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**HOW SERVICE LEARNING IMPACTS IDENTITY FORMATION AND SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY IN EMERGING ADULTS**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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2014

Paige M. Husted
How Service Learning Impacts
Identity Formation and Social
Responsibility in Emerging Adults

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the impact of service learning experiences on identity formation and social responsibility in emerging adult college students. Utilizing purposeful convenience sampling, fourteen college students at a liberal arts college in the northeast were interviewed about their nonprofit volunteer experience. Study results indicated that service learning experience positively impacted the identity formation processes of participants by allowing for identity integration and continuity, exposure to idealized mentors in the field, space for reflection on professional identity, and a deeper understanding of social responsibility. This study has implications for clinical social workers because it offers in-depth insight into the experiences of emerging adults. By understanding and supporting the impact of service learning experiences on emerging adults, we can acknowledge an interdisciplinary dialogue about the fostering of shared values and a commitment to social justice that expands beyond the social work field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Now I become myself.
It’s taken Time, many years and places
I’ve been dissolved and shaken, worn other people’s faces...
the black shadow on the paper, is my hand;
the shadow of a word as thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard,
All fuses now, falls into place.
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face, gathered into one intense gesture...”*

—Mary Sarton

This thesis is about becoming. I have been changed by the process, *as thought shapes the shaper*. It was a solitary pursuit yet entirely collective—a both/and, per usual. I have many to acknowledge with gratitude:

Thank you to my family, supervisors, mentors, and “family” for your unending support, guidance, and inspiration. I am me because of you.

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Thank you to Rob for being my constant, grounding anchor throughout this entire program. You encourage, challenge, and love me so well. Thank you for always being on my team, I love you!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“You see, there’s responsibility in being a person. It’s more than just taking up space where air would be.” –John Steinbeck

The task of forming an integrated identity is one of developmental, cognitive, and existential concern, and is of particular importance during emerging adulthood. Specifically, emerging adults are in a prime developmental stage to establish mature identities, possess the cognitive capacity to critically assess social issues, and can existentially reflect on and commit to values independent from one’s family of origin (Armstrong, 20011; Arnett, 2005). This study seeks to understand the individual experiences of emerging adults who volunteer in nonprofits. The goal of this study is to answer the following question: How does service learning experience impact identity formation and social responsibility for college students in emerging adulthood? By understanding and supporting the impact of service learning experiences on emerging adults, we can acknowledge an interdisciplinary dialogue about the fostering of shared values and a commitment to social justice that expands beyond the social work field.

In this study, the phrase *service learning* is defined as volunteering that “helps to promote both intellectual and civic engagement by linking the *work* students do in the classroom to *real-world* problems and *real-world* needs” (Kenworthy-U’Ren, 1999 as summarized by Fairfield 2010). Service learning blends academic learning, service to the community, and the practice of reflection with the intention of sparking a deeper appreciation of one’s discipline and civic responsibilities (Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). The phrase *identity* refers to an abstract and

nebulous concept, and, like the concept itself, is difficult to describe succinctly and universally. There are many different theories about how identity is formed—whether it is a fixed part of the self or a fluid and dynamic concept, whether it is finalized in a distinct developmental stage or remains an ongoing process throughout life. As Erikson wrote, “A sense of identity is never gained nor maintained once and for all . . . It is constantly lost and regained” (Erikson, 1959, p.118). For the purpose of this study, the terms *identity* and *self-concept* will be used interchangeably to describe an individual’s fluid and ongoing process of defining a personal and social sense of self. The term *emerging adults* refers to people ages 18-25 who are living in an industrialized country and navigating the specific developmental period that is distinct from adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2006). The term *social responsibility* will be defined as a “concern for broader ethical issues outside the self that is characterized by a duty to a common good” (Armstrong, 2011, p.3).

There is a sufficient amount of literature demonstrating the benefits of service learning experiences for college students. For instance, service learning can positively enhance one’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, life skills development, academic performance, and increased civic engagement (Brown, 2011; Chesbrough, 2011; Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). Service learning is also beneficial for society at large; research suggests that students who participate in service learning often experience a decrease in prejudice, increased knowledge of poverty and inequalities, an increase in expression of empathy, and an increased chance of serving again in the next twelve months (Brown, 2011; Chesbrough, 2011; Hughes et al, 2012; Jones & Abes, 2004; Lechuga et al., 2009; Wilson, 2013). However, very few of the aforementioned studies qualitatively explore the impact of service learning on student identity development from the

perspectives of the student participants. A qualitative approach allows participants to tell their own stories and make meaning of their experiences.

I conducted this qualitative study by interviewing a sample of fourteen college students to explore their service learning experience and its effect on their understanding of self, professional identity, and social responsibility. A qualitative approach is in line with this study's theoretical understanding of identity formation as fluid, ongoing, and incorporative of the meaning-making process. Even a single service learning experience can offer an emerging adult the opportunity to form a long-term commitment to pro-social engagement in her community (Cox, 2012; Seider, 2007). Qualitatively studying the experiences that generate interest, commitment, and social responsibility in students who serve allows us to understand more concretely how service learning experience impacts identity formation.

I approach this study with strong personal bias and deep curiosity. I have been personally impacted by my own service learning experiences and directly influenced by mentors in the nonprofit world. My decision to become a clinical social worker was shaped by my post-college volunteer year with low-income seniors in west Oakland, and my commitment to social justice is inextricably intertwined with childhood and adolescent volunteer experiences too. I have also grappled with the implications of volunteering, and the complications of entering a community that is not my own and attempting to be helpful. I have been changed because of my experience, but what about the people whom I served? Does volunteerism perpetuate a divide between those serving (people who often occupy multiple privileged identities) and those served? Is service learning an experience that actually benefits those communities served? Or does it do more harm than good?

The service learning program I worked with after college predicted that its volunteers would be “ruined for life.” The phrase was tongue-in-cheek, communicating the idea that whether or not you chose to work in the social services you would take your service learning experiences and commitment to social justice into daily professional practice. As a result of your volunteer experience, you would be a more thoughtful, engaged, and active citizen, conscious of your own privilege, and aware of the social implications of your actions. I undertook this study on the impact of service learning experiences for emerging adults because I wanted to know if, despite its complications, volunteering ultimately changes volunteers and their communities for the better. Specifically, this study is my attempt to examine whether and how emerging adults—especially those with the greatest historical power and privilege—make use of and are impacted by their service learning experience in a way that reaffirms social justice values and moves towards the dismantling of structural forces of oppression.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The following literature review highlights research pertaining to the following question: “How does service learning experience impact identity formation and social responsibility for college students in emerging adults?” For the purposes of providing theoretical context for this study, I will consider the scope of *identity development* literature that has been influential in shaping our current understanding of the identity formation process. Secondly, I will address research about *emerging adulthood*, the relatively new category of development, with relation to identity formation for adolescents between the ages of 18-25. Third, I will summarize research concerning the impact of *service learning* on college students, paying particular attention to its relation to identity development. Fourth, I detail recent research on promoting *social responsibility* in young adults. Finally, I will argue that this study is necessary and beneficial for the field of social work.

Identity Formation

There are many different theories about how identity is formed. For example, some argue that it is a fixed part of the self and others that it is a fluid and dynamic concept, and some think it is finalized in a distinct developmental stage while others believe it continues to evolve throughout life. The majority of development-based theories of identity stem from Erikson’s (1958) original eight-stage model, in which he suggested that people progress through growth challenges over time (Gerstacker, 2009). Erikson’s theory of ego growth conceptualizes the developmental process as a series of crises each person must weather in order to grow and

develop ego strength. He understood identity development as an inherently psychosocial task because it involves balancing intrapsychic needs with external social demands (Marcia & Josselson, 2012). Erikson's model stood apart from other scholars in his era because he addressed contextual factors that shape one's development throughout the life cycle. For instance, in his proposed fifth stage of adolescent development individuals were understood to work through the conflict between identity exploration and identity confusion at various levels (i.e. individual, behavioral, structural) in order to develop a sense of self (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2012).

Marcia (1966) further integrated Erikson's work on identity research by focusing specifically on Erikson's adolescent stage of development and creating a framework called the *identity status model* which operationalized Erikson's concept of identity development (Schwartz et al., 2012). The four concepts defined in the identity status model are: identity diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity achievement. The statuses are based on the dual ideas of exploration and commitment to areas like occupation, ideology, and relationships (Marcia & Josselson, 2012, p. 619).

When in the *identity diffusion* status, individuals are thought to be low on both commitment and exploration; they are not exploring identity, often lack personality integration, and are more likely to respond to situations out of impulse instead of a connection with a core sense of self (Marcia & Josselson, 2012). Individuals in the *foreclosure* status have unquestioningly adopted the beliefs of their caretakers; they are often inflexible, perhaps even rigid, and are high in commitment but low in exploration. Those in the *moratorium* status are thought to be high in exploration but low in commitment; they have begun to critically examine their own beliefs, worldviews, and are often characterized by "identity crises" as they search for

a cohesive sense of self to integrate. Finally, individuals in *the identity achievement* status are high in commitment and exploration; they have a relatively integrated sense of self, adequate defenses against overwhelming anxiety, and at the same time are able to take in new ideas about themselves and the world (Marcia & Josselson, 2012).

