

ADULT LEARNING IN THE URBAN CONTEXT:
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM THE VOICES
OF FOUR ADULT BLACK MALES

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DEDICATION

First, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Dorothy Jean Williams Duff and to my father, Myron C. Duff, Sr. They are no longer with us, but they impressed upon me the importance of furthering my education and the impact it can have on my future. Their pushing, insisting, encouraging, and supporting led me to this place in my life's journey and it is fitting that my dissertation be dedicated to their memory.

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Myron C. Duff, Jr.

ADULT LEARNING IN THE URBAN CONTEXT: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
FROM THE VOICES OF FOUR ADULT BLACK MALES

The Loving Neighborhood was a very active ecosystem consisting of four communities (Capella, Carson, Midtown, and Summerville) that came together to form one larger community. Although the four neighborhoods' ethnic makeup was about 30% Black, 30% Latino, and 30% White, the Carson community was predominantly Black. The Carson neighborhood had a very vibrant neighborhood association in which there were four adult Black males who actively participated in Carson's economic and community development efforts. These men consistently attended neighborhood meetings, volunteered on community action committees, held community leadership positions, and participated regularly in local events.

In order to understand the work of adult Black males who were seeking to improve the quality of life in a specific community context, this research sheds light on the "voices" of these four adult Black males as they attempted to foster neighborhood transformation by becoming more active in an Black urban community. It is imperative that the shared meanings of Black men be understood within the ecosystems in which they existed, emphasizing the importance of their conversations that addressed the needs of their communities.

While previous research studies have explored adult learning and community engagement separately, these studies have failed to address how Black males could have helped Black communities in grassroots development efforts. Studies that have addressed

these intersections could have provided valuable insight into why Black men became active in their communities, what they might have learned because of their community activism, how they remained motivated, and what skills they would have needed in order to effectively engage underserved neighborhoods. In response to this deficiency, this inquiry employed a critical approach to explore the importance of the unique voices of these four Black men as they participated in the transformation of their neighborhoods.

James J. Scheurich, Ph.D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.” (Baldwin, 1961, p. 205)

Introduction

On July 30, 2018, LeBron James, one of the most popular U.S. Black basketball players of his generation, opened a school in his hometown of Akron, Ohio which he affectionately named *I Promise*. He emphasizes that the school is not a charter school. Unlike other celebrities, who typically opened charter and private schools (Wagner, 2016), James established I Promise as a public school with a mission to serve vulnerable students (Ohio Department of Education). The school was a project facilitated and funded through James’ nonprofit organization in partnership with Akron Public Schools. James’ deep commitment was not the school’s only unique component. The school day began at 9:00 a.m., ended at 5:00 p.m., had an extended school year that began in July and ended in May, offered STEM camps during the seven-week summer break, and each student received a free lunch, snacks, and drinks. Additionally, the school offered adult basic education classes that led to the acquisition of a GED, as well as job placement help for parents and guardians (Zahn, 2018).

Overall, James is supporting this school because of the same challenges that he faced as a child, including missing 83 days of school when he was in the fourth grade due to family instability. However, what is unique about this situation is the reality that a very rich and famous Black male has evaluated the condition of his current life, reflected back on his former living conditions and concluded that the events, situations, and mentors that lead to his current success should be made available to other children experiencing a

similar upbringing. In essence, James' passion and compassion moved him to choose "I Promise" as the vehicle through which he would engage his own community. This passion has led to James establishing an organization that he believes is poised to minimize the barriers for others so that they can reach their fullest potential. The fact that LeBron James is embedding himself in his community in this manner leaves one to wonder what other Black men, with similar passions and commitments, aspire to do for their communities.

Background of the Problem

The Loving Neighborhood (pseudonym), located in Capital City, USA (pseudonym) was a very active ecosystem consisting of four communities including Carson, Capella, Summerville, and Midtown (all pseudonyms). The ethnic makeup of the residents was 32% Black, 31% Latinx, 31% White, and 6% mixed-race that came together to form one larger community (Davenport [pseudonym], 2014). As of 2011, the Loving Neighborhood's residential population was estimated at 8,043 people. Of the four neighborhoods, Carson boasted the largest residential population of Black residents with an official population estimated around 6,500 people. The Capella, Midtown, and Summerville areas had a majority white and Latinx population, and 40.7% of the adults in the Loving Neighborhood, who were 25 years and older, did not have a high school diploma. The overall per capita in Loving was \$9,760.00, with an average household income of \$17,321.00. These numbers were significantly below the average per capita and household incomes of Capital City (The Research Institute [pseudonym], 2001).

The Loving Neighborhood was originally settled in the 1830's by business merchants who were drawn to the area after the South Street Bridge (synonym) and the new railroad lines were built. Irish, German, and Slovenian immigrants migrated to the area during this time and with the construction of South Street (synonym) in 1830 as a southern border, the impetus for a settlement was established on the west side of Running River Road (synonym) which also included boundaries to the north on North Street (synonym) and to the west on West Street (synonym). In 1883, Carson was incorporated, and to help pay off a significant debt, the small city was annexed to Capitol City in 1897. With the coming of the Capital City Railroad (synonym), an ushering in of factories offered more life to the neighborhood as goods were more easily moved in and out of the community as well as the establishment of a meat packing plant aligned on South Street (synonym). All of these became major neighborhood employers which caused a healthy and bustling economy.

During this same period, the population of the Loving Neighborhood was predominantly Slovene. In fact, even though a 1900 census counted 16 different nationalities, “. . . 48 percent of the population was Slovene” (The Research Institute, 2001, p. 2). This was not a surprising figure given that one of the metal casting companies recruited Slovenes as they were “. . . known for their metal-working skills” (The Research Institute, 2001, p. 1). The increased influx of Slovene immigrants did not come without a price, as their presence was met with great resistance. Because most of the Slovenes were young, single men who frequented questionable establishments such as brothels and bars, they were often not allowed to worship at the culturally diverse Catholic Church. However, tired of the unwelcoming disposition of the other cultures and

their challenges with language barriers, the Slovene residents received authorization from Central City to start their own national parish in 1911.

During World War I, many middle-class White families, who lived in the Capella area, began to move out and into more affluent areas. At the same time, an influx of lower-class White families, who migrated from the south, moved in. This era was a time when community groups were established to focus on the economic health and physical structure of the neighborhood. These organizations strengthened the area, but other centers, such as the Midtown Community Center (pseudonym) and the Carson Community Center (pseudonym), were also created because the middle-class residents and local ministers believed that lower-class residents still needed social services (The Research Institute, 2001).

Immediately following World War I, Black families began to move into the Loving Community, thus commencing the racial stratification of the neighborhood. Along with being restricted to live in refined areas of the Loving Neighborhood, Blacks were prohibited from participating in any of the community's activities. This impacted their ability to have access to services such as the community agencies, banks, and grocery stores. Particularly concerning was the increase of income of White families which led to more of them moving to area suburbs leaving multiple vacated homes in the Loving Neighborhood. Moreover, the closing of several of the community's largest employers, including the two major foundries that closed in 1959 and 1962, ignited a serious deterioration of the neighborhood which included high unemployment rates and the closing of most of the public schools. Plant closings also led to high poverty and high crime rates making the neighborhood one of the most vulnerable in the city. All these

unfortunate circumstances led to the structural harm of the neighborhood's capacity to operate effectively (Stone, 2002).

Such conditions fueled Black community leadership in Capital City as they began to frequently protest their concerns with White officials. Their protests were often challenged, but Black leaders persevered, even going so far as to pursue legislative options as change agents. The process was slow, but it did help to establish somewhat positive relationships with Whites. These positive relationships proved to be beneficial in the Carson neighborhood in 1951 as the leadership was able to overturn a ruling which declared that people of color were now allowed membership in the Loving Neighborhood Community Center (synonym). The leadership of Carson eventually organized as a neighborhood association to unify and strengthen its position and its community development efforts. In recent years, Carson had a neighborhood association that was riddled with challenges, but after a reorganization and establishment of new leadership, the community placed itself in a better position to address the challenges it was facing.

Despite these efforts, the Loving Neighborhood continued to experience declining economic conditions. With the construction of the Capital City Zoo (pseudonym) which moved from the east side of Capital City in 1987 to an area in the Loving Neighborhood, families from the Capella community were displaced. This was an example of how government agencies, employers, and organizations with self-serving interests, run predominantly by Whites in power, made decisions and created policies without considering how it affected low-income and marginalized families. When the Whites in power made decisions that led to the decline in these communities, particularly among Black residents, the residents themselves were blamed for creating their own sub-

standard living conditions. There will little discussion about the oppressive practices of those who were in power. Thus, a deficit narrative was established and controlled by the Whites who were in power. A closer inspection of neighborhood politics and actions contradicted the narrative of Whites in power that inaccurately blamed a neighborhood's decline on a lack of resident's concern. Instead, this scenario demonstrated how White power structures undermined the development of people of color and their ability to thrive in this and other similar communities in this country (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2012).

In a last-ditch effort to revitalize the Loving Neighborhood, local ministers created an association in 1984 to provide a mouthpiece for their congregations to speak on the challenges that they were facing in the community. Specifically, these congregations were looking for ways to reduce crime, increase livable wage employment opportunities, transition renters to homeowners, encourage entrepreneurship, improve local education, and enhance the economic viability of the community. To further address the cause, other community organizations came together to form the Loving Neighborhood Community Development Corporation (LNCDC [pseudonym]) to plan and implement projects focused on socioeconomic development. Such plans included successfully attracting a bank to set up low-interest loan programs to replace Green Bank (pseudonym), a large lending institution, which left the neighborhood in 1989. In 1990 the Capital City Police Department (pseudonym) moved into an abandoned public school in an area of the neighborhood with the highest crime rate (The Research Institute, 2001).

In the years to come, more efforts were made to improve the Loving Neighborhood which included a neighborhood revitalization program created in 1992 by the mayor, the 1994 Loving Neighborhood Housing Improvement Neighborhood Plan

(pseudonym), and a grant in January 1998 to concentrate on economic, organizational, and educational development. There was also the securing of a donation from a nonprofit lending organization in July of 2009 to stimulate neighborhood engagement. But before long, it became clear that this initiative began to serve the interest of the benefactor more than the community. Interest convergence (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2012) would suggest that these initiatives were considered by the city and not-for-profit agencies only because they would have eventually benefitted outsiders. From the perspective of the residents, their goal was to bring about social change and if this was to occur with positive long-term outcomes, Graeme (2014) believes that community capacity building was needed. Unfortunately, incomplete projects, consistent changes in leadership, and broken promises left the Loving Neighborhood in a state of continuous decline (The Research Institute, 2001).

In 2014, the Loving Neighborhood was awarded a cultural improvement designation by a not-for-profit lending institution called the Trojan Horse (pseudonym). According to the Trojan Horse's website, the goal of this investment was "... transform neighborhoods and spur urban revitalization to help address the following challenges: high levels of pollution and obesity, high unemployment and poverty rates in certain areas, population loss to neighboring counties, and low graduation rates" (The Trojan Horse, n. d.). The Trojan Horse partnered with the Loving Neighborhood by designating \$35,000.00 annually to hire a part-time staff person who would facilitate the initiatives and projects to convert a stretch of the community into a bustling business district. They would also allocate what they called "early action funds" to the neighborhood for smaller projects (i.e., crosswalks, replacing street light fixtures, façade improvements, etc.),

hoping that the neighborhood would then seek matching funds to scale up their improvements. The Trojan Horse would also help to seek out and help to write other grants that would further benefit neighborhood development in the Loving Neighborhood.

Under normal circumstances, the resources from the Trojan Horse would have been managed by a neighborhood's community development corporation, but at the time, the Carson Community Development Center was not stable in their leadership or in their finances. Therefore, the Trojan Horse designated Central University (pseudonym) as the fiscal agent for this project. Central University was responsible for hiring a convener (community builder) to facilitate the programs for this initiative. These programs were facilitated through committees that consisted of neighborhood residents, business owners, key stakeholders, and community partners who operated within four L.O.V.E. outcomes: Livability-Healthy and beautiful, Opportunity-Entrepreneurs and jobs, Vitality-Growing population, and Education-Lifelong learning.

In January 2017, three years after the Trojan Horse had selected the Loving Neighborhood as a cultural improvement designation, I was working as the Director of Workforce Readiness and Program Development in the Office of Community Engagement at Central University. My immediate supervisor, who was the associate vice-chancellor of the Office of Community Engagement, approached me about assuming the role as the convener of this project because my predecessor had moved on to another position outside of the university. Like other times when this occurred, my supervisor was trying to determine who from our team would be ideal for the role, as she preferred to promote or assign new responsibilities from within the department. I was honored to

have been considered for this opportunity, but it was an enormous obligation about which I had three concerns. First, the person that I would be replacing was well respected in the Loving Community. She had spent years at Central University as an undergraduate, a graduate, and as a professional, cultivating relationships in this area and advocating for the people and business owners who lived and operated in this neighborhood. Being asked to follow in her footsteps was a bit intimidating. Second, although I had seven years of experience in community work, my experience did not specifically focus on community building. Instead, my background was workforce readiness in underserved areas of Capital City's urban core. Although workforce readiness included building relationships in order to institute the programs that our department was offering, and a successful track record of developing a thriving workforce readiness program, I did not quite have the unique skills for this opportunity (or at least, so I thought). Third, not being a resident of this community left me with grave concerns about my ability to effectively advocate for the residents of this neighborhood. My predecessor lived near the neighborhood, but I lived well beyond the boundaries of this area of the city. Would the residents and partners respect and accept me as an individual seeking their best interests? These concerns caused me to experience significant levels of stress and anxiety, which were the reasons for my hesitancy in considering this enormous undertaking.

While processing the associate vice-chancellor's request, I was reminded of a previous conversation with her, seven years earlier, when the former director of continuing education announced her retirement (The continuing education department was an academic area in Central University that offered noncredit offerings to adults in the greater Central City area). In the same manner, the associate vice-chancellor invited

me into her office and asked me to think about applying for the position as director of continuing education. I was surprised that I was considered for the director of continuing education position because I had always worked with students who were pursuing college degrees. This position required the development of nondegree certificate programs for students pursuing personal enrichment and professional development opportunities.

Although I did not have experience working with students in this regard, the associate vice-chancellor felt that the skills that I demonstrated were applicable for the director of continuing education position. Her recommendation would place me in a position that would take me into a completely different dimension of higher education. To say the least, it was a challenging situation to consider, but it was a fantastic way to grow as a professional.

Despite my reservation, I was comforted by the fact that we were well established in the community and that after almost three years, our workforce readiness efforts were running smoothly. These realities made the consideration to add the convener position to the responsibilities of my current job as director of workforce readiness and program development, marked a great opportunity to manage two different workplace areas, simultaneously. Additionally, the opportunity to support working adults in a more direct way, allowed me to use theories from my urban education doctoral program. My doctoral studies focused on critically examining sociological and educational issues in urban environments. I employed what I learned in my doctoral program when I engaged the community. I later learned that adult education theory served as the foundation from which I could disrupt negative discourses and practices, and empower residents and business owners in ways that would lead to neighborhood transformation (Glass, 2001). I

began to understand that neighborhood transformation would occur from the “inside out”- which emancipates, rather than from the “outside in”- which oppresses.

Given all the stakes that were involved for me personally, I could not refuse the position or the opportunity to support this community’s goals. With this in mind, and finally convinced of the advantages of such an opportunity, I decided to accept the offer because it would serve as a continued catalyst for my personal growth and development as a professional. It was also an ideal opportunity to dive deeper into our office’s community engagement efforts. In other words, this opportunity would serve as a vehicle through which to better understand the inner workings of the neighborhood development at a more grassroots level. I served in this role from February 1, 2017 until October 31, 2019.

As the Convener for the Loving Neighborhood, my responsibilities included working with residents and key stakeholders to advance the development of an urban village, within a designated quarter mile radius of an intersection, within the Loving Neighborhood. An urban village is a “. . . walkable, bicycle-friendly, transit-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood that can provide both housing and jobs, environmental benefits, and quality of life improvements for a city’s residents and the surrounding region” (Beasley, 2015). From the moment I started the position on February 1, 2017, I became increasingly aware of and concerned with the fact that there were many who were involved in the development and implementation of this initiative. However, many of the residents, specifically those who lived in the Carson neighborhood, were either not aware of how, or capable of advocating for themselves in regard to these development plans.

More troubling, many of these initiatives were developed by nonresidents (partners), without the consent of the current residents. This led to a lack of trust.

To provide more insight into this conversation, the next section will consist of a detailed examination of the causes for this lack of trust. Key components that played a significant role in sustaining a state of marginalization within the Carson neighborhood were power, euro centrality, and racism.

Power

According to Cervero and Wilson (2001), power occurs when certain groups are advantaged over others (e.g., advantaged groups have more power than disadvantaged groups). One of my first tasks as a convener for this neighborhood was to facilitate a collaborative structure of governance for the Loving Neighborhood. The four communities of the Loving Neighborhood (Carson, Capella, Midtown, and Summerville) agreed that this group would follow the initiatives, agreed upon through their partnership with the Trojan Horse, to establish an urban village in their community. Consisting of representatives from all four communities, the new structure of governance was called The Council (pseudonym) and was led by two co-chairs and a secretary, selected by the residents who were active members.

Very quickly, power and positioning began to compete for control within The Council and its leadership structure. When this group first reorganized in February of 2017, all four communities had an opportunity to serve as a co-chair or secretary on The Council. Unfortunately, the Carson community, which was the only predominantly Black community of the Loving Neighborhood, did not suggest a representative for its

leadership. When the discussion of a new leadership was being considered in February of 2019, a representative from the Midtown community insisted that in order to maintain the continuity of the current leadership (which was all White and only represented three of the four communities), no changes to the current leadership team should be made. In other words, the power that governed these four communities should be left with the three predominantly White neighborhoods. In this sense, the voices of those who were Latino and Black were silenced when decisions needed to be made in any meetings. Because this representative of the Midtown community was a respected voice in the Loving Neighborhood, the majority agreed with his suggestion. Despite my gentle hints to the Carson community about how this arrangement was a detriment to their interests, the recommendation was approved by all four communities. The Midtown resident's insistence on not changing the makeup of the current leadership was an example of the White power structure that was embedded in the Loving Neighborhood. This representative from the Midtown community was so concerned about his power and privileges under the current administration, that he failed to see how his decision negatively impacted another Black community (Carson). White power was a key factor in this situation, not only because this representative was a respected person in this community, but also because he was a White male. As a result, others refused to object to his recommendation that the leadership of The Council remain the same. This is but one example of how power by White residents in predominantly Black neighborhoods were exercised to maintain the control, the status quo, and the interests of the White residents.

Eurocentricity

According to the Hunn (2004) Eurocentrism,

Eurocentrism places the history, culture, and philosophical perspectives of people of European descent in a privileged, more valuable position than any other world culture. Eurocentrism, especially in the U.S. context, disguises itself as a universal perspective from which every culture must evaluate its experiences. It denies the value of other cultural and historical perspectives as ways of seeing and understanding the world. (p. 66)

Many scholars have agreed that White Eurocentric approaches to addressing community issues have been counterproductive. Hun (2004) for example, pointed out that White perspectives of community engagement were masked by the widely held notion of universalism. In other words, the white perspectives were made the standard, at the expense of ignoring the unique cultural distinctions of others. What this Eurocentric perspective failed to consider was how this way of thinking completely disempowered the cultures of others. To provide clarity to this idea, Stovall (2016) painted a picture of this phenomenon through his community work in Chicago. He stated that some of the residents “reminded the group of the collective struggle of Black and Latino/a peoples and how White supremacy/racism has functioned in the past to divide and conquer, resulting in distrust and self-segregation” (p. 68). Clearly, both residents and researchers in Stovall’s example demonstrated the long history and destructive nature of Eurocentricity that operated within nonwhite communities.

Typically, when White imperialistic perspectives are used for community engagement, specifically for Black Americans, the people in the community are blamed when progress is not realized (Ledwith, 2001). Therefore, before community transformation and sustained community progress can take place, the unique experiences of people of color must first be understood. When Eurocentricity was combined with

racist practices, those two systems undermined a community's ability to make progress which served as the catalyst to silencing a marginalized population.

Racism

What has silenced the development of communities of color are the racist practices that have been constant in the residential agenda of the Carson community. Omi and Winant (2015) claim that,

Race can never be merely a concept or idea, a representation or signification alone. Indeed race cannot be discussed, cannot even be noticed, without reference - however explicit or implicit - to social structure. To identify an individual or group racially is to locate them within a socially and historically demarcated set of demographic and cultural boundaries, state activities, "life-changes," and tropes of identity/difference/(in)equality. (p. 125)

The racism against Carson began under these auspices because Blacks were required to live within certain sections of the community when they first migrated to the area.

Although the Loving Neighborhood was made up of four communities, most of the blight was in Carson, which was predominantly Black. Until the early 1960s, the residents were not allowed to live anywhere else within the Loving Neighborhood. In addition, residents of Carson were refused any supports such as what was offered by the Carson Family Shelter, Charity Church Ministries, and the Loving Community Center (all pseudonyms). That is, of all of the different social services that were available in the neighborhood, Blacks were either ignored or the agencies would not serve them because of their race, which further marginalized the community (The Research Institute, 2001). Forcing black families to live in the worst areas of the community and preventing them access to social

services and other basic services were examples of how racism manifested itself in the Loving Neighborhood.

The racism in Carson's housing predicament was also represented in other writings. For example, Pierce (2005) spoke about the dismal efforts of real estate agents in Capital City who habitually "refused to show African Americans property outside of designated areas" (p. 61). In addition, Capital City's racial climate was well entrenched with discriminatory redlining, established by the Ku Klux Klan in 1926, that created policies and unwritten agreements prohibiting Blacks from buying homes in predominantly white residential areas (Midwest Archives [pseudonym], n.d.). To the detriment of Blacks, these laws only strengthened the tone and ratification of these practices, while White residents trusted that the politicians and realtors would always work for their benefit. Indeed, this political ploy of racism created harm for Blacks in Capital City because it became more abstract through redlining and segregationist policies, and thus more challenging to confront (Stone, 2002). According to Pierce (2005), housing was extremely scarce in Capital City for Blacks due to the increased growth in their population. These increases in numbers were coupled with the limited housing options and encouraged slumlords to charge high rents. Because of these entrenched, racist conditions, this practice "continued for decades" (Pierce, p. 64) and were no different for Carson residents. According to a report by the Research Institute (2001), "As more of the area's housing stock became rental properties, physical deterioration began to take place" (p. 3) and these properties served as the primary residences for Blacks.

