(Not) Minding the Gap: Negotiating Social Distance across Service-Learning Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative analysis of the experiences of a small study of 23 service learners indicated that individuals negotiate social distance as they: (1) ascribe agency in action and affect to themselves and others; (2) consider whether they belong on-site and connect with others; and, (3) grapple with the structural inequalities that shape social life. In discussing the multiple dimensions of social distance, this analysis ends with questions that critical service learning practices and pedagogies can address.

Keywords: critical service learning, intergroup relations, qualitative, disorienting dilemma

Social Distance and Its Theoretical Mileage

While "social distance" circulates as a spatial metaphor for the lack of connection between social groups, few scholars center analyses around social distance, suggest its complexity, or *how* it is legible across the service-learning experience. However, the dynamics of social distance appear throughout traditional service learning (TSL) and critical service learning (CSL) literature, as students grapple with representations of themselves and community members and they negotiate the differential positioning of each. Service learners navigate social distance to mutually connect with others or resist sharing their biographical and real-time experiences. Social distance also emerges in the extent to that service learners articulate analyses that link others' life conditions to structural dispossession, contextual factors that are often conspicuous at the boundary that segregates the college and community. As a dynamic that is key to how intergroup others relate, social distance has the potential to respond to the call for the thematic unification of TSL studies related to intergroup relations (Holsapple, 2012), while beginning discussions that CSL can address towards theorizing and practicing

social justice across the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural levels.

The flexibility of social distance is especially important to CSL, because while representations, relationships, and critical analyses appear as individual commitments of the field, they are inextricably linked. Representations and stereotypes that individuals hold about the self and other are fueled by and, in turn, inform the social distance that individuals negotiate in both relationship and critical analyses. Thus, reflexively attending to each commitment may be necessary to shift social distance towards interdependence during and after community engagement.

Social Distance as Rationalizing the Positioning of Self and Other

Social distance is central to both stereotyping and attribution as processes that naturalize others' contexts, and therefore individuals' decisions about whether and how to help. Bringle and Velo (1998) suggest that social group-level biases encourage service learners to explain others' lives using dispositional, rather and situational factors; uncontrollable misfortunes rather than preventable injustices in ways that affect the relationship between the self and other. Intergroup relations research suggests that attributions and stereotypes are linked to social distance by a sense of empathy or self-relevance – individuals tend to treat others they feel are similar as they would treat themselves (Amodio & Devine, 2006; Batson et al., 1997; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Todd et al., 2011; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Together, such work suggests the interdependence of representations about the self and other and how these shape beliefs about others, relationship, and explanations about differential access to opportunities, resources, and institutions by social location.

TSL and CSL literature suggests that service learners challenge representation discourses about others. Some studies have found that service learners explicitly indicate that engagement helped them to deconstruct their prior stereotypes and assumptions, in part, by, presenting counter-representations of community members (Kinefuchi, 2010; Santos, Ruppar, & Jeans, 2012; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011). Even as the types of counter-representations developed by service learners tend to be wholly positive, rather than complex (Shor, Catteneo, & Calton, 2017), they may help service learners to shift their attributions and advocate for community members. Counter-representations mostly appear to acknowledge the shared humanity with community members as a method of negotiating social distance among marginalized social groups who are subject to dehumanizing stereotypes, including immigrants, disabled people, and the incarcerated youth, as well as more generalized racialized and classed social groups (Brewster; 2018; Frank & Rice, 2017; Holsapple, 2012; Kinefuchi, 2010; Marichal, 2010; Rhoads, 1998).

Service learners' explicit references to their own representations and stereotypes are limited, but individuals position their roles as service learners to align with the power and privilege. Service learning often re-inscribes whiteness in action and silencing discourses (Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012), for example, although non-White service learners may also differentially position themselves and others to emphasize their agency and the capacity to transform others (Desmond & Stahl, 2011). Unfortunately, the ego rewards of positioning service learners as agents who transform others can increase their satisfaction and engagement (Noyes, Darby, & Leupold, 2015; Pekrun, 2006), and compound apathy about redressing asymmetric power, center narratives about helping 'the disadvantaged' (Brewster, 2018b; Farnsworth, 2010; Sharma et al., 2011), or absorb "the actual experience of individuals into a categorical one-dimensional designation of neediness" (Van

Gorder, 2007, p. 16). When service learners are positioned as agents and community members are counter-positioned as passive and malleable, service learners maintain social distance and the invisible privilege of being untouched by others' prior experiences, context, and the service itself (Brewster, 2018b).

