Wildemeersch, Jansen, Vandenabeele, & Jans, 1998). However, service learning trips are social experiences. Participants of service learning trips work in groups and often reflect on their experiences as a group, whether the reflection is formal or informal. A large part of my study was dedicated to understanding the social learning aspects of experiential education, and how Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning could be applied to learning through social experiences. Although there are some studies that discuss the role social learning plays in experiential learning, I believe that this is an aspect of experiential learning that does not seem to

be addressed as much in the literature. This section of my paper will discuss some of those studies.

Wildemeersch, Jansen, Vandenabeele, and Jans (1998) discussed the role that groups or social systems play in experiential learning. Wildemeersch, et. al (1998) believed that there are four basic axes of social learning: action, reflection, cooperation, and communication. Wildemeersch, et. al. (1998) stated that "social learning is all about balancing between various tensions which influence the decisions and directions of the learning systems" (p. 251). They also discussed the role that creativity has in striking a balance between the four axes of social learning, and the importance of power and responsibility in successful social learning.

A research study that backed up the claim that learning can be achieved through social experiences was one done by Moran and Gonyea (2003). Their research analyzed the results of a questionnaire given to undergraduate students about the quality and level of their college student involvement. One of the major findings was that academically related peer interaction had more of an influence on a student's perceived intellectual gains than did general college involvement. Another interesting component was that academically related involvement is more influential to perceived intellectual gains than is general college involvement. One of the things discussed in the Moran and Gonyea (2003) article was the idea that learning was actually a social process in which interaction with others allowed learners to obtain knowledge and to become adept at discovering different ways of thinking. This point fits in with the idea of experiential learning as a way to obtain knowledge that goes beyond the more traditional learning methods of learning cognitively through constructing information based on what a learner is hearing from a lecturer. Instead, learning is a process in which the learner takes an active role in his or her education, and learning is often obtained through conversations with others. Part of what my study was intended

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to do was to see if the conversations and the ideas of peers and of the members of the community the participants were visiting would lead to experiential learning. Students can learn by experiencing a new environment and by discussing the meaning of these experiences with their peers.

Clinchy (2000) discussed how a connected education in higher learning would serve to "cultivate connections among students, between students and teachers, and between students and their work" (p. 27). This idea seemed to fit in perfectly with the tenets of experiential learning. Experiential learning allows students to make connections with each other because experiential learning utilizes group interaction in order to solve problems. Connections with students allow for the formulation of ideas through conversations. Students are able to learn about varying viewpoints and diverse ways of thinking through their interaction with other students. Clinchy's (2000) ideas about a connected education in higher learning related directly to the type of learning involved in service learning trips.

Learning through Cultural Experiences

As I discussed in the previous section, much of the literature regarding experiential learning focused on this type of learning at the individual level. Service learning trips offer the opportunity for participants to learn at a social level and a cultural level. Although intercultural immersion experiences have an obvious cultural learning component, an argument can be made that even service learning trips that do not occur outside of the participants' country of origin can be cultural learning experiences as long as the environment being visited is one that is largely unfamiliar to the participants. For instance, an alternative break experience with students who are from a university that is comprised of students who are mostly White going into the inner city of

New Orleans with the intention of helping primarily African American residents in recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina would certainly afford the participants many opportunities for cultural learning. As with the social learning component, it appeared that the cultural aspect of experiential learning did not seem to be addressed as much in the literature as the individual aspect, although there are some studies that discussed the role cultural learning plays in experiential learning. This section of my paper will discuss some of those studies.

The type of learning that can be obtained through intercultural education can be very difficult to achieve. Paige (1993) gave some of the reasons for this difficulty, which included the fact that it "requires learners to reflect upon matters with which they have had little firsthand experience" (p. 3). The learning obtained through intercultural education "includes highly personalized behavioral and affective learning, self-reflection, and direct experience with cultural difference" (Paige, 1993, p. 3). Intercultural education can be even more difficult when the learner has a negative view of certain aspects of the cultural differences. Therefore, intercultural educators should "identify those cultural elements which will be the most difficult to accept, help learners explore their responses to them, and aid learners in devising strategies for dealing with them" (Paige, 1993, p. 5). Another thing that can lead to frustration for intercultural learners is language barriers. Paige (1993) did not believe that language barriers necessarily prevent intercultural education, but he did state "lack of language skills can lead to social isolation and frustration. Language is the major mechanism by which culture-group members communicate and share meaning" (p. 7). Kelly (2010) discussed another barrier to intercultural learning: the tendency for people who are in an intercultural situation to want to use technology such as Skype, Facebook and the internet to stay close to their own culture rather than using their time to become more informed with the host culture. Intercultural learning cannot occur without

interacting with the people who are a part of the host culture. Kakai (2000) stressed the importance of these types of interactions by stating that through "actual interactions with people from culturally different backgrounds, students may deepen their understanding of the necessity to engage in critical thinking" (p. 126).

McCaffery (1993) described some characteristics of successful intercultural learning. He described intercultural learning as a type of experiential learning, and the characteristics of intercultural learning were very similar to the characteristics of experiential learning described in the previous sections of this literature review. Some of McCaffery's (1993) characteristics of successful intercultural learning included active involvement in the learning process, the ability for all participants to contribute to both their own and their fellow participants' learning process, and an experience in which all four of Kolb's (1984) learning styles can be accommodated. The most successful intercultural learning experiences were those in which "the more specific learning goals and objectives have relevance and meaning for the participants in terms of their own lives, what they already know, and their professional and personal goals" (McCaffery, 1993, p. 230). Successful intercultural learning experiences also included a focus on skill development and a "sense of mutuality between trainer or teacher and participant in terms of shared responsibility for movement toward program outcomes as well as contributions to the learning process" (McCaffery, 1993, p. 230).

Another finding of Martin's (1993) was that participants of an intercultural learning experience typically did not give a lot of thought to expectations prior to the experience, but once they returned, they were able to better determine whether or not their expectations about the experience have been met.

Gaps in the Literature

Much of the literature about alternative breaks occurred in the early 1990's when the experiences began to become popular on college campuses, but there has not been as much current literature on alternative breaks. The literature on intercultural immersion experiences tended to focus on longer term experiences such as study abroad experiences; there was less literature on shorter term cultural immersion experiences. The current literature on experiential learning tended to focus on learning at the individual level; there was much less literature about the social and cultural aspect of experiential learning. Although these aspects are addressed in the literature, it does appear that more research on these aspects of learning, as opposed to the aspects of learning at the individual level, would add to the literature.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Chapter 3 focuses on the research method. This chapter includes the research design and rationale, a discussion about my research participants and the sites included in the study, and the data collection techniques and measures. Chapter 3 continues with a discussion of the efficacy of my research methodology to address my research questions, and concludes with a discussion of the data analysis and the method by which I represented and summarized the findings of my study.

Based on the literature review, I have developed the following research questions:

- What are the social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

- What are the cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

The literature also discussed some of the benefits of service learning experiences. I researched this aspect of service learning experiences with my subjects to see if there are additional findings that can contribute to the existing literature. Therefore, I have developed the following sub-questions:

- Why do students participate in service learning trips?

- What benefits do students perceive to accrue as a result of participation in service learning trips?

Research Design and Rationale

This section of Chapter 3 describes the research design used in my study of the social and cultural learning experiences of college students who participate in service learning trips. The first decision to be made in determining a research design is to determine the research methods that will make up the design, specifically, whether the study was quantitative or qualitative in nature. I chose the qualitative research method, and the section below describes the rationale for using qualitative research methods as the process used to gather data. The next step was to determine the methodology that was most appropriate for answering the research questions. I have chosen the phenomenological research methodology, and this chapter contains a discussion about the rationale for using a phenomenological research methodology as the means to answer the research questions. There are different types of phenomenology; Schwandt (2000) discussed three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: social constructionism, interpretivism, and hermeneutics. I chose the hermeneutical phenomenological methodology, and this chapter contains a discussion about the appropriateness of the hermeneutical phenomenological methodology for my goal of writing a description of the lived experience of undergraduate college students participating in a service learning experience.

Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is a broad concept, so coming up with a specific definition of what qualitative research is can be difficult. However, by looking at some of the characteristics of qualitative research, it is possible to attempt to define this research method. "Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible"

(Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3). Qualitative research allows us to try to understand something about people by looking at the context of the situation the people are in. Patton (1990) stated that "qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry" (p. 13). Rossman and Rallis (2012) explained that "qualitative research has two unique features: (1) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and (2) the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world" (p. 5).

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that "with qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations" (p. 1). There are several different forms that these data can take. "Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Since this study was on the lived experience of undergraduate college students participating in a service learning experience, I believe that the qualitative research method, with its focus on a social phenomenon and the meaning of this phenomenon to the people who participated in it, is an appropriate method.

Phenomenological Research Methodology

This study used the phenomenological research methodology. Phenomenology is the attempt to discover and describe the essences of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is a "reasoned inquiry which discovers the inherent essences of appearances" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 3). In this context, Stewart and Mickunas (1990) defined appearances as "anything of which one is conscious" (p. 3). Phenomenology is an approach to understanding the subjective meaning of human experience (Keen, 1975). The phenomenological research methodology focuses on an entire experience instead of on specific aspects of the experience, searches for meanings rather than measurements, uses first-person accounts through informal and formal interviews, and uses the data gathered to understand human behavior (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological research methodology seeks to reveal the structure of experience through descriptive methods (Valle & King, 1978). Interviews are not the only method of data gathering used in phenomenology. Data can be gathered through the use of observations and journals (Creswell, 2007). The themes gathered in the data collection process are used to write a description of the lived experience of the participants, with the intention of presenting the essence of the phenomenon being studied. I believe that the phenomenological research methodology, with its focus on describing the essences of lived experience, was an appropriate methodology for my study.

At the beginning of the study, it was important to distinguish the specific approach to doing phenomenology that would guide the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Thomas Schwandt (2000) discussed three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: social constructionism, interpretivism, and hermeneutics. Social constructionism is based on the idea that "knowing is not passive – a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind – but active; that is, mind does

something with these impressions, at the very least forming abstractions or concepts. In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Social constructionists do not believe that truth can be found through methods such as imterpretivism, because "there is no truth to the matter of interpretation" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 198).

Interpretivism is based on the theory that to "find meaning in an action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interpret in a particular way what the actors are doing" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). There are different ways of conceiving of the notion of interpretive understanding, but as Schwandt (2000) stated, all of the ways share the following features: "(a) They view human action as meaningful; (b) they evince an ethical commitment in the form of respect for and fidelity to the life world; and (c) from an epistemological point of view, they share the neo-Kantian desire to emphasize the contribution of human subjectivity to knowledge without thereby sacrificing the objectivity of knowledge" (p. 193). In order to maintain objectivity, interpretivists consider themselves merely to be observers of the behavior, and must remain "unaffected by and external to the interpretive process" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194).

The third epistemological stance for qualitative inquiry discussed by Schwandt (2000) was hermeneutics. Schwandt (2000) stated that "hermeneutics argues that understanding is not, in the first instance, a procedure- or rule-governed undertaking; rather, it is a very condition of being human. Understanding *is* interpretation" (p. 194). Hermeneutics is different from social constructivism in that "hermeneutics sees meaning not necessarily as constructed (i.e., created, assembled) but as negotiated (i.e., a matter of coming to terms)" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195). Hermeneutics is also different from interpretivism in that "reaching an understanding is not a

matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgments, biases, or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires engagement of one's biases" (Schwandt, 2000, 195).

The specific phenomenological approach used in my study was the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Hermeneutical phenomenology is an interpretative, rather than strictly descriptive methodology. Van Manen (1990) sees the role of hermeneutic phenomenology as mediating "between interpreted meanings and the thing toward which the interpretations point" (p. 26). This type of phenomenology is distinctive from transcendental phenomenology, which is more descriptive and utilizes epoche, a method in which the researcher sets aside his or her experiences and attempts to view the phenomenon from a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is often used in research as a way to get at the ontological question of the nature of reality (Guba, 1990). According to Guba (1990), the nature of reality is that it exists in "the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experimentally based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (p. 27). Reality "doesn't exist until either (1) it is constructed by an actor or (2) it is created by a participant" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 87). When discussing the hermeneutical methodology of phenomenology, Guba (1990) discussed how "individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus" (p. 27).

The phenomenological approach of using themes from the data allows a researcher to present the perspective of reality from the viewpoints of the participants. The hermeneutic

approach addresses the epistemological assumption that researchers should attempt to "lessen distance between himself or herself and that being researched" (Creswell, p. 17, 2007). Since the hermeneutic approach does not involve the use of bracketing out the experiences of the researcher, in my view this approach is more conducive to lessening the distance between the researcher and the phenomenon.

One of my reasons for using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach was my belief that it is very difficult to bracket out the experiences and viewpoint of the researcher. Although I have never participated in a service learning trip, I have been involved in volunteering and other service experiences, and my belief was that it would be difficult to attempt to exclude these experiences when collecting and interpreting the data. In fact, it was my interest and past experiences with service that piqued my desire to participate in such a study. Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that empathy is the most important characteristic of a study in which the inquirer is the main research instrument. As a person who has experience in the field of service, I am empathetic to the participants of this study. I felt that excluding my past experiences would detract from my study. Another reason for using the hermeneutic approach is that I wanted to use interpretation in this study. This interpretation was used in regards to what the data were telling me about the types of learning the participants were experiencing, whether these types of learning fit into the social or culture learning categories (determined by the predetermined definition of these learning concepts) and how this learning resonated with Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning.

There are certain criteria used to judge the quality of a phenomenological study. According to Polkinghorne (1989), some of these criteria should include minimizing the interviewer influence of the participants' descriptions of the experience, accuracy of the

transcriptions, and identifying alternative conclusions (if any) of the analysis of the data. To minimize my influence on the participants' description of the experience, it was important to not ask leading questions, but rather, questions that were open-ended and allowed the participants to use their words to describe the experience of participating in a service learning trip. Although I did formulate some research questions before the interviews, I conducted interviews that were more unstructured in nature. Instead of defining the phenomenon ahead of time, I allowed the definition of the phenomenon to "arise from the respondent's reaction to the broad issue raised by the inquirer" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 156). I transcribed the interviews in such a way that some of the subtle things, such as non-verbal cues, that may not be obvious in a written transcript were addressed. For instance, if a participant said something like "I had a really great time during this trip", yet she said so in a sarcastic manner while rolling her eyes, it was important to note this in the transcript.

Emergent design.

One of the important aspects of the phenomenological research methodology is the emergent nature of such a research design. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, there are several reasons why a phenomenological research design must be emergent in nature: "because meaning is determined by context to such a great extent; because the existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator's) construction; because what will be learned at a sight is always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context, and the interaction is not fully predictable; and because the nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed" (p. 208).

There are several issues that may occur during the course of a study with an emergent research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that "one set of such problems has to do with the relationships between the investigator and those to whom he or she may be accountable or upon whom he or she may be dependent: a funding agency, a dissertation committee, an in-house review agency, or simply his or her professional peers" (p. 210). In the case of this study, the relationship that was most affected by the emergent nature of the research design was my relationship with the dissertation committee. Once the committee was formed and the work towards the dissertation started, I was asked to provide a timeline for the dissertation committee. However, the emergent design of the research study made following a timeline difficult. Another issue was how the emergent design of the study affected the relationship between researcher and research participants. When research participants were being solicited, they were provided with a specific protocol of what was expected of them if they chose to participate in the study (i.e.: "If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. This interview will be audio taped with your permission, and will last approximately one hour. You will also be asked to participate in an audio taped focus group discussion after your alternative spring break experience"). However, these expectations changed based on unforeseen logistical issues (namely, being unable to schedule a time in which all or even most of the participants were able to meet at the same time for a focus group). These expectations also changed based on some of the findings in the data, namely, my belief that one interview with each participant did not provide enough information for a substantive study, which led to a decision to contact the participants who had been on an additional service learning trip and interview them for a second time.

Participants and Site

In determining the quality of my research method, it was important to address selection of participants. Although some researchers do not believe that selection of participants is an issue in qualitative research due to the fact that most qualitative research does not involve making statistical generalizations, other researchers understand that this is central to qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) stated that purposeful sampling is the most appropriate technique for interpretivist studies intended to gain an understanding of a phenomenon. Since my study was not intended to generalize to a population, purposeful sampling was appropriate. The intent of my study was to obtain knowledge about the phenomenon of service learning trips. My sample was purposeful as it consisted of undergraduate students from two different universities who participated in at least one service learning trip. I believed that purposively selecting "individuals, groups, and settings for this phase that increases understanding of phenomena" was the best approach to take (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242). Purposively selecting undergraduate students who participated in a service learning trip was the method best suited to describe the phenomenon of social and cultural learning experiences that occurred for students who participated in service learning trips, i.e. those who had lived experience of the phenomenon under study.

Purposeful sampling was the sampling method that best fit with the paradigmatic location of hermeneutic phenomenology. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained why purposeful sampling aligns with hermeneutical phenomenology when they stated that compared to random or representative sampling, purposeful sampling:

> …increases the scope or range of data exposed (random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases) as well as the likelihood that the full array of

multiple realities will be uncovered; and because purposive sampling can be pursued in ways that will maximize the investigator's ability to devise grounded theory that takes adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values (for possible transferability). (p. 40).

Using the purposeful sampling design allowed me to keep with the emergent design of the phenomenological study.

I believe the service learning trips at the two universities I chose offered the kinds of experiences that I was looking for in regards to answering my research questions. I was looking for instances of social learning and cultural learning that may occur as a result of participating in service learning trips – of lived experiences of such participation. I defined social learning experiences as experiences that consist of learning that has occurred as a result of working and spending time with fellow participants and with those who work for the agency being served. The service learning trips at both of the universities that I chose were designed so that participants attended these trips along with their peers, and they were responsible for working with their peers in order to help people who were in need of service. The participants also worked with other people involved in the cause, namely the volunteers and staff who worked with the host agency. I believed that by interviewing students who had worked together with their peers on a service learning experience, I would be able to answer my research questions regarding social learning experiences. The cultural learning experiences consisted of learning that has occurred as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that which the student was usually a participant. Service learning trips are often designed so that the majority of the participants are going into a community with which they are not familiar (this may mean a community in a geographical area unfamiliar to the participants, or a community in which most of the participants are different ethnically and are not familiar with the culture of the community members). I believe that by interviewing students whose service learning trip took

them to a community with which they were not previously familiar, I was able to answer my research questions regarding cultural learning experiences.

For this study, I chose two universities that were in close proximity to the location in which I lived. One university was a small, Jesuit university in an urban area in the Rocky Mountain area of the United States, while the other was a large, land-grant university in the Rocky Mountain area of the United States. Both of these universities had established alternative break programs and both programs were expecting to have several students participate in alternative breaks during the year my research was to start. I invited (from both universities) all of the participants of the alternative break experiences to be a part of the study. After talking to one of my institutional informants, I also decided to invite all of the participants of the intercultural immersion trip which occurred that year through the Jesuit university. A total of eight people agreed to be a part of the study. Seven of the participants were from the Jesuit university while one was from the land-grant university. I believe this was an appropriate sample size, as Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) stated that "sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data" (p. 242). One limitation of my study was having only one participant from the land-grant university. However, the focus of my study was on the experience of participating in a service learning trip; my study was not intended to necessarily focus on the type of university being attended by the participants. The structure of this lone land-grant university participant's service learning trip itself was similar enough to all of the other trips to justify including this experience in the study.