To this end, racist ideologies assumed that the neighborhood decline was due to Blacks moving into communities when in fact, the demise in Carson specifically was a result of the racialized practices of whites (Mullins, 2006). For example, crime in the Loving Neighborhood, including Carson, was relatively low when the South Street and Denver Street business corridors were bustling. Work opportunities were prevalent in the neighborhood due to the existence of the meat packing plant in Capella and the two metal casting companies that existed in Carson. However, when these three companies closed, unemployment rates increased dramatically, and many people of color struggled to find work due to ongoing racist practices. Unfortunately, this left them with few choices to survive. To meet their family's needs, many residents resorted to criminal activity, and began to depend on drugs to cope with the emotional challenges of racism. When analyzing the blight in such neighborhoods, these important contextual factors were often ignored.

Statement of the Problem

Community engagement in urban contexts often invites a variety of interested parties (i.e., the city, economic investors, local merchants, anchor institutions, not-for-profit organizations) with various agendas, who often employ deficit approaches to neighborhood revitalization. Inevitably, oppressive approaches to community engagement such as community development projects (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003) and university students volunteering for a day of service to “help” (quotes added) impoverished communities, failed to build capacity within the community which led to further degradation and distrust from those who reside within the neighborhood. Too

often, low-income families of color fell victim to this inept, self-serving, and in many ways predatory form of community engagement (Ledwith, 2007).

Across America, the challenges in Black communities are well documented (Alexander, 2012; Blauner, 1969; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Williams & Rucker, 2000). For example, the Parish Levee District in New Orleans, was built by slaves was maintained financially until White elite families moved out, when more Black families moved in. The levee was established because New Orleans was situated below sea level. But when this levee was not properly maintained, the Parish Levee District experienced flooding and many homes and schools were destroyed. Because the city did not extend resources to revitalize the district, many Black families suffered financially and are currently experiencing abject poverty (Buras, 2015). Access to equitable education also serves as a challenge in Black communities as exemplified in Berkley, California where there are “extreme disparities in academic outcomes among students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds” (Noguera, 2003, p. 60).

To address such conditions in urban Black communities, efforts to revitalize the communities included the creation of urban villages which was the case in the Loving Neighborhood. The intent of these efforts, often initiated by neighborhood leaders, businesses, and politicians, was to invigorate economic growth, to encourage new business development, to attract new residents, and to create new employment opportunities for a deprived community. In Capital City, this proved to be extremely successful in three middle to upper-middle class districts where community development projects pushed nonwhites to the margins all in the name of urban renewal and economic development. As similar developers began to move into the Loving Neighborhood, the

possibility of urban displacement was a grave concern to many residents of the Carson community.

At the core of this conundrum were the voices of Black men who lived and worked in this community. These were experienced, educated, and intelligent Black men who had the capacity to provide insight, wisdom, and the leadership to address the very challenges that faced the Loving Neighborhood. Unfortunately, the problem that emerged, in my experience, was that the voices of Black men continued to be ignored, silenced, and muffled in this community. This was the result of a White supremacist structure that was firmly embedded within the Loving Neighborhood. It is my belief that the Carson community and others with similar demographics cannot be emancipated until the voices of those who are marginalized are firmly established in the decision-making process of community revitalization. The primary problem that this study identifies is how the system of White supremacy has negatively impacted community engagement decisions in nonwhite communities by continually ignoring the voices and the brilliance of adult Black men.

Purpose of the Study

Because neighborhood issues tend to cross multiple inner-workings of urban communities including schools, economic development, racism, underemployment, and strained resident-police relationships, a diverse set of stakeholders are needed to develop appropriate and sustainable neighborhood initiatives. Consequently, this study sheds light on the voices of four adult Black males, who aspire to foster neighborhood transformation, as they learn the important role of community engagement in an urban

community of color. Using the work of scholars such as Chaskin (2001), neighborhood transformation is framed as economic development, community capacity building, the facilitation of community specific health initiatives (Hacker, 2013; Wendel et al., 2009), critical consciousness of residents (Evans et al., 2014; Freire, 1968), improved housing conditions, the creation of sustainable employment opportunities, and confrontation of educational disparities. Accordingly, it is imperative that an understanding of Black males, within the ecosystems in which they exist, be explored and that they are included in conversations that address the needs of their communities. While previous research studies have explored adult development (Drayton, 2010, 2014, & 2016; Guy, 2004, 2014; Johnson-Bailey, 2014) and community engagement (Kirk, 2004; Ledwith, 2005; Perkins, 2002) separately, few studies have addressed how adult development and community engagement interactions with Black males can benefit communities of color in grassroots, community engaged efforts. Studies that address these interactions could provide valuable insight into why Black men became active in their communities, what they learned in their community development activities, what prompted them to remain motivated, and what skills they learned or are still acquiring in order to effectively help the residents in vulnerable neighborhoods. This inquiry employed critical theories to explore the importance of the work and the unique voices of four Black men in a predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Research Questions to Be Answered

Given the condition of urban communities, it is essential that Black men have an active role in the improvement of the quality of life of their neighborhoods. However, what are the authentic, yet high impact practices that lead to improving the quality of life in impoverished neighborhoods? To address this question, Lebron James' development of his I Promise School (Zahn, 2018) prompted the following three research questions for this study:

1. What are the learning experiences of adult Black males who are active in their communities?
2. What impacts the decisions of adult Black males to become active in their communities?
3. What are the tools that adult Black males believe are essential in order to actively engage in their communities?

Conceptual Assumptions

I understand that interviewing only four Black men speaks to a small segment of Black male voices in the neighborhood. Notably, there are other Black males who are youth athletic coaches, pastors of churches, neighborhood organization board members, business owners, and fathers who are intricately involved in the revitalization of the Carson community. With limited time, my goal is to highlight the different aspects of Black male experiences who are working as volunteers in their neighborhood organizations to improve the quality of life in their communities. Additionally, I am concerned about how I am viewed as an educated Black male. I did not live in the Carson

neighborhood, and was employed full time at the local University that once displaced Blacks for the sake of the development of its campus (Drake [pseudonym], 2006). I comprehend and I am sympathetic about the reservations that these men may have about our interactions. Conversely, as a Black male, sensitive to the current climate towards Black men in America, I understand how my biases may affect how I interact with the participants and interpret their responses. However, a constructivist viewpoint, which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed (Mertens, 2015), allowed me to recognize that as a researcher, I “should attempt to understand the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Mertens, p. 16) which even as Black men, may be completely different from my own. It was my strongest desire that their realistic experiences as Black men be prominent in this study.

To that end, there were several assumptions underlying this study. The first assumption was that these men had a deep passion and love for their neighborhoods. This reality was expressed in how these men consistently attended, not only the neighborhood meetings designed to improve their community’s quality of life, but also in how they participated in various social activities in the Loving Neighborhood. These social activities were designed to foster a stronger bond with fellow residents and community partners. Their deep feelings about the direction of their community was also evident in how they consistently spoke at neighborhood meetings to address various issues relevant to the area’s living environment. The second assumption is that these men were honest, frank, and authentic in their discussions and had important knowledge to contribute to the research topic. The third assumption was that all information, received and collected, was accurate and relevant to this inquiry. These assumptions were important points of

exploration as they became the foundation on which I developed the questions in my protocol regarding Black men, adult learning, and community engagement.

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

For this study, I used a theoretical framework to help organize and explain the findings. Due to the complex nature of the Carson community, a critical ethnographic approach was used to examine the area's diverse cultural makeup and the unique relationships with current and potential partners. Critical ethnography, according to Mertens (2015), "includes the examination of social structures, including economic, political, social, historical, and cultural institutions and norms that support discriminatory practices that constrain the agency of individuals or groups and the strategies of resistance employed by those who are oppressed" (p. 243). As a participant/observer of this community, my work as a critical ethnographer was to find ways to illuminate the voices of the men who were residents and employees in this community. Through semi-structured interviews that I held with these men, the analysis of the data, and the development of themes through a sociocultural lens, their hidden voices emerged. According to Creswell (2007), a participant/observer immerses themselves in the everyday activities and lives of the individual and explores the "issues of power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization" (p. 70). As a participant/observer, I actively engaged with the residents by consistently attending neighborhood meetings and community events. I conducted participant interviews to gain further insight into the meaning of the culture, and I often ate lunch with residents who also served as leaders of various organizations. I paid close

attention to how they interacted with one another, the types of email messages that were delivered, the relationships that were established, the cliques, and any sign of racism or marginalization of others. In this way, I was “able to engage research participants more easily and use their shared experiences to gather a richer set of data” (Kerstetter, p.100). The data from this study was analyzed from a lens of Sociocultural Learning Theory (Alfred, 2002a).

Sociocultural Learning Theory

According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), the sociocultural perspective of adult development “recognizes that factors such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation affect how society defines us” (p. 312). Previous researchers, the majority of which were white, middle-class males (Knowles, 1973; Levinson, 1986; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961), rarely if ever acknowledged these aspects of a person’s identity and therefore developed narrow and inconclusive perspectives which were then applied in general terms to every research subject. Consequently, the sociocultural dimensions of various individuals were not included and thus these ideologies were inappropriately applied, biases were created, and deficit and inaccurate perspectives were developed for marginalized populations (Alfred, 2002a).

Drawn from Vygotskian’s theories of learning and development, the sociocultural framework speaks to the learning and development that occurs within an individual or group’s context. It is significant to note that this framework acknowledges the ongoing changes within a person or the history of a culture, and as these nuances change, so does

the opportunity for other moments of learning and development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Alfred (2002a) expands on this point of contextualization by mentioning that the “emphasis on the situated nature of learning shifts the focus on learning from the individual alone to the individual in the interaction with and within a larger sociocultural context” (p. 5). Thus, according to the sociocultural model, development and learning is more adequately achieved and assessed when examining individuals and cultures within their contexts. Alfred and others have emphasized that without context, everything becomes compromised because context serves as the significant lens through which researchers analyze human behavior and how individuals develop meaning.

In brief, one of the main reasons why the sociocultural model was beneficial for analyzing the narratives of the adult Black male participants, specifically in the context of Carson, was because of its emphasis on the cultural context of all neighborhoods. As mentioned previously, most theories of adult development were developed by Whites, particularly White, middle class males (Knowles, 1973; Levinson, 1986; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961), who applied their theories to all people, despite their cultural contexts. This practice socially constructed deficit and negative perspectives and marginalized oppressed populations (Sandlin, 2005). The use of dominant culture theory also ignored the appreciation of cultural differences and instead replaced it with white racial norms, practices, and understandings (Manglitz, 2003). The benefit of a sociocultural development perspective for adult development “helped learners, who faced oppression on a daily basis, to take control of their lives” (Guy, 1999, p. 94) which broke away from and dismantled narrow viewpoints of life events. Invariably, this framework was not only for the marginalized, but it was also a perspective that included all persons regardless of

age, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Alfred, 2002a).

Finally, sociocultural learning theory is also a model suitable for adult development in community engagement because it offers an opportunity for all people to provide their counter-stories. Counter-stories or counter-narratives encourage marginalized populations to share their experiences with racially motivated acts that are often left hidden and untold. Thus, these stories “counter” narratives that are often distorted or misunderstood by Whites (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Interestingly, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) suggested that “A person’s race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, among other positionalities, intersect to influence the development of that person” (p. 315). The exploration of these intersections gives people of color an opportunity to share narratives from their perspective that can provide deep, rich experiences regarding one’s development. Although specifically developed for oppressed populations, a tenet of critical race theory (CRT) speaks to this notion of providing counter-story, “because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Blacks, American Indians, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Stefancic, year, p. 10). Thus, sociocultural learning theory provides a space for those on the margins of U. S. society to contradict deficit narratives, and is useful in exploring the learning, development, and experiences of adults specifically with regards to Black men. The need to counter deficit narratives about Black males and provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard further supports why I believe that sociocultural learning theory is a framework that helps to minimize racial biases.

Importance of the Study

Studying the perspectives of Black men in community contexts provides a platform for their voices to be heard. It invites them into the conversations where they can share their insights, perspectives, and solutions for themselves and other Black men in their community. It also provides understanding of how they assert agency, which is “the thoughts and actions taken by people that express their individual power” (Cole, 2019, p. 1), within community contexts. Woodson (1990), recognizes this silencing of voices in the Black community in this way:

The usual way now is for the whites to work out their plans behind closed doors, have them approved by a few Negroes serving nominally on a board, and then employ a white or mixed staff to carry out their program. This is not interracial cooperation. It is merely the ancient idea of calling upon the “inferior” to carry out the orders of the “superior.” (Woodson, 1990, p.17)

Unfortunately, I have noticed that few Black men are engaged at the higher, more strategic levels of involvement in the community. Hunter and Davis (1994), regarded this phenomenon as a way in which the dominant group “casts Black men as victims and ignore their capacity to define themselves under difficult circumstances” (p. 21). This means that the voices of Black males, many of which are residents of these neighborhoods, are impacted by the decisions that are made and but have no say in the finalized decisions about the communities in which they live.

Pierce (2005) also acknowledged the racist practice of silencing Blacks when it was time to make decisions about the restructuring and redevelopment of the Capital City government. This practice repositioned districts to strip the emerging power that Blacks were beginning to command in the city. Specifically, in 1972, a group of middle-class White men, led by the then mayor of Capital City, met in someone’s living room and

reshaped the Capital City landscape. This furtive meeting of White men further segregated the city's Black residents from the privileged Whites, and at the same time it marginalized and disenfranchised the Black communities. Since this governmental realignment, which began in 1969 (Gray, 2003), the city's low-income Black communities have experienced increased blight resulting in high rates of crime, high unemployment, poverty, and substandard housing.

Repeatedly, community efforts have fallen into this same hegemonic decision-making process, where meetings were held by White men in middle-class living rooms, to make decisions that negatively impacted residents in low to working-class communities. Decisions, such as the Capital City government realignment, literally stripped away the voices of the Black communities by suppressing their ability to speak to or challenge any rights that they felt were compromised. Consequently, the opinions and objections of the Black community became whispers when people in power allowed a few Blacks to come to the decision-making table. Neighborhood leaders, pastors, and even city councilpersons, etc. imbue little or no decision-making authority which leads to little, if any, community capacity (Beazley, Griggs, & Smith, 2004; Chaskin, 2001; Wendell et al., 2009) or sustainability (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003) of their neighborhoods. Thus, for Black men to create solutions regarding community matters (based on their experiences and perspectives), Black men need to be able to participate in any discussions regarding the development of their communities.

One group of Black males, whose voices have been significantly silenced, are those who are or have been incarcerated. Alexander (2012) reported that of the Black males in predominantly Black communities, 80% have criminal records. Having a

criminal history can create barriers to finding jobs with supportable wages, affordable housing, and reliable transportation. The failure to secure these life sustaining necessities can then lead to their inability to properly care for their children.

With so many life eroding barriers in place, stakeholders and concerned community members are crucial to the reestablishing of Black men in urban settings. Not only can influential groups help Black men navigate the barriers they often experience upon reentry, stakeholders and concerned community members can also speak out against the system of injustice and mass incarceration of Black men in the United States. However, just as speaking out and removing barriers for the formerly incarcerated Black men is important, so is the inclusion of these same men when decisions are made that affect their circumstances. Not only is this a responsible component of community engagement, but as community problem solvers, it dignifies the men who have endured the traumatic experience of confinement. Empowering Black men who were formerly incarcerated helps to loosen the antagonism between Black men and their community which is developed by the disenfranchising practices of mass incarceration and white male patriarchy (Nedhari, 2009).

As a Black man with four Black sons, I am concerned about the quality of life that my sons will experience in this country. Each time my children leave our home, I experience a heightened sense of anxiety over their well-being. Although lynching has long been outlawed in this country (Hixson, 1969), the increased brutality of police on Black males in the U.S. has proven to be just as detrimental. In fact, the savage displays of law enforcement on Black men can quite possibly be considered the modern-day version of yesterday's brutal lynchings. In addition, with racist norms permeating

practically every organizational system that they will encounter, my concerns are not for my son's ability to navigate academic, economic, and social environments, but rather, my fear is how they will be mistreated by others because they are males who happen to be Black. It is almost unbearable to conceive that my sons will be feared by another person who rides with them on an elevator, that they may be redlined in a neighborhood as they succumb to predatory lending (Caplan, 2014), or that others will assume that because they are on a college campus, that they must be an athlete.

I am fearful that the things I can teach them in our home may not be enough to prevent them from the physical and emotional harms of this world. A possible scenario that gives me great concern is their interaction with law enforcement. After having communicated with my children about the importance of placing their hands on the steering wheel and being respectful if they are pulled over by a police officer, I am fearful that my children will experience the very real possibility of being killed by these officers. Being considerate is what parents should teach their children because it is the core of being a great human, but I argue that being impolite should not serve as the impetus for anyone's death. Therefore, *the conversation* that just about all Black families must have with their Black boys is necessary for their survival in this country.

Some of my first memories are of my grandfather explaining to me how differently I would be treated because I am a Black male living in a racist society. He shared with me that I would be hated by the police in this country and that I should behave cautiously around them. If I did not, I would be disrespected, beaten, thrown in jail, and if I get too out of line, I would possibly be killed. I was told that White people in the U.S. believe that I am lazy, and that I will abandon my children. I was told that White

people in the U.S. believe that I am an unintelligent, hypersexual, and that I can never truly love and be faithful to my wife. They believe that I have an insatiable desire to rape all White women. I was told that White people believe that I am a common criminal and that no matter how successful I became in my life, White people would only see me as a Nigger. Additionally, to be successful, I would have to work twice as hard as the average White man. Like many other Black families in this country, this is a continuous conversation that my mother, father, uncles, coaches, and grandparents had with me. I had the same conversation with my four sons.

To avoid such a discussion in a system that is racist is akin to asking a person to fly a plane without any flight training or flying experience. For these reasons, more Black males need to be present at the tables of discussion and planning about community engagement. More theories and practices need to identify with the Black man's experience, relate to his position in this culture, and respond to this country's hostile climate. The stakes are very high.

Definition of Terms

Colonialism: a system of oppression by a dominant or majority group designed to enact economic inequalities that create huge disparities in the lifestyles of other populations (Fanon, 1963).

Community: as used in this study, consists of a group of people whose backgrounds, ways of knowing, and understanding vary but they live in a geographic and political boundary. Community can also be understood as individuals “bound together by shared condition or concern” (Hacker, 2013, p. 26).

Community Capacity Building: Focusing “. . . on enabling all members of the community, including the poorest and the most disadvantaged, to develop skills and competencies so as to take greater control of their own lives and also contributes to inclusive local development” (Noya, Clarence, & Craig, 2009, p. 11). It is where residents develop solutions for their own communities while maintaining control over their environment.

Community Development: begins with the everyday lives of residents and community partners who are empowered to strive after sustainable neighborhood change through “collective action and is built on principles of participatory democracy” (Ledwith, 2011, p. 3).

Critical: an analysis of a cultural phenomenon or situation with intentions of determining the possibility of harm to the human condition. Critical perspectives examine society by unpacking the hidden inequities through the “questioning of power, domination, and exploitation, the political demand and struggle for a just society” (Fuchs, 2016, p. 1). Critical perspectives focus “on the tension between the existing social and

material world and the possibility for changing this world” (Bauder & Engle-Di Mauro, 2008, p. 1), thus avoiding the reproduction of oppression and marginalization by pointing out social contradictions which empower others around issues of social justice (McLaren, 2003).

Marginalization: the idea of excluding individual(s) from the capacity to fulfill the “individual, interpersonal, and societal levels” (Kagan et al., 2011, p. 6). This exclusion occurs by the dominant group or group in power who establish system to position certain groups where resources are not readily accessible thus preventing them from making positive contributions to society. As victims, they are blamed by the oppressor for the condition from which they are not completely at fault (Castle, 2019).

Minoritized: the continuous development of oppression toward people of color. The concept speaks to the limited access to and barriers created for people of color which hinders their ability to progress in various institutions and organizations (Harper, 2012; Harper, Patton Davis, & Wooden, 2009; Patton Davis, 2013). The term also highlights the historical processes that have occurred over time and debunks the myth that the employment of racism only happens in fixed settings and situations (Benitez, 2010).

Urban: densely populated areas of a city where “the infrastructure” (Howard and Milner, p. 201) advantages the privileged and limits access to those who are socioeconomically deprived of opportunities for the continuous improvement of the quality of life. These limitations include key necessities such as quality education, healthy food options, livable wage employment, affordable healthcare, and economic development. Typically, the result of White flight, urban neighborhoods consist of “concentrated poverty and disadvantage and those of concentrated wealth and advantage”

(Ansell, 2017, p. 32). The imbalance between the privileged and the marginalized impact “schooling; racial segregation; liberal, neoliberal, and conservative school policies, reforms; disproportionate poverty; [and] limited opportunity structure[s]” (Milner and Lomotey, p. 375) as well as a low-life expectancy. The contrast of poverty and wealth is usually racially segregated along a Black/White binary (Martin and Larnel, 2014; Ansel, 2017), but discursive practices of other cultures in urban spaces also occur in Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian communities (Lipsitz, 2011). Although negative terms such as “blighted” are used to describe the more challenged areas of urban areas, residents tend to see them as “spaces of collective identity, survival, and cultural resistance. . . which the social and cultural practices of daily life are rooted, race and class identities are formed, and community is constituted” (Lipman, p. 34).

Overview of Dissertation Structure

CHAPTER ONE introduces the study topic and establishes the background of this work within the context of an urban community and adult Black males who are striving to improve their quality of life. Research questions are presented, terms are defined, and critical frameworks are introduced. The background, reasons for the study, contributions presented, and the implications are also explained.

CHAPTER TWO investigates the literature and establishes the theoretical foundation that led to this study including the presentation of the different ideas behind community engagement. This is followed by an explanation of community engagement, community building, community activism, community capacity building, adult development, and adult development of Black males. The exploration of these concepts is essential to understanding the intersection of community engagement and the learning practices of adult Black men.