Social Distance as Relational Strategies in the Context of Asymmetric Power

Classic operationalizations of social distance emphasize an individual's interest in interacting with others in terms of close proximity and social intimacy (e.g. preferring an acquaintance who identifies as LGBTQ+ rather than a neighbor). Social distance preferences initiate relationship-building or blocking strategies that rigidify boundaries between the self and other or defend against others' access to social spaces and resources (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012; Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002). Social distance influences intergroup relationships as high-power individuals may perceive others as "so distant as to be irrelevant" in terms of social comparisons about skills, attitudes, or capacities (Magee & Smith, 2013, p. 160). If individuals feel that others are distant, then they may fail to acknowledge or respond to others' emotions, limit their self-disclosure, as well as avoid reciprocal trust and communication (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Lammers et al., 2012; Liberman et al., 2002; Magee & Smith, 2013). These behaviors can ultimately manifest as indifference, objectification, or dehumanization, which lead to exploitation (Lammers et al., 2012; Liberman et al., 2002).

A continuum between social distance and interdependence surfaces in discussions about relationship within the TSL literature as scholars have raised the transactional or transformative nature of relationships, but with emphasis on campus-community partnerships or the personal relationships of faculty across those sites. These findings provide that transformative approaches which include a mutual commitment or receptiveness to personal growth precedes relationships that can be characterized by closeness, integrity, and equity (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006; Clayton et al., 2010). Nonetheless, service learners appear to prefer service engagements that are transactional and emphasize charity rather than those that address social change (Bringle et al., 2006; Morton, 1995). Among the few studies that center service learner-community member relationships, Brewster (2018a) found that service learner narrations of subjectivity, including their internal thoughts and somatic senses, responses to others' emotions, and reciprocal self-disclosures emerged among the relatively critical individuals. This sort of presence within narrations co-occurred with explicit claims and discourses that suggested service learners' transformation (Brewster, 2018a, 2018b).

Doerr (2015) explored social distance to explain how service learners differentially conceptualize of helping behavior, depending on whether the sense of interdependence felt towards familiars from strangers. In addition to acknowledging how social group differences can fuel a sense of disconnection, Doerr (2015) suggests that the language of volunteering affirms social distance and thereby contributes to service learners' capacity for othering. Participants indicated that "volunteers" had no stakes in the outcome of service, were not expected to help, and helped people positioned as incapable of achieving these outcomes by themselves. The distinctions between these relationships are perhaps, unsurprising. However, the intimacy and social responsibility for others highlights an index of obligation as fundamental to familial relationship, and transactional or functional intimacy as fundamental to service in ways that raise questions about the bounds

of social justice and equality (Doerr, 2015; Schroeder, Fishbach, Schein, & Gray, 2017).

Social Distance as the Link Between Epistemological Knowledge and Space

Aspects of social distance signal the relative positioning of individuals within a structure or "the [psychological] distance between the rich and poor," and the simultaneous recognition that social unequals are segregated by neighborhoods, networks, and lifestyles that reproduce stratification (Bottero, 2004, p. 6). The dynamics of psychological and physical distance work together to hide issues of power from the privileged, and thus may hinder their capacity to build a critical analysis that compares their access with others' dispossession.

TSL and CSL literature document aspects of critical analyses that service learners gain from their interactions with others—sometimes acknowledging the relative homogeneity of the academy and service as a method of providing students access to others' life spaces and conditions—even with the best of intentions. Service learners rarely engage the realities of inequality, however, and instead express gratitude about their "lucky" circumstances or even frame their privilege as an asset to others (Endres & Gould, 2009; Santos et al., 2012). These effects emerged in a class with an explicit focus on racism and classism (Endres & Gould, 2009) and, thus, suggest the persistence of social distance from representations to the sense of context-independence. Service learners have articulated conditions of inequality, located themselves within matrices of power, and voiced commitments to agentic responses to inequality (Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002). They identified structural inequity and increased their capacity to understand the effects of racism, poverty, and disability as contextual factors that shape social life (Kawecka Nenga, 2011; Rondini, 2015). However, service learners appear to lack the reflexivity to access or articulate the possibility of their own class-based assumptions or posit interdependencies between class positions (Houshmand, Spanierman, Beer, Potear, & Lawson, 2014; Sharma et al., 2011). Similarly, they may espouse egalitarian views and anti-racism and simultaneously critique others and community conditions using racial stereotypes (Houshmand et al., 2014).