Marcia's identity status model was the launch pad for the empirical study of the exploration and commitment processes in emerging adults because it offered an operationalized method for studying the abstract concept of identity. However, in recent years it has come under some criticism (Arnett, 2006; Cote & Schwartz, 2007; Dodds-Schumacher, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2012). For instance, defining exploration and commitment as fixed processes that occur during a specific stage of adolescent development implies that identity is something to be accomplished instead of an ongoing process throughout the life cycle (Dodds-Schumacher, 2004). Furthermore, Marcia's (1966) concept of identity seemed to be based on a limited understanding of the dynamic interplay between individual characteristics and social roles, expectations, and norms that affect each person's unique sense of self (Cote & Schwartz, 2002; Hardy et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2012). That is, the identity status model has been perceived to fall short in its failure to acknowledge the social context of individuals as they grow, thus missing one of Erikson's key contributions to the field of identity development (Dodds-Schumacher, 2004).

While these critiques highlight important developments in how identity is studied today, in my reading of Marcia (1966) I was surprised to see more of a commitment to the psychosocial aspects of the ego identity than the critics implied. For instance, Marcia (1966) emphasizes that the measures he developed were meant to be "congruent with Erikson's formulation of the identity crisis as a psychosocial task" (p. 551). Furthermore, Marcia (1966) clearly

acknowledged that an individual qualitative interview was more effective than a “finish-the-sentence” task for studying an individual’s ego identity because the interview more clearly demonstrated the “meshing of the individual’s needs and capabilities with society’s rewards and demands” (p. 557). This suggests that Marcia did grasp the interplay between the psychological and social forces that affect human development (p. 557). While he may not have conceptualized identity development as a fluid and ongoing process, Marcia (1966) did contribute to the field of identity research by operationalizing Erikson’s key concepts in an empirically helpful way. Although it did seem to interpret identity as a fixed process instead of a lifelong, fluid process, Marcia’s understanding of identity struck me as psychosocial.

Following Marcia’s identity status model, research divided in two directions—a psychological approach to identity development versus a sociological one—instead of maintaining the tension between the two. For example, sociologists focused on the environment’s impact on individual identity and operated under the assumption that people do not develop outside of societal influences and expectations. On the other hand, psychologists honed in on intrapsychic processes while ignoring or downplaying the impact of environmental issues.

Eventually researchers like Cote & Schwartz (2002) returned to an interpretation of Erikson’s original stage model as a call for a multidimensional approach to identity development that allows for, and even demands an integration of the individual’s psychosocial context into the discussion. They have attempted to integrate these two fields by proposing the *identity capital model*, a “developmental—social psychological approach to identity formation that integrates psychological and sociological understandings of identity” (Cote & Schwartz, 2002, p. 574). In essence, this theory borrows from sociology the assumption that individuals develop in

environments with social influences, and from psychology the idea that individual psychological resources can ease the negotiation of identity as it develops through time (Cote & Schwartz, 2002). For example, an emerging adult who grew up in poverty is not immune from the impact of his social environment; however, if he had internal resources or other forms of social support, he might be able to transcend the limitations of his environment and achieve an integrated identity.

In reviewing the scope of identity literature, I was surprised at the lack of clinical social work research on identity development as a person-in-environment process, since this is a guiding principle in social work's theoretical approach to understanding human development. That is, clinical social work education and research has historically emphasized the biological, social, and psychological influences on every person's developmental process. Furthermore, social work is known for its understanding of a person-in-context. Therefore, when studying emerging adult identity formation, it is important to acknowledge both the intrapsychic processes and the contextual influences that impact the individual's developmental process.

This research seeks to contribute to the identity development literature by utilizing a psychosocial understanding of self-concept, in an effort to understand the identity process from the inside out and the outside in (Berzoff, 2011). That is, I seek to understand the impact of service learning experiences on individual identity formation while acknowledging the other influences in each individual's life that also contribute to one's developmental process. This study is also relevant for social workers who interact with emerging adults, as it will help them more fully understand their clients' developmental task of identity formation, integration and cohesion.

Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2006) observed that modern industrial societies place great value on individualism which, somewhat ironically, leaves emerging adults alone and underequipped to integrate a sense of self as they face unique developmental challenges. This observation led him to advocate for an entirely new developmental category: emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a theory of development pertaining to young adults between the ages of 18-25 who live in the United States and other industrialized countries and navigate distinct experiences such as attending college, choosing a career, and exploring intimacy and relationships in the context of newfound differentiation from their nuclear families (Arnett, 2006; Gerstaecker, 2009; Goodwin, 2009; Hardy et al., 2013). Furthermore, emerging adulthood is a distinct developmental stage, and one of the key tasks during this stage is the navigation from identity crisis to identity development (Arnett, 2006). It can also be a time of idealism and the exploration of new ideologies; for instance, the literature on emerging adulthood suggests that the period is a time of "peak optimism about one's potential to change the world" (Tanner, 2006, p. 48 as quoted in Seider, 2008).

Though historically the dominant understandings of identity development did not incorporate emerging adulthood as a distinct period, researchers have recently begun to accept this category, perhaps because of shifts in the cultural norms and expectations for young adults, or simply because it allows for a fresh opportunity to rethink identity development. Seider (2007) notes that emerging adults, and specifically those enrolled in college, experience "greater independence from parents and childhood community, exposure to a diverse environment, new points of view offered by classmates and professors, and the opportunity and distance to think critically about the value systems in which they have been raised" (p. 633). This unique period

for emerging adults and specifically college students provides a ripe period for reflecting on one's individual values, vocational identity, and sense of self.

One important critique of the emerging adulthood theory is its incorporation of the western values of independence and autonomy as markers of maturity. Furthermore, it conceptualizes the transition to adulthood as marked by factors that are more present in industrialized societies. The risk in using concepts like individualism and autonomy as indications of maturity is in the potential to pathologize emerging adults from more collectivist cultures or interdependent family structures. Again, the importance of considering an individual's psychosocial context when assessing identity development is crucial in order to avoid assumptions about deficits that may actually be cultural differences.

Another critique is the assumption that all young adults have the space and mental capacities to explore identity issues, which in and of itself is a privilege afforded by only those who have their basic needs met (and therefore, space to ponder) as well as the psychic capacity to self-reflect. Those critiques aside, when working with college students in an industrialized society and specifically in the United States the theory of emerging adulthood can be helpful in understanding this unique developmental period. Furthermore, this theory's emphasis on growth, ideological shifts, and exposure to new worldviews lends itself to the notion that emerging adults might benefit from an experience like service learning.

Service Learning

In this study, the phrase *service learning* is defined as volunteering that “helps to promote both intellectual and civic engagement by linking the work students do in the classroom to real-world problems and real-world needs” (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 1999 as summarized by Fairfield 2010). Service learning blends academic learning, service to the community, and the practice of

reflection with the intention of sparking a deeper appreciation of one's discipline and civic responsibilities (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996 and Zlotkowski, 1999 as summarized by Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). A brief review of the service learning literature reveals a variety of benefits for those who serve. For instance, service learning can positively enhance one's self-esteem, self-efficacy, life skills development, and academic performance, and increases civic engagement (Brown, 2011; Chesbrough, 2011; Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). Service learning is also beneficial for society at large; research suggests that students who participate in service learning often experience a decrease in prejudice, increased knowledge of poverty and inequalities, an increase in expression of empathy and an increased chance of serving again in the next twelve months (Budge, 2006; Chesbrough, 2011; Hughes et al, 2012; Lechuga et al., 2009; Jones & Abes, 2004; Wilson, 2013).

Service learning attracts students because of its potential to change them for the better. A mixed-methods study by Lakin and Mahoney (2006) illustrates this clearly: In their study, they explored the components of service learning that promote positive youth development by qualitatively analyzing the narrative responses of student participants as well as quantitatively measuring positive development as a result of service learning experience. They found that service learning experiences were positively linked with higher levels of youth empowerment and community connectedness. Specifically, they found that service learning experience promoted a sense of empowerment for volunteers as well as a feeling of connection to others. Furthermore, several participants also expressed a desire to continue being involved in their community in the future (Lakin & Mahoney, 2006).

In their quantitative study on the attitudes and values of students who participate in community service, Hellman, Hoppes, and Ellison (2006) sought to understand the intentions of

university students who engage in service learning, based on the theory that intentions link an individual's attitudes to his or her behaviors (Hellman, Hoppes, & Elisson, 2006). The researchers administered a web-based survey that measured attitudes toward volunteering to 403 undergraduate students at a Midwestern university. Results suggested that the sense of connectedness to the community was correlated with intent to participate. This study offered limited in-depth insight into the intentions and values of college students because the students could not elaborate in narrative form on the surveys. Therefore, the data analysis revealed links, but not explanations. There are many other studies like this in the service learning literature, which suggest a link but cannot elaborate without qualitative data. This lack of qualitative narrative data is one strong reason for this current study.

Chesbrough (2011) also studied motivation to serve and outcomes of service learning in his mixed methods study. He interviewed 24 students, individually and in groups, and then used the results to develop a survey instrument that was filled out by 1000 college students. The instrument was intended to demonstrate how differences in motivation for service and learning outcomes of service experience are based on the participant's gender, year in college, and amount of service performed (Chesbrough, 2011). He found that external motivators to serve (such as a course requirement) diminished as length of time in school or hours of service increased. He also found that external motivators were important in inspiring initial service experiences, but were eventually replaced by internal motivators such as feeling strongly about a cause or wanting to be helpful (Chesbrough, 2011). Utilizing a binary gender understanding and including only cis-gendered participants, he found that male participants were less inclined than female to be involved in service during college years. Finally, Chesbrough found a strong and positive relationship between hours of service and all measures of positive developmental

outcomes, including cognitive growth, increased skills, and identity development (2011). These results suggests that service learning experience does impact an individual's sense of commitment to civic engagement, and the longer a person volunteers, the more likely they are to experience personal growth and become committed to future service.