CHAPTER THREE introduces the methods of inquiry. Critical ethnography and sociocultural learning theory are further discussed as the frameworks applied in this inquiry. This chapter also includes the study procedures, participant characteristics, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR includes a presentation of the findings along with the descriptions of the themes that emerged. During the interviews, the four adult Black male participants shared their experiences of community engagement and processes of learning within the Loving Neighborhood and the Carson community. Chapter IV also includes considerations for community engagement pertaining to Black males in urban community settings. In addition, this chapter includes a deliberation about the need to further explore

the development of adults in community engagement while also centering the voices of adult Black men. A new model for community engagement and Black men in urban settings is introduced and discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE includes the Conclusion and Implications sections, as well as a presentation of the overview of the intersections of community engagement and adult learning in the context of urban community settings. The implications of the study, both theoretical and practical, are offered. The chapter closes with considerations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

“Our urbanizing society is coming apart in large measure because of the disintegration of our communities. To oversimplify, healthy families produce healthy communities and healthy communities produce healthy families—these are the fundamental building blocks of society.” (Perkins, 1995, p. 87)

Review of the Literature

This chapter details the literature relative to adult education and community engagement. There is a brief explanation of the theoretical orientation of the study which provides perspectives on grassroots, deficit, and asset-based approaches to community engagement. The chapter offers a more in-depth understanding of community engagement and the long-term effects these approaches can impose on a neighborhood. The sections that follow explain adult learning with details about the adult learner, the field of adult education, critiques of adult learning theories, and adult learning for Black men as a foundation for conceptualizing their significance in the development of urban communities. The chapter closes with a summary and rationale for this study.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

The review of literature on adult education was included because it served as a sound theoretical foundation for me to interact with the residents, leaders, and partners of the Loving Neighborhood. It was my belief that the stagnancy of leadership development in the community resulted from a community partner philosophy operating under the assumption that projects and initiatives were more effective for neighborhood revitalization as opposed to building strong relationships (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003). Being unfamiliar with the community when I was asked to take on this work, I

discovered that the Loving Neighborhood was a lot more diverse racially than I had previously understood. Because I grew up in Capital City, I knew about the Loving Neighborhood, but I did not know that it consisted of four communities. The only community that I was familiar with was Carson, and I had the understanding that the entire Loving Neighborhood was the Carson community. Additionally, I was not aware that the Loving Neighborhood was an area where many Slovenians settled and that this area's rich history included the former metal working plants, meat packing plant, and many low-income White residents. I was also unaware of the great Latino population that began migrating to the area in the mid-1990s.

For my adult education program, the literature of the scholars that I was assigned to read were predominantly White (e.g., Caffarella, 2002; Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 1995; Vella, 2008). This was problematic because of the diverse makeup of the community. Therefore, my frustration led me to seek scholars of color and critical scholars who addressed oppression and marginalization in the field of adult education. While conducting my search, critical scholars, such as Hun (2004), Johnson-Bailey (2006), and Manglitz (2003), surfaced who challenged White supremacy and illuminated the oppressive realities of racism. Additional scholars, who enlightened my knowledge, included Drayton and Prins (2011) and Guy (2014). Their research specifically addressed adult Black males, which was becoming my own sacred area of interest. Finally, scholars such as Alfred (2002b), Cunningham (1996), and Sandlin (2005) pushed the current boundaries of theory by questioning conventional adult education frameworks that they claimed have ignored the sociocultural conditions, history, and contexts of people of color.

It was through the study of these critical scholars that I was able to focus my academic observations on racism and to then examine how the Whites, in authority, played such a major role in creating barriers against Blacks in this community. Their research compelled me to want to know more about their theories, their current role in adult education research, and how it might further inform and influence my work, as a community engaged scholar, with adults of all cultures.

Urban Black Communities

America believes that it has made in race relations, but urban Black communities continue to demonstrate evidence to the contrary. Policies that were originally designed to improve public spaces ultimately removed the wealth and economic viability of urban Black neighborhoods. For example, Solomon, Maxwell, and Castro (2019) described how a predominantly Black community, in Washington, D C, moved progressively to become a largely White neighborhood because of the displacement of Black residents. This displacement, according to Solomon, Maxwell, and Castro, began in the early 1980's because of the federal government's growing interest in the expansion of industry. As tax breaks were extended to different companies, White professionals found employment and moved into neighborhoods that were predominantly nonwhite, forcing less financially secure Black families out and into even further unstable living conditions. In June of 2015, a ruling by the Supreme Court found that for the Ferguson, Missouri community, there was a "disproportionate placement of subsidized housing in neighborhoods that had been segregated by past government policy [and] could violate the Fair Housing Act, even if the placement was not intended to intensify segregation" (Rothstein, 2017, p.

191). Such efforts of gentrification in this low-income neighborhood right outside of St. Louis forced Blacks to consider other living accommodations in neighborhoods that are also underserved and transitional from redevelopment efforts and road redirection. From 2015 to the current year of 2020, low-income Black families are rarely in a position of power to advocate against these efforts of gentrification leaving them at the mercy of dishonest landlords who “refuse to rent to tenants who use housing vouchers” (Rothstein p. 11).

Similarly, Buras (2015) investigated a Black community in New Orleans, Louisiana where Whites had taken over school districts that had been crucial in the academic development for Black children. In a display of White supremacy, profitable education systems were established, and charter schools were built which syphoned funds from the state of Louisiana and into the pockets of academic opportunists. Instead of using their power to fight for much needed education reform in Black communities, these White controlled, profit-orientated coups only reinforced the strained economic viability that already existed in the predominantly Black New Orleans school districts. In the spirit of the commodification of education, Spring (2011) suggested that the “education business is also represented by investment bankers and law firms who lobby members of Congress and state legislatures to protect the industry’s economic interests” (p. 153). Often, charter schools were typically nestled in urban Black communities with no greater focus than to serve the interests of their financial backers.

Additionally, the inequitable distribution of wealth, in the United States, places Black families at a grave disadvantage, particularly those in urban settings. For example, Oliver and Shapiro (1995) report that the top ten percent of American families control

two-thirds of the wealth and have almost twelve times the median net worth as Blacks. Of those families with zero financial assets, twenty-five percent are White households and sixty-one percent are Black households. Further, seventy-three percent of Black children grow up in homes without financial resources compared to only forty percent of White children. These financial disparities eventually lead to a range of racialized education, sparse law enforcement, and lack of employment in urban Black communities. Equally alarming, Williams and Rucker (2000) report that Black families have higher mortality rates than Whites and have lower levels of access to medical care. The reason for this inequality is a direct result of the high unemployment rates that exist in urban Black communities, and the high percentage of Blacks who have jobs that pay minimal, life sustaining wages, and provide little or no health insurance. Black families, that have poor or no health insurance, are unable to participate in therapeutic options needed to address more acute health care issues.

As if displacement, education, and wealth are not overwhelming challenges, Black families in urban Black communities are constantly facing a superficial housing market that makes it difficult for them to own homes. According to Lipsitz (2011), not only does this place them in positions where they are forced to remain renters, but also their rental options are restricted to slumlords in low-income communities riddled with high crime, devoid of decent stores and pharmacies, and most important, have low performing school districts. Blacks who do own homes “are forced to do so on terms that compel them to pay more for dwellings that are worth less and appreciate in value slower than comparable homes inhabited by Whites” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 6). To be clear, most Blacks in urban communities are not relegated to these less desirable areas by choice as

the “bottom line is that the local, state, and national policies designed to eliminate racial discrimination in housing and employment have failed” (Williams & Rucker, 2000, p. 78). As Lipsitz (2011) suggests, Blacks are often forced into such living conditions due to the racist practices that systematically underwrite White privilege.

Add to this, health disparities, remain egregiously extensive. In Chicago for example, Ansell (2017) reports that “between 1980 and 2010, there was little decline in chronic disease mortality among these [Black working] men and women [between the ages of 16-64] in most areas, and in some instances there were increases” (p. 23). Ansell is quick to point out; however, that these increases are not a part of some moral outrage over these disparities. Instead, the resulting changes were a direct result of the escalating mortality rates among Whites.

The issues that urban Black families encounter, as discussed in this section, are only a minute portion of the barriers that they are faced with daily. The oppressive realities that exist within urban Black communities counter the United States narrative of a post-racial society since the election of its first Black president in 2008. Such accounts merely attempt to perpetuate the myth of being colorblind, which is a form of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). What is forced on the families of urban Black communities is unique and requires exclusive approaches to begin the process of healing, restoration, and transformation. I will examine how these exclusive approaches can begin the process of healing as we explore the different forms of community engagement in the next section.

Community Engagement

In my experience, I believe that for community engagement to be useful, successful, and sustainable, it must begin with the people. Chavis and Wandersman (1990) share that the stronger one's sense of community, the better a person feels they can make change in their neighborhood. As community is developed, strong relationships among neighbors are established, and residents feel more comfortable attending community meetings. On the other side of strong community relationships, Perkins, Hughey, and Speer (2002) question the thought of social cohesion stating that the "excessive concern for social cohesion undermines the ability to confront or engage in necessary conflict, and thus, it dis-empowers the community. Instead of emphasizing social cohesion, 'network-bridging' opportunities to increase power, access, and learning should be emphasized" (p. 33). This quote does not minimize the importance of social cohesion. I am a major proponent of relationship development in community engagement. However, it stresses the tension that is necessary for a neighborhood to experience for them to manage and learn from internal challenges that residents may face. Perkins, Hughey, and Speer (2002) go on to say that these conflicts are essential in helping to support the transition of community relationships from bridging (acquaintances) to bonding (trusted relationships). To this end, social capital, the value placed on formal and informal interpersonal relationships and networks that "can facilitate social mobility and provide access to resources" (Barnes-Mauthe, Gray, Arita, Lynham, & Leung, 2015, p. 393), play a major role in a community's ability to sustain a neighborhood's "revitalization and upkeep" (Perkins, Hughey, and Speer, 2002, p. 36). Communities that can master the tension between cohesion and conflict help to cultivate

agency and builds trust amongst the residents, which in turn allows them to advocate for themselves against questionable tactics by potential partners and stakeholders.

If the goal of an individual or group is to participate in community engagement efforts particularly at a deep, grass-roots level, it is important to analyze what happened historically in said neighborhood from a critical perspective (Evans et al., 2014). When critical analysis is undertaken, actions that are congruent with the culture of the people who reside in a community can be pursued. Further, Evans et al. (2014) assert that a critical model of community engagement and social transformation is “when people have community, a voice, and equal access to valued resources” (p. 2). The silencing of community voices, particularly in marginalized areas, is a hallmark of White supremacy (Hunn, 2004). This silencing prevents the counter-story of neighborhood realities from being heard which further relegates blighted communities into the abyss of disinvestment. To the dismay of marginalized and nonwhite communities, tools for accessing the resources needed for overcoming barriers such as being silenced are typically preserved for the privileged and are only allocated to the underserved communities when it serves the interest of whites (Stovall, 2016). Community engagement that positions Whites as savior to the poor, the Black, the marginalized, and the lowly is an example of interest convergence (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2012), which further speaks to the need for a critical lens in the analysis of the social conditions and sufferings of low-income and marginalized communities.

Challenged communities are failing because of the traditional oppressive practices of the dominant culture with flawed approaches to community development (Simpson, 2003; Beazly, Griggs, & Smith, 2004; Graeme, 2014). Because of the limited and

constraining results of traditional community engagement efforts, community engagement ideologies, with a focus on emancipation, have more sustainable outcomes for marginalized communities (Ledwith, 2007). Emancipatory approaches for community engagement is the emphasis on a “collective and democratic process, with learner-identified problems providing the content for the learning” (Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2017, p. 335). Ultimately, this learning leads to neighborhood transformation because of the resident’s desires to take social action. Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm discuss how such a burgeoning awareness encourages residents to “conduct research investigations and subsequently reflect on the findings. Using “dialogue and critical reflection, participants move from passive acceptance of their situation to becoming empowered through critical consciousness” (Ross-Gordon, Rose, & Kasworm, 2017, p. 244). In the case of the Carson community residents, dialogue becomes the means through which the residents can become aware of and understand how the *power* dynamics and oppressive structures negatively impact their community.

Freire called this form of emancipation, *conscientization* (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007). The strength of this concept is that the learner (or in this case, the residents of the Carson community) became coinvestigators in their sociocultural *situation*. In the process, the residents began “to sense that they may have some control over their lives and turned to questioning things as they were” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 141). Before this point of conscientization, residents rarely examine the world as it was. However, encouraging them into dialogue and critical-consciousness, residents adopted an “an in-depth understanding of the [force] that shaped one’s life space, and became an

agent in constructing a different, more just reality” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 141).

According to Freire (1973), this level of consciousness is called, *praxis*.

Thus, what is needed in effective community engagement is meaningful praxis. Traditionally speaking, praxis is what happens when theory is used to inform practice. However, Freire (1973) extended this notion of praxis and added an emancipatory aspect by moving beyond a praxis, that is simply informed practice. Instead, Freire espoused a critical praxis that questioned the status quo of any setting and reflected on it in ways that would lead to transformation (Evans, et al. 2014). Ledwith (2007) also pointed out the importance of a critical analysis of power within the community and social structures. When community practice is not met with critical analysis, Ledwith warned “that we are allowing ourselves to be redefined as a tool of government policy at the expense of our transformative purpose” (p. 3). To be blunt, community engaged scholars and practitioners are selling out the very communities, for which we claim to be advocates, when we fail to engage the community in critical and analytical ways. Critical community engagement requires an analysis of the social structures that oppress those with limited or no power. Anything else, Ledwith proclaimed, is nothing more than tokenistic community engagement at best. Critical praxis in community engagement requires one to develop the ability to look beyond the surface of the local workings of a neighborhood to analyze and question why certain activities occur. When the status quo is questioned, the marginalized are better informed and able to enact agency to advocate against oppressive practices. Ultimately, then transformation in neighborhoods can be realized.

In the following sections, an overview of community engagement will be provided which will detail deficit and asset-based approaches to neighborhood revitalization. Next, the field of adult learning will be explored, including a summary of researchers who were the geneses of the discipline, as well as scholars with more contemporary theories and critical understandings. The section will conclude with an integration of community engagement, adult learning, and how I believe the concepts can best be used to support Black males in neighborhood work.

Deficit Approaches

Critical scholars have challenged conventional notions of community engagement that marginalized low-income whites and underrepresented families. For example, Hacker (2013) mentioned that for years, many community engaged scholars took up residency in neighborhoods with the goal of doing research “on” the community rather than “with” the community. Their intent was to study, conduct research, and publish articles about the residents of the communities. Hacker goes on to say that the scholarships of these researchers were enriched and their names in the academy became popular, which led to promotions, tenure, and many speaking engagements (Hacker, 2013). Sadly, despite their accomplishments and successes, many scholars did not give back to the communities that they studied. Additionally, these scholars aligned their research with the White supremacist’s understanding of marginalized communities, which does not critically analyze the socio-historical actions that led to the current conditions of a community. In turn, their findings portrayed these communities as perpetrators of their own negligence, rather than the victims of White supremacy. This

deficit approach to community engagement further contributes to the lack of trust that residents typically have for outsiders and neighborhood partners (Ledwith, 2005).

Beazley, Griggs, and Smith (2004) gave strong warning about blaming marginalized communities for their condition.

The “deficit” model assumes that the problem facing communities are due in large part to their own lack of skills or abilities. It is very much on a social pathology understanding of communities that implies that they lack the necessary qualities and ingredients to become “good citizens.” . . . for those in power this model of capacity building is useful. It poses no threat. It is top down, paternalistic and deflects attention away from the need to change the existing institutional economic structures. It is a view that serves and supports the status quo. (Beazley et al., 2004, p. 13)

Because many who attempt to *help* in the Carson community are predominantly White, I would also add that blaming communities for their challenges not only deflects from the systems that influence these challenges, it is also a way for Whites to deflect any personal blame for the conditions of these neighborhoods. In other words, blaming these neighborhoods is an aspect of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), because for some White people in power, the slightest notion that they would have any responsibility for the conditions of challenged neighborhoods would immediately bring them to a defensive mode. In this way, White fragility plays itself out in community engagement by fostering marginalized populations through blame.

Despite this deficit practice of blaming the community, one of the most important aspects of community engagement, that I have learned, is the time needed to engage a community in a way that transformation can take place. As such, I have become increasingly concerned with the notion of residents, businesses, and partnering stakeholders who refuse to understand the patience that is required for community change. Simpson, Wood, and Daws (2003) cited how necessary it is to carefully consider

new community-based initiatives. One of the easiest things to do in community work is to rush into what sounds like a good idea. What is rarely considered fully, they reported, are the long-term social impacts, both good and bad, that must be considered (Simpson et al., 2003). In the next section, this concept of patience is explored further as well as the asset-based perspectives of community engagement.

Another harmful practice of community engagement resides with the neighborhood leaders. I have observed how outsiders seek to immediately connect with the community leaders, such as the neighborhood association presidents, community center directors, or church pastors. On the surface, this may seem to be an effective way to bring about change in a community, but in many cases, community leaders are not always viewed as an accurate representation of the community (Hacker, 2013). During my time in community work, I feel that the most effective and genuine way to engage a neighborhood is to simply to show up at various community events and get to know, not just the leaders, but also the residents who are not involved, not as involved, or are considering the idea of getting involved. Hacker (2013) continued this idea by stating that,

Respect and trust are not automatic. Investigators need to get to know the community. They need to spend time just ‘showing up’ at events unrelated to research. They need to be collaborative in their approach and humble in their demeanor. (p. 32)

Outsiders attend the Loving Neighborhood community meetings seeking only to connect with its leaders to determine one thing: how to get something from the leaders or how to get the leaders to do something for the community. If anything, community engagement is authentic relationship building by seeking to connect with the leader, quasi-leader, child, parent, grandparent, and anyone else who lives and works in the neighborhood.

This process of relationship-building takes time and should not be rushed merely because a grant was awarded prematurely to meet project-laden and over-restrictive deadlines.

Asset-based Approaches

On the contrary, Stuart (2014) speaks to asset-based approaches by pointing out three components of community capacity building. The first is the notion that it is an *ongoing process*. Conventional studies around civic engagement proposes that the primary purpose of community capacity building focuses on what it means to be a good citizen (Dolgon, Mitchell, & Eatman, 2017). Traditionally, community engagement has been referred to as service learning. In higher education settings, this concept has played itself out in one day or short-term service events that celebrate a particular memory (e.g., Martin Luther King's birthday) or is temporary in nature, such as a college student working at a homeless shelter for credit in a one-semester course. Viewed differently, Stuart (2014) writes that community capacity engagement consists of a long-term commitment to a group, neighborhood, or situation with a willingness to ask the difficult questions. These questions result from thinking critically about and being aware of the power structures that hinder the neighborhood's ability to flourish.

Secondly, community capacity building should consist of *leadership that comes directly from the community*. Traditional models of neighborhood engagement establishes leadership structures that include individuals who represent anchor institutions, which are societal institutions that involve themselves "in the development of communities, cities, towns, and villages" (Taylor and Luter, 2013, p. 2) and funding organizations with imperialistic ideas, limited understandings of the intricate nuances of a particular

community, and deficit perspectives about the residents (Chavez et al., 2008). In the case of community capacity building, a bottom-up approach is ideal as it assumes an organic orientation led by the constituents in the community as opposed to a top-down approach, which is paternalistic and oppressive as it is headed by external partners (Beazley et al., 2004). Finally, community capacity building needs to *address the structural issues* that “are beyond the control of a single community” (Stuart, 2014, p. 2). Social justice, the building of a “civil society providing ideological space for ordinary people to be producers, to develop their own system of knowledge and the dissemination of that knowledge, and to critically and in a communitarian way forge a more participatory democratic society. . .” (Cunningham, 1996, p. 7) progresses when residents stand at the forefront of the emancipation of their communities as their voices are heard, their interests are served, and the community is intricately involved in the entire process of neighborhood development. For this reason, it is crucial that residents serve as leaders while partners support, advocate, and help expose and dismantle the power structures that hinder community progress.

Further supporting this notion of community capacity building, Simpson, Wood, and Daws (2003) noted that, “if communities are to survive economic and social crises, the popular argument is that they can best do so by becoming empowered, by building their existing capacity, and by using the skills they have to make their own futures” (p. 278). Again, many outsiders and even some insiders approach communities with the mindset that something is wrong with the residents. This perspective also assumes that only external interventions can salvage an oppressed community (Beazley et. al., 2004). Opposing this position, community capacity building identifies the assets that already

exist in the community (i.e., businesses, potential startups, community pride, residents) and scaffolds onto these strengths to address neighborhood needs and initiatives (Beazley et al., 2004; Wendel et al., 2009). According to Simpson, Wood, and Daws (2003), outsiders should avoid the attitude of *helping* a community as this perspective shares a colonial ideology with condescending connotations. Instead, a community capacity approach to community engagement should be assumed as it fosters the promotion of neighborhood participation and the development of resident leadership who owns up to a neighborhood's problems and create solutions. As the community moves toward their goals, outsiders may become partners with the community in a mutually beneficial way where both are learning from and supporting one another in the work as opposed to a one-sided siphoning of community resources usually at the expense of the neighborhood (Simpson, Wood, and Daws, 2003).

Wendel et al. (2009) viewed community capacity building as a way to have long-term sustainability within the community. That is, when grants and other funding for community and economic development have been exhausted, the efforts to revitalize the community continue. This is because the relationship between the community and its partners is focused on an infrastructure “embodying a dynamic and positive understanding of human, material, power, and social resources” (p. 277). One caution for community capacity building, that Beazley et al., (2004) suggested, was patience with the residents which they called latent capacity release. That is, when stakeholders take on a partner approach with community, talents are “harnessed, not built” (Beazley et al., 2004, para. 10). Building talent, Beazley et al. noted, is akin to a top-down concept, which is patronizing as it assumes community members are empty vessels waiting on the

knowledge to be poured into their minds. Mutual and co-creation of learning is essential for residents and community partners for effective and sustainable neighborhood development (Freire, 2000).

Adult Learning

In this section, an understanding of the field of adult learning is provided. Included are traditional concepts that were established on the foundation of White male perspectives and contemporary frameworks that challenge earlier studies of the field.

The Adult Learner

To provide context for this writing, it is important to offer an understanding and clarity of who represents an adult learner. Ross-Gordon, Rose, and Kasworm (2017) identify three criteria of the adult learner: the first being their chronological age. Notably, in some cultures, the age of adulthood begins as early as 14, in others 18, 21, and in others as old as 24. In contrast, many see the chronological identification as problematic as age tends to be changed by the public majority to meet personal interest groups. Chronological identification is also questionable for determining adulthood as it often fluctuates because of the lack of understanding and research about the transition from adolescence into adulthood (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017).