Before participating in their first interview, I asked my participants to fill out a demographic information sheet (Chapter 4 contains a summary of the demographic information). Each of these participants had experienced at least one service learning trip. For the purposes of

my study, I am using the term service learning trip to mean a learning experience in which the focus is service learning. In analyzing the types of experiences in which my subjects took part, I have determined that the term "service learning trip" could be broken down further into two different types of experiences, the alternative break and the intercultural immersion experience. I interviewed four of my participants twice. The participants who were invited to interview a second time were the participants who had participated in an additional service learning experience since the first interview. The reason for inviting the students who had participated in an additional service learning experience to a second interview was to achieve credibility through triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As far as the participants who had not participated in an additional service learning experience since the initial interview, I decided not to interview these participants because I did not feel as though I would obtain enough new information through this process to justify an additional interview.

Data Collection and Measures

To answer my research questions, I gathered data from the participants in the form of individual interviews. The first set of interviews took place over a period of a couple of months. At the beginning of each of the first set of interviews, I briefly explained what it was I was looking to discover in the research study. The second set of interviews (for those who were interviewed twice) were scheduled approximately a year after the first set of interviews and all took place over a period of about three weeks. All interviews took place on the campus that the participant was attending. The individual interviews were audio taped. The audio tapes were maintained by me and audio tapes were only used to obtain data for my dissertation. These tapes were used only for the purposes of the dissertation and will be erased after the dissertation has been completed. The real names of the students who participated in the study were not used in

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the dissertation. Aliases were used in order to protect the privacy of the subjects and maintain their anonymity. These data were analyzed for themes and categories with the intention of discovering commonalities and differences of the experience for the participants.

Although my study was not an ethnography, my interview had some of the same components of an ethnographic interview. Spradley (1980) described an ethnographic interview as one which "employs questions designed to discover the cultural meanings people have learned" (p. 123). This approach fits in well with the part of my study which focused on the cultural learning experiences of students participating in an alternative break. Ethnographic interviews can take the form of both informal and formal interviews. Spradley (1980) believed that formal interviews work best when the interview starts with descriptive questions. He also discussed the importance of contrast questions, which are described as any questions that ask for differences. One of the questions that I asked of my participants in this regard was "How do you see yourself as different from the people you are serving in this experience?"

One of the choices considered when planning the interview process involved determining which type of interview was most appropriate: structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the difference between structured and unstructured interviews and how to determine which was appropriate for a particular study when they stated:

> …the structured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer knows what he or she does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out, while the unstructured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer does not know what he or she doesn't know and must therefore rely on the respondent to tell him or her. (p. 269).

I viewed myself as falling somewhere in the middle of this dichotomy, in that I knew *some* of what I didn't know, but didn't know *all* of what I didn't know. I determined the best approach for this study was a semi-structured interview. Kvale (1996) described semi-structured

interviews as having "a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions. Yet at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects" (p. 124). Rubin and Rubin (1995) described the semi-structured interview format, where "the interviewer introduces the topic, then guides the discussion by asking specific questions" (p. 5), as opposed to the unstructured format in which the interviewer has few specific questions in mind. I came up with a list of questions that were designed to support both my main research questions and the sub-questions. The semi-structured interview questions that I used for the first interviews were as follows:

- What led to your decision to participate in an alternative spring break?

- Had you participated in an alternative spring break before?

- Can you tell me about your previous (if any) volunteer experiences?

- Please describe your experiences on your alternative spring break.

- Was this experience what you expected? How was this experience different/the same from your original expectation?

- What did you learn about yourself through this experience?

- Do you think that you have changed as a result of this experience? If so, how?

- Can you describe your experiences regarding working with your fellow students? What did you learn from this experience?

- Can you describe your experiences regarding working with the clients/staff/volunteers associated with the program that you served? What did you learn from this experience?

- How do you see yourself as different from the people you served on this trip?

- What did you learn about the program/cause that you served on this trip?

- Will you participate in an alternative spring break again? (for non-graduating students)

- Do you see yourself volunteering in any capacity in the future?

- If you could change anything about the experience, what would it be?

The one exception is that the interview questions for the one participant who participated in an experience that was defined as an intercultural immersion experience were slightly different. I asked a few additional questions about the intercultural immersion program in general since I was not as familiar with this program. Other than that, the questions were very similar except for different wording for some of the questions. The full list of questions for the intercultural immersion experience can be found in Appendix B. The questions for the second interview were similar to the questions for the first interview, with a focus on comparing the two experiences and asking about additional insights that had occurred since the first experience. The full list of questions for the second interviews can also be found in Appendix B.

Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis (2003) discussed potential challenges in the interview process, which included unexpected participant behaviors, phrasing and negotiating questions, dealing with sensitive issues, and transcription issues. In the interview process, it was important to be flexible and to keep an open mind about the process; otherwise, an interviewer can be shaken by things such as unexpected behaviors or answers from the participants. It also helped to be flexible in terms of not just asking the pre-arranged questions, but in asking relevant follow-up questions that depended on the direction the participant's answers took the conversation.

It is also important to note that due to the emergent design of the phenomenological research methodology, I analyzed each interview upon completion, and used outcomes to inform and adapt research questions. Although it is possible to determine a set of original interview questions based on what it is that one wants to discover, it is not possible until the interviews are conducted to know what information will be obtained and how this information changes the research questions. The answers that one gets to interview questions may also lead to additional insights which lead to a discovery that different or additional interview questions may need to be asked. In this regard, interview questions may expand or change based on information received from previous interviews, and therefore the information obtained in subsequent interviews is different as well. As Schwandt (2007) stated when discussing hermeneutic phenomenology, "all efforts to interpret (to understand) always take place within some background (e.g., historical tradition, web of belief, and practice) that cannot be transcended" (p. 134). The history can refer to the history of knowledge obtained by the previous interviews, which change the efforts of interpretation and therefore change the questions on subsequent interviews.

Assessment of Methodology

This section of Chapter 3 will discuss the efficacy of the phenomenological methodology to address my research questions. The phenomenological methodology and research design, sampling, and data collection techniques that I used were appropriate for answering my research questions in a number of ways. First, the phenomenological research design was qualitative in nature. Since my study was about the lived experience of undergraduate college students participating in a service learning experience, I believed that the qualitative research method, with its focus on a social phenomenon and the meaning this phenomenon has to the people who participated in it, was an appropriate method. Second, I believed that the phenomenological

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research methodology, with its focus on describing the essences of lived experience, was an appropriate methodology for my study. Further, my data collection techniques were feasible, in that I had access to my sample and had discussed my plans for data collection with the appropriate program managers. Access to my sample was important in terms of my selected methodology since a phenomenological study requires participants who have all experienced the particular phenomenon, in this case, a service learning trip.

Data Analysis and Form of Results

Moustakas (1994) discussed some of the methods for analyzing data in phenomenological studies. These methods included developing a list of significant statements from the participants, grouping these statements into themes, and writing a description of the experience (including what the participants experienced, how the experience happened, and the essence of the experience). Grouping the statements into themes was part of the coding process; as Charmaz (2006) stated, "coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations" (p. 43). The process of writing a description involved writing a description of the experience of participating in a service learning experience, including the textural (what happened) and structural (how it happened) description that represents the experiences of all of the participants. Describing what happened and how it happened is the process of developing the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). It was during this process that the research questions got answered. At this point, I analyzed the data to find how the data that I collected resonated with Kolb's theory. Although the study used specific questions and theoretical models to guide the research, it was important to address any findings that did not fit with the original research questions or theoretical underpinnings.

Theorization played an important role in this study. While major themes were identified and quotes from the interviews were used to provide examples of where these themes occurred in the data, there was a need for more than themes and interview quotes in order for these data to make sense in a hermeneutical study. There was a need for some interpretation in regards to what the larger overall meaning was to what the participants were saying and how it related to the themes. Also, theorization was used in this study to theorize back to the major theoretical framework that guided this study, namely, Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning. I used theorization to determine instances in which each of the four types of learning in Kolb's (1984) learning cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) occurred for the participants of the service learning trips.

The data analysis method that was used in this study was the content analysis method espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1981). Guba and Lincoln's (1981) method is a reinterpretation of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis method of data analysis. The content analysis method of data analysis is most well known for being used in the grounded theory method, although it can be a useful tool in other qualitative methods as well, including the interpretation of phenomena (Boeijie, 2002). The content analysis method is more appropriate for the naturalistic paradigm and is more appropriate for a study in which deriving a theory is not a priority (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My intention was to process data into a summary representing an experience, not to derive a new theory. (This is not to say that theorization did not occur in this study; as I have mentioned I did theorize back to the major theoretical framework which guided this study, namely, Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning). The content analysis method started with coding; Charmaz (2006) described the importance of this step when she said that "coding is that first part of the adventure that enables you to make

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the leap from concrete events and descriptions of them to theoretical insight and theoretical possibilities" (p. 71). Like Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative analysis, Guba and Lincoln's (1981) content analysis method called for forming data into codes that can be compared to each other to establish categories. These comparisons led to a better understanding of the data and the phenomenon under study. This process involved the initial step of reading and re-reading the transcripts of the individual interviews of the participants. Doing so assisted in the process of describing the experience of participating in a service learning trip.

The next step after reading and re-reading the transcripts was to unitize the items of information into anything that could be considered a descriptor, a concern, or an issue. These units of information should be "cross-referenced to the interview or document so that the context of the item can later be reassessed should that prove useful or necessary" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 314). Charmaz (2006) described the importance of coding when she stated that a "study fits the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystalize participants' experience" (p. 54). She stated the importance not only of constructing codes, but of developing those codes into categories, which was the next phase of the content analysis process.

The next step was to categorize the units. The purpose of this step was to establish categories by placing each of the units into similar categories. If a unit was similar to another unit, it was placed into that category, if it was different, a new category was formed; this was repeated until all of the units were in a category (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). There were some units that did not seem to fit into any of the existing categories, but at the same time did not seem to justify a new category. "Such items should be placed into a provisional 'miscellaneous' category

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but should *not* be discarded; that decision should be deferred to a later point in the process" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 314).

The next step was to characterize the categories, which involved giving a name or title to each category with the intention of catching the essence of the category. During this step, the evaluator's goal is to:

> …assess the set of categories for relationships – he may find, for example, that several of the categories are quite similar and should be combined or, conversely, that some categories should be broken into separate elements. Or it may be that some categories should be subsumed under more generic ones. (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 315).

The next step was to assess the sets of categories for internal homogeneity. In other words, the categories should be "internally homogeneous, that is, should be unidimensional and as 'look-alike' as possible, and externally heterogeneous, that is, as different as possible from category to category" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 315). At this point, the researcher can begin to make adjustments based on missing or incomplete categories. If there are categories that logically seem to belong but have not come through in the data or if there are categories that have appeared but seem to be incomplete, then further data collection would be necessary. Finally, these categories were used for member checking. Member checking involved having the participants take a look at the themes and subthemes that were being described to determine whether or not these fit (in terms of description) the experience of the participant.

The main method that I used to represent and summarize the findings of my study was in the form of a written description that included my findings regarding the essence of the experience of participating in a service learning trip. This summary was what Lincoln and Guba (1985) would describe as the case report. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that "the ultimate purpose of any report is to improve the reader's level of understanding of whatever the report

deals with" (p. 358). Writing up the conclusions in a case study format allows "the reader an opportunity to probe for internal consistency. This characteristic does not refer simply to stylistic consistency or factual consistency (although those may be included), but, more important to trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359). The written description included specific instances of both social and cultural learning as described by the students. This was the point where I analyzed the data to look for how they resonated, or did not, with Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning.

Authenticity

It was important to use authenticity when assessing the quality of a phenomenological study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) used five criteria for establishing authenticity: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

Fairness.

Fairness calls for inclusivity by ensuring that everyone being interviewed has a fair chance to be represented in the write-up of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). I satisfied the criterion of fairness by ensuring that all of the participants were represented in Chapter 4 when I discussed my findings. Chapter 4 included a discussion about the different themes that were constructed through an analysis of the data. Part of this discussion included quotes (from the actual interviews from all of the participants) which gave examples of what participants were saying about each of the themes – of how they were constructing and co-constructing their experiences.

Ontological authenticity.

Ontological authenticity is the attempt to address the ways that the research participants have grown as a result of participating in the study. Ontological authenticity results in growth in the way the research participants experience the world (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Lyotard (1991) discussed this type of growth when he stated that phenomenology is a consciousness "which is nothing if not a relation to the world" (p. 34). I satisfied the criterion of ontological authenticity by dedicating parts of Chapter 4 and 5 to addressing the growth of the participants. This growth included lessons learned by the participants, perceptions of changes in actions and attitudes of participants, and perceptions of changes in the way the participants viewed the world. One of my interview questions was "How have you changed as a result of this experience"? I believe that reporting on some of the participant responses to this question satisfied the criteria of ontological authenticity.

Educative authenticity.

Educative authenticity is the degree to which the research participants are aware of the thoughts and opinions of those around them, for instance, those who may not be the direct subject of the research but may be affected by the research project. The two major things that I looked for in this research study, learning that occurred as a result of social experiences and learning that occurred as a result of cultural experiences, both had to do with what participants learned about the people they interacted with on the trip. I satisfied the criterion of educative authority by using parts of Chapter 4 to report on what the participants learned about their fellow students who participated in the service learning experience, the other volunteers and staff

members who were part of the hosting agencies, and the people who the participants were serving.

Catalytic authenticity.

Catalytic authenticity refers to how the knowledge gained by the research participants about those around them may lead the research participants to take new actions or have a different way of viewing things in the future. I satisfied the criterion of catalytic authenticity by dedicating parts of Chapter 5 to discussing how the participants felt that participating in a service learning experience may have changed their plans or view of the future. This included changes in major, changes in career plans, or just an overall change in perspective in the way that they saw the world.

Tactical authenticity.

Finally, tactical authenticity refers to the degree to which the research participants are empowered to act on the knowledge gained by participation in the study. I satisfied the criterion of tactical authenticity by dedicating a parts of Chapter 5 to discussing not only what participants learned as a result of participating in a service learning trip, but also to discussing exactly how they are planning to use this knowledge. Some of this information came not only from the initial interviews, but through informal follow-up discussions with the participants after the interview process.

Trustworthiness

It is also important to use trustworthiness when assessing the quality of a

phenomenological study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness can be met if the

researcher can meet the criterion of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility.

One of the techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to achieve credibility is

prolonged engagement, which "requires that the investigator be involved with a site sufficiently

long to detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data" (p. 302).

Although the time spent with each participant varied, I was in contact with each of the

participants through e-mail to set up the interviews, and I interviewed each participant at least

once. I scheduled each of these interviews for an hour; some interviews took over an hour while

others were less than an hour. The participants whose interviews were shorter sometimes did not

offer up as much information as those who had the longer interviews, and I tried to make up for

this by asking follow up questions after the initial interview, usually by e-mail. I was able to

obtain some additional valuable information this way. Obviously, I spent more time with the

participants who were asked (and were available) for a second interview, but an attempt at

prolonged engagement was made for all of the participants.

Another technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to achieve credibility is

triangulation. Where it was possible, I used second interviews with participants (who at the time

of their second interview had participated in at least one additional service learning trip) in order

to gather additional information. In addition, I used information from institutional informants

(the staff members who led the alterative break programs at each of the universities that the

participants attended) and I used existing information about these programs in order to fill in the blanks in some areas of the study and to add additional information that could be used to satisfy the criterion of credibility.

It was also important to use member checking to establish trustworthiness. Member checking is important in assessing intentionality, allowing interviewees to correct errors or add additional or more relevant information, and allowing an accurate summarization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking involved having the participants review a summary of the transcript of the interview, in order to ensure that the transcript accurately depicts the experience of the participant. Member checking also involved having the participants take a look at the themes and subthemes that were constructed from the data to determine whether or not these fit and accurately described the experience of the participant. Member checking was also a necessary step in order to look for conclusions that may be different from the ones I as the researcher may have come up with. Having the participants look at my findings and suggesting any alternative conclusions was an important step towards achieving trustworthiness.

Transferability.

The sampling technique that I used was purposeful, which is relevant to the criterion of transferability, because as Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, the "naturalist inquirer is also responsible for providing the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description; for that reason (among others) he or she will wish to engage in purposeful sampling" (p. 316). Also, the thick description that was necessary to satisfy the criterion of transferability is shown in my reporting, especially in Chapter 4, which includes direct quotes from the transcripts of the participant's interviews. The themes that I constructed through data analysis show the

shared aspects of the experience of participating in a service learning trip, therefore I believe that I have satisfied the "responsibility of the inquirer to provide a sufficient base to permit a person contemplating application in another receiving setting to make the needed comparisons of similarity" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359).

Dependability and confirmability.

The criteria of dependability and confirmability can be satisfied by using an audit trail. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, the auditor is:

> …expected to examine the process of the inquiry, and in determining its acceptability the auditor attests to the dependability of the inquiry. The inquiry auditor also examines the product – the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations – and attests that it is supported by data and is internally coherent so that the bottom line may be accepted. This latter process establishes confirmability of the inquiry. Thus a single audit, properly managed, can be used to determine dependability and confirmability simultaneously. (p. 318).

I believe that Chapter 3 of this study thoroughly documented the process of the inquiry, which included inquiry decisions, methodological shifts, sampling decisions, and triangulation processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, I believe I have satisfied the criterion of dependability. I also believe that Chapter 4 thoroughly examines the data, findings, and interpretations; and that Chapter 5 thoroughly examines the recommendations, satisfying the criterion of confirmability.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the research method of this study, including the research design and rationale, a discussion about my research participants (who were selected through purposeful sampling) and the sites included in the study, and the data collection techniques and measures. This chapter included a discussion of the efficacy of my research methodology to address my

research questions, and also contained a discussion of the data analysis processes. Finally, the

chapter discussed the method by which I represented and summarized the findings of my study,

which is a written description of the lived experience of a select group of undergraduate students

who were participants of service learning trips.

Table 3.1 below provides an overview of how the hermeneutical phenomenological

methodology was a good fit to answer my research questions.

Table 3.1. Description of methodological fits between hermeneutical phenomenology and

important aspects of study

Important aspects of study	Description of methodological fit
Problem statement: Research is needed to better understand what changes occur to students as a result of participating in service learning trips.	The qualitative research method, with its focus on a social phenomenon and the meaning this phenomenon has to the people who participate in it, is an appropriate method.
Study purpose: to contribute to the understanding of the lived social and cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips.	The phenomenological research methodology, with its focus on describing the essences of lived experience, is an appropriate methodology.
Research questions: What are the social and cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?	Hermeneutical phenomenology uses purposeful sampling, which allows the researcher to select participants of the type of experiences that I am studying in order to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to contribute to the understanding of the lived social and cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips. The data that I collected from my study enabled me to answer the following two major research questions:

- What are the social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

- What are the cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

In addition, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

- Why do students participate in service learning trips?

- What benefits do students perceive to accrue as a result of participating in service learning trips?

This chapter discusses the demographics and gives a brief introduction to the participants of this study. This chapter also discusses the major themes, as well as the sub-themes, that were identified in and constructed from my analysis of the participant interviews.

Demographic Information

This section of the chapter summarizes the demographic information of my participants. Eight participants took part in the study. At the time of the first or only interview, two of the participants were 18 year of age, four were 19, one was 21, and one candidate was 30 years of

age. At the time of the first or only interview, two of the participants Freshman, two were Sophomores, and two were Seniors. At the time of the first or only interview, the participants included one Nursing major, one History/Peace and Justice double-major, one English/Peace and Justice double-major, one English/Religious Studies double-major, one Music Education major, one Health Care Administration major, one Mathematics/Peace and Justice double-major, and one English major. It is important to note that although I did not ask demographic information for those students who agreed to second interviews, these interviews were all done approximately a year after the first interview, so each of these participants would be one year older and one grade classification higher than during their first interview. The gender breakdown was seven females and one male. All eight of my participants identified their ethnicity/race as White, not Hispanic or Latino.