The increasing attention to space and place within TSL appears to address social distance and the potential for issues of social justice to become more legible and relevant. Some service learners express discomfort and uneasiness about being in communities where poverty intersects with people of color, or alternatively critique others' fear about communities or community members (Becker & Paul, 2015). These expressions are racialized as opposed to explicitly naming race as some service learners characterize others' homes as "ghettos" or dangerous spaces (Becker & Paul, 2015). Bailey's (2017) study of service learners who prepared taxes for low-income families affirmed the importance of examining space for helping students to articulate structural rather than dispositional attributions for poverty.

This burgeoning area suggests that the visibility of stratification, particularly at the boundary between the college and the community may lead to an increased sense of social distance for some whose fear seems intractable (Becker & Paul, 2015). Alternatively, service learners may extend beyond places they formerly frequented for errands and recreation (Bailey, 2017; Farnsworth, 2010). These experiences draw attention to how service learners grapple with what community engagement means beyond their service term, particularly when they acknowledge the limits of social mobility of community members and their own capacity to leave (Bailey, 2017; Becker & Paul, 2015).

However, the discreteness of service may challenge sustained critical analyses. While service learners engage outside of the campus "bubble," they are not necessarily immersed in communities in ways that shift their perspectives or complicate their relationship to their identities (Milofsky & Flack, 2005). Instead, being in the community may seem like an outing with an "important, but somewhat limited impact because students return to the campus and its social and cultural life at the end of the day" (Milofsky & Flack, 2005, p. 168).

The following paper explores service learner experiences to identify the usefulness of social distance for addressing the commitments of CSL. Framed by social psychological literature about social distance and the incidence of related dynamics in service learning, we address the extent to which service learners represent themselves and community members in terms of agentic positioning, turns in relational development, and critical analyses. Throughout, we present quotations that illustrate primary findings and occasionally use excerpts that surface unique dynamics.

The paper closes by troubling the relative positioning of service learners and community members to identify potential directions for future CSL research and practice.

METHOD

Participants and Contextual Indicators

This study recruited participants who had completed the college-wide service requirement at a predominantly White and Catholic small college in the Northeast. Participants were students who engaged in more than 20 hours of face-to-face contact with community members for this credit. The sample included participants across disciplines and types of service. The recruitment strategies included flyers and email distributions from the campus service hub. These written advertisements included an online link to the study instrumentation.

Twenty-three (n=23) participants completed the study. Participants primarily identified as white (n=15). Black (n=4), multiracial (n=3), and Asian (n=1) participants comprised the remainder of the sample. Twenty-one participants identified as women and two as men. These demographics suggest this study's particular resonance with the experiences of service learners who are White women.

The participants were service learners from a variety of courses that featured civic engagement. The sites where participants engaged were located in one of two neighborhoods where almost one-third of residents live below the poverty line. City Library, Marvin's Free Kitchen, and Young and Proud (organization serving LGBTQ+ youth) were sites within a two-mile radius of the college where 50% of residents are Black, Latinx, and Asian. Liberation Academy (attended almost exclusively by girls of color), Capital City Public Terraces (public housing complex offering English-language courses), and Immigrant Services Now were within 5 miles of campus where 75% of residents are Black, Latinx, and Asian. The sites that focused on youth services included City Library, Young and Proud, and Liberation Academy. The sites that focused on adult services included Marvin's Free Kitchen and Capital City Public Terraces, whereas Immigrant Service Now primarily served families composed of adults and children.

Materials

Participants completed an online survey comprised mostly of open-ended items. The items addressed three aspects of the service-learning experience: (a) basic information about the course and brief descriptions of the experience, (b) memorable and impactful moments during the beginning,

middle, and end of the course, and (c) perceptions about service, including perspectives on the site and service learners' dis/similarities with community members. Demographic information was also collected.

Procedures

Participants accessed the online survey, read the study description, and provided their assent to participate by continuing to the survey items. This study was exempt from requiring a full informed consent procedure because it was anonymous and the participants did not belong to a protected population. Participants provided only their mobile phone numbers, without names, so that they could electronically receive a 10-dollar gift card as compensation.