Another way that Ross-Gordon et al, (2017) identify adult learners is through social roles and responsibilities. Despite age, many adult learners, because of their responsibilities to work, family, and community can be identified as adults. For example, a 16-year-old high school student with a child may not be considered an adult by the

school system, but despite their age, the responsibility of rearing, raising, and caring for a child socially places the teenager in an adult role. Further, if a teenager enrolls in an adult-day program to complete their high school diploma, they can be designated as an adult learner. The idea here is that when an individual does not meet what is understood in a particular culture as an adult from a chronological perspective, their social condition, such as having major financial obligations for the support of another, or one who is independent of guardian support, suggests otherwise.

The final way that individuals are identified as adults is through self-perception (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). An individual's outlook determines their understanding of how they position themselves in adulthood. How an individual identifies as an adult evolves from or through various tasks and experiences. More complex is the reality that self-perception of adulthood varies based on the norms of different cultures and the experiences that shape a person's reality.

As reported by Merriam et al., (2007), the field of adult education is difficult to define as it is "a large and amorphous field of practice, with no neat boundaries such as age, in the case of elementary education or mission, as in higher education" (p. 53). Adult learning includes traditional, formal learning activities; non-traditional learning, which is systematic learning outside traditional learning settings (Smith, 2008); and informal learning (Smith, 2013) which, occurs with or without the individual's acknowledgement, within one's daily activities, and with no systematic agenda or structure. The activities of informal learning for adults are not designed for a course. Instead, the learning takes place based on the interest of the learner and their experience. Planned and structured learning can be included, but the curriculum is delivered by flexible and spontaneous

means in settings that are unconventional and non-traditional (Marsick, & Watkins 2001). In contrast to formal learning, which is facilitated through curriculum, informal learning is directed primarily through conversation and experience (Merriam et al., 2007).

Adult Learning Theories

For more understanding of the field of adult learning, it is important to mention some of the more prominent theories within the discipline. In this section, theoretical concepts will be presented along with their applicability to the analysis of Black men. Concerns by critical scholars are also shared, typically around concepts that are believed to limit the ability of theories to capture a comprehensive view of nonwhite and marginalized groups.

Vella (2002) offers 12 principles for effective adult learning that align with the assumptions that frame a healthy foundation for equitable adult learning. The 12 principles include (1) needs assessment, a recognition that learners enter academic spaces for various reasons; (2) safety, referring to the respect that learners have for one another, and sound relationships, developed through dialogue among learners; (3) sequence (programming) and (4) reinforcement (the repetition of the programming); (5) praxis, a focus on reflection and “demands a hard look at content, the re-creation of it to fit a new context, and essentially the testing of it to prove its usefulness” (Vella, 2002, p. 14); (6) respect for learners as decision makers; (7) ideas, feelings, actions; (8) immediacy or the usefulness of the learning; (9) clear roles, meaning that the learner will engage with an instructor if the instructor commits to dialogue with the learner; (10) teamwork, which is where all involved are able to benefit from the learning experience; (11) engagement, a

participatory commitment from all learners; and (12) accountability, which is where learners commit to learning and instructors commit to facilitate learning (Vella, 2002). Although Vella's principles offer practical means from which to address adult learning as it "is best achieved in dialogue" (p. 3), this study will only address three of the 12 principles: needs assessment, safety, and the last, ideas, feelings, and actions.

With *needs assessment*, Vella (2002) asserts that conversation with adults should take place before any formal arrangements are made as she believes that "listening to learners' wants and needs helps shape a program that has immediate usefulness to adults" (p. 5). For example, in my mission to help the Carson community reorganize their neighborhood association, one of the first things that became obvious was that the previous convener made assumptions about what the community needed and then proceeded to enact processes based on those assumptions. Unfortunately, the residents of the community were not adequately equipped to champion for their community and instead looked for the person in my role, the convener, to assume that responsibility. Understanding this, I encouraged the people to take personal responsibility for their neighborhood and reminded them that as a representative of the University, my role in this work was to support them in what they felt their community needed. Accordingly, the residents began to make decisions based on what they felt were aligned with the needs of their neighborhood. As a result, new life began to emerge among the leaders and the organization they were redeveloping. For the residents, I was helping them understand that neighborhood partners should not make decisions that impact their community. As visitors, community partners should support and assist residents in

achieving their goals. Any other agenda by individuals, who do not live in the neighborhood, should be questioned.

Next, Vella (2002) mentions the principle of *safety* in effective adult learning which I believe to be an extremely important concept for any learning transaction, whether formal or informal. Vella claims that the concept of safety is “linked to respect for learners as decision makers of their own learning” (p. 8). Vella continues by pointing out that,

When we do not use dialogue and instead ask learners to be passive, they do indeed learn. They learn how to be passive, to be “good” employees. They learn that they have no power, except to obey. This is not the goal of adult learning in my perspective. (Vella, 2002, p. 25)

However, if trust is to happen among residents, there must be a certain level of safety where adults feel comfortable sharing their ideas and understanding the benefits of co-creating knowledge with their fellow residents. This includes being respectful of one another’s opinions while at the same time respectfully challenging or being willing to be challenged by others. Employing Freire’s (2003) notion of critical consciousness, dialogue can foster conversation and learning for adults when they are employed in and out of formal academic settings. According to Freire, when there is a sense of safety among the adults, dialogue will form an equitable balance of power in the classroom between the students and the instructor.

Finally, Vella (2002) speaks to the importance of addressing *ideas, feelings, and actions*. These three components are necessary because they move away from learning concepts that are individualistic (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles, 1984). Vastly overlooked in adult education studies are culturally relevant theoretical perspectives (Guy, 1999) that give research participants an emancipatory voice through qualitative

research (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Also discounted is the employing of community-based participatory research practices to support neighborhoods in determining the community's issues from their viewpoint (Hacker, 2013). In the case of this study of adult Black males in community engagement, the results focus on addressing the whole person giving a more accurate analysis of their ideas, feelings, and rationales for their actions and providing a counter-narrative to address deficit understandings of their experiences.

According to Merriam et al. (2007), self-directed learning is when individuals take the lead and the responsibility for planning their own learning. This form of learning can occur in very traditional settings such as in face-to-face classrooms or in non-formal academic environments. The first goal of self-directed learning is personal growth which is “grounded in humanistic philosophy” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 107). Humanistic philosophy has seven basic assumptions: human nature is naturally good, freedom of autonomy, individuality and potentiality, self-concept and the self, self-actualization, perception, and responsibility of humanity (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Regarding adult learning, humanism occurs when “the student is the center of the process, the teacher is a facilitator, and learning is by discovery” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 124). Humanism, from an adult learning perspective, attempts to challenge traditional modes of education, or what Freire (2000) calls, banking education. To clarify, banking education is the assumption that the teacher knows everything, and the student is an empty vessel waiting to be imparted with knowledge by the instructor. Banking education fails to recognize the wisdom and educational capital of the student in the learning environment.

A second goal of self-directed learning is its commitment to fostering learning transformation (Merriam et al., 2007). That is, transformational learning focuses on dramatic change that is fundamental in nature, in terms of self. As defined by Merriam et al., 2007, transformational learning supports a concept where “adults need to reflect critically and have an understanding of the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for the needs, wants, and interests” (p. 108). Included in this process is one’s ability to make meaning out of one’s experience through reflection” (Alfred, 2002a). One example of this is Freire’s (2000) social-emancipatory perspective of learning where the oppressed and the oppressor recognize that addressing their liberation is achievable and they can enact transformation. Facilitated through dialogue and learning, the oppressed and the oppressor regain their humanity as they recognize their role in a system as either the oppressed or the oppressor. Freire’s self-emancipatory practice requires dialogue and self-reflection which can be uncomfortable, but ultimately liberating for both. Another example of transformational learning is Afrocentrism, a concept that Hun (2004) speaks to regarding adult education. In Afrocentrism, the importance of one’s own culture is centered, the necessity of this centering is emphasized, and it “is guided by a set of core principles” (Hun, 2004, p. 68) such as “. . . harmony, balance, oneness, and interconnectedness” (Hun, 2004, p. 69). Under these tenets, Afrocentrism serves as an ideal apparatus for attacking racism by illuminating and challenging oppressive practices of the dominant culture, thus leading to a transformative learning.

The third and final goal of self-directed learning, which has been strongly criticized by scholars such as Collins (1996) is “enhancing the ability of individual learners to be more self-directed in their learning” (Merriam et al., 2007 p. 108). One

major criticism of this goal has been that it has a narrow and individualistic focus when the learning should also include “the incorporation of collective action as an outcome” (Merriam et al., 2007p. 108). Countering this concept of individuality, John Dewey (as cited in Elias & Merriam, 2005), pioneered a progressive philosophy that advocates the notion of the collective community to solve common problems. Dewey believed that educating the learner collectively, ultimately contributes to the overall advancement and improvement of a society or a community. One example of progressive education is developing a culturally relevant curriculum which, according to Ladson-Billings (2009), “uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 19). With this thought in mind, it is important that measures be taken to understand the unique culture of adult Black males. Fanon (1963) would call the continued practice of assigning curriculum from the dominant culture *violence* as it ignores cultural uniqueness and promotes negative academic outcomes. Fanon goes on to say that the continued perpetuation of education, that ignores the culture of marginalized groups, ultimately leads to intellectual death.

Probably the most well-known scholar in the field of adult education is Malcolm Knowles (Merriam et. al, 2007). In his first book, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, Knowles (1990) proposed the concept of andragogy, a word coined in 1833 by the German educator, Alexander Kapp (Pappas, 2013), and used as a way to describe the learning process of adults (Merriam, 2001). Andragogy, according to Knowles, was originally based on four assumptions (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The first is the need to know, which he describes as *an adult’s need to know why* they need to learn something, before they agree to pursue the subject. The assumption here is that

adults will place more stake in and appreciation for the learning process if there is a clear understanding of why learning should take place. Second is what he calls *learners' self-concept* which is where adults develop a desire to be viewed and treated by others as capable, self-sufficient individuals. With this assumption, Knowles believes that adults respond negatively to the thought of being imposed on by the will of others. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and prefer to be identified as such. Third is, the role of the *learners' experience* which incorporates the acquired knowledge that adults can attribute to an academic setting by virtue of their age and life encounters. The key to this assumption is that, as opposed to children who self-identify by external definers (i.e., parents, siblings, extended family, etc.), adults tend to self-identify based on their personal experiences. The fourth assumption, *readiness to learn*, is the intersecting of an adult's need to learn with their understanding of its necessity in managing their everyday experiences and activities. Being ready to learn is typically connected to timing, as learning may not be relative to the current life-stage of an adult.

In his later writings, Knowles added two additional assumptions that were based on his new understandings of adult learners (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The first of the new assumptions was *orientation to learning*. That is, as adults connected learning to problems that they faced, they tended to be more motivated to learn. This way of learning invited "new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life problems" (Knowles, 1973, p. 61). Keeping with this thought, Knowles' second new assumption, *motivation*, was when adults were prompted to learn by an internal drive (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like) which were more

influential than external motivators. In all, these original four assumptions, plus the two additional assumptions established by Knowles, were lauded by many in the field as the central understandings of adult education.

Despite the popularity of his assumptions, the work by Knowles (1990) has been met with some criticism. Flannery (1995) for example, suggested that andragogy ignored how it contributed to the political and cultural marginalization of oppressed persons in academic spaces. Sandlin (2005) added to this idea by offering five critiques of andragogy: it assumed incorrectly that education is value neutral and apolitical, that it promoted a generic adult learner as universal with white middle-class values, that it ignored other ways of knowing and silenced other voices, that it ignored the relationship with self and society, that it was reproductive of inequalities, and that it supported the status quo. Even further, Hartree (Merriam, 2001) questioned andragogy by claiming that its tenets were more “principles of good practice” (Merriam, 2001, p. 5) than a theoretical framework. Merriam et al. (2012) adds to the criticism of andragogy suggesting that:

There is little or no awareness that the person is socially situated, and to some extent, the product of the sociohistorical and cultural context of the times; nor is there any awareness that social institutions and structures may be defining the learning transaction irrespective of the individual participant. (p. 88)

In other words, the uniqueness of adults, on the margins of society, were cast erroneously in adult education literature. Due to these and other criticisms, such as by Darbyshire (1993), who questioned how “andragogy assumes that pedagogy is synonymous with subject-centered learning while andragogy involves adults in problem-solving activities” (p. 330), Knowles (1990) further revised his understandings of andragogy. Instead of

positioning andragogy against pedagogy, he instead suggested a continuum of learning ranging from a teacher-directed disposition to a student-directed orientation.

These theories of adult learning do not capture the full spectrum of epistemologies within the field, but they do provide a broad range of insight and criticism to consider in the analysis of adults. As the intersection of adult learning and Black males is introduced in the next section, I will provide an understanding of why the selection of an analytical tool should be taken with great care and consideration.

Adult Learning and Black Males

In the field of adult education, few scholars have dedicated their energies to focusing on the needs, concerns, and inequities of adult Black males. Those that have engaged the topic have revealed important facts about the experiences of Black men which could only be understood with a socio-historical lens. Scholars such as Drayton and Prins (2011) showed how adult Black males valued education and literacy, but were leery of their ability to benefit from such academic opportunities. These Black males felt this way because the environment seemed so foreign, they were faced with intimidating racism barriers, they were excluded from social networks, and they did not have access to employment that provided life sustaining wages. Instead of blaming Black men for their lack of success in the classroom, teachers, administrators, and adult education professionals should be held accountable as these traits were also an indication that these men's needs were not being met. This speaks to the reality and necessity to work with adult Black males within the socio-historical context of white male supremacy (Drayton, 2014).

Subtle messages are also communicated to Black men who recognize that they do not have the advantages of male privilege, in the same way as do White men. That is, the racism and negative perspectives associated with being Black males strip away the dignity of being a man (Guy, 2014). Equally disturbing, Johnson-Bailey, Ray, and Lasker-Scott (2014) report that Black males are often marginalized in academic environments, which may explain why many avoid academic learning opportunities both in terms of participation and attendance. Further adding to the challenging conditions of academia, the declining commitment to social programs such as affirmative action, anti-poverty, and urban employment since the 1980s, has had devastating effects on Black men in academic pursuits (Guy, 2016).

For adult Black males, internalized racism can also play a major factor in their inability to achieve success in their learning. For example, Guy (2014) speaks about how Black men and women ignore sociocultural realities, and instead cling to the hegemonic fallacies that Black males can change their social condition by simply changing their ways of thinking. This brief integrative commentary of adult education and adult Black males expresses the need for more research in the field, and provides rationale for the study of understanding their learning needs and experiences in community organizing situations.

Community Engagement & Adult Learning in Relation to Black Men

Instead of focusing only on buildings, programs, and the attainment of grants, community engagement should include the development of human agency.

Neighborhood initiatives should be led by residents, who collaborate with partners who

support them in achieving their goals. This would then be a process of adult learning, because all who are involved are required to develop a certain level of skills (Cinneide, 1987) to create a sustainable model of success. When neighborhood initiatives are led by the residents, a more socially just approach to community engagement tends to take place. Ledwith (2011) sees the work of Freire (2000) as foundational to community engagement, because what adults know, learn, and understand is indicative of the power of dynamics in a community. The lack of this power can substantially hinder a group's liberation. Community engagement is the social justice needed for Black men to further establish critical consciousness that leads to "personal empowerment, and follows through to collective action for a more sustainable world" (Ledwith, 2011, p. 61).

Regarding social justice and empowerment, Cunningham (1996) was concerned about the *learning for earning* concept that has crept into the field of adult education. Her scholarship questioned the learning for earning perspective in adult education as she believed that it only strengthened the current dominant and oppressive power structures increasing the wealth of the affluent. Consequently, she continued, a mentality of *learning for earning* further marginalized the financial condition of the lower classes. Cunningham argued that instead of adult education serving as a basis for developing a competitive workforce and strengthening the nation's gross domestic product, it should instead serve as the foundation for social responsibility. A *learn to earn* focus, she continued, only reduced "the field [of adult education] to a concern with productivity for profitability and the advancement of world capitalism masquerading as the free market" (Cunningham, 1996, p. 3). According to her point of view, part of being socially responsible as adult educators was to support marginalized persons to challenge dominant

knowledges. One such population that was marginalized in communities, to a great degree, was adult Black males as they continued to have low achievement numbers in their education (Steele, 1992), employment (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995), health (Williams & Rucker, 2000), but high numbers in their incarceration rates (Brower, 2015). To say the least, it was imperative that the field of adult learning served as a community engagement leader in the emancipation of all marginalized and nonwhite populations such as in this case with adult Black men. Therefore, Cunningham pressed the importance of adult education jarring a social consciousness that “is formed through action” (p. 6). Whereas Cunningham leaned more in the direction of education for the sake of education and not employment, I believe that education can and should serve a multitude of goals. From my perspective, education can serve as the foundation and benefit for employment, awareness, and advocacy all of which could benefit Black men given their condition and marginalized status in the United States.

Building on the notion of action oriented adult education, Closson and Nelson (2009) write that adult education should be experienced as opposed to just being read. Using sociocultural learning theory, they posit that social justice for adults should not only occur in the classroom. Learning must also take a social justice approach and observe individuals in their contexts and within their culture. In this sense, the learning that adults experience becomes more meaningful as they pursue socially just communities. It is a process of learning that is facilitated in the context of Black males and can prove advantageous in their personal development and for the community.

Unfortunately, the literature and practice of adult learning, regarding Black men who are involved with community engagement efforts, is scant at best. My time in the

Loving Neighborhood has demonstrated a need for the merging ideas of community engagement, adult learning, and Black male experiences in urban settings. Scholars, such as Mullins (2006), discussed the historical effects of Black residents in an underserved Midwestern community, who were displaced for the benefit of urban renewal, but how it impacted Black men specifically was not examined. Mullin's research exposed how the self-interest of Whites pushed Blacks out of their homes for the purpose of developing an urban university. Even in the face of displacement and despair, Shuck and Helfenbein (2015) found that Blacks, in a Midwestern city, utilized their formal education to empower their own efforts for social justice. This was done "through their families (general knowledge), community networks (community knowledge), and own personal experiences (experiential knowledge)" (Shuck & Helfenbein, 2015, p. 30) both in and out of traditional school settings. Therefore, it is safe to say that understanding adult Black men, in community engagement efforts, fosters modeling for other Black males. This strengthens their voices, their willingness, and their ability to address inequities of power. This also stresses the need for such a study.

Summary

This chapter included literature on adult learning, adult Black men, and their critical roles in the examination of an oppressed community. Specific focus was devoted to the different concepts of community engagement encompassing the practices of community development, community organizing, and community building while focusing on the experiences of Black men and their learning. Literature provided in this chapter highlighted the salient issues related to Black men, specifically for those involved

in community engaged work. Chapter III outlines the methodology used for this study and introduces the community and the study participants.

CHAPTER THREE

Instead of talking, I focused on listening (Yang, 2008, p. 166).

Research Design and Methodology

As I explored the lifelong experiences of four adult Black men, I utilized critical ethnographic methodology to examine the culture of the Loving Neighborhood. These men, who either lived or worked in the Carson community, had the specific goal of improving the community and the quality of life for the residents. Through this study, I sought to understand their perspectives which added to the body of community engaged and adult education scholarship.

To begin the chapter, I describe critical ethnography in relation to this study, the research design that I employed for addressing the research questions, the role of the researcher, and the data collection and analysis processes. This chapter will also provide more detail into the background of the participants by incorporating my prior knowledge of them along with what I learned during the data collection process. Included in this section is the racism that these four Black men experienced, what they learned in neighborhood work, and why they continue to stay involved. Also included in this chapter are my own personal thoughts about how I have contextualized my observations and experiences, while working in this community. Finally, I conclude with an introduction into Chapter IV. The guiding questions for this study are:

1. What are the learning experiences of adult Black males who are active in their communities?

2. What impacts an adult Black males' decision to become active in their communities?
3. What are the tools that adult Black males believe are essential as they engage in their communities?

Methodology

In this section of the study, I will provide a general summary of the theoretical frameworks (critical ethnography, and sociocultural learning theory) used to analyze the data that was collected from observations and interviews of the participants. Next, I will include an introduction to the participants followed by an overview of the research setting and the data collection methods. This chapter will conclude with my position and my final thoughts on the methodology used in this study.

Critical Ethnography

Tillman (2016) expressed a need for culturally sensitive research methods for Blacks to decenter the dominance of theory developed by White scholars, analyze data, and reframe the way resulting practices were ultimately conducted. Tillman explained that when scholars employed culturally responsive research concepts, “the varied aspects of their culture and their varied historical and contemporary experiences are acknowledged” (p. 3). With this understanding, there was an urgency in the academy for research methodologies to draw from the culture of Blacks when analyzing their experiences. Like Tricoglus (2006), I became increasingly attracted to a more ethnographic approach to research in my quest to apply a methodology consistent with

my epistemological assumptions. As such, I settled on critical ethnography due to its focus on social change. Through my work at Central University, I was already deeply embedded within the Near West community. Not only was I interested in adding to the knowledge of community engagement from a critical perspective, I also wanted to “serve the needs of the culture being studied” (Tricoglus, 2006, p. 139). Critical ethnography created a framework from which I was able to uncover the inequities and oppressive power structures in this community and support processes to enact change (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

According to Madison (2012), critical ethnography starts with the understanding that there is an ethical dilemma that needs to be addressed, and recognizes the injustices that are at play within a certain lived region. A recognition of discrimination prompts researchers to address the circumstances that marginalize the community, leaving them with the obligation to look beyond the veneer of what is immediately seen and take a deeper dive into hidden inequalities (Madison, 2012). Critical ethnographic research disrupts deficit assumptions by illuminating the oppressive practices that sustain the status quo. Additionally, critical ethnography allows researchers to look at ecosystems and interactive spaces (Lee, 2008) from a contextual perspective further analyzing power dynamics that exists within wider social structures (Fitzpatrick, 2013). That is, to effectively point out oppressive practices and policies that are often hidden, critical ethnographers must develop the skill to “provide rich, in-depth textual descriptions of ethnographic moments” (Fitzpatrick, 2013, p. 36).