Introduction to Study Participants

The following section will give a brief introduction to each of the eight participants. All eight of the participants were interviewed in the spring of 2011, and four of the participants were interviewed again in the spring of 2012. All interviews were conducted on the campus of the school the participant was attending. The names used in this study are pseudonyms.

Kevin

Kevin was the only male participant, and he was one of the four participants who was interviewed twice. At the time of his first interview, he was a 19 year old sophomore. By the time Kevin participated in his second interview, he had been on four alternative breaks and one 11-week service learning trip. His alternative breaks included trips to Biloxi, Mississippi and New Orleans, Louisiana (twice) to help with efforts for the recovery from Hurricane Katrina, and

a trip to Laredo, Texas to help build houses for Habitat for Humanity. At the time of his first interview, he had recently returned from his alternative break to Laredo, so the interview focused on that experience, although his experiences with his previous alternative breaks to New Orleans and Biloxi were discussed as well. At the time of his second interview, he had just returned from a second alternative break trip to New Orleans. He had also participated in an 11-week service learning trip to New Orleans the previous summer. This trip also focused on recovery efforts from Hurricane Katrina. (Although this experience was sponsored by the university that Kevin attended, it was not technically considered to be one of the university's alternative break experiences nor was it considered to be one of their intercultural immersion experiences. However, this experience was very similar to these types of experiences, so I asked him about this experience in the interview as well and discussed this experience in the study). The second interview focused on his 11-week service learning experience and on his experiences on his most recent alternative break in New Orleans, a trip in which he served as a group leader. Kevin was the only participant that I interviewed who served as a student leader. Kevin was a Mathematics/Peace and Justice double-major. He stated that his decision to add Peace and Justice to his major was a result of his alternative break experiences.

The Habitat for Humanity trips and the hurricane recovery trips both involved long hours of physical labor and the use of tools to repair or build houses. Kevin was the only participant who had any extensive previous experience using power tools, therefore he was often in a position to do more advanced work and to teach others how to use these tools. As a result, Kevin often was able to assume a leadership role. This leadership role became official when he served as a student leader for his most recent alternative break to New Orleans.

When I asked Kevin what led to his decision to participate in an alternative break, he stated:

> *My dad actually works in the physical plant here, he's a carpenter. And he and a bunch of people from the physical plant went down to New Orleans I think it was 5 months after the storm and they took leave to go do that. I think he's gone down 8 times. And hearing his stories about it and seeing how it affected him and the way he views the world and other people in service to them really inspired me to go down the first trip when I was a senior in high school. And it did really completely change my outlook on a lot of things about what I kind of want to do with my life in a sense. And the other two trips just affirmed that and really made it something I love doing and something I feel I have to do.*

Theresa

Theresa was one of the participants who was interviewed twice. At the time of her first interview she was a 19 year old sophomore. She was an English major who planned to become a teacher. At the time, she was volunteering at a Catholic elementary school that serves underprivileged children. The volunteer work mostly involved paperwork, and although it was technically volunteer work because she was not getting paid, it was also a requirement of her major. She had also volunteered in high school at a daycare center. Her first interview came after she returned from her first alternative break building houses for Habitat for Humanity in Laredo, and her second interview occurred after she returned from her second alternative break to New Orleans helping with recovery efforts. Theresa was originally from a rural area of the state in which her current university was located. Her hometown had a high immigrant population, so she was more familiar than the other participants with the population of the people that were being served in Laredo, however she did state about her first alternative break experience, speaking for herself and the other students who had participated in this trip, that *"it was a very interesting and diverse community that none of us had experienced before"*.

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When I asked Theresa what led to her decision to participate in an alternative break, she stated:

I don't really know. I've never done a service trip and I know that they're very beneficial to everyone concerned, that they do something good for the world and that people come back from doing service feeling good about themselves as well. So I knew the concept, but I know mostly service groups are associated with churches and I just never did that when I was younger, so I just haven't gotten around to it, and then there's this kind of time for Spring Break and I was like, well, I don't know what I should do. And my plan was actually to go on the Florida Spring Break trip, but my boss is like Theresa, we need a driver. So I was like, I'll go to Texas it doesn't really matter to me. So I don't really know, it was just kind of impulsive in the moment, so I think that it has always been in the back of my mind that wow, Theresa, you should be doing service and it's time to take a step in that direction. But last year I didn't do it, I went and did the typical Spring Break thing just to get off campus and sleep a lot, but this year I decided to do something more meaningful.

Marcia

Marcia was interviewed once. I attempted to contact her to see if she had gone on a second alternative break, but I was unable to reestablish contact with her. At the time of her first interview, she was a 19 year old freshman. She was a Nursing major. Her interview came after she returned from an alternative break working for Habitat for Humanity building affordable housing for residents of Key West, Florida. Marcia stated that she had been volunteering since about the 8th grade. Her most recent volunteer experience outside of the alternative break was tutoring bilingual, at-risk children.

Although I did not specifically ask participants about their religious backgrounds, Marcia did mention in the course of the interview that she was Catholic and she felt that her Catholic faith gave her something in common with the people who she was helping to serve on the trip (many of the people being served on the Key West trip were Columbian immigrants). However, she did mention the economic and educational differences between the alterative break participants and those they were there to serve.

Her parents lived in a state that neighbors the state where the university she attended was located. She was originally from a different state in the Midwest, and although she had gone to high school in the state where her parents currently resided, her parents had recently moved to a different town. She mentioned that she had no desire to return to her parent's home for her spring break as she did not know very many people in that community, and this was a factor in deciding to participate in an alternative spring break. She did also mention that when she decided to participate in an alternative break, she let her parents decide which specific trip she would participate in.

Stacey

Stacey was interviewed once. When I contacted her to see if she had participated in a second alternative break, she stated that she had not due to prior commitments. At the time of her interview, Stacey was an 18 year old freshman. She was a History/Peace and Justice double-major. She had recently decided to add the Peace and Justice major, although she did not mention whether or not her alternative break experience was a factor in that decision. She was one of two of the interview participants who had gone on the Key West alternative break. Stacey had also been involved in volunteer work in high school, working on philanthropic events that raised money for organizations like the Special Olympics. Stacey mentioned her parents and both of her older sisters as big influences on her decision to participate in community service and philanthropic events.

Stacey stated that as a result of her alternative break experience, she was considering the Jesuit Volunteer Corps which is similar to Peace Corp in that the participants live in a community (although unlike the Peace Corp, the Jesuit Volunteer Corps focuses on communities

in the United States) and volunteer for a year. Other than that, she was still somewhat unsure of

her career path at the time, but did express an interest in possibly being a history professor. After

our interview, she had several questions for me about the dissertation process and about what

obtaining a PhD entails.

When I asked Stacey what led to her decision to participate in an alternative break, she

stated:

> *Well, I like doing community service I guess. And my middle sister actually went to New Orleans and actually got to build a house and everything and she just raved about it and said how much fun it was and initially we were supposed to go to New Orleans, but it was over spring break and there was Mardi Gras and our university being a Jesuit university wasn't really okay with that, which is understandable, so it was just nice that they got to switch gears and allow us still continue to go to Key West. My sister said how much fun it was and I wanted to experience it. And I was happy I got to do it as a freshman. I'm kind of looking forward to do it maybe again.*

Paula

Paula was interviewed twice, once after her original alternative spring break to Laredo,

Texas, and then again after an alternative break experience to the Dominican Republic. Her

original alternative break to Laredo was through the university's Department of Student

Activities, while the second alternative break was more curriculum-based in that students were

required to take a semester-long class along with the alternative break, although this class was a

one credit course with the purpose of preparing the participants for the alternative break

experience. Although Paula's second service learning trip shared some characteristics of an

intercultural immersion experience since this trip took her out of the country, it was officially

designated as an alternative break experience by the university. It was a one-week experience

like the rest of the alternative break trips (the trips that were officially categorized as intercultural

immersion experiences were two weeks long).

At the time of her first interview, Paula was an 18 year old freshman. She was an

English/Peace and Justice double major. She stated that she added the Peace and Justice major

as a result of her first alternative break experience. Paula had previous volunteer experience in

high school, doing things such as tutoring, working in shelters, and neighborhood trash clean-up.

She had also been involved in additional volunteer work between her first and second alternative

break experience. This volunteer work included doing English as a Second Language (ESL)

tutoring with refuges from Somalia, Kenya, India, Bhutan, and Nepal. This volunteer experience

was related to an English class she was taking on rhetoric and the use of language (so although it

was technically volunteer work in that she was not getting paid, it was also a requirement of the

class). She was also involved in various one-time volunteer projects through the university, such

as a community clean-up day. Paula was the only participant that I interviewed who spoke

Spanish, which gave her a different perspective in both of her alternative breaks experiences,

since several of the people these trips were intending to serve were Spanish speakers. Paula also

planned to volunteer full-time for a few years after graduation, either through the Peace Corps or

AmeriCorps. This was something she was thinking about even before her first alternative break

experience, but going through that experience seemed to solidify the idea in her mind.

When I asked Paula what lead to her decision to participate in an alternative break, she

stated:

> *Well, I had never done a service trip before and one thing that has really changed me, coming to (university), has been that it has a very big social justice focus. And so when I was trying to decide if I wanted to buy a ticket to go home or stay there (in city of residence) and do something, I decided that I'd rather spend the money going on a service trip, meeting new people (from university), and doing something I'd just never done before. That would definitely fit in the theme of social justice (with the university).*

Celeste

Celeste was interviewed twice, once after her original alternative break experience to Laredo, Texas, and then again after her second alternative break experience to New Orleans. At the time of her first interview, Celeste was a 19 year old freshman. She was an English/Religious Studies double-major with a minor in Education. She was still unclear as to what she was going to do as a career, although she was exploring the possibility of going abroad to teach. She was the only student athlete that I interviewed (she was on the volleyball team). Like most of the other participants, she had previous experience volunteering in high school, doing things like serving meals to homeless people and collecting food for food banks.

She described both of her alternative break experiences as positive, although she did state that she felt as though she could never live in New Orleans because of the unhealthy lifestyle. One of her comments about New Orleans: *"Everybody smokes. Everyone drinks. The food's unhealthy and I'm gluten free so I couldn't eat most of it, so it wasn't the place for me"*. This view of New Orleans was different from that of some of my other participants, particularly Kevin and Charlotte, both of whom expressed an interest in possibly living in New Orleans in the future. Celeste was described by some of the other participants as one of the hardest workers in regards to the manual labor involved. In fact, when I asked her in the first interview if there was anything that she could change about the first experience, what it would be, she stated that she would have liked the opportunity to work more.

When I asked Celeste what lead to her decision to participate in an alternative break, she stated:

> *I <u>always</u> wanted to do Habitat for Humanity. And I love service mission trips and I've never been able to with my sport schedule and it worked out that I was able to go.*

Charlotte

Charlotte was interviewed once. I did not pursue a second interview with Charlotte because she had stated in her first interview that she would not be able to go on another alternative break because she would be student teaching the following year. I interviewed her after her alternative break experience to New Orleans to help with disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina. Seven of my eight participants were from the same small, Jesuit school in a metropolitan area of the Rocky Mountain region. Charlotte was the one participant from a different school, a larger, research intensive university in a mid-sized college town in the Rocky Mountain region. At the time of her interview, Charlotte was a 21 year old senior. She was a music education major.

Charlotte had previous volunteer experience in high school. One experience that she mentioned was being in a traveling Shakespeare troupe. Charlotte's career plans did not necessarily change as a result of her alternative break experience, as she was still planning on becoming a music teacher, however she did mention that she planned to incorporate service learning into her lesson plans when she became a teacher. Charlotte mentioned several times that she was still processing her experience at the time of our interview, and she was still trying to figure out what this experience meant to her and what it said about her place in the world. This seemed to come out in the interview in the form of answers that seemed to be longer and more reflective than the answers from some of my other participants. (This may also be due to her being older and further along in her education than all but one of the other participants). When I thanked her at the end of the interview she said *"No, this was really good for me, too. This is like*

therapy for me, are you kidding"? It is interesting that some participants saw the opportunity to interview for this study as a way of debriefing the meaning of the experience. The university that Charlotte attended did have some structured processes after the completion of the experience for the purpose of debriefing. These processes include a group dinner and picture exchange, and an end of the year slideshow. The university attended by the other seven participants of the study offered similar processes; these processes will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Charlotte stated that one of the reasons she decided to participate in an alternative break is that one of her professors encouraged her students to get involved in service learning. She also stated that choosing New Orleans for the specific trip was natural for her since she is a Music Education major and she liked the idea of spending time in the birthplace of jazz.

Caroline

Caroline was interviewed once. I did not pursue a second interview with Caroline because I knew she was a senior and would be graduating and therefore would not be participating in a service learning trip the following year. Caroline was interviewed after participating in an intercultural immersion experience in Ethiopia. In order for her to attend this intercultural immersion experience, she had to submit a resume and application, go through an interview process, and had to pass a course. This was different from the alternative break experiences in which only an application was required. Caroline's trip to Ethiopia was a two week trip, whereas all of the other participants' experiences lasted one week.

Caroline was the only participant who would be considered a non-traditional student; she was 30 years of age at the time of her interview. She was majoring in Health Care Administration (she was the only person with that specific major to participate in this

intercultural immersion experience). She had volunteered for six years as a volunteer with a local

sheriff's office. She also mentioned that she would like to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity in

the future. She was also the only participant who had significant work experience before

enrolling in college, as she had worked as a paramedic before deciding to focus on Health Care

Administration.

When I asked Caroline what lead to her decision to participate in an alternative break, she

stated:

> *I'm a very hands-on person; I'm a very tactile learner so I always seek out different ways of being able to learn things and do different things. And it's just my belief that you should make things easier, make life better for other people. And there are people out there that truly have need and you should contribute in society. If you're just a bump on a log then, you haven't really done anything in life. But, if you've even made a small difference to one person in the entire world, you've changed something for them, then you've made a difference and you've contributed to society as a whole. And I think if every single person does that then we've truly changed for the better and made the world a better place.*

Themes and Sub-Themes

There were three themes that were identified from the semi-structured interviews with my

participants. Table 4.1 shows the themes and sub-themes that will be discussed in this chapter.

Table 4.1. Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Social Learning Experiences	Bonding
	Developing Leadership Skills
Cultural Learning Experiences	Reintegration Issues
	Differences between Participants and Those Served
	Overcoming Differences
Self-Learning	Changes in Perceptions of Others
	Awareness of Privilege

Social Learning Experiences

Social learning is learning that occurs as a result of working with fellow participants and with those involved with the agency being served. Participants of service learning trips work in groups and usually live together as a group for the duration of the experience. The very nature of service learning trips leads to opportunities to learn at a social level. This type of learning was expressed by one participant as follows:

I learned there's definitely a lot of communication kind of roles that come into it that you have to establish and you have to adapt to these people. You're living in this exact same house with one shower, one bathroom, in bunks right next to each other. You really become very close with these people and you very much have to learn to work with them and the kind of things they're comfortable with and not comfortable with, things you're

comfortable with. And then I think you kind of push each other to succeed and propel. And specifically in Texas we had two people who were afraid of heights. Deathly afraid. And by the end of the trip we were able to get them both on ladders, way up, facing their fear and hanging siding. I think that's just from learning each other and the way they need to operate and become the supportive kind of family I guess would be the way to put it. (Kevin)

It appears as though one of the things that the participants learned in regards to social learning is the role that listening plays in the shared social experience. The experience becomes about more than just establishing your role within the group and expressing to everyone who you are as a person, but allowing the other members of the group to express who they are as well. This becomes a particularly profound learning experience for people for whom this does not always come naturally. As one participant stated:

> *I'm the kind of person who, you ask me a question that I don't know the answer to and I'll talk my way into an answer. Whereas most of my group liked more processing time. They liked to sit back, think about it, and then deliver something a little more completed and thought out. And you see that in classrooms all the time, with kids, and you have to know to give somebody … and so I made the conscious decision in my group to just sit back and not be always the first person jumping in because you can crush a lot of other people's thoughts if you are always doing that. And I took that. I wanted to do that on the trip as well and it was a really, really good decision because I got to know people very quickly on a much deeper level than I would have if I'd been talking at them the whole time.* (Charlotte)

When Charlotte states that *"you see that in classrooms all the time, with kids"* it appears as though she is using some of her previous experiences to guide her actions on her alternative break trip. Charlotte is studying to be a music teacher, and has some experience volunteering in the classroom. She uses some of what she has observed and experienced in the past to inform the way she chooses to communicate with her fellow participants. She feels that by doing this, she was able to communicate better and form a deeper relationship with her participants.

One of the things that participants of the study were able to learn about their fellow service learning participants is that despite the fact that there were some similarities with the

participants, there were significant differences in what each person had to offer as well. One

participant discussed how using her listening skills allowed her to make such a realization when I

asked her what she learned from the experience of working with her fellow service learning trip

participants:

> *To really, really listen and really look at what other people have to offer, because despite what they're here to do, they have such diverse backgrounds. We were all brought together to do essentially the same thing. But we have diverse backgrounds in our degrees and even beyond our degrees we have such diverse backgrounds in our life and those are just resources waiting to be tapped, to be able to do whatever. I mean, anything that you can, to help you succeed in doing what you want do. So, I had a guy that's a Master's of Science Nursing, and he used to work construction, so he helped me build shelves one afternoon. Because he's good with a socket wrench and that helps me out immensely. And it's not in his nursing scope, it's not in his Master's of Nursing scope, but it's that history that I could tap into to, really succeed and really make things happen.* (Caroline)

One of Caroline's observations about her group is that they come from diverse

backgrounds. She did not state that this diversity is necessarily ethnic in nature, but instead a

diversity in *"our degrees and even beyond our degrees, we have such diverse backgrounds in*

our life". She was able to use her listening skills to make these discoveries about her group. She

also felt as though the diversity in the life experiences of the individual group members added a

lot to the group in terms of its ability to be successful.

Bonding.