Coding

The co-authors of this paper hand-coded data across multiple readings. These readings focused on how the content and construction of participants' texts communicated the dynamics of critical consciousness, including reflexivity, relationship, and critical analyses. Specifically, the analyses emphasized sub-dynamics related to social distance, participant descriptions of the immediate social environment of the service site, references to actors (e.g., names and pronouns), actions, and affect. We coded the data individually and reached consensus about the codes (e.g., high level of reflexivity relative to the sample) and counts (e.g., references to the service learner versus references to community members). Subsequent, selective coding focused on clustering and isolating narrative segments to illustrate emergent themes. Throughout this process, we re-categorized and/or re-named codes in order to test the resonance of directions that emerged from the analytics. Additionally, we documented and checked analyses against the theoretical memos that each member wrote after individually analyzing sub-sections of the data. We assigned pseudonyms to individuals and places to add clarity and personalize the data. Note that the lead author worked individually on subsequent versions of this paper.

FINDINGS

Negotiating Social Distance as Relative Agency in Action and Affect

Only service learners who worked with children positioned themselves as agents of transformation and emphasized their authority while counter-positioning the young people as unmanageable and rambunctious. Participants positioned themselves as having agency to act, without parallel references to the actions of others or a sense of interdependence. They initially used diminutive terms to describe the community, projected the impact they would have on children, and largely obscured their own subjectivity about service. Excerpts from Nicole and Christine's (pseudonyms) experiences at City Library suggest that this social distance was organically bridged through familiarity and relationship.

> I thought it was very overwhelming and chaotic in how to handle all of the children and organizing activities for them to go to and then monitor it. The kids had a hard time with listening to a person of authority and being respectful… I remember sitting down to do homework with a small group of girls. These girls who were once seemingly disrespectful and unable to listen, now would share things about their day with me and show me what they'd done in school. Some of the girls would even share personal things or tell stories of their home life and/or ask me for advice on certain things. (Nicole)

Nicole characterized the site as chaotic and emphasized her responsibility for

organization and supervision. As she spent more time on-site, her reflection shifted towards the girls who shared their experiences at home and at school with her. Nicole found that girls who were "seemingly disrespectful and unable to listen" were now engaging and trusting. Nicole indicates that she began to connect with them, although she still appeared to be an authority among those who asked her for "advice on certain things."

Christine illustrates social distance in her portrayal of a shifting sense of disengagement. Her initial reflections indicated discontent with the amount of time she was expected to be in the community. The community and campus were represented as polarized just like her references to "us" and "the kids," and a sense of ambivalence emerged around the children who were warm, although "they gave us a hard time, and it made it difficult to want to be there."

> Honestly, 3 hours was a really long time to be out in the community, and at first I was not looking forward to the experience. The kids were sweet, but there were times that they gave us a hard time, and it made it difficult to want to be there…I remember a time when one girl at the library finally wanted to read instead of run around and make the librarian mad. She picked out a book and we read the whole thing together and it was a really special moment because I could see that she wanted to read and wanted to learn, but just needed a little push. (Christine)

The children and Christine appeared relatively detached until she and a girl read a book together, which demonstrated that the girl "wanted to read and wanted to learn, but just needed a little push." By the end of the semester, this was Christine's "favorite girl" who cried and hugged her during the final session. This emotionality left her feeling that she "made a difference in her life, and that all of the work I put in each week was worth it."

Service learners who worked with teenagers and adults generally did not initially position themselves in terms of agency and power, or represent themselves by roles as service learners. These service learners discussed a mixture of excitement about entering the community and nervousness about interacting with others. These service learners emphasized their unfamiliarity, particularly with English Language Learners (ELLs) and LGBTQ+ teenagers.

Service learners challenged representations and societal stereotypes about community members with counter-representations that positioned community members in wholly positive terms. In grappling with projections about who community members were, they tended to cite their relationships and analyses of their service experience. Community members were generally positioned as intelligent and caring people although with specific counter-representations varied by service site.

Participants who worked with children at City Library, School-to-Cool, and Immigrant Services Now largely addressed children's' resilience and perennial positivity. Participants critiqued the monotony of unstructured time for young people, and even indicated that the time they spent in service should be more instrumental to their future. For example, Tammy indicated: "The children need a lot of support when it comes to be familiar to the American culture. Playing with them all the time is not always beneficial. They need more support academically and socially." Other participants, like Ameenah, argued against discourses that relate class and intelligence by suggesting "…just because a lot of them are low-income students, they have

a lot of knowledge and are aware of what is going on."