A key to critical ethnography is the researcher’s positionality. Madison (2012) believes that before scholars analyze the condition of a context, the research must first

examine their “own power, privilege, and bias” (p. 6). This self-analysis is referred to as *reflexive ethnography* or *turning back* which places the researcher in an ethical position of accountability for how they view themselves *and* how they are situated in relation to the individuals with whom they are conducting the research. This also holds the researcher ethically accountable for the organizations they represent, how the researcher’s thinking is influenced, and the power that the researcher wields. Positionality in critical ethnography requires a researcher to repeatedly ask themselves the challenging questions that probe at the ethical essence of their scholarship. As a foundation, Madison (2012) suggests the following questions:

What are we going to do with the research, and who ultimately will benefit? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been? How will our work make a difference in people’s lives? What difference does it make when the ethnographer himself comes from a history of colonization and disenfranchisement? (p. 8)

Madison (2012) asserts that in critical ethnography, asking ourselves such questions places us in a position of responsibility towards the subjects by rejecting and minimizing our potential to be self-centered scientists. Instead, acknowledging our vulnerability in judging and evaluating others humanizes our research, and we as researchers become individuals who can be proven incorrect in our scholarly assessments. In this admission, we acknowledge our baggage and imperfections as fellow human beings (Tricolus, 2001).

As a part of my critical ethnographic experience, I used sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991) which is “active thinking about one’s thoughts and feelings” (Ellis, 1991, p. 28) to employ a deep, self-reflection about my experiences and observations in this community. Shabazz (2016) also employed this approach as he studied the cultural

forums of barbershops for Black males to reflect on his own life encounters as well as to serve as a source for his own personal healing. Likewise, as the principal researcher for this project, I sought to engage in this same theoretical construct to process my own thoughts and feelings about my experience as a Black male in the Loving Neighborhood.

Creswell (2007) added to these assumptions by stating that critical ethnography paid attention to a distinct culture group, large or small, with a focus on how they engaged with one another on a day-to-day basis. To achieve the goal of learning the shared values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of the group studied, the researcher committed to immersing themselves within the community. It was with this approach that researchers could gather data through participant-observation and interviews to capture a deeper understanding of the culture. My method for gathering this data included reviewing minutes from various meetings, analyzing email messages that were disseminated to residents, business owners, and community partners, interviewing four participants, and taking ethnographic field notes at the different meetings, interactions, and events that occurred in this community. In writing ethnographic field notes, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) mentioned that,

Choosing what to write down is not a process of sampling according to some fixed-in-advance principle. Rather, it is both intuitive, reflecting the ethnographer's changing sense of what might possibly be made interesting or important to future readers, and empathetic, reflecting the ethnographer's sense of what is interesting or important to the people he is observing. (p. 14)

Thus, the field notes that I recorded were used to write substantial descriptions of the setting dynamics. To this end, my goals as a scholar included knowledge development *and* advocacy. Thus, I required a framework that included an emancipatory approach to research. Critical ethnography maintains an orientation that is value-laden, challenges

mainstream ideologies that support the status quo, and counters oppressive power structures, policies, and methods of control (Barab et al., 2004). Because of my belief in supporting the capacity of research participants, critical ethnography served as an ideal fit to support and encourage their empowerment and to frame my study.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

As mentioned previously, there is an urgency in the academy for research methodologies to draw from the culture of Blacks when analyzing their experiences (Tillman, 2006). Scheurich and Young (1997) disrupt traditional thinking with the argument that theoretical lenses, developed by Whites, dominate and shape most of the academic frameworks. Because of this reality, they note that most, if not all theories developed by the dominant culture, are epistemologically racially biased. They state conclusively that:

Racial critiques of research epistemologies have virtually nothing to do with whether an individual researcher is overtly or covertly racist. A researcher could be adamantly anti-racist in thought and deed and still be using a research epistemology that, given our later discussion of epistemological racism, could be judged to be racially biased. (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 5)

Guy (1999b), continues this notion of biased epistemologies by insisting that:

No matter how much conservative educators or politicians desire to wish it away, social injustice afflicts racial, ethnic, linguistic, and culturally marginalized groups in the United States. Educational strategies, models, and practices that do not explicitly challenge the status quo only serve to reproduce it. (p. 93)

Unfortunately, the history of racism and oppression limits our ability to create the perfect theoretical framework from which to research human behavior. Despite this, I believe

that the sociocultural model is one framework that helps to minimize these biases in terms of how adults learn and develop, and thus is suitable for analyzing the distinct dynamics of different cultures, in particular, adult Black males.

Alfred (2002b) suggests that sociocultural learning theory is beneficial for analyzing the unique nuances of adults because it supports learning contexts that do not sacrifice the learners' "personal and cultural identity" (p. 3). Alfred expands on the tenets of sociocultural learning theory by embracing the concept of culture as plural, which speaks to an approach to culture that does not restrict a learner's culture as one-dimensional. This understanding recognizes that learning is influenced and impacted by many cultures and therefore must be understood and analyzed within their cultural contexts. Additionally, this concept of cultural plurality which maintains that learners are advantaged with a cultural *toolkit*. This toolkit is especially important because Alfred (2002b) stresses that learners of color are consistently evaluated against concepts that are White in origin. However, when social cultural learning tools are embraced, "contextual factors influence the meaning that the learner makes of the learning process" (Alfred, 2002b, p. 8).

Curry (2018) pointed out that the matter of urgency in culturally responsive research was not just important for Blacks in general, but that the crucial state of Black males warranted a deeper examination. Not only were Black males the victims of obstructed justice, but they have also been prevented from expressing their own state of marginalization (Hunter, & Davis, 1994). In my continued work in the Loving Neighborhood in general and the Carson community specifically, I have witnessed firsthand how Black men have been silenced. For example, before one of the participants

became the executive director of the Carson Community Development Corporation, Black male representation was conspicuously absent from its board. There was a Black woman who sat on the board, but she represented only half of the Carson population. Although she was very capable in her own right, having a Black male on the board not only afforded an opportunity for the voices of Black men to be heard from their perspective, but it also established a sense of support and solidarity in regards to Blacks in the Carson community. Therefore, I employed sociocultural learning theory to give voice to the Black men as they have been silenced by these forms of omissions.

Introduced by Vygotsky in Russia, in the 1920s and 1930s (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), sociocultural learning theory operates from the notion that the everyday events of individuals occur in cultural contexts that are facilitated by systems of language and symbols and are more effectively interpreted when examined from an historical perspective. Specifically, Vygotsky stressed the reality that there is a perpetual connection between social dynamics and individual processes. His three main themes are as follows:

(a) individual development, including higher mental functioning, has its origins in social sources; (b) human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs; and (c) the first two themes are best examined through genetic, or developmental analysis. (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996, p. 192)

John-Steiner and Mahn interpret Vygotsky's works as rejecting isolated, psychological development. Instead, they insist that his research be viewed and used as "products of sociocultural evolution to which individuals have access by being actively engaged in the practices of their communities" (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996, p. 193). As the learner participates in collective endeavors, situations and opportunities are created for their

cognitive and linguistic development to occur. It is at this juncture that their learning processes take place via ever-evolving, historical contexts. John-Steiner and Mahn conclude that there is no blueprint that fits all aspects of human development and therefore suggest that sociocultural learning theory is useful for cognitive and social change. For these reasons, I believe sociocultural learning theory is fitting to analyze and re-center the position of Black men and how they learn in this community.

The data in this chapter was analyzed through the theoretical framework of sociocultural learning theory as it held to the understanding that learning does not happen in a vacuum (Vygotsky, 1978). Instead, it was “intertwined with the context within which they occur” (Alfred, 2002b, p. 5). Although many scholars refer to various aspects of Vygotsky’s notion of sociocultural learning theory (John-Steiner, & Mahn, 1996; Moll, & Whitmore, 1993; Wertsh, 1991), the data for this study was analyzed through the three dimensions discussed by Alfred (2002b): culture, context, and community. I chose Alfred’s understanding of sociocultural learning theory because of its emphasis on adults, a major aspect of my research, but also because of Alfred’s commitment to use the tool for critical analysis.

The first dimension Alfred (2002b) mentions is *culture*, which refers to the rules and processes that are defined by group members, developed, and subsequently socialized within a community. It is through this process that “resources, tools, and strategies necessary for group participation and for solving their day-to-day problems” (Alfred, 2002b, p. 6) are established. An individual’s or a group’s culture is defined by their practices and behaviors and impacts how these practices and behaviors impact learning (Morin, 2019). More specifically, “sociocultural theories take much greater

account of the important roles that social relations, community, and culture play in cognition and learning” (Wang, 2007, p. 151).

Alfred (2002b) cites the scholarship of Trice and Beyer (1993) which provides a deeper understanding of culture and how adults learn and develop. This study consists of six characteristics. The first, *collective*, is how individuals of a group have similar beliefs and practices, and how individuals with different beliefs are ostracized. The second is *emotional* which means that belonging to a group helps an individual to manage their anxiety and meet their emotional needs. When these needs are met, it further reinforces their “strengths, values, and cultural practices” (Alfred, 2002b, p. 6). The third characteristic is *historically based* and is the assumption that cultures are intricately connected with their histories. To view them apart from their histories creates an inaccurate picture of those individually and collectively within the group. Further, group interactions provide a means from which to cope with and manage the nuances of their histories. The fourth is *symbolism* which is where symbols provide an additional means from which individuals communicate and express themselves within their cultures. The fifth characteristic of Trice and Beyer’s study is *dynamic* which indicates that fundamentally, cultural norms and expectations remain constant, but they are not permanently fixed. Cultures evolve and this is understood and accepted within the group. The sixth characteristic of this study is *fuzzy* which denotes that cultures are complex and sometimes challenging to navigate and understand. These six components of culture, the first tenet of sociocultural learning theory, are diverse in their ideas and ideals because of the interaction of multiple subcultures within an institution or organization (Alfred, 2002b).

Context is the second dimension of sociocultural learning theory (Alfred, 2002b) that was used in this study. It focused on the total environment of an individual's development and assumed that their cognitive development could not be fully understood without considering the social and historical context within which it was embedded. According to Wang (2007) "When we view sociocultural theories within our real world, it is not hard to understand that learning is embedded in a social and cultural context" (p. 151). Of further significance, Alfred noted that "practices of racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism, for example, have been found to be overt and covert in the practice of adult education" (Alfred, 2002b, p. 8). Through the lens of sociocultural learning theory, context has moved beyond the surface of a person's life and has provided a deeper understanding of an individual's experiences by looking at the oppressive practices they have encountered and examining how they have been impacted by these practices. It is within the framework of this context that one's individual development occurs and analysis in this study will be discussed.

Community is the remaining dimension of sociocultural learning theory which is "where learning is embedded in discourse and social practice" (Alfred, 2002b, p. 9). In essence, the community becomes the space of learning and it is within the community that members develop discourses. These discourses are distinguished into what Gee (2015) calls primary discourses and secondary discourses. Primary discourses are learned through an apprenticeship process "early in life during their primary socializations as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings" (Gee, 2015, p. 187). Primary discourses provide us with our cultural distinctions and serve as the foundation for how we navigate other discourses. Secondary discourses result from apprenticed

socializations outside of our primary group. In essence, we learn to “strategically use aspects of [our] primary Discourses or community-based secondary Discourses in ‘pulling off’ performances in some of [our] other secondary Discourses” (Gee, 2015, p. 188) in the later stages of life.

In sociocultural learning theory, it is within community that members come to understand discourse and, according to Gee (2015), is determined either by *acquisition* or *learning*. Acquisition occurs when one gathers knowledge through the “exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching” (Gee, 2015, p. 189). The learner is aware of the importance of acquiring understanding, and acquiring the confidence to do so usually happens within natural and meaningful environments. Learning, on the other hand, is from a designated instructor in a traditional or non-traditional format, with the intention to “trigger conscious reflection” (Gee, 2015, p. 189). In this regard, the teaching method systematically creates academic constructs for the sake of reflective learning outcomes.

These dimensions, concepts, and terms all provide the basis for understanding sociocultural learning theory and the racial experiences of the men in this study, who are situated in an urban community setting. Because the focus of this study is on culture, context, and community, I utilize these terms of sociocultural learning theory consistently throughout my research.

Research Setting

Guy (1999a) writes that “every aspect of adult life is shaped by culture, and education has served as a vehicle for defining the cultural values that people hold or that they view as central to being successful in their society” (p. 5). This research inquiry occurred in the cultural ecosystem (Lee, 2008) of the Loving Neighborhood, which included the four communities of Midtown, Capella, Summerville, and Carson in Capital City, a city located in the Midwestern United States. Pseudonyms were assigned to specific settings and locations to preserve the confidentiality in this study. I met with the participants in a place of their own choosing (i.e. home, restaurant, bar, barber shop, car, and so on) to craft a sense of comfort and control during the interview (Patton, 2011). Data gathered from the interviews reflected the unique culture of the Loving Neighborhood, a community with a long history of racism, poverty, desegregation, and marginalization. Despite these past traumatic experiences and challenges, hope resided with the residents of this community and even some of its partners. They took great pride in being a part of the Loving Neighborhood.

At the time that this data was collected, all four of the participants either worked or lived in the Carson neighborhood. As I entered the area by way of Denver Street (pseudonym) on my way from Central University, and drove west over the bridge of the Running River (pseudonym), it occurred to me that one could get the sense that they were entering another world. Due to the fact that a new housing development was being erected on the edge of the Loving Neighborhood that faced Central University, the demarcation between the carefully preserved identity of the university and the neighborhood began on the other side of the apartment complexes. New structures were

developed to capitalize on the burgeoning downtown where more middle-to upper-middle class families were beginning to reside. Students from Central University were also tenants of the building. Walking and biking to work had become popular in Capital City, and these complexes, expensive housing developments, and bike lanes helped to accommodate such activities. In many cases these developments occurred without the informed consent of the neighborhood. The neighbors complained about the height of the new structures because they obstructed the skyline view of downtown. Their complaints were ignored. Without any warning or input, new apartments and housing developments began to appear on the edges of the neighborhood, which created a sense of anxiety among the residents.

Denver Street marked the southern border of the Carson community. I was told by one of the study participants that when he was a child, he was warned never to cross the street into the Midtown and Capella neighborhoods. This is because the Midtown and Capella neighborhoods were predominantly White and he would be subjected to intense forms of racism. It was difficult to imagine that such a time existed when Black, White, and Latinx families moved back and forth across Denver Street and interacted with one another, as if the road did not even exist. There was typically a steady pace of cars that cruised up and down the road, but even in the height of rush hour, it was never busy or backed up. A national thrift store chain sat on the south side of Denver Street, past the apartment complex. In addition to serving as a traditional thrift store, with a space to drop off used clothing, the thrift store chain boasted the establishment, direction, and management of a chartered high school for adults and teenagers with unique life challenges. As another branch of the thrift store's organization, the schools were funded

through donations as well as clothes that are given and sold for profit. Further up the road, the thrift store organization had a branch that focused on workforce training. Despite these initiatives, I rarely witnessed those who operated the thrift store participate in any of the Loving neighborhood's activities, meetings, or events. Because of this, I did not view them as community partners. Instead, I would say that they were *doing to* (emphasis added) the neighborhood as opposed to *partnering with* (emphasis added) the residents.

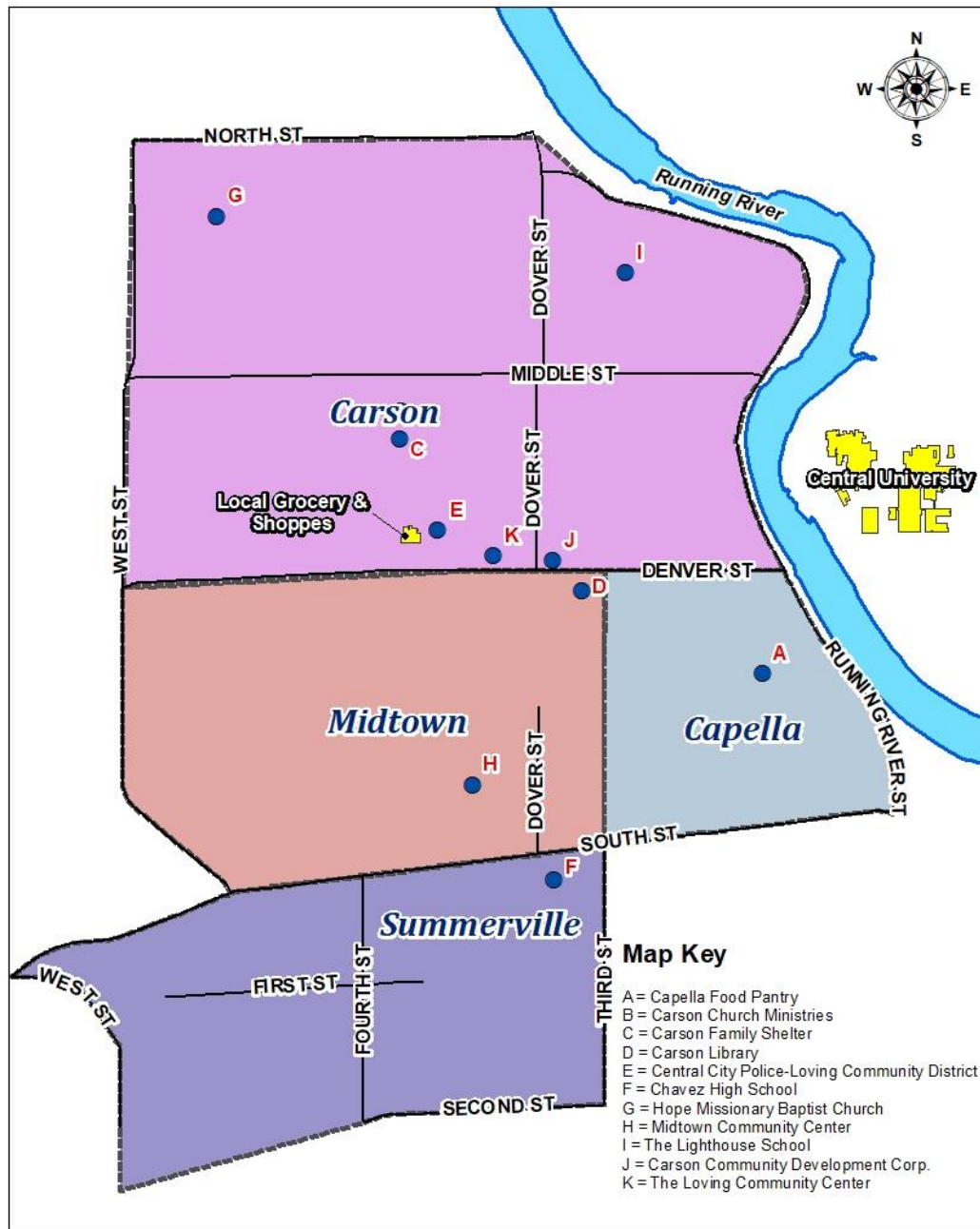
The Carson community was on the north side of Denver Street. The northern border was marked off by Northwest Street (pseudonym) which housed one of the city's best bakeries. Moving through the neighborhood, one caught an immediate glimpse of the variety of homes that were uniquely woven together along the streets. Some of the homes were well kept with manicured lawns edged to perfection. Other homes were deteriorating with dilapidated porches, overgrown grass, fences that were in desperate need of repair, and roofing that may not have been replaced since the homes were built in the early 1900's. Added to this dilapidation was a series of roads that snaked throughout the community with huge, gulping potholes. This was a testimony to how the community continued to be neglected by the city. Many gas stations and housing developments were peppered throughout the Carson community, most of which were established through a relaxed zoning approval process. Unfortunately, the chokehold of red tape stonewalled the neighborhood's ability to thwart those initiatives that contributed to the community's blight. Those same red tape processes moved at painfully slow speeds when complaints were made about the condition of the streets.

Although the Carson community was predominantly Black, it was at one time a community that was the home of Slovenian Whites, who migrated from the Application region of the United States (The Research Institute, 2001). Consequently, many Whites lived in Carson and they, along with a growing number of Latino families, could be seen traversing the neighborhood. Like the Black families, the Latinx families hurried their children to and from the neighborhood schools, patronized the community businesses, and even exhibited a sense of pride about their neighborhoods. However, I observed that while Latinx groups may have lived in Carson, they rarely interacted with Black and White residents. As I spoke with a few Latinx community workers in the Loving Neighborhood and Latino faculty at Central University, they surmised that the language and cultural barriers may have played a role in these limited interactions.

Despite these challenges, a deep sense of joy radiated throughout the community. Even though the residents were aware of the community's condition, they continued to smile, laugh, and find fun in their neighborhood. For example, parents were excited to retrieve their children in the evening from a Catholic parish daycare center. The daycare was a large, brown brick building that had been supporting and stabilizing the community since its construction in the early 1900s. Families gathered on their porches, on the sidewalks, and even in the streets. In addition to the gatherings at the daycare and on the porches of the residents, I saw this kind of joyful and hope filled interaction in the parking lots, at gas stations, in restaurants, and in churches, which were heavily clustered throughout this community.

The Loving Nieghborhood

Capital City, USA



Data Collection Methods

As stated previously, I actively worked in the Loving Neighborhood from February of 2017 through October 2019, building trust with these men and others who diligently supported this community. As Black men, we were already unique in the community because there were few of us actively engaged in the area's traditional community efforts, thus we quickly developed a bond. Pursuing a critical ethnographic form of data collection (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Soyini Madison, 2012), I took on a similar position as Stovall (2016). As an observer, he positioned himself as an insider/outsider (Smith, 2012; Wendel et al., 2009) as he engaged poverty-stricken neighborhoods in Chicago who were fostering effective school transformation. As an insider, helping with the creation of two new schools, Stovall (2016) was intricately involved with students, teachers, administrators, and families. As an outsider, not only was he not a resident of the two targeted neighborhoods, but he was also an employee of a university that was viewed by the residents as an intimidating force of oppression. Likewise, as an outsider, my work in Capital City was a unique terrain to navigate. Primarily, I was not a resident of either of the two poverty-stricken neighborhoods that the university had committed to supporting.