While the benefits of service learning for participants have been thoroughly documented, the effect of service learning on student identity development has not been fully explored. There is a particularly noticeable gap in the research and literature when it comes to first hand reports from students themselves. Two exceptions are a qualitative study by Cox (2012), who noted how even a single service learning experience can offer an emerging adult the chance to “foster longer-term commitment to service mindedness” (p. 20), and a qualitative study by Seider (2007), who found that emerging adults who were dedicated to service attributed the development of their commitment to a single academic service learning experience. These and other studies suggest that service learning experience often affects the person's sense of social responsibility. By interviewing the students about their service experiences and connecting their responses to the literature on identity development, this study seeks to qualitatively understand how service learning experience impacts their commitment to social responsibility.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility is a “concern with broader ethical issues beyond the self, characterized by an obligation to a common good” (Armstrong, 2011, p. 3). Some assert that encouraging civic engagement in young adults is a key component in sustaining a “well-functioning, viable, and democratic society” (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). One goal of service learning experience is to increase each participant's sense of civic engagement and community involvement (Bringle & Steinberg 2010; Weiler et. al. 2013). I find these arguments compelling,

and a big motivation for this study is a desire to better understanding how to foster—in young adults—an ability to think critically about social issues as well as an inclination to become more involved in their communities.

One aspect of social responsibility is the need to be “civic-minded”, which refers to a person’s inclination to be “knowledgeable of and involved in the community, and to have a commitment to act upon a sense of responsibility as a member of that community” (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010, p. 429). In their review of the research about how service learning impacts civic-mindedness of college graduates, Bringle & Steinberg (2010) compiled a list of learning outcomes that are important for the civic-minded graduate. They then developed a conceptual framework to guide their analysis, which identified seven traits of a civic-minded graduate: academic knowledge and technical skills, knowledge of nonprofits and volunteer opportunities, listening and communication skills, knowledge of social issues, diversity skills, self-efficacy, and behavioral intentions aligned with the student’s civic behaviors (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). After extensively reviewing the service learning literature and delineating its limitations, Bringle and Steinberg ultimately concluded that service learning can positively impact the development of civic-minded college students (2010). Furthermore, service learning experience can contribute to the enhancement of quality of life for communities.

In her qualitative study on the dilemma of social responsibility for upwardly mobile youth, Steinitz (1976) differentiated between two contrasting ideological value figures in American society: The Self-Made Person and the Good Neighbor. The former has bootstrapped her way to success and thinks that giving aid inhibits an individual’s accountability to herself to succeed. The latter takes into account the arduous path to success and does her part to help others when she can; the Good Neighbor understands that resources can be crucial in helping others

succeed (Steinitz, 1976). When interviewing high school students in this study, Steinitz (1976) found that students' attitudes towards welfare were correlated with their levels of compassion toward people in trouble. It seems their political identities impacted their stated social responsiveness. Furthermore, she found most students to be conflicted and ambivalent instead of steadfast in their opinions. That is, many students felt that every person should be given the same opportunities regardless of qualifiers, so that every person has the same chance to succeed. At the same time, only those who try hard and apply themselves should be "rewarded" for their efforts (Steinitz, 1976). This study suggests that understanding how youth make sense of the world and individual responsibility has relevance for developing compassion in youth who hold one or more positions of privilege. Furthermore, this study highlights student ambivalence and suggest that service learning experiences might nudge them towards a less hesitant commitment to pro-social engagement in their communities.

In contrast to the study above, McGuire and Gamble (2006) quantitatively studied the effects of service learning on one's social responsibility. Their results suggested that hours spent in community service had little relation to changes in social responsibility (McGuire & Gamble, 2006). Instead, they discovered that psychological engagement in service was the factor that predicted changes in social responsibility. In this particular study, the students who participated in classroom discussion groups were encouraged to consider the broader political and moral implications of their service activities, which may have fostered a stronger commitment to the underlying social justice issues (McGuire & Gamble, 2006). This suggests, as Lakin and Mahoney (2006) have observed, that students might likely develop a greater understanding of their experience, as well as a greater sense of social responsibility, if their service learning experiences include either a reflection period or a guided discussion.

Implications for Social Work

When assessing the impacts of service learning on individual identity development, it is important to move beyond the quantitative analysis of program features to the qualitative reflections of students. There is a clear need for an in-depth qualitative study to explore the subjective experiences of students who participate in service learning. Analyzing personal reflections from students provides researchers the opportunity to learn how one's sense of social responsibility is shifted by the service learning experience. In so doing we will begin to comprehend which processes effect positive change in their participants.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study is in response to the following research question: How does service learning experience impact identity formation and social responsibility for college students in emerging adulthood? I conducted an exploratory study by analyzing qualitative data gathered from individual interviews with fourteen emerging adults. Qualitative research was the ideal method because it allowed for the collection of descriptive responses that could be comprehensively explored in-depth (Roberts-Douglass & Curtis-Boles, 2013).

This research was influenced by social constructionist theory, which holds that “individual behavior, relationships, aspirations, and expectations emanate from the social construction of self, formed through shared language” (DeSocio, 2005, p. 53). For instance, social constructivism prioritizes the client’s subjective experience of reality as well as the necessity of considering social context when seeking to understand an individual’s experience. Social constructivism also rejects an objective reality, instead creating space for each individual to make sense of his or her own reality through the creation of stories about their lives and experiences (DeSocio, 2005). Many of the tenets of social constructivism align with social work values and shaped the way I interviewed participants and analyzed data.

Sample and Recruitment

This study includes the responses of fourteen emerging adults enrolled at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont. Individuals who participated in this study met all of the following criteria: 1) full-time students at Bennington College; 2) at least eighteen years of age;

3) had completed one or more Field Work Term placements at a social services or nonprofit organization during their time as a student at Bennington College; 4) had an interest in human services as a field of study and/or possible career choice; 5) had a willingness to reflect on issues of identity formation, career choice, social responsibility, and the field work experience; and 6) agreed to participate in the study.

I recruited participants by contacting a staff member in the Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA) office at Bennington College for a list of students who had volunteered at a nonprofit agency during their college's Field Work Term. Then I emailed the list of students with an invitation to participate in my study (Appendix C). Since I actively selected the sample based on my study's needs, the study used a purposeful convenience sample (Engell and Schutt, 2013; Marshall, 1996). This method of sampling allowed me to find participants who were likely to provide insight and understanding about topics pertaining to my research question (Engell and Schutt, 2013).

I recognize that college students are privileged in ways that other emerging adults might not be. To be enrolled in an institution of higher learning is to have access to resources that not all emerging adults possess. For instance, earning a four-year college degree allows individuals with the credentials greater access to higher paying, professional occupations; a worker with his advanced degree is expected to earn as much as 2.1 million dollars more in his or her lifetime than a fellow worker without the degree (Bretz, 2012; Fletcher, 2013). While 79% of students born into the top income bracket gain bachelor's degrees, only 11% of students from bottom-quartile families graduate from four-year universities (Fisher, 2012). And the more selective the school is, the greater the disparity (Fisher, 2012; Fletcher, 2013); students at the top 468 colleges and universities in the United States benefit from increased amounts of spending and are far

more likely to graduate than students at other institutions (Fletcher, 2013). Furthermore, white students represent 75% of the student body population at the top 468 colleges across the United States (Fletcher, 2013); they benefit disproportionately. While not one of the 468 top colleges, Bennington College is a small private liberal arts school, and 80% of its student body is white.

I also recognize that restricting my sample to college students at a private, wealthy college limits generalizability to the greater population of emerging adults. However, the majority of emerging adults in the United States—over 65%—are enrolled in a college or university (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013) suggesting that studying college students is important when trying to understand the experiences of emerging adults. The statistics also demonstrate that college students are a privileged group in some aspects, but vary widely in racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic identities. Furthermore, the findings from this study can offer suggestions for future research pertaining to identity formation in the larger population of emerging adults. Exploratory qualitative exploration of identity work for college students is minimal and underdeveloped, and the social constructivist perspective offers an essential mode of analysis for understanding their unique experiences.

Data Collection

Students who met all selection criteria were emailed a consent form that further described the nature of the study, the risks and benefits of participation, and the guidelines the study followed to ensure their confidentiality (Appendix B). At the beginning of each interview I discussed informed consent in detail with each participant, which he or she then signed. I used an audio recorder to tape each interview and showed the device to each participant as I reviewed informed consent.

Participants met for the interviews in a private, confidential office space located on Bennington College campus in Bennington, VT. Interviews were in-person, semi-structured, and between sixty to ninety minutes in length. They were semi-structured in order to provide general guidance without constraining the participants' ability to speak freely about experiences that felt relevant to the project topic (Engel & Schutt, 2013). My goal was to stay mindful of my effect on the participants' responses, gently guiding the process without being too directive. To do this, I created a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix E), while also coming to each interview with a willingness to follow the participant's lead. That is, I asked my interview questions but remained open to exploring any content that felt relevant to the participant as it related to identity formation, career choice, social responsibility, and service learning.