With teens and adults, participants challenged similar representations. Service learners from Immigrant Services Now and Capital City Public Terraces addressed representations that immigrants and ELLs were unambitious, disinterested in "being American," and undeserving of inclusion and support. Their counter-representations highlighted community members' work ethic, intelligence, and humanity as when Julie indicated: "They are hardworking people who want to make a 'home' here in the US. They deserve to be here, and their place in the US should not be questioned/threatened."

Janet taught English at Capital City Public Terraces and cited strong relationships across her experience, despite language barriers. She used her insider knowledge to suggest community members' value as humans, learners, and companions:

> They are incredible people that have amazing stories about their lives. They love to learn and they want to learn anything and as much as they can about the English language. They are also extremely inspiring and fun to be around. (Janet)

At Young and Proud, Kim's counter-representation was likewise salient given the increasingly troubling personal and structural xenophobia across the globe. Her counter-representation was framed by her growing knowledge of LGBTQ+ rights and the personal relationships she was developing. After the election, Kim recalled that:

> A boy came in crying after Trump was elected, he was nervous because his rights were going to be impacted. I felt so terrible for him and sat in silence next to him as I too feared what would happen to this world. (Kim)

This excerpt builds off Kim's growing realization that while some teens had been ostracized from communities, schools, and families, they could experience inclusion and even sanctuary at the service site. In addition to her empathic distress in the moment, Kim discussed quietly sharing the boy's concern about the political and social climate in the future.

Across sites, active but implicit representations were illustrated by some participants but appeared to organically resolve with the development of relationships. Service learners neither explicitly or implicitly indicated personally holding representations, but engaged in countering societal stereotypes about community members. Because participants characterized others in wholly positive terms, they may have side-stepped having to grapple with the sense that community members needed the engagement because they were dispositionally deficient. Rather, community members appeared resilient within uncontrollable contexts where they had been treated or represented unfairly.

Negotiating Social Distance as Collective Belonging and Interpersonal Connection

Most participants reported feeling anxious during their first time on site because they didn't know what to expect, were nervous about others' perceptions of them, or were worried about being an outsider. Participants indicated uncertainty about how they would strike up conversations with strangers and cited age differences, language, and social anxiety as potential barriers to connection. The majority of participants reported almost immediately feeling comfortable on-site, however, often because of efforts made by community members who offered warm greetings, quickly learned service learners' names, and engaged service learners in

conversations and activities. While the illustrative examples in this section represent service learners' comfort following the openness and initiative of community members, they are also rare within this sample for their expressed interest in sustained relationships with the site and people within it.

Shoshanna recalled a young person complimenting her during the first moments of service when it became immediately clear that others' apprehensions were inaccurate.

> One girl came up to me immediately and said, "you have really pretty eyes." After that moment, I completely relaxed and realized that I had nothing to be apprehensive about because most of the kids are very willing to interact with the service learners. My engagement coordinator had mentioned that the kids might be aggressive or say offensive things, but I am happy that I did not encounter that. The kids were welcoming and accepting of myself, the other service learners, and my engagement coordinator. (Shoshanna)

She continues by referencing warnings that the young people might "be aggressive or say offensive things." Instead, Shoshanna found that the young people engaged and accepted her and the others from campus. Ultimately, Shoshanna indicated that she was sad to leave at the end of service, how the people on-site impacted her personally, and how much she misses them.

Magnus provides the last example of early connection on-site. His narrative was rare because he distinguished the people he engaged with from their positional identities as service recipients. Magnus indicated that "members of the Capital City community" came to Marvin's Free Kitchen for a free meal, rather than positioning them as needy, homeless, or hungry. This approach to seeing others may have contributed to Magnus being engaged enough with community members to "learn each other's names," which appeared to precede the sense of fellowship that emerged across his reflection.

> It reached a certain point where we would learn each other's names. It made me feel like they had accepted me as part of their community and very welcomed at the site. It without a doubt motivated me to come to service even more. (Magnus)

The sense of knowing others and being known as a part of a community helped Magnus to be more enthusiastic about his service each week. He ultimately acknowledged how relationships make service meaningful.