To prepare for the interviews, I relied on Seidman (2013), specifically the notion of interviewing friends. He stated that, "instead of exploring assumptions and seeking clarity about events and experiences, they [participants and the interviewer] tend to assume that they know what is being said" (p. 46). Throughout this study, it was important for me to keep this in mind because we as Black men were not only fellow laborers of community engagement, but also became good friends. However, being a

fellow Black male did not provide assurance that the interview process would not be challenging (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the five of us, as Seidman continued, “need[ed] to have enough distance from one another that we [did] not take the other for granted” (p. 46). Being that my questions focused on the learning experiences of Black men who were centered on community engagement efforts, making assumptions based on the familiarity of our relationship could jeopardize the entire exercise. To prevent such a mistake, I kept a journal in which I recorded reflective notes and personal assessments and emotions as I conversed with the participants. This allowed me to monitor our “comfortability” to determine if there were unnecessary assumptions taking place that would jeopardize the authentic opportunities for us to share our stories.

I audio recorded all the interviews. Immediately following each completed interview, I sent them to a transcription company which was recommended by trusted friends. Once transcribed, they were posted to my account within 24 to 48 hours on a secure platform provided by the company’s website. A username and password were required to access the finished product. The transcriptions were overlaid with words on the actual recording which was very convenient. There were times when I could listen to a portion of the interview and insert clarity and provide corrections when the transcriber was not clear about the usage of particular words.

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Central University Institutional Review Board. I served as the primary research instrument in this study and conducted informal semi-structured interviews using general, open-ended questions offering the participants latitude to freely share their experiences and discuss what they had learned as committed residents and employees in their communities (Mertens, 2015).

My decision to employ semi-structured interview styles (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013) resulted from the relationship that I had established with the participants, and the bond we maintained on our community-engaged journey.

I created and used an interview guide in each of the interviews (see appendix page 208) which was also used to develop continuity, a thread of reasoning, to avoid awkwardness, and to establish a sense of seriousness and preparedness with the participants. In addition, I asked open-ended questions to encourage unexpected statements and stories (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, I took notes before, during, and after the interviews to highlight my reflections about the participants' responses. Each interview session lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The transcriptions of the sessions were compared to the notes to assure the accuracy of the collected data. Considering the schedules of the participants and the time that it took to review and transcribe the recordings, the interviews were conducted during the months of May and June of 2019.

Data Analysis

I chose not to print off the transcriptions on paper. Instead, I made all markings on the transcription platform provided by the transcription service. I then compared my notes with the recordings and transcriptions. To open up the data to discover thoughts and ideas that would lead to major themes, I conducted initial coding (Charmaz, 2014) by naming short segments of data with labels that categorized, summarized, and accounted for each idea. I then copied and pasted each data point and the supporting statements into a Google document. Next, I placed the initial codes in categories within the frameworks of critical ethnography (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Madison, 2012) or sociocultural

learning theory (Alfred, 2002; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Once I finished the initial coding, I moved to axial coding (Charmaz, 2014), a process where categories become subcategories with a shift from descriptive to conceptual thinking. As such, I labeled each minor idea and the related major idea expressed by the participants. I proceeded with consistent comparison of new codes (which were highlighted in red ink) to the previous codes. As coding and comparison continued, I looked for common themes to appear (Maliski et al., 2008), followed by the use of this focused coding (Charmaz, 2014) method to determine the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize the labels. This required a frequent examination of the data and codes for clarity and refinement. These newly established themes (Charmaz, 2014) were sectioned out on the Google drive page with red subtitles.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, I used thick description as an interview method. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), thick description is an in-depth, qualitative style of interviewing designed to gather large sums of information from the interview that are later broken down into themes during the coding process. According to Mertens (2015), thick descriptions “enables readers to make judgements about the applicability of the research findings to their own situations” (p. 271). Although thick descriptions provide enough detail to understand context, readers must use caution when attempting to generalize findings as the circumstances and contexts may vary. Instead, generalizing the applicability of the project to the context of another similar situation may be more appropriate.

Secondly, I established trustworthiness through credibility. I was an insider to the culture (i.e., I am an adult Black male), and I had spent almost three years deeply embedded within the Loving Neighborhood where I established what Lincoln and Guba (1985) called, *prolonged engagement*. That is to say, I shared the same culture, gender, and experiences from the community with these men. This placed me in a position where I came into this interviewing process with a perspective and understanding that allowed me to provide further clarity to the phenomena. In addition, the rapport that I established with these four Black men encouraged a trusting relationship and encouraged them to speak more candidly about their experiences as Black men in this environment.

One final way I established credibility in this study is through “member checks” which, according to Seidman (2013) is when the interviewer shares their report with the participants to assure that the data that were collected through the interviews is accurate. Seidman noted that his:

practice has been to offer to share with participants any material that concerns them. I especially want to know if in working with the interview data I have done anything that makes them vulnerable, or if I have presented anything that is not accurate. Except with regard to issues of vulnerability or inaccuracy, however, I retain the right to write the final report as I see it. (p. 100)

In the same vein, I maintained this same logic in my work. Issues concerning Black men in this country are alarming (Curry, 2018). Therefore, very delicate measures need to be taken into consideration when conducting research with vulnerable populations. More importantly, these four men are my friends and in no way did I wish to take advantage of their willingness to participate in this project. As such, I shared the data with them to allow them to ponder the accuracy of the information and determine if I had in any way made them feel as though they had been represented in an insufficient or condescending

way. However, once trust among us had been established, I made it clear that I was communicating this experience according to my own reality.

Researcher Positionality

The fact that I am an educated, Black male who was employed by a university with a history of displacing a Black community to expand its campus (Gray, 2003; Mullins, 2006), placed me in a very sensitive situation. This historic reality continued to resonate within the hearts of many of the people who remain and have personally experienced this academic gentrification. As a result, I was always cautious about deferring to the residents when community decisions are made. Additionally, when I was in meetings and decisions were made that I believe impacted their lives, I was adamant about advocating for them when the objectives of others were not aligned with resident goals.

As a former employee of a neighboring university that chose to partner with challenged neighborhoods in Capital City, I was given the responsibility of serving as one of the institution's primary point-persons to support neighborhood initiatives. Because of what I came to understand about neighborhood engagement, I positioned my research to analyze community engagement from the perspective of Black men. As mentioned previously, I learned, during my time in this neighborhood, that the voices of nonwhite men were rarely present and/or heard at community meetings. This absence of the Black male voice failed to maximize the benefits of having their perspectives involved in the transformation of their communities, particularly since so many were affected by the decisions that were made.

My work in the community involved meeting with city players who were completely disconnected from grassroots ideologies and understandings. Because few nonwhites occupied positions in influential positions, ideas and systems of White supremacy continued to flourish. To my discouragement, I continued to see how plans were often made by city officials, funders, and power brokers who failed to involve the community in an agenda that affected its residents. In many cases, information about community engagement initiatives were shared with residents and community leaders only after the plans were already in place. Black men were desperately needed at the table to share in the discussions, to cast a vision, and to challenge deficit assumptions about their culture for the transformation of their communities.

Correspondingly, I have positioned myself within my research not only to address the silent voices of Black males involved in community work, but also to point out the microaggressions that I continued to face in the community, at the university, and in stakeholder meetings. Microaggressions are “stunning small encounter[s] with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race” (Delgado, & Stefancic, p. 167). Whether these micro aggressions were intentional or not, the insults and racial slights minimized the dignity of a person. When I experienced these microaggressions, I found myself mentally and emotionally struggling with these belittlements. To manage these experiences, I reminded myself of my responsibilities to the university, the need to take care of my family, and my dignity as a man. In all likelihood, I believed that these microaggressive experiences discouraged residents from participating in community meetings and events.

I recognize that there is more at stake with my research than publishing, promotion, and tenure (Smith, 2012). Therefore, I also planned “to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization, and social justice” (Smith, 2012, p. 4). Accordingly, my research will serve as a counter-story to deficit agendas that further marginalize populations of color in order to illuminate the racist, colonizing, and white supremacist practices and policies connected to grassroots community engagement and press the need for social change and transformation (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Ross-Gordon, Rose & Kasworm, 2017). Like Stovall (2016), I hope to inspire other Black men to embrace a mantle of engagement that in turn will inspire others to also incite change. In this regard, I plan to claim a place for myself within the academy (Grande, 2004).

This research became personal to me for many reasons. I reflected on the first time that I experienced racism. It happened when I was in the third grade and the little White children at the school repeatedly called me “blackie” and “nigger.” I will never forget the deep, intense hurt. Prior to that time, I was a happy-go-lucky little boy caring only about comic books, running as fast as I could in open spaces, rushing to get to my next bowl of cereal, and watching cartoons with avid fascination. After experiencing the darts of racism at my new school, I pushed myself into an emotional shell. I became more guarded with my words and I was closed off to most people at the school. I was lonely, isolated, and I had no friends. I felt vulnerable and unprotected. But since I wanted to protect my parents from worrying, I never told them about how I was “adapting” to my new school environment. In 1976, we had just moved from Indianapolis, Indiana to Dayton, Ohio, and I did not want to add to their stress. We were living with my

grandparents at the time, and they were looking for a place for our family to reside that was within the school district that I was attending. The name of the school was Monticello Elementary, which was in Huber Heights, Ohio, a suburb just outside of Dayton, Ohio.

After attending Monticello for a month, my parents found a home in an area of the city that had a more diverse population, and with students who were friendly toward people from different cultures. Although I blended in well, made new friends, and enjoyed my new learning environment, I was excited when, in the summer of 1980, we moved back to Indianapolis, Indiana. Upon our return, I found that I enjoyed my school and my friends while I was transitioning into my teenage years. But a year after our arrival, my parents divorced. Devastated, I never complained, I never cried, and I never discussed this life altering event to anyone. The experience silenced me as I tried to hide the pain of growing up in a home without a father. I was a young Black boy experiencing emotional trauma and I kept quiet because I did not want to burden my mother who was picking up the pieces of her life.

A few years later, one month before I turned sixteen years old, my girlfriend told me that she was pregnant with our first child. It was one of the scariest moments of my life. I was raised in a Christian home with a family who had very high expectations of all thirteen grandchildren, of whom I was the oldest. As I struggled to find a way to tell my mother, father, grandparents, and mother's four brothers that I was about to become a father, I felt as if I had ruined my life. On June 4, 1995, my oldest son was born. I was excited but overwhelmed by the thought of raising a son at such a young age. Although I had a job at a fast food restaurant, I was still in high school and living with my mother.

She and my father were tremendous in helping me raise my son. Ultimately, my son's mother and I parted ways, but we remained friends.

Other than not being able to see my son every day, the worst part of being a noncustodial parent was attending court. I was a father who desperately loved my son. I had been given wonderful examples on how to be a responsible father by the men in my life, and I had every intention on carrying out what I had learned from them, with my own son. However, in a child support courtroom, filled with men who were there for a variety of paternity matters, we were looked upon by the judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys as men who did not love their children and who had devious plans to shirk their responsibilities as fathers. As I began to speak with these men and overhear their conversations, I learned that we were alike in so many ways. They adored their children, but experienced challenges, that in most cases, prevented them from being able to adequately support their children financially. Some were laid off. Others had so much money taken from their checks that they could barely scrape together the resources for their personal living expenses. I would hear these men share how they were arrested for not being able to pay their court ordered child support, which eventually led them to losing their jobs. Even worse, many of the mothers of the children refused the men time with their children because they had not received child support payments. The list of such scenarios seemed endless.

I was fortunate that my child support was made affordable because of my limited income. Additionally, my son's mother and I had a very good relationship and she never refused me the joy of spending time with my son. Although the court ordered visitation every other weekend, he would stay with us for weeks at a time, particularly over the

summers and during the holidays. Listening to the men talk, I realized that, compared to their situations, I was very fortunate. However, I could not help but think about how the individual stories of these men were not told. Their circumstances were too unique to be judged by the broad brush of stiff child-support laws. To the detriment of many of these men, they fell victim to a system of power that saw them as nothing more than objects, as opposed to human beings trying to find a way to survive while loving and supporting their children.

I was dejected when I left the court room that day. I was saddened by the reality of how noncustodial fathers were viewed by the court system and I was frustrated that I had placed myself in this situation at such a young age. Not only was my voice silenced, but so were the voices of my brothers in the noncustodial courtroom. When I arrived home that day, I remembered a conversation I had with my uncle about a book entitled, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley* (Haley, 1965). That same day, I walked to the library, located the book, checked it out, and began to read voraciously through the pages. Although my life and upbringing differed from Brother Malcolm's, it was his voice that captured me. As he stated, "I learned that crying out could accomplish things . . . So early in my life, I had learned that if you want something, you had better make some noise" (p. 11). I was captivated by the forcefulness of Brother Malcolm's voice, which he used to bring awareness to a situation, to expose oppression, and to get things done. Reading Malcom X's autobiography changed me in more ways that I can imagine. I learned the importance of speaking up for those who did not have a voice in our society. I carried this with me for the rest of my life: as I finished high school, graduated from college, completed graduate school, and as I began my profession.

Therefore, when I observed the imposed silence of Black men in the Carson community, I decided to use my dissertation to make noise and to dismantle, deconstruct, and disrupt the oppressive practices that I observed being perpetuated against the Black men of this community.

Realizing that the voices of these four adult Black men in the Carson community were silenced, I focused on the research of King and Swartz (2017). Their study provided an Afrocentric framework, which consisted of six principles that served as a platform for the men to share their experiences. One of the six principles the authors spoke about was *representation*, which:

refers to comprehensive portrayals that provide enough content and context about individuals and groups to avoid distortions and stereotypes. Individuals and groups remain connected to their ancestral cultures and communities as normative subjects of their own experience. Representation asserts that, when the cultural characteristics of individuals or groups are taught, more authentic portrayals are possible. (p. 16)

One of the ways that I provided a vehicle for their voices was through my scholarship. Interviewing these men gave them an opportunity to share their stories from their perspectives and without being under any duress. Enough time was allotted which allowed them the opportunity to provide accurate depictions of their experiences in the Carson community. They were also able to dispel, disrupt, and refute any deficit assumptions that others may have made about Black men in such settings. Much of what the men shared with me was in complete opposition to what outsiders felt was necessary for community development.

Inclusion is another principle mentioned by King and Swartz (2017) as it “asserts that when all cultures and groups are understood as substantive participants in human development, their presence is necessary, not expedient or token” (p. 16). I believed in

the necessity of the presence of Black men at all decision-making sessions, particularly regarding the Carson community. However, I did not believe that all would recognize them as *substantive participants in human development*. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued, “racism is ordinary, not aberrational – ‘normal science,’ the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (p. 7). Because the dominant culture will always look out for their own interest, folks from non-dominant cultures must do the same. Therefore, the idea of *self-determination* (King and Swartz, 2017) became the channel of progress for Black America. In other words, “African individuals make decisions and control their lives within the context of considering the collective needs and interests of African people and maintaining the sovereignty of African and other cultures” (p. 14). We must take our seat at the table instead of waiting for a seat to be given to us. From my experience, a seat is tokenistic when it is given and rarely does it come with any power.

The final principle that I will mention for this work is *indigenous voice*. As I shared in my personal history, the social structures in this country strangled my voice as a youth and I was consistently silenced. With an indigenous voice, I was able to provide those four adult Black men a curricular portrayal of their experiences which allowed them to “define themselves, [and] their textual presence as historical agents [that] mirrored their agency in life” (King and Swartz, 2017, p. 16). As I experienced, when these men discovered their voice and agency, and they became empowered to assert this agency in the emancipation of their community.

Essentially, these three of the six principles of Afrocentricity offered a “collective discovery, location, and actualization of African agency within the context of history and

culture” (Asante, 2003, p. 3) for these men. Their agency, or empowerment toward action in the Carson community, moved away from a dominant thinking ideology about its support, and instead found an Afrocentric lens from which to operate. It is the utilization of this Afrocentric lens that these Black men have come to believe is the most profound perspective in the community’s transformation, as it was most closely aligned with the culture of the residents. Previous and unsuccessful attempts have focused on concepts from the dominant culture, which in the case of the organization mentioned in the next section, served as a major hurdle in stifling the progress of the neighborhood.

The Trojan Horse

Before the results of the interviews are communicated, it is important that I share more context about The Trojan Horse (pseudonym), a national non-profit organization established by the Ford Foundation in 1979. According to their website, their mission is to “connect hard-to-tap public and private resources with underinvested places and people working to access opportunities every one of us deserves” (n.d., n.p.). In essence, they operate as a not-for-profit lending institution supporting challenged communities and operating out of satellite offices throughout the country.

While their goal was the economic development of underserved neighborhoods, the Trojan Horse’s office in Capital City established a strong foothold in various communities, namely the Loving Neighborhood. They exercised their power over the residents by encouraging them to focus primarily on neighborhood projects, as opposed to building people capacity. The more the Trojan Horse organization focused on neighborhood projects (often by residents, paid staff, and community partners) as

opposed to the development of people capacity, the Trojan Horse placed itself in a better position to receive donations from external funders. To that end, the Trojan Horse organization made a case for financial support of their organization by highlighting their neighborhood initiatives. As funders become aware of their neighborhood achievements, they continued to finance the efforts of Trojan Horse organization.

The executive director of the Trojan Horse organization was also well respected by the city's economic and community development elite, including those in the mayor's office. The executive director was a White male, but because his parents were missionaries, he grew up in Brazil and identified himself as a Latinx. He acquired experience in community development when he lived in a Latinx community in Chicago, and he led an immigrant march in Capital City in 2006. He lived in a low-income community in Capital City that was slowly being redeveloped by urban investors. When this executive director spoke and made recommendations, influential groups of individuals and organizations in the Loving Neighborhood often paid close attention. The respect that the executive director garnered from various city officials allowed him the power and the freedom to have a great influence on how much or how little his organization supported the Loving Neighborhood. Because of his background in community work and his phenotype as a White male, the executive director wielded a great deal of influence because many communities desired to be supported by and connected with him and the Trojan Horse organization. Despite much consternation from many of the Loving neighborhood residents and community leaders, the Trojan Horse organization firmly established itself by supporting an agenda that I believe was detrimental to the neighborhood's revitalization.

Epistemology/Epistemological Framework

To guide this study, I chose the constructivist paradigm as it allowed me to gain an understanding of the participants' experience as Black men in urban community settings. The primary assumption of this philosophy is "that reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2015, p.16). More specifically, Mertens (2015) suggests that through constructivism, multiple realities are obtained, these realities may not be consistent with one another, and they can fluctuate over the course of a study. Within this framework, the goal is to uncover the many realities for the development of meaning and understanding among the participants. Using the constructivist paradigm allows the participants to share their own reality, thus creating a space for them to have a voice concerning their own experiences (Mertens, 2015). By this measure, the constructivist paradigm serves as a useful epistemological framework from which to employ critical ethnography and sociocultural learning theory.

In addition, the transformative paradigm enhances this study because it provides a framework from which to bring about change. Within this paradigm the researcher "consciously and explicitly position themselves side-by-side with the less powerful in a joint effort to bring about social transformation" (Mertens, 2012, p. 21). This paradigm recognizes the need to critically examine the inequitable social structures that are in place between those who are oppressed (e.g., Black men) in urban community settings and those who are privileged. Thus, for this study, the transformative paradigm provides the platform for standing against, preventing, or minimizing these toxic power relations and ultimately focuses on the voices of Black men seeking to improve the quality of life of an underserved neighborhood.

Research Participants

Prior to the beginning of this study, I asked each of the men to participate and assured them that their participation was completely voluntary. The four individuals who agreed were assigned pseudonyms so that their names would remain confidential throughout the research inquiry. No one else had access to any confidential information about the participants. I was also authorized by the Institutional Review Board of Central University to conduct this study. The participants for this study were four Black men who either lived or worked in the Carson community and were actively engaged in the process of improving the community's quality of life. My rationale for selecting these four men stemmed from my regular interactions with them at various community meetings and activities. Therefore, this method of participant selection, called *convenience sampling* (Mertens, 2015), was used since I chose individuals who were each actively involved in the same community revitalization efforts. These four men fit the focus of the research as they were all adult Black men who were learning how to engage their community but had been silenced by traditional neighborhood engagement efforts.

Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David (pseudonyms) were the individuals who took part in this study. Larry and David were residents of the Carson community and they were very active in their neighborhood association and other meetings central to the community. After serving for two years, Laverne retired in the summer of 2018 and stepped down from the position of executive director of the Loving Neighborhood Community Center. Everett assumed the role of executive director of the Carson Community Development Corporation in October of 2018 after the previous executive was asked to resign. Although neither Laverne nor Everett live in the Carson community,

they used their expertise to find solutions to improve the neighborhood's quality of life. While each of the men were at different stages of their lives and took various routes to arrive in the Carson community, they all had the same goal for the community. These two men met often in neighborhood meetings, and were connected by cultural and gender similarities which established a sense of solidarity.

Laverne

Looking much younger than his age, Laverne was sixty-nine years old and was originally from the south side of Happyville (pseudonym), USA. He was a very soft-spoken man and proudly declared that he was the third generation in his family to be honored with his name. He started off as a police officer (patrol) working the midnight shift in Happyville, while he also worked on his undergraduate degree during the day. When he graduated, he worked as a grant writer for a hospital. He began as an assistant director of security to an HR consultant, and then he worked for an organization located in Washington, DC. It was with the latter employer that he participated in a two-year program, where he was able to earn a master's degree. After completing the program, he accepted a position with a corporation in Happyville.

After working for the corporation for some time, the company transferred Laverne to Capital City in 1989. Because of his background in security, Laverne advanced quickly in his career, and he soon became responsible for overseeing the company, mostly in the western part of the United States. He enjoyed living in Capital City because he felt it was an ideal location in which to raise a family. So, after working for the corporation for 10 years, he took a new position in the healthcare industry as an executive director. This

move decreased his travel time significantly and after serving in that role for a year and a half, he was promoted to vice-president of operations. He served in this and other similar roles for an additional 12 years until he decided to retire.

Whereas the other participants were persuaded to work in underserved communities, Laverne was different in that his interest in neighborhood work was piqued through serving on the boards of various nonprofit organizations. He said,

I did several other board work and really developed this passion for giving back, working with everything from the Capital City Classic [pseudonym] to some of the local organizations. Resigned from Capital City Health [pseudonym], or so I thought, and took a job out in Las Vegas. I was commuting about half the time. Every weekend, I was coming back here. I did that for about a year and a half, and decided to get off that commuting train again. Then, [I] went to work for a company that was doing a new start. They were based out of Flint, Michigan. I did a new business start here. Then, I did that for about two years. Then went and worked for the [Loving Neighbor Community Center]. I always wanted to do something in that arena. When I retired and went to work for a community center, that was probably the highlight of my passion in terms of doing work that was really fulfilling.