My interview guide began with a few questions to collect demographic data, such as age, year in college, gender identity, and intended major. While this data was not analyzed in any formal way, it allowed me to report on the diversity of the sample, and to stay aware of potential trends that could provoke new questions and future research areas. My qualitative questions can be broken down into the following themes: Self-reflection on the identity formation process before arriving at Bennington College (i.e. Coming into Bennington, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do as a career? Has that changed at all?); Field Work Term (FWT) experience (i.e. How did you choose your nonprofit placement? Were there any moments during your service experience that felt particularly transformative? If so, how?); Social responsibility (i.e. What does it mean to you to be socially responsible? Do you think that your idea of social responsibility changed as a result of your service learning experience?); Identity formation (i.e. How do you understand different aspects of your social identity?).

Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded for themes that pertained to my research question. Both qualitative and social constructivist theory hold that values-free inquiry is impossible, so I sought to be reflexive by acknowledging my own biases (Engels and Schutt, 2013). In order to increase the study's validity I triangulated my analysis through peer debriefing (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). For example, I had two graduate colleagues and my advisor (a doctoral candidate) review the transcripts and my coding process to ensure that the study made sense and that my interpretations of the data were plausible, accurate, and minimally biased. Reliability was also strengthened by peer review of the interview guide (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Engels & Schutt, 2013). Furthermore, the entire data collection and analysis endeavor was guided by an iterative process in which I was continuously thinking, reflecting, and reconsidering all elements of the research process in order to minimize researcher bias and the projection of my own understanding onto participant's experiences (Stake, 1995 as referenced by Engel & Schutt, 2013). Finally, I collected a detailed record of my thesis process and materials to create an audit trail.

Ethics and Safeguards

To eliminate the risk of coercion or dual relationships, I did not interview any students whom I had seen or was currently seeing for individual therapy at Bennington College. To protect the confidentiality of study participants, I stored the names and identifying information of participants separately from transcribed data. Furthermore, the transcribed data was labeled with pseudonyms. I also kept informed consent forms, audio recordings of the interviews, transcribed data, and any other notes or material related to the study participants in a locked file in accordance with federal regulations.

Regarding risk of participation, individuals were warned that they might experience emotional reactions to being asked personal questions about identity formation, social responsibility, and service learning. To minimize this risk, participants were informed beforehand that they could pass or decline to answer any question asked. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to ask for breaks if they felt overwhelmed, upset, or uncomfortable in any way. I also paid attention to participants' affect and body language, and checked in throughout the interview if I notice a shift in presentation that seemed to signify discomfort. Finally, I offered participants a referral to the campus psychological services center in case they had interest in following up with a therapist after their interview. Participants were notified of the potential benefits of participation, which included the following: a chance to reflect on their service learning experience, an opportunity to create meaning from their experience, and the possibility of further integrating their own sense of identity. Namely, they might learn about themselves in the process of interviewing.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is derived from the phenomenological tradition, which emphasizes the subjectivity of the data and the analytic process (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). Social constructivist theory rejects an objective truth, and instead prioritizes a meaning-making process that is rooted in social context (DeSocio, 2005). Both the phenomenological tradition of qualitative analysis and the social constructivist approach were influential in my philosophical approach to analyzing this study's data. I utilized an inductive approach that was guided by the tenants of thematic analysis as I sought to identify patterns in the data (Engels and Schutt, 2013). In addition, I entered data analysis with my research question in mind yet remained open to the possibility of the data presenting new patterns that I had not considered. The openness of this

exploratory process invited themes to emerge from the data itself instead of in response to a specific hypothesis (Engels & Schutt, 2013).

I began my analysis by reading through each transcription in full. I then re-read each interview and coded for words, phrases, or sections of text that seemed meaningful or relevant to my research question. Next I developed a codebook that defined, delineated, and itemized my themes, which I used to code and identify patterns across all interviews. Finally, I developed four main themes around which to organize my findings; these will be outlined in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore the research question: How does service learning experience impact identity formation and social responsibility for college students in emerging adulthood? There are few qualitative studies that explore the individual experiences of students who participate in service learning. This study seeks to contribute to that gap by delving into the subjective experience of social responsibility and identity formation in college students who have volunteered in a nonprofit organization.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of volunteering at a nonprofit or social service site during their college's six-week winter break, or "Field Work Term." The daily responsibilities of each participant varied from site to site. Students described doing administrative work, street outreach, direct services with children and adults, art installation, teaching, video editing, curating, environmental awareness programming, interviewing clergy, playing or teaching music, caring for wildlife, and mentoring youth.

Four key themes emerged across the interviews: 1. Identity development through idealization and devaluation of people at one's service site; 2. Development of identity continuity and integration through the experience of transitioning between college environment and off-campus service site; 3. Professional identity development; 4. Refinement of individual and collective social responsibility in response to social issues. The following chapter presents the data collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews with fourteen college students. Demographic information was collected from participants pertaining to their racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, and age.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The study was comprised of thirteen students from a small liberal arts college in the northeast. The participants ranged in age from 18-25 years old. Ten of the students identified as White, one as Black and Latina, one as Latino, and one as Middle Eastern. Ten participants identified as female and three participants identified as male.

While the focus of this study is on the impact of service learning experience during college, it is notable that every participant cited one or more influences in life before college that impacted the development of his or her sense of self and understanding of social responsibility. The influences repeatedly mentioned include: family background, exposure to hardship, prior volunteer experience, socioeconomic status, religion, and educational experiences. Each participant encountered a unique combination of these and other environmental factors.

In addition to external influences, most participants also identified an intrinsic sense of social responsibility and sense of self that was “already there” without any environmental stimulus. One participant gave a clear example of this idea: “I guess I’ve just been naturally interested in those things my whole life. I was always reading books and asking questions that you know, my parents couldn’t answer, driving them insane. Of course my background shaped me, but um...it was definitely in me too, and it would have manifested itself regardless.” This study seeks to focus specifically on the impact of service learning experience on identity development processes while acknowledging the variety of co-existing external and internal forces that also shape one’s sense of self and worldview.

1. Identity development through idealization and devaluation of people at the service site

Participants’ identity development processes were affected by the service learning environment. Specifically, most participants described being impacted in some way by staff,

supervisors, clients, and interns in the workplace. Some participants had negative interactions with colleagues, and devalued certain aspects of the person in order to identify in opposition to the devalued trait. Alternatively, the majority of participants described feeling inspired by interactions with people at their service learning sites. Within this sense of feeling “inspired,” participants idealized aspects of their colleagues and ultimately felt positively about the chance to encounter people doing service jobs with a high level of dedication, steadfastness, and collaboration. Participants were also impacted by the contentment they witnessed in their colleagues.

A. Idealization of colleagues

“I felt really impressed by them all the time”

Participants commonly expressed feeling impressed by colleagues’ dedication, particularly their “commitment.” For instance, one participant reported that many of the staff members at her agency were “incredibly dedicated,” calling their devotion to the organization “inspiring.” Another participant described co-workers who were unwavering in their effort to do “the absolute best they could with what they had” despite the difficulty of the work. She elaborated, “It’s a hard job, so it’s not like it’s easy to just keep going...but to me it was, these people are doing this because they feel that it’s important work.” This same participant also described her co-workers as “compassionate” and “going above and beyond for the people they worked with.” Similarly, another participant was impressed with the steadfastness of her co-workers during long days at the organization, stating that she was “really impressed” with their “patience and commitment” to the people they served.

In addition to feeling impressed by individual traits, participants also noticed positive interactions among colleagues. For example, one participant was struck by the collaboration

between co-workers in her agency. She reported that it was the “friendliest office” she had ever worked in because people were “very comfortable walking around the office, collaborating.” She went on to say that all of the staff at her agency were “very accommodating and nice.” A different participant vividly described the way his colleagues “banded together” to “re-create the organization” in an effort to stave off bankruptcy. This was his first internship in a nonprofit setting, and also the first time he had seen this kind of collaboration and effort among staff members. He summarized, “you know, a lot of us might be skeptical of nonprofits, but it was great to see people who really care, trying to do their best.” This suggests a sense of unexpected admiration of the staff members at the nonprofit agency.

Many students also observed contentment in their co-workers and supervisors; contact with adults in the field who seemed happy in their work assured some students that they too could be professionally content in the nonprofit world. For instance, seeing his co-workers balance career, family, and personal passions allowed one participant to believe that career success and personal happiness are not mutually exclusive. He was impressed with his supervisors’ competence and fulfillment; he went on, “They seemed like they were actually content with their jobs and their lives.” Furthermore, witnessing their contentment allowed this student to imagine himself in his supervisors’ place someday. In his words, “I was like okay, cool, that’s more what I would want to do. And to realize that was pretty nice.” A different participant described being impacted by the sense of joy she encountered in her co-workers. She exclaimed, “All of them just had this inherent joy; I’ve never encountered a single population that was so happy.” When asked how their joy impacted her, she responded, “I wanted to join them! They had no regrets.” A third participant described her supervisor’s commitment to the nonprofit agency as well as her graduate studies. The participant went on to say that “seeing her

dedication was really meaningful and inspiring” and reported that her supervisor gave her “hope” that one she could “live like this and do this work too.”