While participants enjoyed growing familiar with community members, they appeared to be challenged to respond to deeper levels of intimacy in everyday and traumatic disclosures. Service learners heard when there were disagreements on site or when others needed help. Community members spoke about what service meant to them, how they wished service learners could stay beyond the semester, and appreciation for the service site. Community members also shared stories about their lives at home, experiences of moving between neighborhoods and feeling unstable, stories about family deaths, and cultural trauma. Service learners appreciated these disclosures and felt trusted but provided no indication that they trusted community members with their disclosures. Clara was the only participant who referred to reciprocal disclosure by indicating that "the willingness to share some information about our lives" was a commonality she shared with a community member, although she did not

write the nature of what she shared with community members.

Participants described being unprepared to respond to intimate disclosures. Service learners may not know how to respond to community members' disclosures—untold life struggles, spending the entirety of a young life in a refugee camp, feeling alone or neglected—because they do not have parallel experiences. Shoshanna discussed feeling unable to imagine an 8-year-old boy's intimate loss and responding to what and how he disclosed:

> He brought up his father's passing very casually and it was difficult for me to figure out how to respond in a way that did not upset him. This was emotional for me because I could not imagine losing a parent at such a young age. (Shoshanna)

Similarly, Janet recalls that when a woman she worked with:

> …told me the struggles she faced in her life which was incredible to hear because it made me realize how lucky I am. I was happy that she shared those things with me and that she felt comfortable enough to tell me, but after she told me, I really did not know what to say. (Janet)

The lack of parallel sharing may not suggest participants' flight from their own subjectivity. Rather, it may indicate the importance of recognizing the uneven distribution of trauma experienced by some marginalized people that empathic distress, concern, and listening may fall short of addressing. In the absence of responses, service learners appeared to negotiate distance by using downward social comparisons about the luckiness of their life circumstances and present trustworthiness.

Community members almost exclusively laid the foundations for relationships from the outset of the service experience, expressing how much the service learners meant to them, and disclosing intimate experiences. It is unclear whether service learners' responses to others resonates with the social distance of affective disengagement, a flight from vulnerability, or a lack of experience to disclose. In the absence of other responses, they cited feeling lucky to have been trusted and have not faced experiences similar to community members. These internal responses indicate the social distance created by differing life circumstances and the limits of empathic reactions alone in relating to others' suffering.

Negotiating Social Distance as Social Location and Objective Distance

Participants discussed the end of service by referencing parties, hugs, or goodbyes—often with a sense of finality that highlights how temporary community can be. Community members were again illustrated in their action, affect, and initiative. Children hugged and clung to service learners, children and adults expressed gratitude for them and their service, and occasionally provided participants with small gifts. Participants acknowledged the emotionality of the last moments in ways that drew attention to both the arbitrariness of ending relationships at the edges of the academic term, but also expressed the difficulty of sustaining relationships.

Participants negotiated social distance with expressions of sadness and projections about the lack of interactions in the future, effectively foreclosing the possibility of relationship. Characteristic responses included Nicole's indication that "it still makes me sad I can't see her anymore," and Kim's indication that she was "sad to leave the youth I had come to know, on the last day we all hugged

goodbye and hoped we would see each other again soon."

In discussing her experience at Immigrant Services Now, Emma suggested that service enabled close relationships between service learners and community members. However, she also suggested that service facilitated the abrupt ending of these relationships as the term concluded. Although Emma "never particularly liked children and they never really liked" her, she grew close to the 3-year-old in the family who always seemed to sit in her lap. On the last day Emma and the family sat around the table drawing portraits of one another and she recalled "we all were so joyful, almost like one family." Emma's reflection continued:

> When I had to say goodbye to the family I was serving, I was incredibly saddened to never be able to find them again. We had such a close relationship and the fact that it was ending made me feel like I was experiencing an intimate loss. (Emma)

The sense of finality is noteworthy because Emma indicated that the end of service presented an "intimate loss." While it is unclear why she could not find this family again, her recollection did not attempt to project or realize a future where they could keep in touch, or she could visit, or continue to do service outside of the course.

Lastly, Magnus indicated the social distance that college students may feel towards the community around the campus. Magnus was the only participant to discuss being in the public sphere, which enabled his interaction with community members outside of service.