Laverne's career was greatly influenced by the skills and expertise that he learned in the executive positions he held at various corporations. After his first retirement, Laverne's passion for serving in challenged communities led him to apply to serve as the executive director of the Loving Neighborhood Community Center. This center served primarily the Carson community and it offered an early childhood education center, a post-secondary readiness and enrollment program, a STEM experience program, family strengthening initiatives, programs for seniors, a mentoring program facilitated through the sport of boxing, tutoring, and an after school and a summer program. Established in 1905, the Center served as a beacon of hope in Carson as its moral mission was to serve the poor and working-class residents of the community. According to documents

retrieved from the national registry (Pryor, 1994), the Loving Neighborhood Community Center supported initiatives such as a free kindergarten, free dental, prenatal and well-baby clinics, and the first public home nursing program. The Center also offered English classes for the large Slovenian population that migrated to the area to work in the metal working plants. Interestingly enough, Laverne pointed out that in the early years of the organization, the Loving Neighborhood Community Center refused to serve the Black residents of Carson. Building on its original goal of serving the neighborhood, Laverne worked to re-establish a reciprocal relationship between the community and the Center. Whereas previous directors were not as open with the community, Laverne developed an open-door approach to community engagement. Although it was an idea that was suggested by the board members, he pushed it to the point where it became a central part of his community engagement strategy. In this sense, Laverne understood the historical context of the Carson community by building on the culture through an open-door concept.

Although Laverne did not live in the Carson community neighborhood, he was deeply involved in its day-to-day affairs, as much as his responsibilities with the Center would allow. After serving in this role for almost three years, Laverne decided to retire. However, even in his retirement, Laverne still served on boards that were responsible for the advancement of urban communities. Over the course of our interviews, I began to pay attention to how Laverne rarely talked about his family and how particular individuals influenced him in various ways. This again spoke deeply to how he was greatly impacted by his secondary discourse as his life was immensely shaped by the jobs that he occupied

with various employers. In the following quote, Laverne spoke about how the racism that he experienced continued to impact him as a professional:

You know, one of the challenges is that you sometimes get stereotyped. Sometimes you get this . . . Many people question your capabilities, they question your education, and they question your motives. I mean, you work harder for funding. I can remember that. Applying for funding, your reputation and your credibility was one of the first things they look at. You know? Fortunately, I was able to qualify for some of those things but it was a challenge. I've seen that sometimes you've probably heard this term, you've got to be twice as good and get up early in the morning and then stay late at night.

Serving as a Black male executive director of a community center was the type of executive position that brought an onslaught of others questioning his ability to effectively conduct his duties. Moreover, Laverne shared that the deficit disposition that others had about Black men added to the stress of his ability to attain funding, which was vital to his organization's survival. Thus, this notion that a black man must work twice as hard (DeSante, 2013; Lui, n.d.; White, 2015), was a serious reality for Laverne. The roadblocks that he faced were more intense versus what a White male might have experienced in the same position. Guy (2014) stated it this way: "Gendered racism creates a double jeopardy for Black males that influences how their careers develop differently from their white male counterparts and Black professional women" (p. 21). Despite Laverne's education, experience, and accomplishments, he suffered the same level of racism.

Laverne's greatest concern was that if he was not able to successfully navigate this inequitable reality, it would place a negative stigma on Black men, which he believed would diminish the likelihood that another man of color could be hired. From his perspective, the pressure to succeed was not only for the sake of the organization's ability

to thrive, but also to establish a reputation that would not tarnish the committee's willingness to hire other Black men in the future. Laverne's emotional connection to his culture and his desire to pave a path for future Black executive directors gave him the strength to push through these racially motivated conflicts and resulting anxieties with consistent effectiveness. Laverne's assumptions aligned with scholarships that highlighted how many employers derived negative "perceptions and experiences grounded in peripheral activities and not directly as a result of directly interacting with Black males in the workplace" (Guy, 2014, p. 19). What was revealed in Laverne's experience and in countless academic studies is the deeply imbedded existence of racism and how its existence continues to be ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Patton Davis, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007).

A large part of Laverne's secondary discourse was that he had to learn how to earn the trust of the people he worked with, as well as the community that the Loving Neighborhood Community Center served. He said,

You know, I think one of the lessons certainly had to do with gaining the trust of the constituents of [The Loving Neighborhood Community Center]. I had to roll up my sleeves a lot of times. There were days, you know, where I was manning the door or cleaning the toilets in the same day that I was doing budgets and meeting with funders. It was . . . You had to humble yourself to do part of everything that was required.

As mentioned previously, Laverne did not talk much about his family and how it influenced him, but he did speak on how he grew up in a neighborhood like Carson. This knowledge acquired through this secondary discourse seemed to give him awareness about how to engage people and earn their trust. His responses seemed to indicate a recognition regarding the importance of earning the trust of the Carson residents, not by taking on an attitude of an executive, but by building trust with co-workers and residents

and relating to them on very practical levels. Getting involved in what he calls the “nitty gritty” was a simple but important lesson and one that has served to his advantage with the people on many levels in the Carson community.

Another way that Laverne learned to earn the trust of the people is through the Black churches in the community. Early on, Laverne understood the significance of the church in Black culture (Douglass & Hopson 2001; Logan, 2018). Therefore, he chose an approach that was appropriate for Black church engagement and one which I have often seen as beneficial. As a student-affairs professional, I witnessed college administrators who sought to partner with local congregations in community engagement by attempting to only connect with the pastors. Because of my own understanding of how Black churches operated, I believe that partners who attempted to connect with them by *only* developing a relationship with the pastor was a flawed approach. Often, the pastor and the church leaders were overwhelmed with countless requests from parishioners and partners along with the everyday pressures of managing a church (Grosch, & Olsen; Harmon, Strayhorn, & Herbert, 2018). In many cases, Black churches were stretched thin with few volunteers and a leadership (Baker, 2019) trying to meet the needs of a congregation and a community in crises. Although the Black church was an ideal partner through which to connect with the Black community, many partners were not aware that reaching out only to the pastor was one more relationship that the pastor had to find a way to manage. Thus, I believe that Laverne’s approach, which was to connect with the people of the church as opposed to only the pastor, was one I have always subscribed to as it built a greater sense of trust and empowerment among the people.

When I asked Laverne to share the major points that he had learned from working at the Loving Neighborhood Community Center, he explained how he employed this strategy of working with the Black church.

I believed in embracing the religious community. The African American neighborhoods are a very religious based group. I found that I would attend church services and churches that maybe wasn't my home church. You have to, you know, people have to know that, 'Okay, you're open.' Or, 'He's a person I can have a conversation with.' So many seniors would stop me from time to time and give me, put some fat on my head as they would, 'Here are the things you should be thinking about. I've been in this neighborhood for 50 years. Here's one of the things I want to make sure you're doing.'

The brilliance behind Laverne's community work was illustrated not only in how he listened to and learned from those residents who had a very strong, and vested interests in Carson, but also his ability to establish projects throughout the community. His motivation for community work came from the children he saw and interacted with in the neighborhood, and his desire to make a difference in the community. He said,

You know, I think it's certainly the giving back. When you see some of the kids that you sort of watch them grow in the education or exposure that they receive, and I think as you get older, there's more than just a paycheck. You want to do things to make a difference. I think that underserved communities need to have good resources. You know, good sound, well designed, well lit, air conditioned, appropriate heat, appropriate food in their community centers. Just as some community centers might have in some affluent areas.

The interesting part of Laverne's involvement was that, even though he was retired from the Loving Neighborhood Community Center, he was still actively involved in board work with organizations that addressed neighborhood concerns. Specifically, he was connected with an organization that supported young Black men in Capital City. Slightly bashful, Laverne shared that even though he recently retired as executive director of the Loving Neighborhood Community Center, he continued to stay involved with community

organizations that addressed inequities and disparities of nonwhite people, because of the dignity of the work. With pride, Laverne expressed passionately the importance of encouraging others to get involved.

Larry

Larry was born in 1952 and at the time of the interview, he was sixty-six years old. Other than living in Cincinnati for a few years with his wife, he was born, raised, and spent his entire life in Capital City. His grandfather was from South Carolina and worked on a train as a Pullman porter. A benefit of the position was that he was able to visit many of the cities in the United States. Of all the cities that he had visited, Larry's grandfather decided to move to Capital City because it seemed like an ideal place to raise a family. Therefore in 1926, Larry's grandfather built the house where Larry currently lived, and then sent for his grandmother, who was still in South Carolina. When Larry's grandparents died, the home was deeded over to his mother and her brother. In 1973, Larry's parents eventually bought his uncle's share of the home and became the sole owners of the property. Once Larry married, he and his wife moved to Cincinnati to seek employment opportunities, but returned to Capital City after his father died. Upon his return to Capital City, Larry and his wife bought out his parent's ownership of the same home that his grandfather had built. This made him the third generation in his family to live in the same house and in the Carson neighborhood.

It is important to note that Larry expressed deep feelings for the home that had been in his family for so long.

I'm a very, very sentimental type person, and so being somewhere else and driving by the house and seeing strangers in it, changes made, just

wouldn't sit well with me. My soul is more comfortable being there and knowing that it's still in the family. The house was purchased, the property was purchased in 1924. My grandmother, grandfather had the house built in 1926 . . . [And when] your grandparents are gone, your parents are gone. It's an interesting thing, because I spend so much time in the house. There are things about the house that make me feel closer to them.

Others have shared with Larry that the memories were too overwhelming for them to live in the home where his deceased parents and grandparents once lived. But the strong emotional connection that Larry had with the home and the memories associated with the structure brought him a great deal of comfort.

One interesting aspect about the home that Larry shared was the conditions under which it was built. He explained that although banks were very resistant to extending mortgages to Black families at the time, his grandfather was able to secure a loan from a banker by the name of Steven Jewel (pseudonym). Jewel was a prominent individual and one of the few bankers to lend money to Black families in Capital City. Larry admitted that he had not conducted a detailed research on Mr. Jewel, other than the original deed on which his name was written, but he was left with the understanding that the family had what he called, "abolitionist hearts." In other words, the Jewel family seemed to be committed to their version of social justice by extending loans to the Black community. Through my own investigation on the Jewel family, I discovered that it could not have been Steven Jewel who extended the loan to Larry's family because he died in 1866 (Vargus [pseudonym], 2016). However, Steven Jewel was a devout Christian, opposed slavery, participated in human rights initiatives, and was a recognized friend to the poor. Although he did not directly extend the loan to Larry's family, his charitable nature seemed to have been passed down to his family who continued in their generosity toward people of color (Vargus, 2016; Reich Historical Accounts, n.d.).

As our conversation continued, Larry eventually began to talk about how he had experienced racism on his job, but not necessarily in recent neighborhood encounters. The fact that racism was not mentioned does not mean that he did not believe that it existed. Larry spoke to what he understands about racism first by speaking to its subtleness. He said, “They don't tell you, ‘We're putting up some roadblocks to your agenda.’ People don't do that. You have to wade through it and get hit, and figure it out.” The fact that he mentioned this tactic leaves one with the understanding that Larry had either witnessed racism at work or had been a specific victim of racism himself. Because of the upbeat and positive attitude that Larry seemed to always have, he spoke candidly about how to approach racism once he recognized its existence:

People that are not who you thought they were. And so, they're revealing themselves now. And so, you have to wade through all of that, smooth all of that out. And then you're ready to, basically, rock and roll, face the world, and move forward.

Larry did not deny the existence of racism but it seemed that he saw the urgency of the neighborhood issues as more important, and therefore chose not to challenge, call it out, and then dismantle the structures and practices that, despite being subtly racist, supported its existence. Instead, he chose to work through the reality of racism by focusing more on the matters he believed were most important for improving the neighborhood's quality of life.

One way he navigated this conundrum of racism integrated with community improvement, while remaining positive, was by pointing out the importance of using people skills and learning to be tactful. He said,

So, what I have learned to do now is to lay low and peep high. I stay on the ground level, but I'm peeping at everything and everybody. And I'm listening with those two ears. And I'm trying to put things together.

Because sometimes, people are telling you their agenda, you just aren't hearing it. You aren't listening. You aren't seeing. To properly respond, to properly be able to... To be in the leadership with [Carson], and to be able to properly help people, you have to know what's really going on.

Larry's secondary discourse revealed the lessons that he learned, specifically through acquisition in neighborhood work. People skills, according to his understanding, were about the importance of paying close attention to everyone and everything connected to the community. For Larry, to do otherwise, placed one at a disadvantage of not being able to advocate for the neighborhood. As he concluded, "To me, the most valuable skill that I have learned and can put into place is to be accurate in what I say, accurate in what I hear, and accurate in what I understand." Watching others allowed him to engage more tactfully with others as well as to protect himself from being deceived. Larry continued to communicate his passion for the neighborhood by stating that,

I want to make sure that instead of going back to the bad old days, it goes even further forward. That when I'm older, if I die and Anna's [pseudonym for his wife] there, that she won't feel scared like my grandmother did. Or she won't feel threatened. And she won't feel like she can't go out at night, because it's scary and something might happen. That, along with the fact that it's my neighborhood now. I've invested in the neighborhood and in the house and I want to improve things. I want to see it better. I want my own surroundings and those of everyone else's to be better. I guess I just don't see any reason why it can't be.

Larry's emotional reflections on why he stayed active in his community began with the love he had for his wife. It was refreshing to hear him express his love for her because Black men, in this country, were typically mischaracterized as hyper-sexual, unwilling to commit to monogamous, long-term relationships, and as individuals without compassion for their communities (Bell, Janis, Bailin, Lerman, & Seigal, 2011). The men who participated in this study were the exact opposite of these stereotypes and I believe there are many more with similar devotions to their families and neighborhoods than the media

and other negative entities reveal. Larry, like the other men in this study, believed that the stakes were too high and his love for his family was too strong to allow the difficulties to deter him from supporting his community.

Everett

Like Laverne, Everett was a very soft-spoken gentleman. Originally from the north side of an east coast city in the United States, he moved to Capital City in 1988 after his wife, who was his girlfriend at the time, graduated from college. They agreed that they would settle in whatever city either one of them first found employment. Everett revealed that because of his success as a wrestler from the seventh grade through his freshman year in high school, he was able to earn a scholarship to a private Episcopalian school in his hometown. Everett explained that even though ten other Black students accompanied him when he started, the school was still predominantly White. Even though this school offered kindergarten through the twelfth grade, the total enrollment of Black students was only sixteen Black students. The tradeoff was that his skill as a wrestler paid for his education through the remainder of his high school years.

After graduating high school, he attended a historically Black college/university on a wrestling scholarship. After earning a degree in math and physics, Everett attended graduate school and earned a master's degree in engineering. His first job out of graduate school was as an engineer, but he left the field because he found greater satisfaction in "non-engineering" (my title) opportunities. He mentioned that his wife and children also transition from their professions her engineering profession for similar reasons, but his children also followed like-minded career paths.

I found that my kids are doing the same . . . With the exception of my first son, my kids are doing the same thing. Everett, Jr. [pseudonym] has a degree in biochemistry from [XYZ University] and he's doing harm reduction. So, he's out teaching people how to deal with drug dealers, and street walkers, or stuff like that, and how to assist the community in not doing more harm to them in the system and not doing harm to the community. Needle exchanges, things like that. It seems like we all end up in public service somehow. I don't know why that is, but it just seems that way.

Like his grandparents had done in Everett's life, this modeling of public service from which Everett and his wife operated, seemed to have had an enormous impact on their children. Although his children all pursued STEM fields, they either left because they did not find their careers fulfilling, or they found ways within the field to obtain deeper meanings in their professions. Essentially, Everett's primary discourse had such an impact on his life that he chose a profession where he would use his training as an engineer for the benefit of neighborhood development.

Before, Everett served as the executive director of the community development corporation in Carson, he was served in a variety of executive director roles in underrepresented communities. Despite his impressive academic training and professional accomplishments, Everett's abilities as a leader of a not-for-profit community organization were consistently questioned. Unfortunately, most of his encounters were racially motivated as he explains that,

I think color is everything. It's because I'm a Black man that's driving a lot of their views. That's who they see in front of them. That's the person who's not invited to their country club. There's a push trying to maintain their space, I'm talking about White in particular, trying to maintain their space and create their space where they're going to be. They don't mind a few of us being in there, but how much chocolate do you put into white milk before it's chocolate milk? That's the balance that they perceive. That's United States for the most part, it's not 100% across the board, it might not even be 25% across the board, but the people in power, that's

what they're about. I believe this is a Black/white or white/Brown thing. I really honestly believe that.

As a result of this understanding, Everett claimed that he had been specifically asked by Whites in power such as city officials, board members of the Carson Community Development Corporation (predominantly White), other non-for-profit organizations with influence in the city, and even the executive director of the Trojan Horse organization to maintain the status quo among the nonwhite residents in the neighborhood that he supported.

In this way, Everett was not seen by Whites as an advocate for the people and their needs. Conversely, he believed he was used by Whites who overtly ask him to inject and maintain White supremacist notions, so that their agendas would not be hindered. At his previous position in the Douglass Park community, Everett refused to acquiesce to a system of covert manipulation and because he did not comply, he was accused of mismanaging the organization's funds. Through careful planning, Everett developed a money management strategy that both supported the organization and shielded him if someone attempted to wrongly accuse him of financial mismanagement. Fortunately, Everett was able to combat this power play by keeping very detailed records of how funds were appropriated, which exonerated him of any wrongdoing. Despite this, those racially motivated groups in power still won. The damage had been done and Everett moved on from that position. This experience highlighted America's long history of hypervigilant White people monitoring Black folks where,

Black bodies in America continue to be reduced to their surfaces and to stereotypes that are constricting and false, that often force those black bodies to move through social spaces in ways that put white people at ease. We fear that our black bodies incite an accusation. We move in ways that help us to survive the procrustean gazes of white people. We dread

that those who see us might feel the irrational fear to stand their ground rather than finding common ground . . . (Yancy, 2013, p. 3).

Like Laverne mentioned, Everett was yet another Black man who had to work twice as hard to prove that he was capable *and* [emphasis added] ethical as he tried to support the needs of the residents in his Black community.

Everett also talked about what he learned about balancing time between his obligations with the Carson Community Development Corporation and his family. Before he assumed the position, he concluded that “One of the things that I wrestled with in taking the position was I knew it’d be a challenge for my family.” He continued by explaining how he had to cope with being away from his family:

Just the time commitment, and if it's not for the evening meetings, or the weekend meetings, it's the amount of stuff you have to get done, because you're always short staffed. So I mean, you're ending up doing a lot of work on the weekends and stuff like that. And it goes unrewarded for the most part. I think that's probably the biggest thing for me personally. For the work, everybody's operating their silos. Everybody's doing their own thing, trying to figure it out on their own. As much as they say they're trying to work together, it takes time and commitment, and nobody has the time to commit. And so, you end up piece-mealing . . . They end up piece-mealing themselves out to the work that's being done. So in effect, you're ineffective. You're ineffective in making change. For me, the big gap is communication, is talking with people, its bringing people around the table.

Despite the challenges, Everett had a very positive outlook on the reason why he stayed “in the game.” He said,

I enjoy working in that atmosphere. It doesn’t bother me to not have all the answers. I feel comfortable not having all the answers and still helping people move forward. So it's really not about me, it’s not about the organization. It’s really about the other people getting assistance, getting help from what we’re trying to do. From what we’re trying to do in this organization and the stakeholders that work with the business. So I never wake up on a Monday morning not wanting to go to work because of a grant or because of something. Some disgruntled neighbor or resident,

neighborhood leader, problems their having because that's all a part of it. So it just doesn't bother me to do that. I enjoy helping people and I really believe that most people want help even when they're not able to ask for it and I have this very idealistic view of the world.

Like Larry, Everett developed an outlook on community work that helped him to navigate the tensions and the triumphs that were often obscured, but all too real for these Black men in the Loving Neighborhood. As previously stated, Everett understood and experienced racism and micro aggressions as a Black man in this line of work. However, the way he chose to manage the difficulties in the terrain that he called a "game," allowed him to cope with his obligations with a more upbeat disposition. Such thinking prevented Everett from feeling downhearted about himself in a way that could have weighed negatively and heavily on both his family and his work environment.

David

David was thirty-seven years old and lived in the Carson community. He was originally from a northeastern country in Africa, called Eritrea. The eastern part of the country was bordered by the Red Sea, and Eritrea shared its remaining borders with Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Sudan. He was born in a refugee camp and his family moved to the United States when he was four years old. Because of the 30 Year War, President Ronald Reagan allowed Eritreans and Ethiopians to find refuge in the United States. His family was one of many that came to the Midwestern city of Jaytown (pseudonym), where he lived in an Eritrean community. Their original gateway into the country was through an organization called Love International (pseudonym). An interesting fact about this organization was that it was not, as he stated, originally designed for Africans. Instead, its original purpose was to meet the needs of western Europeans who were

seeking asylum in the United States during the times of World Wars I and II. Fortunately for the Eritreans and Ethiopians, funding was still available to serve their needs in their time of refuge, and David's family along with other families took full advantage of the opportunity. They were eventually placed in a high-rise living unit in one of the Jaytown's low-income areas.

David talked emphatically about the strong sense of community that was connected to his Eritrean culture, where they were taught "that everyone's your brother and your cousin." His primary discourse had a great impact on him because it included the idea of community engagement. His family was helped by an organization called Neighborhood Empowerment (pseudonym). In addition to being supported by his family with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and employment, the agency worked with the neighborhood children to engage them in various activities. According to David, their summer enrichment camps were small, but they had a great impact on how he learned to build neighborhood relationships. The camps were eight weeks long and offered programs with fun and enriching activities, and provided an experiential approach to learning. This was the environment that developed his secondary discourse, and which fostered a perspective that extended beyond his childhood community. The program also helped him to view success differently. In other words, he acquired a more urban understanding of an accomplished person from being just "a guy with rims and a nice car and who could get women." Conversely, the camp taught him that strong relationships for the good of mankind were another dimension of success and he subscribed to this ideal with great enthusiasm.