One of the discernible sub-themes within the Social Learning Experiences theme was

Bonding. The concept of bonding with the fellow participants was one that was brought up

several times during the course of the interviews. The participants discussed how spending so

much time in such close proximity to their fellow students was bound to create opportunities for

these students to bond with each other. Several students mentioned this bonding as being one of

the most enjoyable aspects of the experience. Although most of these experiences were only a

week long, there were several opportunities for bonding. In fact, in some cases, this bonding

started with the actual travel to the service learning trip location:

> *We traveled 40 hours total I think down there in vans. But we got to know each other really well and we all got along well, the group, when we got to the first stop for lunch it's like okay you guys can split up just meet back here and all of the college kids, all of like 12 of us or whatever, we all stayed together. Nobody split off, we all wanted to be together. So it's just that camaraderie, team-building sort of thing was just fantastic.* (Celeste)

> *Well, it started off with 22 hours driving which was a very intense get-to-know-you session because some of the people I didn't even, I had never seen before the trip. And we started at 3 in the morning, got in the car, and hi, I'm Paula, who are you? Tell me your life story. So that was really cool to get to bond with them.* (Paula)

It is important to note that, in several instances, the participants that I interviewed either

knew no one or only one or two people who would be going on the service learning trip (other

than having briefly met the other participants in the informational meetings that led up to the

trips). There were some exceptions. Two of the experiences, Paula's second alternative break

experience and Caroline's intercultural immersion experience, were set up so that a class was

taken by the participants before the service learning trip started. Also, participants who went on

more than one alternative break experience often went with some of the same participants from

their first experience. However, most of the participants who went on a service learning trip for

the first time, or only one time, had met very few of the participants beforehand. Although they

may not have known each other before the trip, some of the participants stated that one of the

explanations for why bonding seemed to occur so easily is that the type of students who would

be interested in participating in a service learning trip are bound to have some similarities in

terms of the way they view the world. As one participant said:

> *…I established a pretty strong connection with them simply because when they got a group of people together who all really care about essentially the same things, there's something so powerful about that, because you connect with people on a values level. Not*

just a "we do the same thing after school" ... the things that mattered deeply to me also mattered deeply to these people... (Charlotte)

Another participant stated:

The relationships that I built, I couldn't have been expecting it, I guess. I didn't know anyone signing up and they were all wonderful people. My parents were worried about me signing up when I didn't know anyone and I was like, well, I think that I'll get along with everyone because what kind of people would give up their spring break to do volunteer work? How am I going to have any problems with someone like that? And I found that to absolutely be the case. They were all very welcoming, very nice to me, and we all bonded very quickly. (Theresa)

Another participant discussed how for her, this bond was even stronger on her second

experience, which was an alternative break experience outside of the country:

...service trips draw a certain type of people which is why you get so close to them. Because you all come in with an open heart and a willingness to work hard and just experience whatever happens to you. But international trips are like a kind of a smaller group. Because that's another step further. And so you're even more closely related or similar to the people than the ones from the first trip. (Paula)

Although it made sense that a bond would occur naturally between these participants due

to proximity and being in a situation in which they were working towards a common goal, since

the experience was relatively brief it also may be expected that these bonds would fade away

once the participants returned from the experience and rejoined the life they were leading before

the trip. However, some participants were adamant that this was not going to happen:

But also, coming back, there was a lot of "OK, no avoiding me when I see you on the quad, this isn't going to be a one week friendship. We're going to be friends forever". I would say some of my greatest friends now are people who I met just a month ago on this trip. And even though they're in different dorms and I didn't know them before, now I see them all the time and do stuff with them all the time. (Paula)

...I did get to know a lot of other people on our trip. I know there's like four people that I'd never seen on campus and the campus is 1800 (students) which is really surprising if you don't see someone that you haven't seen before. But now I am constantly in contact with a couple of those people. We see each other on campus, say "hi". We actually had a reunion about two weeks after the Key West trip just because we missed each other and everything. I know I grew close to several people and I hope that will continue throughout the years here. (Stacey)

It is important to note that when participants mentioned bonding, they were mostly talking about bonding with their fellow participants. Although it is natural that this is the group with which the most instances of bonding would occur, it is also true that there were other groups of people with whom bonding either did or could have potentially occurred. Those other groups included: the university staff leaders (not the student leaders, but the representatives of the university, usually faculty or staff members, who accompanied the participants on the trip), volunteers from other universities who were participating in the same service learning experience, the volunteers and the staff members of the host agencies (such as Habitat for Humanity), and the people for whom the trip was designed to serve. The section on Cultural Learning Experiences contains the findings regarding participants' perception and relationship of the people for whom the trip was designed to serve. The upcoming section of the study contains the findings regarding the perceptions and relationships between the participants and all of the other groups they encountered during their service learning experiences.

Participants spoke highly of the university staff leaders. In fact, there were a few instances of what could be considered bonding experiences between participants and university staff leaders. For instance:

> *Our leaders were great. I mean, they were, they're faculty employees and they just brought so much with them. They let us do a lot. I was really impressed … Mark and Steve work in phys plant. And they know how to build the house. They know how to do what they're doing. But they were really good at teaching us how to do it. And having us do it so that it wasn't like, oh, you're not getting it. I'll just cut the board. They really let us, and were really patient and let us do it. They were there to support us and that made all the difference.* (Celeste)

Mark is actually the father of one of the participants, Kevin. The Jesuit university that was attended by most of my participants is known for having a very prominent social justice component. The motto of the university is Men and Women in Service of Others, and throughout

the campus are signs which ask, "How ought we to live"? This university is well-known for its impact on the surrounding community, and faculty and staff are often involved in these volunteer efforts as well, so it is no surprise that staff members of the university played a prominent role in these alternative breaks. In fact, most of the staff leaders have been attending alternative breaks with the students for years. Efforts are made to show that social justice efforts should extend to everyone involved with the university community, not just the students. These social justice efforts allow for bonding opportunities between students and faculty and staff.

Much like the bonding that was discussed between the participants, the bonding that occurred between the participants and the university staff leaders seems in some cases to have lasted beyond the service learning trip:

> *I guess one thing I would like to touch on is that our group leaders were incredible. And so, Donna, who works in Admissions and Mark and Steve who work in phys plant, I didn't even know who they were before and now they're like my parents, or my second parents, and I see them working on campus and I work in the same office as Donna so I see her all the time and it's just, it's so great to have that connection at (university).* (Paula)

One of the other groups that the participants of these service learning trips would have potentially had the opportunity to bond with was the volunteers from other universities who were participating in the same service learning experience. However, for the most part, it doesn't seem as if that bonding occurred. Kevin stated that his experiences did allow him to meet some great people from some of the other universities and that he remained friends with some of these people. However, in the following excerpt, he discussed two different situations in which he felt that the students from some of the other universities were participating in these experiences for the wrong reasons:

…from the way we looked at it, this may sound a little arrogant or pompous, they didn't have the same kind of work ethic I think we did. I think most of those kids came down to have a résumé buffer, like I worked for Habitat for a week, awesome. Whereas we actually came down to change something and to actually work hard. They had 2 team leads, a woman and a man. The woman I hardly ever saw do anything other than to stand to the side and kind of complain about things or crack jokes. And the man was very much controlling. He didn't really let the rest of his group do anything. It was always I'll get up with the nail gun and do this, will you hold the other end … that kind of thing. I'll use the saw, just be supportive. So I don't think … our connection with them wasn't very good at all because of those reasons, they didn't seem, the people themselves were nice people, but I don't think our goals necessarily matched up with what we wanted to do. It was the same thing in Biloxi. There was a group from (another university) who was the exact same way. The best way, I can remember from that, we were gutting someone's house, pulling out and vacuuming old black mold, you'd be going full hazmat suits, and at the beginning of the day they were giving us the story of the guy, he was there, kind of telling us he needed to go to the hospital to help his wife because she had black mold in her lungs from living in the house. And one of the guys from (another university) turned to another guy and said "Why are we working on this house if he's not going to be here to help work"? It was kind of just, like a slap in the face. Like the guy has to go to the hospital to help his wife who was harmed by this house and you're complaining? Like you don't want to work here because he won't be here? That seemed so wrong in every way. (Kevin)

One participant seemed to take some of the blame for why the different colleges didn't always get along, but tried to justify her reasoning. This is her answer when I asked her if there were any interactions with the other colleges:

There was supposed to be, but we were bad. Obviously that's the worst thing that we did. And just to use my favorite example of that: we cut the siding, so they would bring us the siding and then tell us the measurements and then Celeste and I would chalk the line and then measure it and then cut it, and Celeste's really fast with the cutting machine. And then one day a different group from a different school took the cutting table before we got done with lunch because they fed us last so then we were just kind of, had to wait for them to get it. So this is where we didn't put learning first and we kind of stole the table during snack time so they just didn't take a break and then we just went and did it. So we didn't make very many friends from other schools. I think I can tell you one name of a kid that went to a different school, so I think that was our downfall. But it was in the name of efficiency… (Theresa)

One of the participants, Celeste, did not necessarily see the lack of bonding with other colleges as a bad thing. She preferred spending more time getting to know the group from her own university. She felt that in her case, it was not likely that she would maintain a longstanding

friendship with someone from another university anyway. Therefore, it was better to utilize the limited amount of time getting to better know some of the students from her university with whom she may actually have a chance to develop closer friendships.

Another group that the participants of the service learning trips had the opportunity to bond with was the volunteers and staff from the agencies that hosted the trip. For the most part, the participants had positive bonding experiences with this group, as explained by one of the participants:

> *We absolutely loved our group leaders. We had Toby and Danny and they were just super great. One was Hispanic and one was not. And so communicating with the one who was Hispanic was fun. Because a lot of people enjoyed testing out their Spanish and stuff. I was not one of them. We were solely in English, but he was wonderful. And it was just easy to see how great he was, kind of a thing.* (Theresa)

It also appeared that in some cases, the relationships formed with the volunteers and staff from the external agencies were going to continue past the trip itself:

> *Oh, the staff was great! They were all really invested in the project. They knew what they were doing. And helped us. But I found the staff kind of drawn towards our group. We had a lot of energy and so we met most of the staff and they would like switch off working with us and two of them are actually coming out in the beginning of May, they're coming out here to see us and to see some of our leaders ... we had a great, great connection with them.* (Celeste)

However, not all of the experiences were positive:

> *...our first day on the work site our team lead was a man named Mike who was the project supervisor for United Saints in New Orleans. So he knew all the jobs that were being done and all the volunteer groups. And the first day he was complaining about the volunteers saying, I work with thousands of you idiots before, his quote, and I know the kind of work you guys are capable of so I have to watch your every step 'cause I know you guys kind of suck.* (Kevin)

Another participant further describes some of her frustrations with the organization, especially compared with her original experience:

…it was kind of disappointing … some of the leaders just weren't, their hearts weren't there. And that was disappointing to me compared to Habitat. Because I guess my whole experience I did compare to my first one and … United Saints was not as organized. It took us a long time to get out the door every morning and to get to the worksite and to get started. Whereas with Habitat you were on the worksite at 8 a.m., you were working and you were getting stuff done. And … but just the organization in general, a lot of little things like people driving without licenses, not supposed to be … and just, the quality of the organization just was not impressive to me. (Celeste)

It is important to note that although all three of the participants who were involved in this specific alternative break trip (this was the alternative break to New Orleans by the participants of the Jesuit university) expressed frustration with the host organization and its leader, all three of these participants also felt that the comments by this site leader had more to do with negative past experiences from groups from other colleges, and they all felt that the team leader warmed up to them once he realized that they were actually there to work.

Developing Leadership Skills.

Another sub-theme discernible within the Social Learning Experiences theme was *Developing Leadership Skills*. In most cases, leadership skills were developed when students took an informal leadership role. For instance, this is an example that one of the participants discussed when I asked her what she learned about herself through the experience of participating in an alternative break:

> *I would say I learned something about myself in that I didn't know I had as many leadership qualities that came out during the trip. One night we had something … I mean I'd call it a hurricane kind of … and it completely rained out all of our tents and we were drenched. Everything was … there was nothing that was dry so I had been talking with the Priest because it was Ash Wednesday and we went to Mass and things like that and the group that was supposed to be helping us volunteer cancelled their trip a couple of days before they were expected and so the Rectory of St. Mary's had open rooms and I was able to kind of get us in there.* (Marcia)

One of the advantages of being able to interview some of the participants a second time was that it allowed participants to discuss additional learning experiences that had happened as a result of a second service learning trip. One of my participants, who had actually also participated in an additional 11-week service trip in New Orleans between his second and third alternative breaks, assumed a leadership role as he was assigned to be a student leader for his third alternative break. When I asked him how the experience of working with the rest of the group was different on his second trip upon assuming the student leader role, he stated:

> *I think the dynamic is just a little different being ... being a leader from a follower ... the group kind of, it was funny to watch. You noticed it a lot when you were walking down the street ... if the kids were walking together and you're all kind of split up, then they stay in these groups. As soon as two group leaders come together and start talking to each other the group separates around the group leaders .... Like a group will go in front of them and a group stayed 10 steps behind. They assume you're doing something official so they want nothing to do with it. So in that kind of respect you definitely feel a difference in how you interact with the students. They see you as a leader so you're kind of shut out from some of the more personal things. At the same time, being a student leader, I can kind of fold into that mesh, like when they are playing games or doing the kind of silly little things that those students like to do I can easily fall into it and go right back into I'm just a participant with you guys. But finding a balancing point between the two is a little challenging. That was very interesting.* (Kevin)

By assuming the student leader role, Kevin had to learn to balance his need to be a leader with his need and desire to be one of the students who was also there to learn and experience the trip. He discussed these dual roles as a balancing act that while challenging, gave him a unique opportunity to learn about group dynamics. The participants spoke frequently about the importance of learning to work as a part of a group, and these insights were interesting in terms of learning about the social learning experiences that occurred on these service learning trips.

He makes another observation about the differences between informal and formal leadership duties:

I think in the 11-week program (in which he had an informal leadership role), it's kind of convenient because you can assume leadership when you want it. So if I didn't feel comfortable with the task that the church had volunteered me to do I could kind of defer to someone else. I didn't have to assume that responsibility unless I was comfortable and ready for it. Whereas in this trip it was from the day I said I'm, I wanted to lead it and setting up all the arrangements to go down to New Orleans and the organization and housing and food and then coming to actually be a leader is, you're depended upon 100% of the time. It's, you're the guy who's going to have the answers, you're the guy that we're going to go to for everything. So that's a lot more pressure and responsibility which I think I handled well, but it's just … you can't really kind of defer it. You can to staff leads but in some respects you have more experience than them in what the kids are going through being a student who's gone through it and having done that work for a total of 14 weeks before going down on this trip it's just kind of a different approach, very much. I couldn't kind of defer anything. It was … it had to come to me and I had to answer it and that was it. (Kevin)

Cultural Learning Experiences

Cultural learning is the learning that occurs as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that which the student is usually a participant. In order to study this aspect of learning, it was necessary to find out if these service learning trips were indeed an opportunity for the participants to work with a culture or environment with which they were unfamiliar. In my interviews, I asked each of the participants if they felt that they and the majority of the students in their group were going into a community with which they were not familiar. Every participant stated that both themselves and they felt, the majority of their group, were unfamiliar with the community that they were going into as a part of their service learning trip. Here is a typical description:

> *We were, all except for one, White. And all …we kind of all described ourselves as middle class-y which is, of course, kind of weird because something like 75% of the U.S. population describes themselves as middle class, but truly we're, we are all very fortunate in that realm of things and we were working in the lower 9th Ward of New Orleans. So, we were definitely in an area where people were different from us.* (Charlotte)

The quote above was from the one participant who attended the public state university, but the answers were very similar for the participants who attended the smaller, Jesuit university as well. In fact, although I was not able to interview every person from every alternative break experience, I did get the impression from asking this question of my study participants (and asking the participants to speak for the other service learning trip participants whom I was not able to interview) that almost everyone who participated in one of these service learning experiences was White, while the majority of the people the participants were serving were not White. Both of my institutional informants gave me the same impression. I also got the distinct impression that almost, if not all, of the participants would have considered themselves to be in a higher socio-economic status than the people they were there to serve. As a result, the participants had several opportunities for cultural learning experiences. Some of the participants used these experiences to try to break down cultural biases:

> *I'd say the main thing…is breaking down the social bias for a lot of things. Poor black in New Orleans, there's a kind of stigma that goes along with that as there is with immigrant in Texas. Going down and experiencing those and talking to them definitely broke those down. I found people down there are I think the sweetest people on the planet and deserve a lot more credit than a lot of people give them in all ways, so I think that's the main similarity is just breaking those walls down. And becoming aware of something outside of yourself and other people and humans, not just something on the news that you look at and kind of go, well, they shouldn't be doing that. That's terrible.* (Kevin)

Although two of the service learning experiences involved in my study occurred outside of the United States, the rest of the experiences occurred within the United States. It is my belief that one does not have to participate in an experience defined as an intercultural immersion experience that occurs outside of the participant's country of origin in order to experience cultural learning. As Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) state, "regional, ethnic, and religious cultures account for differences within countries" (p. 45). Service learning trips that do not occur outside of the participants' country of origin can be cultural learning experiences as

long as the environment being visited is one that is largely unfamiliar to the participants, and that

was the case in the service learning experiences in this study. One student talks about these

differences:

> *It was really eye-opening I guess in a way. As much as I don't want to admit it there were biases I kind of hold, and prejudice, that just because I don't know their culture and I don't know what's going on in Texas, it was specifically Texas culture and Mexican culture … and Laredo is a half mile from the border so you really got to experience kind of both. Especially the tense area where you had border patrol and FBI, CIA, ATF, and Laredo police and a half mile away it was the exact opposite. Because they're in a country always trying to come across it seemed. But that was very eye-opening for me in that experience and then meeting the kind of people who were down there moving, changing things I guess would be the way to put it. Definitely, again, eye-opening to see what they go through and the life of an immigrant crossing over. And then we, once they cross over, they may get citizenship and status but still kind of walls they have to leap in order to live a life that most of us would call normal, if even below standard. It was really eye-opening to break down those prejudices.* (Kevin)

Kevin described the experience as eye-opening, and admitted that he had preconceived

biases about both the Texas culture and Mexican culture. Acknowledging his preconceived

biases and prejudices, and then using the alternative break experience to learn about the people

and situation in Laredo allowed Kevin to experience the type of cultural learning that service

learning trips are designed to impart on students. Kevin is able to a see a part of the country with

which he is not familiar, and he is able to learn about this area and the issues that the people of

this area face by experiencing the culture in person, a type of learning that may be more effective

than if he were to learn about these things through the classroom alone.

The intercultural immersion experiences, by definition, provided opportunities for

students to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own. These experiences are set

up to provide its participants an opportunity to learn about cultural differences. The one

participant who went on a specifically designed intercultural immersion experience trip

described her experience and how this type of learning offered some challenges:

The culture change was quite a bit different and then sometimes it was very difficult. Ethiopia's never been colonized so they're primarily a black population and when you go into a primary black population as a white person you stand out. They have this preconceived notion that all white people have money. So they kind of almost mob you and they beg for money. That was a very difficult thing to kind of come to grips with and kind of become okay with. Because you felt out of place enough that you felt like you could be a target so you felt very vulnerable in that … do you know, that avenue? So that was a very hard thing to get over with. I think I'm a little more trusting than other people are and I try to see the good in people, so I tried to see the good in it and tried to see that these people aren't really a threat but they just, they're trying to find a way to make ends meet, to be better, to whatever they need. To fill the needs that they're missing. So I probably put myself in a little more vulnerable position sometimes by being a little more trusting around those people. (Caroline)

Caroline described the discomfort often involved when one is placed into a new culture. This discomfort seems to come partially from being in a situation in which she is in the minority (one of the few White people in Ethiopia). However, this level of discomfort may actually be conducive to learning. While trying to learn about a new culture through the classroom or simply by reading books about the culture may not give students the same level of discomfort, it may also not truly provide the understanding needed to learn about a culture in the same way that experiencing the culture first-hand would. As Paige (1993) states, intercultural education occurs through "direct experience with cultural difference" (p. 3).