> [I was] waiting for the bus and one of the people that I had gotten to know through Marvin's Kitchen was at the same stop as I. We had a nice conversation while we waited for the bus to come. It made me feel like my service had meant something to me and other people. It felt like I was able to genuinely connect with people in the community. Going to school at CSC, it often feels like you are a tourist when you are off campus in different parts of Capital City, but service has helped to bridge that gap…(Magnus)

Magnus indicated that extending relationships outside of the service site left him feeling like a part of Capital City, and also made interactions on-site more meaningful as he also emphasized the capacity to "genuinely connect with people." This language highlights the possibility that service learners may inhabit the roles that shape their relational positions within the site, but may not feel authentic enough to inhabit outside of it, limiting the potential for "real-life" interactions with community members.

With the end of service, aspects of social distance emerged in their narratives that suggested the impact that service learners had on others and, less frequently, the impact that others had on them. While participants recognized the emotionality of endings, they rarely narrated their own emotional experiences or plans to continue engaging with community members or the service site. The boundary between the college and the community emerged with the finality of leaving the site for the last time at the end of the academic term, and the certainty with which participants projected not seeing community members in public. Such endings affirm that community engagement presents the opportunity for mostly White and relatively privileged service learners to integrate with mostly poor communities of color. The temporary nature of connection

highlights service learners' free mobility around and within communities.

DISCUSSION

Participants in this study reflected on the beginning, middle, and end of their service learning experiences and negotiated social distance with community members. In entering communities, service learners largely did not position themselves as agents of transformation, and when they did, this dynamic dissolved over time with contact. Consistent with other research (Shor et al., 2017), service learners challenged representations about community members by characterizing them in exclusively positive terms to negotiate stereotypes meant to rationalize their dispossession.

Interestingly, community members appeared within these narratives as agents of relational transformation. Service learners tended to react to community members empathetically, but without narrating details about their subjectivity. On the surface, this dynamic characterizes asymmetric relationships by illustrating a vacuum of trust, communication, and self-disclosure (Lammers et al., 2012; Liberman et al., 2002). Service learners potentially enacted functional intimacy to complete service (Schroeder et al., 2017). The emotional reactivity within service learner narratives appears to illustrate transactional elements of relationship. While service learners discussed a felt sense of transformative aspects of relationship such as empathy or compassion they tended to be unable to respond to community members by voicing empathic concern, admitting they did not know what to say, or demonstrating how much they admired and respected community members.

This potential interpretation suggests that the reliance on community members to evolve relationships may be a form of exploitation (Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006; Clayton et al., 2010).

Lastly, social distance appeared acute at the end of service and surfaced the recognition of the gap between the community and campus, and the life spaces of service learners and community members. The finality that service learners expressed about the dissolution of contact suggests the perception that community engagement is limited to the course or a specific service site, particularly in a segregated social sphere where intergroup interactions are rare or may seem inaccessible without institutional support. This interpretation supports anxieties about the role of space in service learning and indicates—as all of these findings do—the necessity for critical pedagogy. Importantly, what appears as service learners' lack of initiative for maintaining connections with community may be a continuation of the reactivity as community members evolved relationships. Across the narratives and sites, community members' affective and relational labor suggests that *they* did not mind the gap and negotiated social distance.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is crucial to acknowledge that the larger inquiry from which these data were drawn intended to identify service learner positions and discourses of solidarity across service experiences to replicate findings from a previous study based on a singular course. As such, these data are limited both by the small sample size of this study and by their capacity to address the extent to which these different courses used materials and pedagogies associated with CSL. While we recognize myriad participant and course variables that were not addressed in this study that are vital to directly informing pedagogies and practices of CSL, we find value in the theoretical potential of social distance and related insights. The consideration of the

flexibility of social distance in this study surfaces questions that CSL can address as the field continues to develop and intensify: (1) How might the explicit consideration of social distance impact how service learners make meaning of themselves, others, and relationships generally? (2) What are the affordances and limitations of such consideration in helping students articulate structural analyses from individual experiences? (3) To what extent does CSL require service learners to engage others in relationship as they would their familiars? (4) In what ways might relationships be limited by a lack of parallel biographical and structural experiences? What are the affordances of these differences? (5) How might CSL address interdependence when engagement is temporary and segregated life spaces are persistent? (6) How might service learners enact aspects of transformational approaches to relationship without exploiting the availability, openness, and life experiences of community members?

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