When asked about the effect of these positive interactions with colleagues on participants, many reported feeling inspired to embody these characteristics and influence others in similar ways. For instance, one participant was moved by the motivation of his co-workers and invigorated to respond with enthusiasm of his own. He noticed that his supervisors had “conviction”, which made for a “really nice environment.” He went on to say that being in a room full of people who are “very motivated and really care, so committed and friendly and happy to be there” was very exciting, and he couldn’t help but remark to himself, “Wow, these people are here and they’re setting a good example, so I should try to do that too.” A different participant was compelled to be “as willing as possible” to do “whatever [they] needed, whatever I could do that would help”. He went on, “Their excitement for the cause was contagious...it made me realize that there is pride in this work...Now I know I’d be fine working for a nonprofit. I really like the idea of giving back.” This finding suggests that exposure to positive, motivated staff members in the nonprofit field encouraged participants to emulate the same traits.

Students were also impacted by their interactions with clients. One participant emphasized how “rewarding” it was to be “appreciated” by clients for “whatever little help I could offer.” She went on to say that the fulfillment she experienced in her work inspired her to find “other ways to keep giving back.” Another participant recalled the appreciation and motivation he felt when doing street outreach: “What was inspiring about it was the willingness of people to do something. They were aware, to some degree, of the power they had if they organized and did something, they didn’t have to take it lying down, so to speak. They were

willing to take initiative and respond.” Multiple participants reported similarly, suggesting that students were inspired by the people they met during their service learning experiences.

B. Devaluation of people at the service site

“I thought they were dangerously close-minded”

Some participants reported negative encounters with people at their service sites. For instance, a few of the same participants who reported their older colleagues inspired them also stated their fellow interns annoyed them. One student bluntly asserted, “I thought all the other interns were dumb, or not very serious.” He was especially frustrated at their “dangerous, close-minded” thinking, and identified in contrast to them. Specifically, after describing why their thinking was detrimental, he elaborated on his own open-mindedness and the value he places on being connected to multiple disciplines, in an effort to not be “so disheartening” as they were. By disheartening, he seemed to mean that he was disappointed by their lack of interest in considering new ideas; he had “expected more” from his college-aged peers. Another student reported that her staff was “not as open to critique as they thought they were” because they “thought they were doing better than every other nonprofit in the city.” This student found their lack of openness to feedback to be unhelpful to the agency as a whole. A different participant who worked with a religious organization devalued the “religious right” and made sure to emphasize that her own co-workers were not associated with the “kind of religion that harms instead of helps.” In all of these examples there seems to be a devaluation of a characteristic and an identification of the participant’s difference in response to the devalued aspect.

There were also a small number of participants who recalled seeing their co-workers as imperfect. Interestingly, the participants who had negative things to say about co-workers seemed to blame the nature of the nonprofit environment, not the individual worker. For

example, one student accounted for her co-worker's apathy by attributing it to the demanding workplace: "I was really surprised by how like, overworked everyone was...I think the teachers and staff were definitely burnt out, and I remember one of them just being like this job takes a toll on my body all the time." Despite this experience, the same student still managed to be impressed with her co-workers. She went on to say: "It's interesting because she was full time staff and she was really good, and like I admired the way she worked with the kids. So it was just upsetting to hear, I guess how exhausting the work was and how that affected her ability to function, and her health too."

2. Development of identity continuity and integration when transitioning between college campus to the service site

"People were so different from my college"

An apparent theme throughout the interviews was a stronger identification with one's college while out in the "field". Many students reported surprise at how different the "real-world" was from their college setting and the need to adjust accordingly. Multiple students reported missing the open-minded setting of their college environment.

One student contrasted her frustration with close-minded fellow interns at her service site to her experience of acceptance at her college; she was surprised by "how different people are, from [my college]." She went on to describe her college as "all accepting...of every facet of life, no matter your sexuality, your gender identity, your race..." In contrast to her college experience, she viewed her fellow interns from different colleges as "so unknowingly racist, or homophobic, things like that. And it's not like they were intentionally against these people, it was just kind of like, ingrained in them, because in general everyone there was white, middle

class, heterosexual, college graduates.” This student also identified as white, middle class, and heterosexual. Another student said:

I was working in really isolated parts of [state in the northeast] and they just, I don’t know, they had very differing views from me. And I just witnessed a lot of racism, a lot of homophobia, I think that’s, that was kind of what was tricky, because especially in my 2nd [service learning experience], I had forgotten that people could be so inappropriate, you know like say things that you just cannot even fathom saying [here at my college].

This student’s comment suggests that she is identifying as a tolerant, accepting, and politically correct person in contrast with the people she interacted with during her service experience. Specifically, she is identifying herself in alignment with values that she associates with her college community and in contrast to values she saw in people within her service learning community. Exposure to different worldviews in her service learning community seemed to allow this participant to further integrate her own chosen values and sense of self.

While some students were shocked at the close-mindedness they encountered during their service learning internships, other students found the real world experience a refreshing change from the isolation of their college. For instance, one participant articulated: “Because you know, you can get disconnected, we are literally on a hill, you know, a little bubble, and like at times last term, I felt a little bit disconnected.” Similarly, another student (who identifies as white and middle class) reported that her college is “it’s own bubble” with “only white people and like, middle to upper class” and is therefore “pretty unrealistic, like not a good example of most society.” She found transition between college and the service learning experience to be “interesting” because it allowed for exposure to diversity. Other students emphasized the personal growth they experienced from living independently for the first time ever. For example,

one student exclaimed, “Yeah, it was the first time I was paying my own rent, buying my own food, and I felt like it was the experience that I wanted, worked for, earned, so that was really empowering, and it makes me feel like I can do this, I got this, like okay!” Living on her own allowed this student to “try out” her newfound independence and continue her identity development process in a different setting.

Many participants found themselves identifying with their college more than ever before once they were engaged in off-campus service communities. For example, one participant reported that her college is specifically known for being unique and engaged, which she appreciated even more during her service experience: “When I got discouraged I had to remind myself that I am a [specific college] student, and we are very unique.” She went on to say that visiting professors always say that students from her college are “more creative, yeah, and like we always get really interested in material, interested in learning, we’re very intellectual.” Another student stated that his supervisors found students from the student’s college to be particularly open-minded and willing to “think outside the box.” And furthermore, he found himself feeling fonder and prouder of his college than he did before his service experience: “Everywhere I went, I was thinking like man, I go to [my specific college]! Does this feel like a thing someone from [my college] would do? I am a [specific college] student! Just in my head, you know...it was kind of fun to be a real college student and be identifying with my college and everything. That was cool.” Again, this participant seems to be identifying with values he associates with his college community and may even be using his college as a “transitional object” with which to explore himself in relation to the world.

3. Development of identity through reflection on professional goals

“I’ve been trying to figure out whether I’m meant for this kind of work”

Many participants highlighted their gratitude for space to reflect on their own professional identity during their service learning experience. One participant found it “helpful and challenging” to experience working in the nonprofit field because she had been “trying to figure out whether or not I am meant for this kind of work.” Most students who had already been considering a career in the service field felt affirmed in their career interest. The two students who had never worked in the nonprofit setting felt inspired by the “meaningfulness” of their service learning experiences and “more open” to considering a career in a nonprofit setting.

A. Participants who had a prior desire to work in the nonprofit reported a confirmation of their desire to work in a nonprofit setting

Most students had considered working in the nonprofit field before their service learning experience, and many had taken classes relating to psychology, social work, political science, and community action. These students all reported that their service learning experience reaffirmed their chosen area of study and future career goals. For example, one participant noted that service learning experience “really shaped my identity, I guess, in the sense of where my role is and how I can fit in with a job that works with this certain population.” Another participant recalled feeling excited that she enjoyed the work as much as she did, and eager to be involved in direct service in the future. She exclaimed, “It gave me an opportunity to experience excitement while working, and the excitement made me feel like, ‘Yes, this is what I want to do!’”

B. Participants who had no prior interest in working for a nonprofit increased their consideration of a career in social services

Two students who had planned to study and/or work in a non-service career found themselves reconsidering their future aspirations. For instance, one participant stated that her service experience led to the “personal realization” that she is not “meant to work in an office” but instead needs “to admit to [myself] that I want to be in the classroom. Even though it does not pay as well, I have always enjoyed the work more and need to be working directly with kids.”

A second participant had volunteered for three consecutive years in architect firms and only decided to “try out” the nonprofit opportunity during his senior year because he thought it would “spice up” his resume. He entered the service learning experience with “zero expectations” and was surprised to discover that he “actually felt fulfilled” by his work in the nonprofit arts organization. Furthermore, he realized that he could “find pride in any job” and “would be fine working for a nonprofit, because I like the idea of giving back and I found meaning in this sort of job. You know? It was rewarding.” The same participant summarized, “...there has definitely been a shift in my professional trajectory. I’m not sure if I’ll go back to architecture. Or if I do, it will be with a different understanding of how to give back in a more systemic way, and to find how to make it meaningful.” His service learning experience offered him the chance to experience fulfilling work through giving to others, and he will take that experience into whatever career he chooses to pursue.

4. Refinement of individual and collective social responsibility to respond to social issues.

Participants were asked to define social responsibility and then reflect on how their service learning experience had impacted this understanding, if at all. In terms of impact, many

participants described developing deeper and/or more nuanced understanding of social responsibility as a result of putting their values and ideas into practice. Even participants who initially denied that service learning experience impacted their sense of social responsibility still demonstrated a more complex and thoughtful understanding of their individual accountability in response to social issues they encountered while serving.