Although experiencing a new culture can be discomforting, community members of the culture being visited can play a huge role in helping visitors learn about the culture. In the passage below, a participant discusses a situation in which one of the Habitat for Humanity staff gave the participants a taste of the local culture:

One day, one of the ladies, it was Ash Wednesday, and so she took two of us to Mass and then drove us back and then as we were driving to the site she goes, hey, I have to stop and get my Coke for the day and so she went in and she brought us back these cookies, and they were, I don't know what they were called, but they were like really popular in that area and so she was like, you guys have to try these because it's like part of the culture here and kind of give a little bit into that and then the whole thing with Mexico being right there, it was kind of our joke throughout the trip. Like don't go to Mexico, I

mean it's dangerous over there right now. But we got to go on different tours and meet different people and kind of experience that culture also. (Celeste)

Another way that the participants were able to learn about the culture of the places they visited was through activities put on through the universities. Theresa discussed talking to a Border Patrol agent who was asked to present to the group about his job and how it related to the dynamics of living in a border town:

> *And he was an amazing individual because he … that would be such a hard job and it made me empathize with him a bit because you're, you have to adhere to the law even though your heart says something different and he did a great job of exemplifying what it's like to go to work every day and like, well that sucked, but I have to do my job and you have to go back kind of a thing and it was just emotional.* (Theresa)

One of the questions that I asked participants was what they had learned about the cause that the service learning trip was intended to serve. In some cases the cause was not very well defined by the university beforehand, so it was interesting to hear how the different students interpreted the purpose of the service learning trip. Many of the answers about the cause that the participants were there to serve gave some insights into the cultural learning that may have occurred for the participants:

> *So I think the cause here specifically was in Laredo they do have kind of a large immigrant population. Not, not all illegal, but they do have a lot of … it's a mainly Spanish speaking town. And it's in that kind of loophole area where the people moved in and then the State of Texas said, okay, if you live there we have laws that we have to give you water, and we have to give you sewage run off, and we have to give you all these kinds of things. And through some legal loophole that I'm not 100% sure of they were able to kind of write off all those things and not do it. So the people were essentially living in a kind of shanty town. There wasn't a lot of running water. There's not a lot of food. These towns specifically, they're called the colonias, are the poorest towns in the country, even poorer than New Orleans, those kinds of things. So through these people it was mainly just giving them a living environment that was safe and healthy and those kinds of things. It was helping the people who have been brushed off by some legal laws because of whatever reason you want to pick out. Helping them live a life that is safe and healthy and that can push them to become…to be more. You know, to have a life that's normal, what they kind of want, and what everyone wants … the American dream I guess. White picket fence and all that.* (Kevin)

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This kind of experience affects the way you look at things. It's affecting the way that I'm looking at Japan now. It really is. And you know it affects the way that I think about Haiti a few years ago. And you know when people talk about Japan…I go, yeah. But what about New Orleans, too? Yes, these things are terrible and they happened, but like this is still going on. In this country. Right now. Today. And that changes a lot because I can't get it off my mind. I cannot stop thinking about those kids that are there and have no, have very few places to be kids where it's safe for them. (Charlotte)

The community members who interacted with the participants provided the participants with an opportunity to not only help people in need, but to understand on a deeper level some of the reasons these societal problems occur:

Just the cost of living in Key West is one of the highest of any major city, like San Francisco, it was absolutely astronomical. The Habitat for Humanity lady presented a PowerPoint with all the statistics and it's baffling. (Marcia)

The participants of the Key West alternative break got a few "free" days in which they did not have to work and could explore the area on their own. The community members gave the participants suggestions about what to explore:

Yeah, they suggested a lot of beaches. I think we went to the beach every day which is really nice… and we got to go to Ernest Hemmingway's house … we got to go to the southern-most point, we went scuba diving which was really nice because it was supposed to be like $50 but we got it for like $10 and it was just a blast. It was like two hours out in the water, scuba diving and like experiencing the coral reef and everything. It was just gorgeous. So, I don't think we ever would have done that if they hadn't said, hey, here's a coupon! There's a sunset festival every night where vendors just like pop up shop and sell whatever they made and we only heard about it through the Habitat for Humanity people, and we really got to see the culture and how people really live in Key West. Like people make their living off of the sunset festival sometimes, just off of tourists. So it's just really interesting to see that. (Stacy)

As it turns out, a lot of the cultural exploration of the city or region where the service learning trip was taking place occurred outside of the confines of the actual service project. Participants seemed interested in using their free time to check out the culture of the city where they were temporarily residing. While these experiences were not always related specifically to the cause they were there to serve, it was an important component of cultural learning in that in

order to know something about the people of a city, one has to know something about the city itself, and the participants of the service learning trips seemed to embrace this idea. Even during their free time, the alternative break participants seemed more interested in furthering their cultural learning experience than engaging in some of the more "traditional" spring break activities:

> *We'd work really hard all day and go and explore downtown New Orleans at night. We went to Bourbon Street on St. Patrick's Day which was kind of an interesting experience. And most of us came away from that going, this is not the culture of New Orleans that touches me. This is drunk, White college students as opposed to spending the day at the village with the kids in the community and the people who do the second line parades with the jazz funerals and the feathers... that's what I think grabbed most of us. So it was really cool to see all these different components that are in the city. And we also made a sort of conscious decision as a group to eat out as much as possible which I know sounds kind of strange, but we decided that that's how we wanted to spend our group money. So we went to all local places. There were a couple meals we were eating fruit in the car, but for the most part we were going to local, real places ... off the beaten path, which was great. Because first of all the food is amazing; second of all there's an interaction that you get with the local people that's totally different than if you go to one of the popular tourist places. And there's nothing wrong with that, it's just, I think, not what most of us wanted out of our trip.* (Charlotte)

> *We took a tour on Wednesday and they took us down to the 9th Ward and really got into the really poor parts of New Orleans and how they're not being helped and how they need to be helped. And ... we learned a lot about, if you're 18 and you're not on the street and you're still alive and you're not doing drugs, well you're considered a success. And they used to have 9 schools down there and now they have one and they just finally got it to be kindergarten through 9th grade...yes, New Orleans is rebuilt in so many different aspects. But not in the poor areas. And that's what really needs help. It's like ... they're not recovered. And they have a really good attitude about it. But it's hard.* (Celeste)

Although the purpose of the trip was to help people who were usually in a very dire situation, it was also important to get out and see the larger picture as well, to get the full context of what it is as a whole that makes up this community in which these residents live. In other words, it was important to get the entire story:

That was part of the really powerful thing about it. It's not just that we were seeing the tremendous devastation, but seeing a culture that is still very much alive and very powerful and full of so much pathos and energy. I loved it. I'm ready to move back, I'm ready to move there right now. (Charlotte)

One of the participants, Kevin, had the advantage of serving in one location, New Orleans, several times. Therefore, his depth of understanding of the culture seemed to be greater than the other participants who only had the opportunity to visit a location once (besides Kevin, who had three trips to New Orleans, including an 11-week summer experience, and one trip to Laredo, the other participants who went on two trips went to two different locations). This seems to be supported by the research of Paige (1993), who found that the greater the immersion into the culture, the greater the amount of cultural learning occurs long term. Kevin's descriptions of the culture of New Orleans went beyond simple observations that could be obvious to anyone who has visited New Orleans for just one day. As Paige (1993) states, it "takes some time for sojourners to learn the appropriate behaviors, to develop the insider's knowledge of how the culture functions" (p. 8). For instance, a person with only a rudimentary knowledge of New Orleans may be aware of the reputation New Orleans has for having a unique culinary tradition. However, Kevin made the deeper connection of the role that food actually plays in the culture:

Well ... first thing that comes to mind is food. New Orleans is so ingrained in its food. It's very unique, it's very distinct, it's ... you can't get it anywhere else the same kind of style. So, and that's how they also thank people ... like Betty (one of the residents whose house was being worked on by the participants) feeding the entire team of volunteers twice. That's how she thanked them. She doesn't have much else, this is the thing that they do in that culture regardless of what they have or what they don't have, they will always feed you. It was same thing at the church on Friday they were having a fish fry. So they gave us all free lunch, like, you're here to help ... thank you. Here it is. And I think that's also a symptom of the culture. In New Orleans they are very much a talkative people. You could go into a grocery store and buy a bag of cereal and ask the cashier how her day's going and she'll tell you that she's about to get a divorce with her husband and she's fighting over the kid and give you her entire life story and you don't find that anywhere else. One of the things that really hit me that I heard when we were down there was that America has gone from a front porch community to a back porch community. You're no longer sitting out front talking to your neighbors. You're in your own private space

enjoying your time. Where in New Orleans it's the exact opposite. People are sitting on their front porches talking to people on the street. Their neighbors know their neighbors, they hang out in the middle ground which is like the median, they hang out there all the time and have barbeques and eat. (Kevin)

Another participant, one who previously admittedly did not enjoy some aspects of New

Orleans, discussed some of her other thoughts about the culture, which were similar to the

findings mentioned in Kevin's previous passage:

... it's kind of a very free city. Yeah ... the people, they love people, they want to sit down, they want to know about you. They want to talk to you. They're very friendly people. Yeah, it's a very free city, it's a very giving city. You know, they don't have enough to buy clothes for a year but they'll make you dinner, or they'll make you lunch because they want to and that's how they say thank you. (Celeste)

Paula, whose trip was to the Dominican Republic, spoke about the cultural differences

between Dominicans and Americans in terms of the way they interact upon encountering

someone they know:

The Dominicans have a very in-the-moment lifestyle which I have certainly adopted, possibly to a fault, back here in America. We have a joke in the group about running on Dominican time, which is you're late everywhere because, not because you're just lazy or late, but because when you are walking down the street or here across the quad and you see someone ... instead of just blowing by, hey what's up, see you later ... you stop and give them the attention they deserve. And so this service trip was focused on finding a way to interact with other people and cultures in a more genuine way I think. That's what I personally took away with it. (Paula)

Paula was not only able to observe this aspect of the culture of the Dominican Republic,

but has actually adopted that part of the Dominican lifestyle into her own life once she returned

to the United States. In the passage below, Caroline has a similar discovery. It also has to do with

how the people of the country she visited, Ethiopia, experience time in a way that is very

different from the way we experience it in America:

Yeah, for instance I had scheduled an appointment with somebody to meet them and, of course, I'm my general 15 minutes early in Ethiopia and they have a, yeah that's a

guideline … they kind of show up whenever. La de dah de dah 45 minutes later and they're like, hey, how's it going and … you know, because they're just so much more laid back and just relaxed and it's not so rigid. In America it's like, we had an American schedule in Ethiopia so we literally got up at 6 o'clock every morning and ran all day long and it just, it kind of opened my eyes to how other cultures really function and how we just need to relax. I'm way too structured, I'm way to strict about what I do and my time is so structured. I mean I have schedules for everything and everyone in my life to be able to make everything work and Ethiopia is so not like that. And it kind of opened my eyes to sometimes you've just gotta live and just kind of live for the moment and not feel so scheduled. (Caroline)

Once again, the participant not only learned something about the culture of the country she was visiting, but took this discovery and considered how it could apply to her life back at home, coming to the realization that she is way too structured and needs to live in the present rather than quickly moving from moment to moment. Both Paula's and Caroline's excerpts above seem to be examples of the type of assimilation that Paige (1993) describes when he states that, as a result of being immersed in a new culture, sojourners will begin to "acquire new ways of thinking and behaving, they will begin to pose difficult questions about cultural identity, personal integrity with respect to belief and behavior systems, and other issues that penetrate below the surface" (p. 173).

The staff or volunteers who were a part of the host agency seemed to have a large role in the cultural learning experiences of the participants. Most of these volunteers or staff members were people who lived in the community, so they offered insights that were very similar to the insights of the people who were being served. In some cases, the volunteers or staff had utilized the services of the host agency at some point in their lives and were now involved closely with the agency as a way of giving back. These agency staff or volunteers could speak to the participants in a way that could only come from community members who knew what it was like to be a part of that culture. They were representatives of the community, their stories were the stories of the people of the community, and this information was very educational for the

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participants, even if this information was sometimes provided in a way that was brutally honest

and sometimes hard for the participants to hear:

> *One of my trip leaders has been to New Orleans a couple of times and she's worked in the village before. And she told us before, so the thing with Mack (a community leader and staff member of the host agency) is that he's going to say some things that might anger you and might hurt you. But you just gotta hear him out and then you can step back and evaluate what he says. But just hear the guy out. Just listen to him because he represents what a lot of people in that community think and feel. And that was totally fascinating. Hearing him talk about his own storm story about … he left and then came back within a couple of days. You know, once he was sure that his family, his wife and his daughters were safe … he came back and he was one of very first responders. I mean he was one of those people who can talk about the smell of death.* (Charlotte)

Not only was Mack a valuable source of information as a community leader who

experienced the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina first hand, but as a life-long resident of New

Orleans, he was able to speak to the participants about the way the community members viewed

the reaction to the tragedy. He was able to use his history as a member of the community to

impart knowledge on the participants, some of whom had never been to New Orleans. He was

able to do this in a way that may have been more informative to the participants than if they had

simply learned of the tragedy on the news or from textbooks written on the subject by people

who had never been members of the community:

> *And he's talking about how, in the 1920s, the 30s and the 60s when there were hurricanes and when downtown was in danger of flooding the Army Corps of Engineers knocked down the levies in the 9th ward. I mean this is documented. This is something that there are confirmed accounts of, this is not Mack being crazy. You know and he said, going to the lower 9th ward and seeing a barge that had plowed through the levies and onto houses, he said, what do you all think? You don't think that that was on purpose? And we're all going, I don't know, I don't know Mack, I don't know. But at that point it doesn't actually matter what I think. The point is that perception is reality for these people and for the number of times that this has happened in their memory … why on earth would they think that this time would somehow be different? So I get it. I get what he's saying. Even if, even if I really can't comment on whether or not the barge going through the levies into the lower 9th ward was on purpose, I do not know. But that's not*

what matters. What matters is, that's how he feels and that's how a lot of people feel. And that's terrifying to me. And it's heartbreaking. And that was part of my process of realizing that I have no idea what it feels like to be abandoned by the people who were supposed to help me. That has never happened to me. Ever. And I just have no, I have no idea what that is. (Charlotte)

Although most students seemed to enjoy the cultural explorations they got to experience on the trips, at least one student seemed to have trouble balancing the educational part of the experience with the service part of the trip. In the passage below, although Theresa expresses some appreciation of the knowledge she was able to gain through some of the cultural explorations, she also expressed a sense of guilt that these explorations may be taking away from some of the service aspects of the trip:

> *Yeah, it was really fulfilling. But it also felt bad that we ended up taking the whole day off from the work site to do those things. So we went on a tour and then we went to the Hurricane Katrina Museum, actually, so it was a good learning day and learning about New Orleans, but then at the same time I felt guilty because I wasn't doing any work that day. But the site manager told us that we worked hard enough to earn the day off which was good and he doesn't hand out compliments so it was good that we had earned his respect a little bit but … we still should've been working.* (Theresa)

Reintegration Issues.

One of the things discussed by some of the participants was the difficulty with readjusting to life back at home after the service learning trip. One would expect this to be the case, especially with the participants of the service learning trips who travelled out of the country. Paula discussed the need to talk to some of the people who she served on the trip, people that became like a family to her and who she was now missing upon being back in her home country:

> *…when I struggle to readjust to coming back to America after we came back, it was these people who I would call up and just say I miss my family … I want to speak Spanish, I don't like English ….* (Paula)

However, it was not only the trips out of the country that causes reintegration issues with

the participants upon returning. Here is Theresa discussing her struggles upon returning from

New Orleans:

Ohhhhh, it's the worst. That's what Kevin and I talked about on the phone today. I'm still apathetic. I wrote a paper at 6 this morning, it was due at noon today, because I just don't want to do homework. I just have such a hard time coming back to school and seeing the importance of it. Especially for me, I know that I'm dedicating my life to kids and I'm going to be a teacher, so that is a service for others or at least I think it is. I know that I'm getting my education so that I can teach, but after coming back from a service trip from tangibly working with my hands and helping someone in that moment it's hard to come back and, well I have to open this book, or this book is worth my time and I don't know … I'm very apathetic and my poor family … I don't want to go back to school. It's very difficult to adjust back. I genuinely love school, but it's so hard to see the point. It's beautiful outside! I don't want to be in class … it's just difficult. So hopefully that'll wear off soon because I have too many commitments to stay this way but it's been really bad. I mean it, I had, like you get home and you get out of the van and then we all separate … so like went to different dorms and you just see us walking away and that's kind of it, which is hard and it breaks my heart. It's really sad Sunday when we first got back all I did was miss people, I think I texted people all day, didn't do homework. Yeah, so it's really hard to come back, apathy is stamped across my forehead … everything that I do, but it will get better and I know that and I know that I've been benefitted as a person for having gone, it's not that I would change whether I went or not. (Theresa)

Theresa discusses missing the people she went on the trip with and not wanting that

experience to end. She said that she spent her first day back texting her fellow participants rather

than doing homework, not only because she missed her fellow participants, but also because she

was struggling to find meaning in the schoolwork that she was assigned, a theme that was also

brought up in the following passages by Kevin and Charlotte. This struggle to find meaning in

schoolwork suggests the development of a new construction of meaningfulness as a result of the

experience. Kevin discussed how, using his previous experience, he tried to help his fellow

participants adjust to reintegration issues:

It's rough. Really rough. Like why am I here in this affluent neighborhood learning about the people who are hurting when I could just be helping the people who are hurting and spending my time a lot more wisely. So I think my experience doing these trips, I was able

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to help them (fellow participants) with those questions a little bit more and show them why this really does matter to Betty, the woman you worked with. Why everything you did is so important to her and why everything will continue to be important and how to readjust back to (university) lifestyle from doing something like that. (Kevin)

The number of homework projects that I have put off doing because I'm researching the storm and all of that has been pretty dramatic. But I'm okay with that. Because this matters to me right now and I'm fine with taking a little less time to do a homework assignment that ultimately doesn't matter. I'm sorry to say. (Charlotte)

Upon their return from the service learning trips, things like homework no longer seemed as meaningful as the things they were involved with on their experiences. Charlotte consumed herself with continued study of the issues she experienced as a part of the service learning experience, rather than spending time on homework assignments that seemed to lose some of their meaningfulness to her.

In the passage below, Charlotte also discusses how there are triggers which continue to remind her of her experience and how these bring her back to wanting to be in New Orleans rather than on campus. In fact, one of those triggers was the interview itself. However, while Kevin described the readjustment period as "rough" and Theresa describes it as "the worst", Charlotte, despite acknowledging the difficulty of readjustment, is comforted when she remembers the importance of what she accomplished on the trip. She is also comforted that the experience seems to have made clearer for her the path she wants to take in life and she is excited about taking steps to continue that journey. The passage below again seemed to indicate that her experience on the service learning trip helped to clarify what was meaningful in her life. She also discussed how doing the things that she was doing before the trip did not seem to be as meaningful to her anymore:

I miss it so much. Every time I think I'm adjusted back to being in real life something will happen and it'll just all come back up … like today (during the interview), for example. You know I was starting to recover and now it's like I'm just plunged back in. But, again,

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that isn't actually a bad thing. As uncomfortable as it kind of makes me, and as distracted as I get from all the other things that I'm supposed to be doing … this is important. And I think that's part of why it feels so good to have been a part of it because this actually, I was doing something that really, really mattered. And even in a small way, it mattered. And I want to get back to that. And if that means getting through these next couple semesters as expediently as I can, then maybe that's what that means. That is not to say I have not had some truly powerful experiences while at school here. It's just that right now, at this moment, I'm not having a whole bunch of them. And it's winding down to the end of the semester and I'm in classes like orchestration and music history that just aren't touching me the same way right now. But I'll get through them and it'll be fine. And I've got more clarity about what lights my soul on fire in terms of what the next step in my life is. (Charlotte)

Differences between Participants and Those Served.