A. Understanding of social responsibility

Participants were asked to describe their understanding of what it means to be a socially responsible citizen. In general, most participants believed that every citizen is accountable to be engaged in the world around them and aware of the social impact of their actions. Within this general understanding, each participant had a unique perspective on the specifics of social responsibility. For instance, some participants felt that all people are responsible in the same way, while others emphasized the subjectivity of the concept of social responsibility.

Some participants asserted that being a socially responsible person must include a willingness help to those in need. For instance, one participant described the importance of advocating for those who experience injustice: “I think it’s making sure that people aren’t in situations that they have no control over, like poverty for example. It’s advocating for people who are oppressed in some way...because everything deserves to be nurtured and have a chance to thrive.” Other participants believed that social responsibility is something every citizen should have regardless of their career; as one participant clarified, “Everyone needs to be socially responsible, whether they work in social services or not”. She went on to say that social responsibility is a “general understanding of how to treat people in any context”. Another participant felt similarly, stating that everyone should be an “active, aware citizen” because “we’re always doing something that has repercussions on the social sphere.” A different

participant emphasized that each individual has some responsibility to do her part to create a healthier society for everyone: “I think that everyone has some kind of responsibility to interact with members of their community and help change people for the better... to create a healthier community and society, an accepting society, and somewhere where everyone can live up to their potential.” And finally, multiple students emphasized that social responsibility can take place on the individual level. One student summed it up quite clearly: “So I think some see social responsibility now as this big, crazy, intimidating thing, which I think a lot of people do because they don’t think they can control the bigger world around them, but I think it’s not such a huge feat. It just starts with one person, one thing, even if you just affect like a handful of people, like it counts.”

There were other students who admitted to feeling conflicted about whether or not every person has the same sort of responsibility to society. For instance, one student acknowledged the difficulty in answering the question and then went on to say that he felt more socially responsible before he knew about “how big and complex” those “social issues” really are. Understanding the structural nature of issues actually resulted in him being less motivated to try and change society for the better. Furthermore, he feels that there’s not always a clear “right” thing to do that will benefit everyone equally, and therefore one should “always think about if the right thing is the thing that benefits me or benefits others.” When asked if he felt responsibility towards issues that are important to him personally, such as the environment, he noted that he “loves the environment” but also loves “eating meat, smoking cigarettes, and you know, doing things that are not so great for the environment. I’m always going to be for it, like let’s save the forests and stuff, but I’m not going to be into that uptight hippie thing either.” In his case, social

responsibility was something to be grappled with, and ultimately involved an assessment of what is good for him as well as others.

Another student differed in her definition of the complicated aspects of social responsibility. She had spent her service learning term working with a nonprofit foster care organization, and she felt that social responsibility should be more about people feeling responsible for others in their community instead of relying on the government to respond to social issues. She stated, “I really struggle with this universal idea that you should help people, and the government should help people.” She went on, “I do think you have social responsibility when you witness abuse or neglect, a responsibility to speak up.” However, she felt that more than just speaking up, individuals should feel personally compelled to respond, to “enter socially, in your own community, and be part of the solution.” She also highlighted the emotional component that compels people to respond to injustice: “I think anyone who is going to stand up for something is going to *feel* that they need to stand up for it, not out of a sense of social responsibility... I feel that for a lot of big issues people are going to step up because of that gut feeling.”

Another student felt “we should all feel responsible for society’s issues on some level,” but went on to state that “if everyone [felt that responsibility], then we wouldn’t have these social issues to solve.” Furthermore, he believed that social responsibility was not something that could be reasoned or even mandated, but rather something that each person has to come to on their own: “it’s not the kind of thing you can exactly just lay out, like here’s a very well reasoned argument about why you shouldn’t do X, Y, and Z.” He concluded, “I feel responsible, and I know that people who share kind of responsibility can do a lot and they should be trying to spread that ethos of responsibility, where they can, um, but I understand that not everybody feels

like that, there are also structural forces going on too, you know.” Both of these participants seemed to feel that individuals must be personally compelled in order to respond to social issues; just rationally understanding an injustice is not enough to move someone to action.

Finally, another student felt that each person should help when they can and with whatever resources they could spare, but was adamant that it is not the same for everyone. She went on to say, “I think helping should be mandatory if you can. But...I think that calling it responsibility makes it seem like people have to do it and those that don’t are bad, and I don’t think that’s true. I think it’s kind of a moral thing, and if people don’t want to do it they don’t have to, but for me like I don’t need everything I have so why can’t I give it to someone who needs it, and it does not have to mean giving money or goods, I think time is extremely valuable too.” She seemed to feel that social responsibility is in part tied to morality, but is also connected to privilege and being generous with one’s resources.

One participant did not favor discussing social responsibility as a general term because she felt that the conversation should first be rooted in a specific culture: “I dislike discussion of [social responsibility] when it isn’t grounded somewhere...There’s value to all sorts of dialogue, for the most part, but to just discuss sexism, racism, all those things without, you know, I just can’t really conceptualize the “-isms” in one way.” She had spent four consecutive Field Work Terms volunteering in nonprofit organizations in different countries. This participant elaborated on her belief that thinking about one’s responsibility to society should be grounded in the local culture. She went on, “Rather than just saying ‘I want to address the issues!’ What issue, where, when, for whom? All of those. And how. I think that’s very important, the how. Rather than just the fact that you are addressing it.” This student had previously emphasized how her commitment to social justice began long before college, but then elaborated on how service

learning experience has deepened her understanding of the need for contextual solutions to social issues, because every issue is rooted in a larger cultural context. Her thoughtful response demonstrates the development of nuance and complexity in her understanding of what it means to be a socially responsible person.

B. Putting social responsibility values into practice

Many participants reported some sort of perspective shift in their sense of social responsibility, even if they had been conscious of their own social engagement before the service learning experience. One participant stated, “I was thinking of issues like that beforehand, but I ultimately realized that there’s no excuse not to care about those things.” Another student reflected that service learning experience was “a big opportunity to act on social responsibility”; she went on to explain that her understanding of social issues like racism, classism, and homophobia has been deepened in her studies at college, but only on the theoretical level: “so while we can learn and develop language and articulate and develop values here, it’s hard to act upon them. It’s easy to overanalyze, get a bit existentialist, so I feel like [service learning] is the opportunity to actualize your social responsibility.”

Other participants reported similar experiences, highlighting how volunteering allowed them to put their ideals into practice. For instance, one participant stated that “seeing [her] own social responsibility and values go into action” was “rewarding” because she was able to “physically adjust it and work with it.” Another student reported that studying political activism is different from participating in activism, and he found service learning a chance to put his values into action. He said, “You know, at school it can get tedious, or lack meaning, just arbitrary assignments, like what’s the point? So like, working at [the organization] was a way for me to actually put into action all these ideas that I had been studying, which was pretty cool.”

Across the board, participant responses demonstrated that volunteering directly with issues that they had been studying served to deepen their understanding of social issues and their commitment and sense of personal accountability to social engagement.

Conclusion

Key findings from this chapter offer insight into how emerging adult participants' identity development processes were impacted by their nonprofit volunteer experiences. Specifically, the findings suggests that service learning experience contributed to participants' identity cohesion and integration, deepened their sense of personal accountability to respond to social issues, and offered a chance to idealize and learn from mentors in the nonprofit field. Furthermore, participants also contemplated on their own personal, professional, and social identities. Analysis of the findings from this chapter, limitations of this study, and implications for social work will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This qualitative study sought to answer the following research question: How does service learning experience impact identity formation and social responsibility for college students in emerging adulthood? A qualitative approach allowed participants to tell their own stories and make meaning of their experiences, which is in line with this study's theoretical understanding of identity formation as fluid, ongoing, and incorporative of the meaning-making process. Overall, the findings from this study confirmed previous service learning and identity development research and offered new insight into the impact of service learning experience on emerging adults. Specifically, four key findings emerged in the data: 1) Identity development through idealization and devaluation of people at one's service site; 2) Development of identity continuity and integration through the experience of transitioning between college environment and off-campus service site; 3) Reflection on professional identity; and 4) Refinement of individual and collective social responsibility to respond to social issues. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in the context of current literature and describes their implications for future research and social work practice.

Key Findings

1. Identity development through idealization and devaluation of people at one's service site.

In my study of 14 college students, most reported being influenced by relationships with adults doing meaningful work in the service field. Numerous participants described idealizing

colleagues at their agencies. For instance, when recounting their interactions with supervisors, several participants recalled a positive connection and a desire to emulate. This finding is consistent with the identity development literature, particularly the suggestion that emerging adults develop identity through idealizing role models (Arnett, 2006; Brogan, Corral, Liang, & Spencer, 2008). At the same time, it is a new finding within the service learning literature, and suggests that service learning research might be benefited by a deeper understanding of emerging adult identity developmental processes.

The emerging adult literature suggests that professional identity formation processes occur in the matrix of relational interactions (Flum & Porton, 1995). That is, individuals develop in a social and relational context and their identity formation and exploration processes are impacted by interpersonal relationships. Recent literature on neurobiology and attachment suggests that biological developmental processes are impacted by primary caregivers' interactions with infants (Applegate & Shapiro, 2005; Schore & Shore, 2008). Furthermore, neurobiological studies suggest that humans continue to develop identity in an intersubjective relational processes throughout the lifespan (Shore & Shore, 2008).

The emerging adults in this study seemed to strengthen their sense of self by internalizing the behavior and values of positive role models at their agencies. That is, through the idealization process, participants were able to identify with the “good” parts of their supervisors; students saw in others what they hoped to embody themselves. This finding is consistent with Zuccherò's (2011) qualitative study on the impact of intergenerational service learning experience on adolescent volunteers. Over one-third of the participants in his study reported being inspired or positively influenced by an adult at the service site (Zuccherò, 2011).

The pattern of idealization among participants also resonates with self-psychology identity development literature, which suggests that emerging adults need their positive attributes to be mirrored by idealized role models (Flanagan, 2011). In other words, emerging adults learn about themselves by studying their own image through the eyes of others (Flum & Porton, 1995). This gentle, empathic reflection of their mirrored idealized selves allows students a chance to turn inward and consider their identities. In addition to seeing positive aspects of themselves mirrored back, students also saw their aspirations being lived out by their supervisors, as evidenced by their statements about imagining themselves on similar career paths. For instance, one participant declared: “I was like okay, cool, that’s more what I would want to do. And to realize that was pretty nice.” Kohut, as summarized by Flum & Porton (1995), described the idealized role model as a “template” for the emerging adult’s ambitions and ideals. The results of my study seem to indicate that through service learning experience, participants were granted access to adult role models to idealize and emulate.

Participants also described feeling valued, appreciated, and cared for by their supervisors and colleagues, which might be another aspect of the “mirroring” that is so important to emerging adult identity development. Specifically, this finding suggests that the staff members positively influenced participants by offering attention, gratitude, and concern. This finding has implications for social work supervisors who train emerging adult interns and for volunteer coordinators in nonprofit agency settings. Positive supervisory relationships are more likely to occur when the supervisor offers the student encouragement, space to explore individual and occupational development, and acceptance during the process (Bradley & Ladany, 2000). The implications for social workers are clear: interns and volunteers are watching us, and our

reactions matter. As supervisors and social workers in nonprofit settings, we have a direct impact on emerging adults' sense of self and development of values.

In addition to idealizing their co-workers, some participants also reported devaluing colleagues or traits that colleagues embodied. This resonates with the phenomenon of devaluation in the face of regression that is prevalent in self-psychology literature (Flanagan, 2011). Some suggest that the devaluation process is necessary to maintain newly minted identities (Flum & Porton, 1995). Students who are still in the process of forming a stable sense of self might feel threatened when exposed to difference, especially if that difference is not in line with how the student wishes to be seen and known. Understanding the role of anxious regression might explain why some participants described devaluing the traits in others that they did not want to identify in themselves. That is, if students were threatened by difference in the supervisors they idealized, they may have devalued traits in order to distance themselves from the disavowed parts.

Interestingly, when co-workers and supervisors fell short of participants' expectations, participants either expressed distress or used context to understand the others' actions. This could suggest that the simultaneously occurring idealization processes were strong enough to hold the complexity of devalued traits. The idealization and devaluation processes that participants reported are key factors in the identity development processes experienced by emerging adults during service learning. Furthermore, it seems that a marker of emerging adulthood development might be the ability to tolerate the complexity of idealization alongside an integration of the idealized person's flaws. My study suggests that service learning seemed to help emerging adults develop this capacity for integration, which would be an interesting area for further study.

2. Development of identity continuity and integration through the experience of transitioning between college environment and off-campus service site.

The process of transitioning between the college environment and the service learning site allowed participants the opportunity to practice maintaining coherent identities across settings. This resonates with the literature on emerging adulthood, which suggests that if emerging adults are to make lasting life commitments, they must first progress through the psychological task of developing an integrated sense of self that can guide and sustain their commitments (Arnett, Cote, & Schwartz, 2005; Gerstaecker, 2009). Part of navigating the task of identity development and integration involves clarifying consistent individual values across different settings. It seems that service learning is part of the “psychosocial moratorium” in which emerging adults can explore potential identity formations without the pressure of deciding immediately (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) emphasized the importance of enhancing ego capacities by navigating environments and maintaining a stable sense of self throughout; he described this as developing a consistent sense of self through transition. Participants in this study described a similar process, noting their awareness of themselves in new environments and their sense of identity shifting accordingly. As emerging adults develop a more integrated identity, they increasingly show the same self to others in their social environment (Arnett, 2006).

Seider (2007) suggested that when emerging adults in college experience independence from family of origin, they have the opportunity to think critically about their value systems in comparison with what they observe in their surroundings. However, findings from this study suggest that students may further maintain a cohesive sense of self by strongly identifying with their college. For example, one student found himself wanting to relate to his service learning

experience through the lens of his particular college: “Everywhere I went, I was thinking, like, ‘Man, I go to [my specific college]! Does this feel like a thing someone from [my college] would do? I am a [specific college] student!’ Just in my head, you know...it was kind of fun to be a real college student and be identifying with my college and everything. That was cool.” This could be an example of an emerging adult using his college as a soothing transitional phenomenon, a safe base from which to explore the world and his place in it (Berzoff, 2011). As an individual connected with an institution, this participant was able to safely explore and make sense of the service learning experience environment. This may also suggest that the impact of college experience on one’s identity cannot be fully actualized until one is in a new environment.

One way that participants identified with their college was by connecting more with their college’s values and practices during their service learning than they did while at college, stating that they did not realize how “open-minded” or “unique” their college was until they were at their service learning agencies. For example, one participant reported that her college is specifically known for being unique and engaged, which she appreciated even more during her service experience: “When I got discouraged I had to remind myself that I am a [specific college] student, and we are very unique.” This is another example of a student being “soothed” by her identification with a larger institution that reflects her values and ideal self.

Furthermore, this finding of identity development and integration through the transition between the academic and service learning environments also resonates with service learning literature that suggests understanding of theory is deepened through practice (Blieszner & Artale, 2001 as summarized by Zuccherro, 2011). Schon (1983, 1989) asserts that knowledge of practice only emerges through “iterative application of knowledge in context, with much experimentation, trial, error, and invention” (Schon, 1983 as summarized by Fairfield, 2010).

Many participants reported a deepening of their social justice values and an actualization of those values when putting them in practice at service sites. Putting values into practice allowed for identity integration and cohesion. This is consistent with the service learning literature, suggesting that students who serve and reflect on service are more solidified in their individual and social identity than those who do not (Zuccherro, 2011).

3. Reflection on professional identity.

In this study, participants reported that service learning experience offered space and material for reflection on their own occupational identities. This finding resonates with literature that suggests the practice of professional goals can lead to solidification of commitment to a chosen career. For instance, Eyler and Giles (1999), as quoted by Johnson (2012), found that "service learning strengthened the service orientation of students who were already interested in careers of service" (p. 38). Professional identity refers to one's conscious awareness of being a worker; establishing a positive and integrated understanding of one's own professional identity is an important factor in psychosocial well being (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Literature suggests that students become more focused in college on developing a sense of future career goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Service learning literature also proposes that volunteer experience seems to influence certain aspects of identity, especially occupational exploration (Johnson, 2012).

Students reported that during their volunteer experience they were able to think about their own professional aspirations. Students who had desired a job in the nonprofit world found themselves transformed from imagining to experiencing. Alternatively, students who did not intend to work in the nonprofit setting were nonetheless surprised at the sense of fulfillment and

meaning they found in their service learning experience. This suggests that service learning experiences are beneficial for many students regardless of their career aspirations.

4. Refinement of individual and collective accountability to respond to social issues.

The most striking finding with implications for social work is the enhanced sense of connection and commitment to social responsibility in students who engaged in service learning experiences. This is consistent with literature that suggests a connection between service learning experience and increased social responsibility. Specifically, service learning offers students a chance to learn by doing, and in that process, to critically reflect on societal processes (Gannon & MacNeela, 2014). This finding is also consistent with the service learning literature, which suggests that service experience during college is linked with increased civic engagement (Brown, 2011; Chesbrough, 2011; Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). Service learning is also beneficial for society at large; research suggests that students who participate in service learning often experience a decrease in prejudice, increased knowledge of poverty and inequalities, and an increased chance of serving again in the next twelve months (Chesbrough, 2001; Hughes et al, 2012).

Limitations

Although this study's findings offer insight into the subjective experiences of college-age emerging adults, some limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. One limitation is the small and relatively homogeneous sample. Convenience sampling from a single private liberal arts college inevitably led to the recruitment of multiple students with similar characteristics and demographics. However, in accordance with this study's guiding social constructionist theory—namely, that each person has a unique and subjective experience to share—no two interviews were exactly alike, and participants from the same community had distinctly different service

learning experiences. Still, a more diverse and larger sample could provide greater generalizability and further insight into the impact of service learning experiences on emerging adults.

Another limitation was sampling based on responses; the students who replied to the recruitment email might be more likely to have qualities of initiative, helpfulness, and reflectiveness on issues of identity and social responsibility. Or, students who had a positive service learning experience might have been more willing to participate and discuss their experience than those who had negative service learning encounters. Furthermore, the research interviews occurred after the participants returned from their service learning experiences and therefore it is difficult to assess whether the changes took place during the service learning experiences or before. Said a different way, future research might utilize a pre- and post-interview process to assess changes over time, and to identify other possible causes and influences on the perceived changes. Finally, this study's design was inductive and depended on the subjectivity of the researcher and could have been strengthened by a second researcher. As mentioned in the third chapter, three other social work researchers coded sections of the data and compared these codes to improve inter-rater reliability and trustworthiness.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Most codes of ethics are detailed guidelines for professional practice, but the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics merges professional with personal value systems for how to work and live in society. Included in these values are commitments to social justice, the dignity and worth of every person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2014). While the service learning experiences of participants in this study were not directly associated with social work education and practice, this study's findings

highlight that a focus on service learning in emerging adulthood could be very valuable for consideration in social work education. Specifically, service learning experience offers emerging adults the chance to form meaningful human relationships, enhance commitments to social responsibility and social justice, engage with diverse populations, and develop integrity and competence as students, professionals, and human beings.