When the participants of this study discussed the differences between themselves and those they served, oftentimes the concept of privilege was brought up:

Well there's a lot of ways to approach that question. I think first and foremost I'm going to go with privileged. That I have been given a life that I haven't worked too hard for and I was born in America and therefore I have rights such as education. And financially my family is stable so, therefore, I think that that's the first difference is that I guess basically we have a house and they don't is going to be my first aspect. (Theresa)

Theresa, who as a part of her curriculum was also volunteering in an elementary school with children that she described as underprivileged, acknowledged that her financial and educational situation were very different from the people she was serving on the trip, and she seemed to understand that much of this difference is based on the fact that she was born into a more privileged situation in life. In fact, at one point in the interview she mentioned how privileged she is to be in a financial situation where she can attend a private college that organizes service trips (for which participants have to pay) in the first place. This showed a vital understanding of the difference between her situation and the situation of the people she is serving:

I'd definitely say that I'm lucky because I grew up where I grew up with the parents that I have who just happened to have jobs that provided enough money to provide a good home or to let me go to school where I wanted to go to school and who let me, I never have to worry about am I going to go hungry? Am I not going to have enough clothes to wear? Because I have enough. But, with that in mind I've never had to really work for anything. I've never really struggled or faced something that if I don't do this I'm screwed. I worked to get into college and that was obviously really hard and learned a great deal, but worst case scenario I don't get accepted anywhere and get a job ... I mean, this just doesn't compare to these people who if they don't volunteer and get their work, they're not going to have a home. And it was just really different and showed you what it means to truly, not just want, but to need something and to work for it. And also the emphasis on community and people and like everyone down there was a family. And it's just the idea that you need other people and that you can't do everything on your own and that you can't be expected to just work by yourself and be that, oh look at that superstar, look how well she did. You need to work with people and to just be a part of the family and the community. (Paula)*

How privileged I am, I go to a Jesuit university and that doesn't really come cheap but I'm just so privileged ... my parents, I know that they sacrifice a lot for me and I'm thankful for that and I'm glad I could just do this for someone else who may not be as privileged as I am. (Stacey)

Stacy's comment echoed the previous two comments in that all three participants

discussed their privilege in terms of the financial stability of their families and how that allowed

them to attend an institution of higher education.

Caroline had an interesting perspective when asked how she saw herself as different from

the people that she served on her trip:

It's literally a night and day difference. The people – there is a very huge cultural division in that country of people that are barely surviving and barely making ends meet and people that are living even semi-comfortably relative to what our middle class and upper class are doing in this country and those people are go-getters and they're out there and they're getting education and stuff like that. And then there's, but the section that we focused on is the people that are truly, truly poor and they are so poor that they don't realize that they're poor. I mean, stepping out of the capitol into the environment that we were our second week, they're mostly agricultural farmers and those kind of people and it was ... I don't think they realize that they're poor. They just, that's their way of life. And it's a very, very different dynamic to see those people just kind of not even realize they're poor and not really care about anything else that's going on around them except for their basic needs and their basic necessities in life and it's very humbling to look at that and be like, god, I'm so wrapped up in whether my internet works and

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when the latest iPad comes out and that kind of stuff. And it's just a very different dynamic. (Caroline)

Two of the things that stand out about this passage is that Caroline noticed the disparity in the country of Ethiopia between the very poor and the people whom she described as living semi-comfortably, although she stated that even those that are living semi-comfortably in Ethiopia seemed to have a lower standard of living than the middle and upper class people of the United States. Also, it is interesting how she felt that the very poor people of Ethiopia may not have even been aware of their poverty due to the fact that it was the only type of life they knew.

Overcoming Differences.

There were times when I asked students to describe the difference between themselves and the people they were serving, and while they did mention some of these differences, they also wanted to discuss some of the similarities as well:

> *I'm, you know, well White, number one. And socioeconomically so much better off, I mean I'm going to be frank about that. And I went to an independent, all-girl school in the Washington, DC area. My life really could not be more different in some ways and then in other ways there are those things that connect people on a much deeper level that are far, far more important. I think you can overcome a lot of those differences...* (Charlotte)

> *Because Key West is so close to Columbia and most of them are immigrants, and that's definitely not something that I'm familiar with at all. They had to come and learn another language, things like that. But other than that, I also shared the Catholic faith with them and we went to Mass together and didn't see huge differences other than economically and maybe educationally.* (Marcia)

The following passage shows how the service learning experience resulted in a revelation that it is possible to connect with people who may be in life-situations that are very different from one's own:

I think I always knew that deep down I care about people and that I have …my mom calls it a really strong empathy muscle, but I exercise my empathy muscle a lot and I think I always knew that, but I didn't know how far that could kind of take me. And I didn't know if I'd really be able to connect with people who are "so different". They're really not … on the surface they seem really different, you know. And I didn't know if I'd be able to and I did, and my whole group did. And there's this other part of myself that I can't let go of which is this deep desire to do something to help people who need it. (Charlotte)

Charlotte seems to be demonstrating that she is moving into the acceptance phase of Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The acceptance phase is one of the ethnorelative stages, and is defined as the phase in which "cultural difference is both acknowledged and respected" (p. 47). Although it may seem as though she is downplaying the differences between herself and those she is serving, throughout the interview, she makes many statements indicating that she is fully aware of those differences, and in the passage above, she demonstrates a respect for those differences which allows her to be able to connect with the people she is serving despite the differences.

One caveat that should be mentioned for this past section discussing the differences and similarities between the participants and those they were serving is that for some of the experiences, the contact that participants had with the people they were serving was actually very brief. This was especially true for the alternative break trips through Habitat for Humanity in Laredo and Key West. The following passage describes this dynamic, but also describes how they were able to learn about the culture in other ways:

It wasn't a direct or a bonding relationship at all, we never got to talk to them (the people being served) or anything. Which makes sense because there was 3 different college groups working on the house that we were building and that's for every week and there's no way that they can meet that many people or be gracious to that many people. So I think that makes the most sense. But at the same time we didn't build a relationship with who we were working for by any means. But I think we did experience the community through the people who lived there that were in charge of Habitat for Humanity. We absolutely loved our group leaders. Like we're all people, I guess is how I see it, it didn't really matter color, ethnicity, or anything like that. (Theresa)

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Theresa demonstrated how, although they had limited time with the people they were serving, the participants were still able to learn about the culture through their interactions with the Habitat for Humanity staff who were from the area. Theresa also seemed to focus on the similarities between herself and the Habitat for Humanity staff rather than the differences (*"we're all people…it didn't really matter color, ethnicity, or anything like that"*).

The service learning experiences were designed so that the students would be working closely with the volunteers or staff of a host site (such as Habitat for Humanity). Although the design of the experiences sometimes did not allow for a lot of contact with the people being served (something that I address in the Recommendations for Practice section), those who designed these experiences should be credited for setting these experiences up so that participants could experience cultural learning through the host site volunteers or staff.

Self-Learning

Although my primary research questions inquired into social and cultural learning experiences, I did feel that it was important to address individual learning in the study as well. As a result, I asked a question in the interviews about what my participants learned about themselves through participating in a service learning trip. The data that I received from this question was significant enough for *Self-Learning* to be highlighted as a major theme. The two sub-themes were *Changes in Perceptions of Others* and *Awareness of Privilege*.

One thing that seemed to take place for many of the participants is that how they related to the other people involved with the service learning trip taught the participants something about themselves. They learned how their own humanity is co-constructed by shared social interaction and the humanity of others. For some participants, taking part in a service learning experience

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brought out parts of their personality that are not necessarily exposed on a regular basis. One of

the participants, Charlotte, mentioned that she made a conscious effort not to speak up in the

group as much as she might normally because she saw that there were some quieter people in the

group and she wanted to give everyone a chance to express themselves. In the passage below,

Theresa gives another example of how she discovered a part of her personality that was not

normally on display:

> *It brought out kind of the parts of my personality that I hide away, I think. Since I didn't know this group of students I didn't feel like I had to be as outgoing as I force myself to be otherwise. So I was more inner-reflective a lot of the time and didn't talk as much as I usually do. So I think that was interesting for me to see that, wow, that is part of who I am and I should acknowledge that more in my own life. It was a whole group of girls and then the two boys that, we're all enthusiastic and we all had very similar personalities and so it was nice to sit back and let them be rambunctious and enjoy my own self a little bit more.* (Theresa)

Every participant that was interviewed had some previous volunteer experience. Almost

all of them were planning a career in what could be described as one of the "helping fields". The

fact that the participants were using a spring break for the purposes of helping those in need

shows that they were interested in making the world a better place, however, the service learning

experiences seemed to turn what may have been a vague idea about helping others into

something even greater:

> *Well I found a passion, for one thing, that's helping others. Definitely tacked on the Peace and Justice major. About myself, specifically, I don't know what I can tell you. I can't think of anything off the top of my head that I learned personally about myself. Other than that deep-seated care for other people that is now ingrained within me of something that I have to do. It's not an option, it's a duty I guess would be the way to put it.* (Kevin)

> *I think the biggest thing I learned is that people are my greatest source of inspiration in life, as corny as that might sound, and just before I went I was still thinking English and History and I had no idea what I wanted to do, but it was a very, almost selfish, like I love English, I love History, I love to read and write and learn all this stuff, so that's what I'm going to do with my life. And this definitely turned me around and showed me*

that actually, what I enjoyed the most is being with people who I enjoy and meeting new people and working with people and for people. And so that's where the Peace and Justice came out, which was a surprise for my Dad when I go back home, but I just love knowing that I have so much to offer and that even though I'd never used a hammer before, I had no experience, but I could pick it up because there were people willing to help me and teach me. And then I would be able to turn around and use that to help others. So definitely I learned how much people mean to me. (Paula)

I just really like service work. I kind of knew that before and that's what I want to do after college, too, but just going kind of reaffirmed that like this is something I would love to do all the time. Just being able to give back and see what you can do, what the extent you can do to help other people. (Celeste)

I think I always knew that deep down I care about people and that I have …my mom calls it a really strong empathy muscle, but I exercise my empathy muscle a lot and I think I always knew that, but I didn't know how far that could kind of take me. And I didn't know if I'd really be able to connect with people who are "so different". They're really not … on the surface they seem really different, you know. And I didn't know if I'd be able to and I did, and my whole group did. And, I mean, there's this other part of myself that I can't let go of which is this deep desire to do something to help people who need it. (Charlotte)

Although Kevin, Celeste, and Charlotte all had ideas before the trip about what they would like to do with their lives and how it involves helping people, after the trip that idea becomes cemented into who they are and how they want to live their lives. Several of the participants had decided to join Americorps or Peace Corps or to do study abroad as a result of these trips. For some of the participants, it has helped to either affirm or change their decision in terms of a career:

And I thought for a long time I was going to be a singer, I was going to be a professional performer, and I finally realized what was missing from that and it's the direct service component. I mean and I do, I do believe in the power of music to change people's lives, but I'm not certain that that's the right way for me to do it. And that's what kind of locked in for me is that I want to be on the ground and in the trenches and if that means … and well, frankly being a teacher is one of the best ways that I think you can do that. So I have learned a lot about what my values are in terms of what my career is going to be. I think I had an inkling about it before I left, but now I know. I know for sure that if there isn't an element of service, if there isn't an element of affecting a world that I will not see … I don't think I can do it with the same gusto as a job deserves. And as kids deserve. (Charlotte)

For some participants, participation in a service learning trip not only cemented what they had already previously planned in terms of the future, but it also gave them the confidence that they could go through with these plans. For Paula, her first alternative break trip cemented her desire to go into a helping profession. Her second experience helped to give her the confidence to know that she can be successful in her future plans. In some ways, her experience became a trial run for a future experience which, while is very exciting for her, also created feelings of doubt and anxiety. But participation in a service learning trip in the Dominican Republic erased some of those doubts and stirred a passion in her that increased her confidence in her ability to travel abroad for a more extended period of time:

> *I definitely gained a lot of confidence. I had already signed up and turned in my application for study abroad but was really nervous about it. Like really ... even though it was months in the future ... like losing sleep over it at night. But then I went to the DR and it was like I do know Spanish, I do trust that I'll be able to find my way around ... there'll always be someone nice to take care of me, yeah, there's a lot of risk and it could be dangerous ... I could get hurt, but I'm not stupid. So my confidence definitely boosted a lot and I kind of realized ... not to sound arrogant but that I'm a lot braver than I thought I was... in high school I could never imagine myself doing this. But now... I just talked to my trip leader about how I'm going to go to Chile for 4 months and then just backpack around South America which, still is really scary, but I'm not as afraid as I would've been if I hadn't gone on this trip.* (Paula)

> *Changes in Perceptions of Others.*

For some participants, taking part in a service learning trip changed the way they see other people. The experience helped participants to become more empathetic to a person's circumstances and to the reasons why a person may be in a certain situation:

> *I hope I'm more understanding of people. Definitely people who I may not know ... my first impression of them I hope I won't take into consideration as much as I get to know them, I just want to be more open-minded towards, maybe their background or situations that they had to go through. So I just really hope I'm not as quick to the gun and I don't like you, more as, oh, how are you? Just trying to get to know them a little bit better.* (Stacey)

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Awareness of Privilege.

Mentioned earlier in this study was the idea of the participants becoming aware of the

role privilege plays in their lives. This idea came up repeatedly when I asked participants what

they had learned about themselves:

> *I'm not taking so much for granted anymore. There are a lot of things that we have*
> *access to and we do that is just inconceivable in that country (Ethiopia) and so many*
> *other places in the world and I'm a lot more thankful of what I have, I think. And I'm a*
> *bit more appreciative of where I've been and what I've had the opportunity to do.*
> (Caroline)

One common thread between all of these service learning experiences is that all of these

participants were sent to help people who were impoverished. This was true of New Orleans,

Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic, Laredo, and even Key West, which despite being a tourist

town, has pockets of poverty amongst the worst in the United States. Almost all of the people the

participants went to serve were minorities, immigrants to the United States, or residents of a poor

country or a poor part of America that was unfamiliar to the students. One of the things that the

service learning trips were able to do is to show the participant's first-hand how their fortunate

situation in life is quite different than the situation for many other people in the world. All of the

participants of this study identified as White, while the overwhelming majority of the people

they served were minorities, so part of the privilege they discovered is White privilege. Also, the

participants of the study mostly identified as middle-class, whereas all of the people they were

serving would probably be considered to be in a low socio-economic status. All of the

participants of the study were native English speakers whereas many of the people they were

serving were not. The study participants were exposed to the myriad of different ways that

privilege (in terms of race, socio-economic status, language) played in their lives. This awareness

of privilege by the participants led to an appreciation for the opportunities that they have been

given. Specific among the opportunities that participants repeatedly mentioned was the opportunity to obtain an education.

This chapter discussed the major themes, as well as the sub-themes, that were identified in and constructed from my analysis of the participant interviews. The themes were *Social Learning Experiences* (with the sub-themes of *Bonding* and *Developing Leadership Skills*), *Cultural Learning Experiences* (with the sub-themes of *Reintegration Issues, Differences between Participants and Those Served*, and *Overcoming Differences*), and *Self-Learning* (with the sub-themes of *Changes in Perceptions of Others* and *Awareness of Privilege*). Chapter 5 will contain a discussion of these findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to contribute to the understanding of the lived social and cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips. This study revealed several findings that may help to increase this understanding. The findings of this study may be useful for college personnel or faculty who are currently involved in implementing service learning trips or who may do so in the future. This information may be useful for college students who want to know what a service learning trip might be like as viewed through the eyes of participants. Chapter 4 discussed the underlying themes constructed in this study, which included *Social Learning Experiences, Cultural Learning Experiences, and Self-Learning.* Chapter 5 contains a review of the findings, a section that discusses recommendations for practice and application, a section that discusses the limitations of the study, and a section that discusses recommendations for future research.

Review of Findings

The primary method of data collection for this research study was through semi-structured interviews with eight participants who had participated in at least one service learning trip. Three major themes were constructed as a result of these interviews: *Social Learning Experiences, Cultural Learning Experiences,* and *Self-Learning.* This study is intended to answer two main research questions:

- What are the social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

- What are the cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips?

In addition, this study addressed the following sub-questions:

- Why do students participate in service learning trips?

- What benefits do students perceive to accrue as a result of participating in service learning trips?

The major themes of *Social Learning Experiences* and *Cultural Learning Experiences* were not surprising considering that my study focused on the social and cultural learning experiences of students who participated in a service learning experience. Part of the reason that I chose to focus on the social and cultural aspects of experiential learning is that much of the literature regarding experiential learning focused on experiential learning at the individual level, but there was much less research about experiential learning at the social level. However, despite my initial focus on the social and cultural learning experiences of students who participate in service learning experiences, I did feel that it was important to address individual learning in the study as well. As a result, I did ask a question in the interviews about what my participants learned about themselves through participating in a service learning trip. The data that I received from this question were significant enough that *Self-Learning* could be illuminated as a major theme.

Findings on Social Learning Experiences

One of the main research questions for this study was: What are the social learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips? I believe that my findings on social learning experiences answer this question. For the purposes of this study, social learning is defined as learning that occurs as a result of working with fellow participants of

the service learning trip and with the other members (staff or volunteer) of the agency being served. Service learning trips are designed so that participants can learn at a social level. The two sub-themes that described *Social Learning Experiences* were *Bonding* and *Developing Leadership Skills.*

One of the reasons that service learning trips are social experiences is that despite the fact that these experiences are relatively brief (usually no more than two weeks), in that duration, a significant amount of time is spent in close proximity to a group of people, which creates opportunities for students to bond with each other. The experience of participating in a service learning trip seemed to have a profound effect on the way participants viewed their fellow participants. Participants became very close and even started referring to their fellow participants as family. A comfort level was established, and perhaps more significantly, situations in which participants were not comfortable were confronted with the help of the fellow participants (for instance, when a participant who was scared of heights was given support by her peers to confront her fear while doing work for Habitat for Humanity). Although some of the participants had met before their service learning experiences, it is significant to note that many of the participants had not known each other before the service learning experience. Yet this experience was conducive to a type of bonding that led the participants to think of each other as family, even though the experience is relatively brief.

In fact, the opportunity to bond with fellow participants was often thought of as among the most important aspects of the service learning trip experience. Almost every participant mentioned how bonding with fellow participants seemed to come naturally. One major aspect of service learning trips that seemed to play a big role in bonding among participants was the role that reflection played in this process. Not all of the service learning trips had a formal reflection

component, but informal bonding happened during all of these experiences. Baxter Magolda's (2001) research found that one of the most important aspects of service-learning activities is reflecting on the meaning of these experiences with supportive peers.

Part of the bonding that occurred for the participants of my study may have had to do with the fact that the type of people who would pursue this type of experience would most likely have some similarities in terms of world-view. These bonds tended to continue even after the service learning trip was completed, although it should be noted that the majority of the participants of my study were students at a small university, and staying in touch for these students may not have been such a challenge. It would have been interesting to see if the same held true for students who attended a larger university; unfortunately, I only had one participant who fell into this category, so it was not possible for me to determine whether this happened based on the sample for my study.

Participants of the service learning trips often interacted with volunteers from other universities who were participating in the same service learning experience. It appeared that in most instances, bonding did not occur between these groups. There are a few reasons why this may have been the case. For one thing, it would be understandable if students would have had the tendency to want to stay within their own groups and not necessarily mix with the groups from the other universities, especially if the service learning trips were not designed to encourage this type of group mixing. However, it did appear as though the participants seemed to have a low opinion of the work ethic of the students from some of the other universities that were participating in the same service learning trip. Some of the participants of this study felt that the students from the other universities thought of the service learning trips as a resume builder, and not a true opportunity to help those in need.

One of the other social learning experiences for participants of service learning trips was the opportunity to develop leadership skills. This often came in the form of informal leadership roles, although some participants were (or were planning to become) formal student leaders of the service learning trips. Some students were able to use their leadership skills on their trip, while others felt as though they had learned leadership skills through their experience and would have the opportunity to use them in future career or service experiences.