Also, emerging adults who participate in service learning encounter social workers at their volunteer sites, and it is our responsibility as social workers to “contribute time and professional expertise” to the “promotion of the social work profession and values” (NASW, 2014). Social workers frequently engage with or directly supervise emerging adult volunteers from local college, and graduate social work students during their fieldwork placements. The findings from this study suggest that supervisors have an impact on emerging adults and their development. As social workers compelled by individual and professional values, an awareness of the impact of service learning on emerging adults directly impacts the ways we think about, supervise, and train emerging adults in our clinical settings, whether they are service learning volunteers or future social workers.

Furthermore, this study is relevant for therapists who work clinically with emerging adults and college-aged clients. Emerging adulthood is a time of change, exploration, and growth. For social workers who engage with the emerging adult population, these findings provide an understanding of the unique developmental processes that emerging adult clients may be experiencing as they navigate professional and educational settings. An understanding of emerging adult processes can help clinical social workers to anticipate and competently respond to the experiences their clients have in volunteer experiences and clinical training internships.

Implications for Future Research

This study and the literature on service learning all point to a vital and under-researched question about how service learning in emerging adulthood operates in similar or divergent ways within different sociocultural groups and identities. Research suggests that women are more likely to engage in service learning activities than men (Astin & Sax, 1998; Chapman & Morley, 1998; Ender, 2000 as summarized by Johnson, 2012), white students are more likely to serve than students of color (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2006 as summarized by Johnson, 2012), and students from middle or upper class backgrounds are more likely to serve than students from lower-middle or lower class backgrounds (Johnson, 2012, Seider, 2007). This study's participants echo the literature; every participant in this study associated with at least two (and often more) privileged identities. This bias in the literature suggests a need for more qualitative studies with diverse populations of emerging adults from varying racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, further research into the reasons or barriers that keep students from less privileged sociocultural identities from engaging in service learning experience could offer insight into this issue.

In addition to an empirical outcome that supports the argument for incorporating service learning components in undergraduate and graduate studies, there are also values-based reasons for making this an integral part of higher education. By understanding and supporting the impact of service learning experiences on emerging adults, we can acknowledge an interdisciplinary dialogue about the fostering of shared values and a commitment to social justice that expands beyond the social work field. Furthermore, encouraging activities that foster the development of social consciousness, especially in those individuals who occupy one or more identities associated with privileged status, will generate self-awareness as well as an understanding of

privilege and oppression (Seider, 2007). By supporting students in developing a broader exposure to inequalities and a commitment to service, social work educators, supervisors, and clinicians can increase the number of socially conscious young adults who are entering the work force (Seider, 2007).

Conclusion

As discussed above, this study found that students who engage in service learning often benefit from the experience in several ways, including the development of greater identity cohesion, connection with role models in the field, reflection on occupational identity, and acquisition of professional skills. Exposure to supervisors who are inspiring allows students to identify with positive attributes and connect to a sense of meaning in the service setting. Furthermore, exposure to the negative sides of the nonprofit field allows emerging adults to integrate the good and the bad, and possibly offers a model for integrating the different parts of themselves as well—capacities which may also be key to emerging adulthood development itself. Transitioning between college and service sites offers students the chance to solidify values and maintain a cohesive sense of self. Practicing values through volunteering provides students space to integrate theory and practice and to actualize their sense of social responsibility. Furthermore, the lived experience of joining an affirming team and engaging in meaningful work is crucial to catalyzing a commitment to change and social awareness in adulthood.

Service learning experience allows college students in emerging adulthood to reflect on their own identity process and sense of social responsibility. Specifically, it allows them the chance to develop into more thoughtful, sensitive, and socially aware human beings. Whether or

not they go into the field of social work, emerging adults will likely be deeply impacted by their experiences of nonprofit volunteering, an impact which will be evident in their future endeavors.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

How participant came to Service Learning:

1. What factors, relationships, and/or experiences affected your decision about what you wanted to study at Bennington?
2. Coming into Bennington, did you have any idea what you want to do as a career? Has that changed at all?

Service Learning:

3. How did you choose your Field Work Term?
4. Why did you decide to work in a nonprofit agency?
5. Have you heard of the term “service learning”? What does it mean to you? Is service learning important? If so, how?
6. Did your service learning experience at Bennington impact you in any way? If so, how?
7. What did you learn during your service learning experience?
8. How did your understanding of yourself shift during FWT?
9. Were there any moments during your service experience that felt particularly transformative? If so, how?

Social Responsibility:

10. What does it mean to you to be socially responsible? Do you think that your idea of social responsibility changed as a result of your service learning?
11. Do you have a particular political point of view? How do you think that has been informed? How does this impact your sense of social responsibility? Are there certain issues and causes about which you feel strongly? Tell me about them.
12. How did your understanding of privilege and oppression shift, if at all? How will this experience impact your thoughts, beliefs, and service commitments in the future, if at all?

Identity:

13. How do you understand the different aspects of your social identity? What different communities or groups do you identify with? (If they struggle, say: “You might identify with racial groups, sexual orientation, religious groups, etc”)
14. One of the things I’m really interested in is how students’ values and sense of self could be impacted through service learning. Do you have any thoughts or reflections on that in terms of your own experience?
15. How would you describe the different aspects of your identity as it relates to your intended major and/or career choice?);

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work and am conducting a study exploring the service learning experiences of students at Bennington College. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how service learning experience impacts emerging adults' sense of identity and social responsibility. The data from this study will be used for my MSW thesis and in professional publications and presentations on this topic.

Participation in this study will include an in-person interview of approximately sixty to ninety minutes duration with the researcher. The interview will explore how you came to choose direct services for your Field Work Term (FWT) and if/how that experience shaped your sense of self. The criteria for inclusion in the study includes: you are over eighteen and are a full-time student at Bennington college; you have completed one or more Field Work Term placements at a social services or direct services site during your time as a student at Bennington College; and you have a willingness to reflect on issues of identity, career choice, social responsibility, and service learning. Interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed by me, in private. Should I use an additional transcriber, they will sign confidentiality forms.

Your risk of participation will be minimal. It is possible that, for some, thinking in depth and sharing thoughts about the experience of service learning could be uncomfortable. Should you wish to consult anyone regarding any concerns that may arise, the contact information for Bennington Psychological Services is attached. By participating in this study, you may increase your awareness of yourself and a deeper understanding of your experiences. You will also be directly contributing to a gap in the literature about a topic that affects you. Compensation will not be provided for participation in this study.

Every measure will be taken to maintain confidentiality. Your responses will be kept separate from your name and other identifying information. Basic demographic information will be collected and reported on in general and descriptive terms to protect your identity. All data will be stored in an electronic file that is password protected. Besides the researcher, only the research advisor, and transcriber, if used, will have access to the data. Data will be separated from participant identification before it is shared with the research advisor or transcriber. Data will be presented as a whole unless specific quotes or vignettes are used in which case they will be carefully disguised using phrases such as "one participant said" and "another participant said". Themes derived from interviews and observations will be disconnected from identities of study participants. Before data is processed with the research advisor, identifications will be removed. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time before, during, or after the interview, and you may refuse to answer any question. If you wish to withdraw from the study you must notify the researcher in writing by April 1st, 2014. Upon withdrawal all materials pertaining to your interview as well as any identifying information will

be immediately destroyed. If you have not withdrawn from the study by April 1st, 2014, your answers will be a permanent part of this study. You may contact me or the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee at Smith College School for Social Work at the email or phone listed below for questions or concerns about this study.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Signature of Participant _____ Date: _____
Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Contact Information: Paige Hustead, Smith College School for Social Work Master's Candidate
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Or Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee 413-585-7974

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS AGREEMENT FOR YOUR OWN RECORDS. THE RESEARCHER WILL PROVIDE THIS COPY EITHER BY SCANNED EMAIL OR SENT IN THE MAIL TO YOUR DESIRED ADDRESS.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about this study. Whether you decide to participate or not, your work and opinion are appreciated in this study.

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Hello,

Did you do direct service or public action for your Field Work Term, either this year or in past years? Are you interested in reflecting on themes of service, social responsibility, identity, and career choice? Would you be will to participate in a brief interview to share your experiences? If so, please keep reading!

My name is Paige Hustead; I am currently an MSW student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of conducting research for my thesis, which explores the Field Work Term experiences of Bennington students. I am reaching out to students who have done at least one direct service or public action placement during Field Work Term. Feel free to contact me with concerns or questions. If you are willing to participate, please contact me directly and we can set up a time to meet on campus and talk about your experience.

Also, I would very much appreciate your help in recruiting others for this project. If you feel comfortable, please forward this email to those you know who may meet the criteria for my research.

Thank you for your time,

Paige Hustead
Smith College School for Social Work '14
phustead@smith.edu
(XXX)-XXX-XXXX

Appendix D: HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

December 6, 2013

Paige Husted

Dear Paige,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: David Byers, Research Advisor