Many of the social learning experiences described by the participants seemed to be examples of what Kolb (1984) would describe as concrete learning. "An orientation toward concrete experience focuses on being involved in experiences and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way" (Kolb, 1984, p. 68). A person who learns through concrete experience is more likely to learn through an emphasis on feeling rather than thinking. Someone learning through concrete experience lives in the moment and is less concerned with generalizing an experience to come up with some overall meaning. People with concrete experience orientation take an "intuitive, artistic approach as opposed to the systematic, scientific approach to problems" (Kolb, 1984, p. 68).

People who learn through concrete experience enjoy being with other people. Working with other people was mentioned as one of the most important and most enjoyable aspects of the service learning trips. The experience of participating in a service learning trip, specifically the opportunity to work with other people, helped many of the participants realize that what really drives and inspires them is working with other people. Some of the participants in the study changed their (or added another) major as a result of their service learning experience.

Findings on Cultural Learning Experiences

The other main research question for this study was: What are the cultural learning experiences for college students who participate in service learning trips? I believe that my findings on cultural learning experiences answer this question. For the purposes of this study, cultural learning is the learning that occurs as a result of working with a culture or environment different from that which the student is usually a participant. Participants described the experience of working in an unfamiliar environment as sometimes uncomfortable. Some participants admitted to having preconceived biases that needed to be overcome. However, participants also stated that they felt more educated about the culture of the people they visited based on the fact that they were able to experience this culture first-hand rather than attempt to learn about the culture merely through classroom lectures or reading.

In the section on Learning from Social Experiences, I mentioned that every participant mentioned bonding with other participants as one of the most positive aspects of the experiences. When I asked participants about bonding with the people they were serving, their answers were more mixed. For some participants, bonding with the people they served was the most positive aspect of their experience, even more powerful than bonding with fellow participants. This seemed to resonate with the literature by Rhoads and Neururer (1998) who found that an ability to bond not just with the other participants but with those whom they are serving is one of the benefits of participation in service learning. However, other participants felt that there was not very much chance to bond with those they were serving. In some cases, this simply had to do with the fact that sometimes the people they were there to serve were not around very much, especially in the case of the Habitat for Humanity trips. And sometimes even when the people being served were around, a language barrier made a true bonding experience difficult. Paige

(1993) discussed the negative impact that language barriers can have for people in a culture with which they are not familiar.

One of the questions that I asked participants was what they had learned about the cause that the service learning trip was intended to serve. It should be noted that when I asked this question, a few participants had difficulty answering it with more than a very simple explanation. For instance, in some cases, the cause for the trip to Laredo was described simply as establishing affordable housing. However, some of the answers demonstrated a higher level of thinking about why the people they were there to serve were in such a position in the first place. This could be seen as an example of what Kolb (1984) describes as reflective observation: "An orientation toward reflective observation focuses on understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by carefully observing and impartially describing them" (Kolb, 1984, p. 68). This is the stage of learning where learners are beginning to understand ideas rather than implement ideas. As the name suggests, the reflective observation mode is defined by an emphasis on reflection as opposed to action. Reflection is used to discover the truth about something or to figure out how something happened. This is the stage where learners start to use their own thoughts and feelings to form opinions (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb (1984) states that people "with a reflective orientation enjoy intuiting the meaning of situations and ideas and are good at seeing their implications" (p. 68). For example, Charlotte was able to describe her experience doing disaster relief in New Orleans not just in terms of the way it made her feel, as one who is in the concrete experience mode of learning may do, but how her experience affected the way she viewed some of the other world tragedies that had recently occurred, such as the earthquakes in Japan. Some of the responses to the interview questions demonstrated thinking about some of the legal and policy ramifications of the decisions and

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actions taken by our government. For instance, Kevin demonstrated some of the components of learning through reflective observation when he spoke to what the experience of being an immigrant in Laredo meant on a larger scale. His focus was not on relating to the people or how the experience affected his feelings, but more on trying to attribute a meaning to being an immigrant in America.

All of the participants acknowledged that in certain ways, they were different from the people that they served. The participants of my study, all of whom were White students who were born and raised in the United States, acknowledged the role that privilege played in their lives and demonstrated an understanding that much of what they had in their lives was a result of privilege. This realization seemed to be the beginning of the recognition of White privilege, which "refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78). The concepts of White privilege are intertwined with Critical Race Theory, which is a movement that "considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). It seemed as though some of the participants were beginning to realize the role that being White played in their lives. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated, the "interplay of meanings that one attaches to race, the stereotypes one holds of other people, and the need to guard one's own position all powerfully determine one's perspective" (p. 80). In some cases this awareness of privilege seemed to be in the initial and emergent stages, and in other cases the responses demonstrated an explicit understanding of the role privilege played in their experience. One participant acknowledged that she had worked hard to get into college, but she realized the difference between her situation and

someone who had to work hard just to avoid homelessness. Participants understood that their life situations were very different from those of the people they were serving. Although some of the participants may have had this awareness before the service learning trip, working directly in the unfamiliar environment of an impoverished culture really seemed to bring the issue to the forefront. Some of the participants used the opportunities for cultural learning experiences to try to break down cultural biases. The acknowledgment of cultural biases indicated that some of the participants were moving past color-blindness and moving (gradually) into a realization that "only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 22). Some of the participants had the fortune of hearing from community members who were able to provide information about the historical perspective of the culture that the participants would not otherwise have been exposed to. The participants were able to hear stories and perspectives that they were not hearing from the media or other sources. These stories came from a cultural perspective that, while may have been different from a mainstream perspective, were no less "true" for the community members involved. Culture has an impact on the reality that one creates, and the participants were able to acknowledge this reality that may have been different from there own due to cultural differences.

Many participants discussed the difficulties they had when they came back from their experience, because they had a sense of guilt for being back in the comfort of a university life while they knew that there were people suffering in the world. They questioned the importance of sitting in class and doing homework assignments that they were beginning to feel were meaningless after coming back from an experience where they were able to help those in need in a very real and tangible way.

While the participants were very honest and forthcoming about the differences between themselves and the people they were serving, they also wanted to acknowledge the similarities as well. At one point, I wondered if the fact that some of the participants chose to focus on the similarities was a sign that they were not experiencing cultural learning. However, I do not believe this is the case. As I have stated, participants acknowledged differences between themselves and the people that they were serving. However, they also seemed to believe it was important to bring up the similarities, perhaps in an attempt to overcome some of those differences. Participants viewed their experiences on the service learning trip as an opportunity to bridge the gap between themselves and those they were serving. The participants chose to focus on opportunities to bond with those they were serving. Some of the participants wished to view the experience as more than just an opportunity to help someone by engaging in a manual labor task and then moving on; they preferred to view the experience as an opportunity to really learn about a new culture and to get to know the people they were serving. Unfortunately, there were times when the participants were not able to spend much time with the people they were serving, and in those situations, the participants often expressed regret that they were not able to get to better know the people who they were there to help.

It also appeared that not only did some of the participants engage in cultural learning, but they actually planned to take aspects of what they learned about the culture and apply them to the way that they live. This was true of the two participants who traveled to another country for their service learning experiences. Both of these participants noticed a difference in a way the people of the culture they were visiting were different from the people of their home country. Specifically, they noticed that the people of the country they were visiting seemed less obsessed with the concept of time than Americans were, and that the people of the host culture took time

to actually stop and talk to people they encountered on the street rather than just saying a quick "hello" and moving on. As one participant put it, the people in the host culture give the other people they encounter "the attention that they deserve". Both of the participants who took trips to foreign countries noticed the contrast between the more relaxed, more people oriented, and less time consumed aspects of the host culture as it compared to the culture of Americans. Upon returning to the United States, they expressed a desire to incorporate more of the type of culture they experienced from their trip into their everyday lives.

Many of the cultural learning experiences described by the participants seemed to be examples of what Kolb (1984) would describe as concrete learning. As Kolb (1984) states, a person with a concrete learning orientation is more likely to value "relating to people and being involved in real situations, and has an open-minded approach to life" (p. 68). Participants used their experience of getting to know the people of a community, a community much different from the type of community they grew up in, to help break down some of the stigmas that occur for the people they were there to serve. Participants tended to approach the experience with an open mind, and therefore came to some conclusions about the people they served that are different from some of the conclusions that others may make about people in similar situations. Kolb (1984) states that people with reflective observation orientation "are good at looking at things from different perspectives and at appreciating different points of view" (p. 68). That is part of the purpose of service learning trips. The opportunity to view things from a different lens is part of the cultural learning experience that so often occurs during service learning trips.

One specific way that the experiences of my participants resonated with what I was finding in the literature has to do with the process of reentry back into one's own culture once the service learning experience is over. The participants of this study described in detail how

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difficult this process was for them. Their experiences match very closely to the experiences of the participants of a study by Ivory (1997), who described the re-entry crisis experienced by students upon returning home from an alternative break. Much of the research on integrating back into one's own culture involved researching the experiences of study abroad students. Study abroad experiences were typically different from the type of service learning trips that I researched for my study in that study abroad experiences lasted for at least a semester whereas all of the service learning trips that I studied were a week to two weeks long. However, there are some similarities in that they are both experiences in which some immersion into a unique culture was experienced. La Brack (1993) described the experiences of returning from a study abroad experience and how students adapt to integrating back into their own culture. Students returning from a study abroad experience tended to make some significant changes in their life, as many "as a result of their experience, may change majors, departments, and friends" (La Brack, 1993, p. 245). Reentry back into one's home culture may:

> …involve loss and change for the individual; there is the loss of the familiar (relationships, cultural frames of reference, etc.) and challenge of the new (new frames of reference, new relationships). In addition, all transitions present opportunities for personal and intellectual growth. (Martin, 1993¸ p. 302).

Some of the difficulty associated with reentry can be alleviated by reflecting with the fellow participants of the intercultural experience or by keeping in touch with the people from the former host culture with whom relationships were established during the intercultural experience. Some of the participants of my study did mention that speaking with some of the people from the former host culture did make them feel better when they were having trouble adjusting upon return from their service learning experience.

Another important aspect of culture that was important to this study was the idea of dimensions of culture. Some of these dimensions include regional, ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliation, a gender level, a generation level, and a social class level (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The study participants were exposed to some of these different dimensions, especially in regards to some of the interactions they had with the people who lived in the communities that the participants were serving. As Hall (1976) stated, models of culture are often based on the idea that "there are different levels of behavior: overt and covert, implicit and explicit, things you talk about and things you do not" (p. 11). In many cases, the participants' interactions with those being served were very friendly with the community members expressing gratitude for the help they are receiving. However, some of the participants were beginning to realize the role that White privilege played in their lives, and there is no doubt that the community members were very aware of this privilege as well. One community leader in particular was very vocal about the role that he thought race played in society, and this was a message that was not necessarily easy for some participants to hear. In some cases, the role of White privilege was one of the "things you do not" talk about, while in other cases it was discussed thoroughly.

Another dimension of culture that was brought up by the participants, specifically those who had traveled out of the country for their experiences, is the role that the concept of time plays in culture. Hall (1983) stated that, in regards to culture, time:

> …is treated as a language, as a primary organizer for all activities, a synthesizer and integrator, a way of handling priorities and categorizing experience, a feedback mechanism for how things are going, a measuring rod against which competence, effort, and achievement are judged as well as a special message system revealing how people really feel about each other and whether or not they can get along (p. 3).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) discussed how "anthropologists have long insisted that how a culture thinks of time manages it is a clue to the meanings its members find in life and the supposed nature of human existence" (p. 148). The two study participants who traveled out of the country for their experiences discovered that the meaning that the people of the countries they were visiting have a very different concept of time than what would be considered the traditional American way of thinking. The participants found that "showing up on time" was not viewed as an important thing in the foreign cultures they visited, and in many cases this was due to the fact that the people of these cultures were more interested in visiting with everyone they saw along the way to their meetings. The idea of giving someone one encountered on the streets one's full attention was more important than giving that person a brief nod or "hello" in the rush to be on time for an appointment.

Findings on Self-Learning

Despite the fact that my primary research questions focused on the social and cultural learning experiences of students who participate in a service learning trip, *Self-Learning* was constructed as a major theme. In some ways, what the participants learned about themselves still related to how they interacted with other people. Some participants discussed how they learned the importance of listening skills, and some students discovered parts of their personality they were not familiar with before, such as their ability to become a leader in group situations. One participant felt that, because of the personalities of the rest of the group, she was comfortable bringing out an aspect of her personality (a quieter, more reflective, introspective aspect) that was not normally seen by everyone else. If the rest of the group was comprised of mostly introverted people, then she may have felt the need to speak up, assume a leadership role, and try to make things happen. She mentioned that in most situations in her everyday life, she felt she

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had to force herself to be outgoing. While participating in this service learning trip, the rest of group allowed her not to have to do this. She felt more comfortable being herself.

As a result of their service learning experiences, participants learned a lot about what they wanted to do with their lives in the future. While most of the participants were in a major that offered preparation for what could be described as one of the "helping fields" (such as education or healthcare), many participants described their service learning experience as a motivating factor to move from participating in service as an ancillary aspect of what they wanted to do in their lives, to wanting to do service as a major part of their lives in terms of a career or long-term volunteerism. Many of the participants knew they wanted to be in a field where they could make a difference even before their service learning experience. This desire may have contributed to the service learning experience being so positive, as McCaffery (1993) has found that the most successful service learning experiences (specifically intercultural learning experiences in the case of his research) are those in which "the more specific learning goals and objectives have relevance and meaning for the participants in terms of their own lives, what they already know, and their professional and personal goals" (p. 230). Participants seemed to become more certain and specific about what they wanted to do with their lives after the service learning experience, and they expressed a confidence in their abilities to successfully achieve these goals in the future.

Motivation for Participating in Service Learning Trips

One of the sub-questions of this study was: Why do students participate in service learning trips? Some of the participants mentioned the role that family members played in the decision to participate in a service learning trip. These participants had family members who had

participated in service previously, or who had encouraged the participants to participate themselves. Other participants had professors or staff members at their respective university who encouraged service learning.

All of the participants of my study had volunteered in some capacity before their service learning experience. This fact seemed to fit in with the findings of Astin and Sax (1998) who found that those who had participated in service activities in high school were more likely to participate in service activities in college. Although all of the participants had previous volunteer experience, many of these experiences were relatively brief and while these previous experiences gave the participants a chance to serve, in a lot of instances, it did not seem to give the participants much opportunity to learn. Some of the participants seemed somewhat unfulfilled by these previous experiences. Most of these experiences did not offer a lot of opportunity for the participants to actually see the difference they had made. When I would ask participants about their previous volunteer activities, several of them seemed to play these activities down. At first I chalked this up to modesty, but I now believe that after participating in a service learning trip, they were able to see that their previous efforts did not compare to the experience of engaging in a service learning trip. While the participants may have had a previous interest in community service, they were now looking for an opportunity where they could make a bigger impact, and many of the participants felt that participating in a service learning experience was the perfect opportunity to make that impact. The nature of the service learning experience, which allows for an immersion into a situation, became so much more meaningful to the participants than their previous volunteer experiences which only gave them a brief opportunity to serve without really getting to know the people they were there to serve. That could be why someone like Stacey, who had volunteered before, could for the first time truly begin to empathize with someone who

is in a situation that is less fortunate than her own. Before her service learning trip, she had the desire to help people, and she may have briefly interacted with those in need, but she had not truly been immersed in the situation to a point where she began to discover these deeper insights into the plight the unfortunate.

Another finding by Astin and Sax (1998) was that undergraduate students who were involved in religious activities were also more likely to be involved in service activities. Although I did not specifically ask about religion as a part of this study, during the course of the interviews some participants did mention the role that their faith played in their lives. Seven of the eight participants of this study were attending a Jesuit university with a very prominent social justice mission. This university is involved in social justice activities in the surrounding community and beyond, and faculty and staff are often involved in these efforts. Many of the non-student trip leaders are staff members who have been leading alternative breaks for several years. This university has a reputation of encouraging social justice efforts, not just through its students but also through its faculty and staff. As a result, the university as developed a culture in which bonding opportunities between students and faculty and staff often occur through these shared social justice efforts. One conclusion that can be made is that for several of the participants of this study, the Jesuit mission of the university they attend is significant in terms of motivations for participating in a service learning trip. For many of my participants, the context of attending a Jesuit university seemed to shape participation in service learning trips as more of a calling, with a religious slant to it, than may have been the case (and was the perceived case of some of the participants) if more of them were not students at a Jesuit university which encourages social justice. It seemed as though through the eyes of these participants, not only were they responding to a calling, but the experience made that calling clear, especially for the

participants who mentioned finding a passion for helping others. This may account for some of the experiences of participants who were less interested in some of the educational components of the experience and wanted to strictly focus on the working aspect. The educational component could have been seen as something that was beneficial to the participants of the service learning experience, but for some participants, that was not what the trip was about; the focus needed to be on spending every moment available doing work to help those in need.

It should be noted, however, that not all of the participants who attended the Jesuit university felt that religion played a part in terms of motivation for participating in a service learning trip. One participant mentioned that the reason that she did not participate in any longer term service learning experiences when she was in high school was that these types of experiences were only available in her community through the local church. She actually felt more comfortable about participating in the longer term service learning experience at her university because, even though she was attending a Jesuit university, she felt that the service learning experiences themselves were not explicitly religion-oriented. She mentioned that she attended her university not for religious reasons but because it was the school that offered her the best scholarship. It also should be noted that the one participant who did not attend the Jesuit university gave some very similar answers to those who did, even though she was participating through a public university with no religious affiliation. Her responses also seemed to indicate that she felt that her experiences were a kind of a calling, although religion was never mentioned in her responses.

Research by Serow (1991) has shown that some of the biggest factors supporting participation in volunteer activities for college students included a sense of satisfaction from helping others, becoming involved through a club, activity, or class, and a duty to correct societal

problems. All of these factors were mentioned by the participants of this study as factors which led to a decision to participate in a service learning trip. Some of the participants stated that participating in a service learning trip would help them fulfill a desire to make some meaning out of their lives. Some participants also stated a desire to do something different and meet new people. Most of these experiences occurred during the spring break period of the participants' universities, and participants described a desire to do something productive during this time. Some students even chose to participate in these types of experiences rather than going back home to spend time with their family. The participants who I interviewed twice mentioned the positive experiences on their previous service learning trips as being the main motivating factor on their decision to participate once again.

Benefits of Participating in Service Learning Trips

Another sub-question of this study was: What benefits do students perceive to accrue as a result of participating in service learning trips? Survey data collected by Hunter and Brisbin (2000) found that students participating in service learning view the experience positively. There is no doubt that this finding relates closely to what I found during my study. While some of the participants did mention things about the experience that they wish had gone differently, all of them overwhelmingly thought the experience was a positive one, and most expressed a desire to participate in a similar experience in the future.

One of the benefits that participants mentioned several times in regards to participating in a service learning trip is the feeling of accomplishment that came along with making a difference in a real and tangible way. For most participants, the most satisfying aspect of the service learning trips is when they got to practice what Kolb (1984) would describe as active experimentation. "An orientation toward active experimentation focuses on actively influencing

people and changing situations" (Kolb, 1984, p. 69). This is the learning stage in which learners practically apply what they have learned from the other stages. The focus in this phase shifts to what needs to be done rather than the meaning of things. There is a shift from observing to doing (Kolb, 1984). As Kolb (1984) states, people with an active experimentation orientation "enjoy and are good at getting things accomplished. They are willing to take some risk in order to achieve their objectives. They also value having an influence on the environment around them and like to see results" (Kolb, 1984, p. 69).

Most of the participants that I interviewed were involved in experiences that allowed them to see a finished product at the end of their trip. For instance, the participants of the service learning trips that involved Habitat for Humanity were able to help build a house. In the interviews, participants described the positive feeling of being able to accomplish something tangible. They described the feelings of pride that occurred when finishing a task, especially when those tasks are for a family in need. The participants of these service learning trips were directly able to see the results of what they had accomplished.

It should be noted that in most cases, the participants of these service learning trips had little say into what it was that needed to be done. For the most part, what the students were going to be doing to help the people they were serving was already established (i.e. disaster clean-up, building a house though Habitat for Humanity). However, these service learning trips did seem to allow the participants to think about societal issues such as poverty and immigration on a larger level. Although they may not have had the opportunity to come up with solutions to issues during these specific service learning trips, they were able to learn about some issues effecting the world, and many of the participants expressed a desire a go into a career path (or at least

become involved in continued volunteer service work) that would allow them to continue helping to alleviate some of the problems facing society.

Another benefit that participants of service learning trips perceived to accrue was the opportunity to learn new skills. These experiences also offered some students the opportunity to use skills that they already had to help others. For instance, Kevin, whose dad is a carpenter working for the Physical Plant at the university Kevin attends, was experienced using power tools. He was able to use this experience to help people in need, and he was also able to teach others to use these skills in that manner as well. Caroline, who had worked as an EMT at one point in her life, describes being able to use some of her existing skills that she learned as a Health Care Administration major to develop an archive filing system for inactive patient files.

Another skill that participants were able to learn (or at least develop) was listening skills. Participants found that listening to fellow participants, staff, and especially those they were serving was an important component to making the experience successful. This sometimes involved listening to stories that were difficult to hear, such as some of the stories about the role racism played in the Hurricane Katrina tragedy. But listening through uncomfortable messages seemed to be part of the participants' cultural understanding and development.

When discussing the benefits of participating in a service learning trip, participants mentioned how the experience helped them to figure out what they wanted to do with the rest of their lives. Some participants either changed or added on majors as a result of these experiences. For some participants, these experiences changed their ideas about what it is they wanted to do for a living. For others, these experiences gave them concrete ideas about how they could take the knowledge gained from these experiences and implement them into the work they planned to

do in the future. This could be what Kolb (1984) described as the abstract conceptualization phase. "An orientation toward abstract conceptualization focuses on using logic, ideas, and concepts" (p. 69). Whereas someone with an orientation toward concrete experience is more likely to learn through an emphasis on feeling rather than thinking, someone with an orientation toward abstract conceptualization focuses more on thinking rather than feeling. This learning stage is a continuation of generalizing the understanding of the knowledge obtained through concrete experience. Whereas a person in the reflective observation stage of learning can take the experiences from the concrete experience phase and use them to create an understanding of that specific situation, learners in the abstract conceptualization stage take it a step further and use the experience to form a more general theory about how the world works. Those with an abstract conceptualization orientation use logic rather than feelings to create knowledge. A person with this type of learning orientation "enjoys and is good at systematic planning, manipulation of abstract symbols, and quantitative analysis" (Kolb, 1984, p. 69).

One example of abstract conceptualization occurred when one of the participants, Charlotte, seemed to be describing systematic planning when she described how she intended to use the knowledge that she has gained on her service learning trip for her future career. Charlotte was planning to be a teacher, and she described how she was going to take her students on service learning trips. She was specific in her discussion about how a curriculum would need to be in place for these trips to be most effective. Although Charlotte discussed her feelings throughout the interview, when she discussed her plans to use service learning, her discussion is actually more rooted in the logic, ideas and concepts of service learning. Logic, ideas and concepts are the key components that Kolb (1984) described as a part of abstract conceptualization.

Research has shown that one of the benefits to participating in service learning is gaining perspectives on a different culture (Finger, et. al., 2007). The participants of my study also mentioned this as a benefit of their service learning experiences. Some participants expressed appreciation about learning about another culture and being able to break down some of their previous biases. Other participants enjoyed learning about other cultures so much that they were planning longer term intercultural experiences, such as Peace Corp or a semester abroad.

Recommendations for Practice

Studying what, if anything, participants of serving learning trips learn as a result of the experience may provide information that may be useful for college personnel or faculty who are involved in implementing service learning trips or who may do so in the future. This information may lead to changes in how the program is implemented for the experience to be a successful one for each of the participants, especially in regards to ensuring that participants are gaining the knowledge that is intended by these programs. In this section I make recommendations for college personnel or faculty who are implementing (or may be interested in implementing) service learning trips.

One thing that became clear in talking to the service learning trip participants is that some kind of formal reflection component should be incorporated into these experiences. Informal reflection is important and will occur naturally as the members talk about the trip in general. However, a formal reflection component is also important. Formal reflection can be in the form of encouraging students to write in a journal every night on the trip, or setting aside some time on one or two nights during the trip simply to have a group discussion about how the trip is going (what the participants are learning about the cause/people that they are helping, how this

experience is changing the way the participants look at things, how the participants' life experiences are different from the experience of the people they are serving). Some of the service learning trips that I studied had a formal reflective component while others did not. Participants seemed to get a lot out of the formal reflective components, and Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning would suggest that reflection is an important aspect of an experiential learning experience.

Also, to the degree that it is possible, it is important that the trip participants have some kind of responsibility around coming up with solutions to the problems with which they are there to help. The issue needs to be clear and defined as the trip is being planned (i.e. students on this trip will be helping with disaster relief, poverty, homelessness). And while the participants will obviously be there to help alleviate these issues, there also needs to be a component where they are allowed to think about the issue, and work as a group to at least discuss ways to alleviate the problem. In other words, participants should be allowed to work together to come up with a solution rather than just being told what to do. Obviously, there is a limit to what one group of students can do about a problem like poverty or nature disaster relief, especially in such a short amount of time, but the experience should include some element of having the group members think about the issues on a deeper level and trying to figure out ways to discover why the issue occurs and what can be done on a greater level to help alleviate it. Group exercises and discussions at night (after the work that is being done during the day) may be an excellent way to encourage problem solving skills. These types of exercises and discussions could also occur after the trip. If some type of continual learning experiences could occur after the trip, then the learning process may continue for these students. These efforts would help students learn through Kolb's (1984) fourth cycle of experiential learning, active experimentation. Individuals

engaging in active experimentation are attempting to solve the problem through actively experimenting with the different ideas that they came up with in the reflective observation stage of the learning cycle. Some of this deeper type of learning occurs in credit-based service learning opportunities in which students are participating in a service learning experience as a part of a for-credit class, but these types of opportunities should also be available for students who are participating in non-credit service learning experiences.

Additionally, participants should have ample opportunities to work with the other people involved in the project, including students from other schools. One thing that was clear in my research on the social learning experiences of participants of service learning trips is that their experience working with their fellow students, their trip leaders, and the other staff supervising them (i.e. Habitat for Humanity) were very positive, but their experience working with the students from other schools was less positive. There could be several reasons, for instance, people just have a natural tendency to interact with whom they are most familiar. And it should be noted that not all participants thought that this was a problem. As one student said:

> *…at first I thought, maybe we are supposed to reach out and try and bond with these other schools that are halfway across the country and then I thought, we're here to bond with each other too, and so it's okay that we're all getting to know each other better and working together as a community as a school.*

Although there may be some things that make this logistically difficult, helping service learning trip participants to have a more pleasant experience with students from the other schools on the trip could involve finding out what other schools will be there at the same time and making some effort to contact trip leaders of the other schools beforehand to try to establish some type of agreement that the students spend some time interacting and working with the different colleges together on the project rather than working only with their own school groups.

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I think in some cases, participants missed an opportunity by not having a better chance to work with these other students and to get to know them and their experiences on a deeper level. Interacting with other schools is probably not something that is going to automatically happen without some effort by the group leaders of the service learning trips to reach out to the group leaders of the other schools and encourage the groups to intermingle and work together. This could include inviting them to participate in an activity or group outing together once during the week. Otherwise, the participants may just stay in their own groups and will not truly have the opportunity to work together. Again, this would be a missed opportunity for the service learning trip participants to learn how to work with different groups of people, who may have different perspectives in the way they view the world.

Also, as much as is possible, service learning trip participants should have the opportunity to interact with the people that they are there to help. This interaction did not always happen on the service learning trips that I studied. In some cases this may not be feasible, and I do know that for this study, there were instances in which even when participants did get to meet those they were there to serve, a language barrier was present in many cases. However, it was clear that the participants who put in so much time and effort and did not get to even meet the people they were doing the work for left the experience feeling a little empty.

Lastly, efforts should be made to address the reintegration issues that will occur for some of the participants. While it did seem as though this was addressed with informal get-togethers for some of the experiences, it still seemed as though participants were struggling with these issues. More formalized efforts to help students through the reintegration process are warranted.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was having individual interviews only. I originally planned to have a focus-group interview as well, but time restraints made this impossible. Collecting data through a focus group may have added valuable information in that it would have allowed me to observe how participants interact in a group, a perspective that I was unable to observe in the individual interviews. Also, I originally planned to collect participant journals, however, this was not required of most of the service learning trips, and most of my participants did not journal as a part of their experience. The data gathered from journals may have added a different perspective not captured by individual interviews.

Another limitation is the lack of diversity of my participants. Although I wanted my sample to be comprised of participants who were not familiar with the culture they were visiting, that did not mean that all of the participants had to be White. Yet, all of my participants identified as White, and all but one was female. Having a more diverse sample may have added different perspectives to the study. Also, although I picked two universities from which to gather my sample, all of my participants except for one came from the same university, a small, Jesuit school. I do not necessarily think that the responses from the one respondent who did not attend the Jesuit school were markedly different from the rest of the participants. The one participant who did not attend the Jesuit school did not mention religion in any of her responses. As for those who did attend the Jesuit school, religion may have played some role in terms of motivation to participate in a service learning experience, but it did not seem to be the biggest factor for any of the participants, and some of the participants did not mention religion at all. (However, religion may have played a factor for these students when deciding which university to attend in the first place). Despite the fact that I did not see a marked difference in the

responses of the student who did not attend the Jesuit school compared to those who did, I still would have liked to have more participants from the larger, public university. I believe that doing so would have added additional insights into the experience of participating in service learning trips. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned, when trying to establish transferability, the naturalist inquirer is "responsible for providing the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description" (p. 316). Adding more participants for the larger, public university would have helped with establishing transferability.

Another limitation is that the only people interviewed for this study were the participants of the service learning trip; however, they are only one set of stakeholders in the system. A more complete study would have included some of the other stakeholders, such as the people being served by these experiences, or by the staff and volunteers who act as the hosts to the students. This would have also helped with the transferability of the study, for the same reasons mentioned in the paragraph above.

Recommendations for Future Research

Seven of the eight study participants were enrolled in a small, Jesuit university with a very pronounced social justice mission. Further study could be conducted on the social and cultural learning experiences of participating in a service learning trip for students in different educational settings. For instance, how are service learning experiences different for students of large public universities, historically black colleges or universities, or ivy league schools? Focusing on the experience of students from different types of universities could add some different perspectives and could add to the current research.

Also, additional research with a more diverse sample of students would be warranted. This diversity should come in the form of ethnic and gender diversity. The two schools from

which I chose my participants lack in diversity and since seven of my eight participants were female, my study came almost entirely from the perspective of White women. Future studies in which a diverse sample could be obtained would allow for the possibility of studying the differences that the effects of participating in service learning experiences have on students who come from different ethnic backgrounds. How would a Hispanic participant experience a disaster relief trip to New Orleans differently from a White participant? How would the experience of building a home for the impoverished residents of Laredo be different for an African American female as opposed to a White male? Future research could help to answer some of these types of questions.

Another possible area for future research would be to study the effect service learning trips have on the people who are being served by them. This type of research could study what, if any, social or cultural learning experiences are being obtained by the people being served by these service learning trips. Although the purpose of a service learning trip usually focuses on providing service to a certain population, while it is the participants of the service learning trip who are theoretically provided the educational opportunities, that does not mean that the recipients of the service do not learn something as well. Do those being served learn something of a social and/or cultural nature as a result of being served by these trips? Future research could potentially provide important information on this topic. Such a study would need to contain a review of literature about the insider-outsider role that occurs for those being served, as they are the stakeholders in the system that provides and produces these service learning experiences.

There are many reasons that lead one to obtain a college education. For some, college may be no more than a necessary step in order to obtain the credential needed to perform a job in order to make a living. But for others, college is one of the means by which one can make a

positive difference in the world. The focus of this study was on service learning trips, just one of the many ways that students choose to make a difference. The information obtained in this study may be useful for college personnel whose goal is to help students achieve their goals of changing the world for the better. The recommendations for future research give some examples of how this topic can be studied further, as the next generation of students embarks on a journey of self-discovery, and of discovery about the world in which they live.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Participant Letter

My name is Beau Bienvenu. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Colorado State University. I am currently writing my dissertation on the experiences of college students who participate in alternative breaks. You are one of the students who has been selected to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in two individual interviews and one focus group interview after your alternative spring break experience. The interviews and focus group will be approximately one hour in length (total time commitment ~ 3 hours) and will take place on or near the Regis University campus.

The questions asked will focus on your experiences of participating in an alternative break at Regis University. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to during the interview sessions. Your name will not be used in my dissertation. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time. If after reading this letter, you decide to participate in my study, please complete and return to me the attached participant demographic information sheet (email: beaubienvenu@aol.com), I will contact you to arrange for the interviews.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at beaubienvenu@aol.com or 720-231-4251.

Thank you for your assistance on this project.

Beau Bienvenu   Linda Kuk, Ph.D.
Doctoral Candidate   Associate Professor
CSU - School of Education   CSU - School of Education

Yes, I would like to participate in this study _____

No, I will not participate in this study _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – ALTERNATIVE BREAK PARTICIPANTS

What led to your decision to participate in an alternative spring break?

Had you participated in an alternative spring break before?

Can you tell me about your previous (if any) volunteer experiences?

Please describe your experiences on your alternative spring break.

Was this experience what you expected? How was this experience different/the same from your original expectation?

What did you learn about yourself through this experience?

Do you think that you have changed as a result of this experience? If so, how?

Can you describe your experiences regarding working with your fellow students? What did you learn from this experience?

Can you describe your experiences regarding working with the clients/staff/volunteers associated with the program that you served? What did you learn from this experience?

How do you see yourself as different from the people you served on this trip?

What did you learn about the program/cause that you served on this trip?

Will you participate in an alternative spring break again? (for non-graduating students)

Do you see yourself volunteering in any capacity in the future?

If you could change anything about the experience, what would it be?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – INTERCULTURAL IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

PARTICIPANT

Can you tell me a little bit about the program? It sounds like it is a Global Health class followed by the trip to Ethiopia? Is this a requirement of your program? If not - What led to your decision to participate in this program?

Had you participated in any service learning programs before?

Can you tell me about your previous (if any) volunteer experiences?

Please describe your experiences on your trip to Ethiopia.

Was this experience what you expected? How was this experience different/the same from your original expectation?

What did you learn about yourself through this experience?

Do you think that you have changed as a result of this experience? If so, how?

Can you describe your experiences regarding working with your fellow students? What did you learn from this experience?

Can you describe your experiences regarding working with the clients/staff/volunteers associated with the program that you served? What did you learn from this experience?

How do you see yourself as different from the people you served on this trip?

What did you learn about the program/cause that you served on this trip?

Are there any other service learning experiences that you will be taking in the future? (if not graduating)

Do you see yourself volunteering in any capacity in the future?

If you could change anything about the experience, what would it be?

SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How did participating in an alternative spring break previously influence your decision to participate in one this time around?

Other than the alternative break, have you been involved in any other volunteer experiences since we last spoke?

Please describe your experiences on your most recent alternative spring break.

How did your experiences on your first alternative break change your expectations going into this more recent experience? Was this experience what you expected?

What was the cause that you served on this trip, was that really defined?

What did you learn about that cause?

How was this experience different/the same from your original experience?

Did you learn anything new about yourself during this experience?

Was the experience of working with your fellow students any different this time around compared to your original trip?

How were the people you served on this trip the same/different compared to the people you served on the previous trip?

What did you learn (or did you learn anything new) about the culture of the people and the place you were there to serve?

Was the experience of working with the people you served (or staff or other volunteers) any different this time around compared to your original trip?

If you could change anything about the experience, what would it be?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *The Social and Cultural Learning Experiences of College Students who Participate in Alternative Breaks*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: *Linda Kuk, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Education,* lkuk@colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: *Beau Bienvenu, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education,* beaubienvenu@aol.com

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are being invited to participate in a study about the learning experiences for college students who participate in alternative breaks at Colorado State University. The intent of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants of alternative breaks, with a focus on the cultural and social learning that may occur as a result of the experience. As someone who will be participating in an alternative break, you will be able to provide valuable information about this experience.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The study is being conducted as part of the Co-PI's doctoral studies. The research team will consist of the members of the Co-PI's dissertation committee, which include the PI (and advisor to the Co-PI), the Co-PI (the doctoral student), and two additional committee members. However, only the Co-PI will be actively conducting research, which will be in the form of interviews and focus groups.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of college students who participate in alternative breaks at Colorado State University.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? For this study, who will be asked to participate in two individual interviews (one before the alternative break and one after) which will last approximately an hour each. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in a focus group (after the alternative break), which will last approximately an hour. You total time commitment be will approximately three hours. The interviews and focus groups will be conducted on the Colorado State University campus, most likely in one of the library study rooms or in one of the conference rooms in the School of Education building.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in two one-on-one interviews, one before your alternative spring break experience and one after. These interviews will be audio taped with your permission, and will last approximately one hour each.
- Provide the researchers your participant journals from your alternative spring break. The Co-PI will ask for these journals just long enough to make copies of them, at which time they will be returned to you. The Co-PI will be the only one with access to these copies.
- Participate in one audio taped focus group discussion after your alternative spring break experience**.**

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should not take part in this study if you do not wish to be audio taped during the focus group session or either of the two one-on-one interview sessions. However, if you do not wish to share your participant journals with the researcher, it will still be possible for you to participate in the other aspects of the study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research, but the investigators hope that the information obtained from this study may lead to changes in how alternative break programs are implemented in order for the experience to be a successful one for each of the participants. Understanding the experiences of those who participate in an alternative break can be helpful to college personnel responsible for creating and implementing these programs. This information can be useful in determining whether or not students are gaining the knowledge that is intended by these programs.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your real name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. Also, a pseudonym will be used instead of your real name in the text of the study.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? Participants who take part in the focus group will be provided with a light meal and/or snacks.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Beau Bienvenu at 720-231-4251. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on (Approval Date).

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? In order to accurately record your comments, the researcher would like to audio tape your interviews and the focus group. Once the researcher has transcribed the audio tape, the recording will be destroyed. Please indicate below if you give the researchers permission to audio tape your interviews:

___Yes, I give you permission to audio tape my interviews

___No, please do not audio tape my interviews

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing <u>3</u> pages.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____
Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

1. Name _____

2. Gender

Male _____   Female _____

3. Age _____

4. Ethnicity/Race: Black or African American, Not Hispanic or Latino _____

American Indian or Alaska Native, Not Hispanic or Latino _____

Asian, Not Hispanic or Latino _____

Hispanic or Latino _____

White, Not Hispanic or Latino _____

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Not-Hispanic or Latino

Two or More Races, Not Hispanic or Latino _____

5. Educational Status

Freshman _____   Sophomore _____

Junior _____   Senior/More than three years completed _____

6. Major _____

7. In which alternative break did you participate? _____