David's parents eventually moved to Capital City in the late 1990s because they felt their previous home in Jaytown was "too much" in terms of crime and poverty, with very limited opportunities for their family. He also stated that in Jaytown, his siblings were beginning to indulge in a lifestyle of which his parents did not always approve. For his family, the pace of Capital City was slower and thus an ideal location for a change of scenery. Although Carson had a city-wide reputation for being one of the most crime-ridden communities in Capital City, David's family was not dissuaded. For them, the Carson neighborhood was considered safer than what they had experienced while they lived in Jaytown.

When his family moved to Capital City, David went to Vargas (pseudonym), a city on west coast of the United States. Initially, David went for a sporting trip, but soon developed a deep appreciation for the city, particularly the environment (i.e., the sky, water, climate, and so on). Eventually, he decided to live in the city and in an area where he no longer had to be nervous about living in a violent neighborhood. After working odd jobs, David attended junior college and then transferred to a four-year university where he earned a dual degree in business and political science. After he acquired knowledge about working in communities, David decided to also pursue opportunities where he could learn how to support marginalized neighborhoods. Attending college was instrumental in turning his life around, because his original intention was to pursue politics. He became discouraged when he began to understand what he calls the "game." Eventually, he focused his efforts on business to earn an income and to give back to the community. This was a concept that originated from his experiences with the Neighborhood Empowerment organization, when he lived in Jaytown.

After working for a few years as a merchant mariner, David decided to move from Vargas to Capital City to reconnect with his family. Continuing with the model of what he saw with Neighborhood Empowerment, David started a business called “Our House” (pseudonym). The focus of the company was to provide affordable housing to low-income families and homeless veterans in the Carson neighborhood. The mission of the business was to hire residents of the neighborhood as employees of the company. By doing so, he hoped to minimize the transportation barrier that some residents had as well as helping to keep the resources within the community. His family experienced the transportation and affordable housing needs when they first moved to the neighborhood.

Some of the most moving recounts of racism that I heard in the interviews were those from David. As a person who immigrated from Eritrean, Africa to the United States and as a young child having to learn a different language, David admitted that he faced unique challenges. This contributed to him being very soft-spoken, and because of his age, he struggled with having his voice heard and with being respected among the residents in the Loving Neighborhood. He said,

We're constantly trying to prove your word that what you're saying is just not parts. There's a reason why you're saying it, and especially, and that you could come off aggressive because people are not listening to you and then you're like, wait a second, I was listening to you the whole time talking and now that I'm talking you have a great idea and it sucks because people will try to take your idea and make it their own and it's like it's tricky because you do want the neighborhood to be better because of the idea. So you want to relinquish that attachment but at the same time you have to have a purpose just like I was saying with the community there's no connection to it.

This frustration was a reality for David, and I have witnessed how he was treated by others many times. One such incident occurred as residents, community partners, and I attended a monthly neighborhood meeting. This meeting was a meeting of all four

communities of the Loving Neighborhood for the purpose of reporting, hosting guest speakers, and planning. About halfway into one meeting, David was attempting to inject his opinion only to discover that at least three times he was interrupted by the President of the Summerville Neighborhood Association, a White, middle-aged woman named Karen (pseudonym). As this continued to occur, David decided to address how he felt about being disrespected in the meeting. In a stern but calm demeanor, he proceeded to explain his frustration that even though in meetings he patiently listened to others, that when it was his time to speak, he was not afforded the same courtesy and respect from others. Such behavior, he concluded, was a pattern that had worn thin with him. Incensed that David would make these accusations, Karen rebutted him as if he had no right to address him in such a manner. He refused to back down. Again, David remained in his seat, and was calm but steadfast as he continued to explain his feelings of being disrespected. Upon seeing this, Karen decided to leave the meeting.

As a participant in this meeting, I was happy that David spoke out about this because I paid close attention to how Karen, the Summerville Neighborhood Association President, had treated him in this meeting. DiAngelo (2011) might describe Karen's response as a common defensive move from White people, who upon experiencing the slightest amount of racial stress,

They ... [become] intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (p. 54)

The abrupt exit by the Summerville Neighborhood Association president was a perfect example of what DiAngelo calls *white fragility*. Instead of processing David's accusation

to determine if they were true, Karen, who as the association president held a great deal of power, chose to take a posture of defensiveness. To be clear, David was continually interrupted by Karen on several occasions, but she failed to consider the truth in what he was saying about how he was being treated. Essentially, this blatant act of racism was underscored when David spoke up about the inequities that were occurring. Instead of his fellow residents coming to his defense, David was depicted as the problem. This is one of many examples of how racism plays itself out in the Loving Neighborhood.

Here, I am reminded of countless occasions when White people have asked how they can help fight racism in America. My response is to call out racism when and where it surfaces, particularly when Whites are the only individuals in attendance (Hughes, 2017). The display of gendered racism (Guy, 2014; Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014) that Karen exhibited toward David was deplorable, but in my opinion, the fact that others did not speak up for him made them just as complicit to these acts of racism. As Karen began to storm out of the room, I waited for someone, particularly any White person attending the meeting to draw attention to Karen's disrespectful and racist actions. To my surprise, no one said a word in David's defense. Allowing her to leave without confronting her and not supporting David is an example of how one becomes complicit in perpetuating the ideals of systemic racism in any community (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014). It also further supports the silencing of people of color, in this case, a Black man. Yet even more disturbing was that instead of defending and supporting David, Janet (pseudonym), the president of the Carson Neighborhood Association, was trying to calm David down, as if his behavior was embarrassing her. The more he spoke up for himself, the more she attempted to keep him quiet. Nonwhites in White spaces carry the burden of

having to choose between tacitly participating in their own objectification and marginalization within the institution or actively reacting against these racial dynamics at the risk of institutional alienation, and possibly exclusion (Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2018). This institutional dynamic embeds a mechanism for the reproduction and reification of White institutional power and privilege, and the potential for racial reproduction.

This was not the only time that I witnessed this form of voice silencing directed at David. In a Carson community leadership meeting, the residents were speaking about priority issues in the neighborhood. Although addressing crime was at the top of the list, David (who was a passionate supporter of the neighborhood trash pick-up efforts) began to share his ideas about a butterfly sanctuary initiative he was developing in the neighborhood. The butterfly sanctuary, he believed, contributed to the beautification of the Carson neighborhood. Equally important, David was also able to connect the project with a local elementary school where it served as a part of the children's science projects. Because David's butterfly sanctuary was not a priority for a few residents, he received backlash. In defending himself and his initiative, a heated debate between David and two other Carson residents (namely Larry and his wife Anna [pesudonym]) arose, and after a few scathing comments between them, David left the meeting. Again, his voice was silenced, but this time by people from his own community.

David used cautionary language when he spoke about the things he learned. Although he once again spoke of the necessity of having people skills, David's conversation leaned more in the direction of being on guard. He said,

I think the big thing that I learned about myself is how to take it on the chin more. Where I come from, I wouldn't dare let anyone dehumanize me

the way I've seen, the way some of the people in the neighborhood have treated me.

From what I have witnessed of these four men, no one who has participated as a leader in these meetings has experienced such an outpouring of microaggressions as David. It has only been in the latter stages of my time working with him that I have observed him speaking up for himself. Making matters worse, he has received little support when he has expressed these frustrations and therefore discovered the confident person that existed within himself. He admits that he wishes that this part of who he was had become evident prior to his time spent serving in the neighborhood. From my perspective, having a mentor could have been a way to provide him with the tools to navigate the microaggressions that he has experienced.

David shared that even with the overwhelming silencing he has experienced in the neighborhood, working to improve the quality of life in his community was still invigorating. He said,

I don't think it's normal really to be honest with you because I get a high out of [it], I like it. What I think is just I like it and I see the purpose for making a difference on my block. I believe in the people and I think you can definitely make a positive impact on people by putting together a structure or something. So I believe in the asset, the true asset people power, and that you can...

Despite the ill-defined challenges that he experienced, David remained involved because knowing that he was supporting his community was for him energizing and uplifting. His motivation came from the concern that he had for the people who lived around him.

Summary

This chapter explained the research design and methodology used to examine the experiences of four Black men in a low-income community who were seeking to improve its quality of life. Key concepts related to the study, critical ethnography in general, and sociocultural learning theory more specifically, were outlined and addressed. A rationale was given for participant selection and there was a description of the setting chosen for the study. There was an explanation of the role that I played as the researcher for this study, how my subjectivity may have influenced the interpretation of the findings, and how I interacted with the people that lived, worked, and were partners to this community. This chapter also explained the data sources and methods of collection used with the participants. Additionally, there was a description of the participants, how data was analyzed along with an explanation of how I established trustworthiness.

Chapter IV presents the findings that resulted from exploring the experiences of the four Black men and how they learned the art of community engagement, empowerment, and neighborhood transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Malcom X said in his autobiography, “. . . why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient” (Haley, 1965, p. 173).

Research Results

The research questions for this inquiry sought to understand why four Black men chose to engage the Loving Neighborhood, particularly the Carson community, in order to accomplish the following: to bring about change, to have an impact on its development, and to improve the quality of life for its residents. The results of this research also addressed how these men experienced racism. Their interviews provided them with an opportunity to share what they learned about racism as they engaged the community. The results also provided insight into why they continued to serve in their various positions within the community. By addressing these points, this study gave voices to the participant’s experiences that were often veiled, particularly when outsiders chose to invest in underserved communities (Hunter & Davis, 1994). The study also provided important insight into those who decided to support and advocate for marginalized neighborhoods.

Looking through the lens of the sociocultural learning theory, four themes emerged from the accounts of Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David. The interviews provided rich counter narratives that illuminated their experiences as Black men as well as what they believed would support the improvement of the Carson community’s quality of life. Those themes included mentoring, community and cultural learning, long-term planning, and external funding skepticism.

Major Themes

Mentoring

One way or another, all four men collectively discussed the importance of mentoring in their community engagement efforts. For example, David spoke of the need for mentors in his hometown when he stated that,

And my idea of someone being successful was a guy with rims and a nice car and got the women. It sucks, but that's the reality of a young Black man imagining what success is. And it was amplified when the crack epidemic was around and when you didn't see a Black president, you didn't see chief police officers. The only people with real power, even at a young age as a teacher were White and so it was hard to imagine yourself to do something.

Reflecting on his childhood, David recognized the challenges associated with images of Black men selling crack cocaine. David believed that more successful Black men were needed in community engagement initiatives to guide and support young Black males through the process of finding alternative ways of achieving success. David argued that this would contribute to fewer Black men pursuing the pathways to crime. As previously mentioned, David was not directly mentored by anyone. His guidance and training came from an organization called Neighborhood Empowerment that provided a framework for how he became an active and effective advocate for the residents in impoverished communities.

According to his primary discourse, Everett was directly mentored by his grandmother and grandfather, because they were both influential in his desire to work in underserved neighborhoods. He noted:

My family actually grew up owning property and managing rental housing. So, I learned at a very young age about rental housing: how to

keep track of the finances and how to take of it. I mean, from 10 or 11 doing a lot of maintenance, I'd work with my grandfather, so [I] was always engaged in both sides of the housing issue: both the rental side and then as far as home ownership or maintenance side of it.

Consistent with my own upbringing, Everett's grandfather played a great role in Everett's training which served him well in his community development positions. I also learned how to interact with other people from my grandfather. He was always an engaging, outgoing person and this served me extremely well as I navigated the personalities of the Loving Neighborhood. While Everett's grandfather seemed to have mentored him in the business and technical sides of working in the community, Everett's grandmother guided him more in terms of understanding and engaging with people, sharing:

From my standpoint, I go back to what my grandmother did, and that was know your neighbors. Make sure that they're part of the family, and together you take care of the community, both the physical and family side of it. So, it was nothing for us to go and fix up houses, make sure the block was clean, and actually swept the block.

Much of what Everett learned from his grandparents, played directly into his role as the executive director of the Carson Community Development Corporation which included housing development in the neighborhood. The mentoring that Everett received from his grandparents was a version of what Gee (2015) referred to as *acquisitioned learning* and it played a major role in Everett's decision to move into and be effective in his work in the community.

Larry spoke in more general terms regarding his secondary discourse, and how he was mentored by others, replying:

I think that the jobs I've had and the mentors that I've had along the way, have shaped how I operate now. I'm a very Black and white person. I see things . . . If you tell me that [at] 3 o'clock, all the lights on Croquet Way [pseudonym] are supposed to be green, I don't want to see a red light. If I come through here and see a red light, I'm up in arms. You know?

He went on to say, “I think that, and as I say, the people I’ve had as mentors and supervisors along the way, have shaped how I look at things, and how I approach things. How I come at things”.

Laverne was the only participant who did not speak of mentoring from a primary discourse perspective. In other words, he did not discuss mentoring in terms of how he was impacted. Instead, he mentioned it from the notion of role modeling and what the community needed for the sake of Black men. He discussed this at length:

There's a lot of community centers that are led by women and it's not bad. There's not enough community centers that are led by Black men. I think if you made the same observation in health care, you'd take the Good Samaritan Hospital [pseudonym] and, what, 60% of their clients are from the African American community. Sometimes they're [in] leadership [but] maybe 1%. I think it demonstrates to others counting that, ‘Yeah, I can do that. I can lead a community center, or I can lead a business, or I can aspire to be a leader in law enforcement or any of the other.’ Sometimes you don't know any contact. Sometimes all they see in law enforcement is the patrol officer. There's many times you come to The Loving Community Center and you'd see the leadership, the CCPD (Capital City Police Department [pseudonym]) leadership, the CCPD was there. They never come in contact with you unless you had some sort of a serious problem. You know, they come and stand right next to them and they can tell you their story. Unless you're passing that torch, you're not doing your community a service.

For Laverne, modeling leadership was significant because he believed that Black men should hold prestigious positions, particularly those in predominantly Black communities. Holding important positions in the community communicated the message that Black men could lead effectively. It was Laverne’s understanding that Black men respected what they saw in other Black men, and therefore Black men should be the voices of primary and secondary discourses in their communities. Given this understanding, Laverne believed that if more young Black men saw multiple aspects of

success, they would begin to see that there are a variety of options from which to choose to live a meaningful life.

Unfortunately, research supports the idea that the Black community is still limited in its understanding of the different career choices that are available (Deruy, 2016; Rooks, 2013). It is my belief that the primary images that depict success for members of our communities are either doctors, lawyers, marketing professionals, professional athletes, or drug dealers. Such career options, which can seem limited, is why I believe many Black men fall into a sense of hopelessness and despair. When counseling students and their families as an academic advisor, I was consistently amazed at their lack of knowledge regarding career opportunities that are available to them besides becoming a doctor, marketing executive, lawyer, or teacher. Black males should be exposed to additional career opportunities, including working as executive directors and community builders in their communities.

Although I am elated that Hollywood shows more nonwhites in successful roles (Blackish; Boomerang; Good Deeds), I feel that they tend to be oversaturated in the same careers that I mentioned previously (doctors, marketing executives, and lawyers). This limited exposure by the media conveys the idea that there are only a few careers from which to choose, and if we as Black men show limited interest in this limited list of careers, then there is something wrong with the Black man, not the market. On the other hand, seeing more Black men in nonwhite communities who hold a variety of successful positions, as Laverne suggests, yields more promise, more options, and hope for the future. Seeing other Black males in a variety of successful careers, that Laverne discusses, provides a way by Black youth can become exposed to other respectable, well-

paying careers from which to choose, and not just the often-celebrated doctor, lawyer, and so on. Additionally, it fosters the idea that there are more careers yet to be *created* than these young men can conceive. Because the media is predominantly controlled by White men, these men have the power to control the narrative of how nonwhites are depicted and the roles that they play, no matter how inaccurate (Kulaszewicz, 2015).

Essentially, these four men communicated the need for the development of Black men so that they could become leaders to develop the Carson community. For decades, money from the Capital City government, nonprofit funding institutions, and other benefactors had been poured into this community with the intent of stimulating urban renewal (The Research Institute, 2001). Unfortunately, history repeated itself because there was little or no evidence that these financial resources were used to sustain community development initiatives in the Loving Neighborhood. Despite the consistent push for people development, outsiders like Capital City government and other not-for-profit agencies such as The Trojan Horse, continued to encourage an agenda consisting solely of promoting projects. Most of these not-for-profit agencies helped the Loving Neighborhood find money for neighborhood projects to improve its aesthetics, but no money was allocated to improving their assets, or to assist the residents in learning how to use these assets to stand up and revitalize their community themselves. Ideologies that promoted projects over people served the interest of outsiders. These outsiders were predominantly White and did not necessarily have the best interest of the people in this predominantly Black community (Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003). In other words, neighborhood “projects” gave more credit to organizations such as The Trojan Horse, and therefore, their donations from external funders were increased significantly.

Continuing with the idea of the interest convergence (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009), what Larry, Laverne, Everett, and David believed to be vital for the needs of their communities was in conflict with the vested interests of neighborhood partner organizations which were predominantly led by Whites. Consistently, these men have stated the necessity of mentoring for the development of individual lives as a strategy for the neighborhood's sustainability. They have expressed how being mentored impacted them and how they observed how it impacted other Black men. Further, scholars have written about the importance of mentoring in the lives of Black men and how its absence continued to challenge one's ability to successfully navigate underserved communities (Ginwright, 2010). Not only was mentoring important in providing guidance, as Ginwright (2016) pointed out, but it served as the ideal means by which the mentee could manage the stress that accompanied living in underserved communities. The tension between projects and people development was a constant conflict in the Loving Neighborhood, particularly in the Carson Community. If scholars such as Ginwright have pointed to the value of mentoring, and Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David have all pointed to the significance that mentoring has played in their own lives, why have community partners, corporations, and developers not adapted this ideology?

It is my belief that these organizations are not interested in community development and that they are not genuinely interested in the welfare of the people. From my observations in meetings, emails, and general conversations, these groups continue to communicate a false idea of care, concern, and love for the people living in this community as evidenced by their top down approaches to engagement. The men who participated in this study communicated their concerns with a project-based prospective

that ignores the cultivation of relationships with the residents. Despite their expressed reservations, the voices of these men are overshadowed by the oppressive plans of dominant culture thinking masked in condescending idealism of so-called community partnership. According to Hart (2001), “valuing the knowledge lodged in experiences that are fundamentally different from one’s own means being able to be silent and to truly listen to others’ life stories” (p. 171). The life stories of these men and their experience in community continue to be ignored as they do not align with the plans of outsiders. Ignoring the perspectives of these men are examples of how organizations use their *power* to manipulate vulnerable communities into programs that have not considered the perspectives of the residents. The conclusions that these men draw from being silenced occur in the next theme.

Community and Cultural Learning

All the men expressed the importance of learning about, understanding, and being able to relate to the people in the community. Learning about the community and its culture was communicated from the men in a variety of ways. For example, Laverne felt that growing up in a neighborhood like Carson gave him greater insight into impacting change. He shared:

Well, I think one of the things that was an advantage is that I grew up in a neighborhood not too un-similar to Carson in the south side of Happyville. I had a basic understanding of what was needed. You know, I think that unless you’ve been there, unless you are engaged in some ways, it’s a little more difficult to do.

It was the social capital (Barnes-Mauthe, Gray, Arita, Lynham, & Leung, 2015) that Laverne had as a Black man from a similar neighborhood that gave him a nuanced understanding of how to engage this community, adding:

I think as a Black man there, you know, I think what I understood and what they felt I understood. I think people felt more that they had access. It's important that they have people who look like and come from the same community. I think that if you come from that community, you're less likely to abuse people in it.

Laverne played out this idea in his daily activities by initiating an open-door policy so that people in the Carson community would have access to the leadership of the Loving Neighborhood Community Center. For him, being a part of the community's culture strengthened the center's relationship with the community. Likewise, and equally powerful, was Laverne's sensitivity to Carson due to the acquired knowledge he gained by growing up in a similar neighborhood. This prompted his decision to engage in it more deeply which served as an advantage for him, as opposed to a person who did not have a similar experience.

Everett looked at one's ability to connect in the community from a different perspective. In his previous community engaged activities, Everett lived in the neighborhood or at least lived relatively close to the area. In the Loving Neighborhood, he felt at a disadvantage because he did not reside in Carson, saying:

Over here, I don't know everybody. I don't know the gang bangers over here. And, because of that I'm not comfortable everywhere I go. And so, because I'm not comfortable, that prevents me from having a dialogue that I would normally want to have and know that I need to have. And so, what I have basically chosen to do is to identify other individuals that could do that for me. I wish I had the ability just to go out, and just hang out with folks. Can I do it at Douglas Park (pseudonym)? Yeah. But, I kind of know that, and they kind of know me.

Everett's thoughts seemed to suggest that working in communities was not just about the work. It was also about spending time with the people in the community and understanding the culture in order to build trust and an understanding about the neighborhood in a very grassroots kind of way. According to Everett's approach to getting to know the people in the community, neighborhood work should start with the people and everything else moves outward from there (Christens, 2010; Simpson et al., 2003). If an outsider or insider desired to support a particular community, they must first have a working knowledge of the people, have a relationship with the people, the culture of the people, and they must also have an appreciation for the sociocultural and historical challenges they would face as residents in an urban community.

Even though David and Larry, who lived in the Carson community, did not directly communicate the importance of knowing the community to impact change, elements of their understanding of this concept was intimated in their conversations. The idea of living in the community and levying the greatest impact for change seemed to exist in Larry's and David's commitment to live in Carson. Both were financially capable of living in more affluent areas of the city, but instead, they both chose to live in this underserved community. Larry described the balance he used to maintain his credibility with fellow Carson residents while also staying alert with outsiders.

You know, I think that I also feel that I form an important link in our community and the powers that be, in the government and so forth, because I feel like I can communicate with the folk in the street. And I can communicate with the people downtown. So that I can use enough \$10,000 words that the people downtown don't think poorly of me and think I'm just a dummy. And I can use the verb to be with my brothers so that they're comfortable, and they don't feel like I'm something different. It's like now, I get people asking my opinion on ... Or how they can get help with this, or I need a no dumping sign in my yard, or blah blah blah.

In this way, Larry indirectly communicated the idea that living in the community, building on relationships, and listening to fellow residents was the means that he chose to impact the improvement of the neighborhood's quality of life. His knowledge of the resident's needs was an advantage that he used to help him meet the goals of their community.

Creating strong relationships with fellow residents and developing deeper understandings of the community's culture was also how David was able to assess the community's need from a relational as opposed to a deficit, top down perspective. David's decision to start a business in Carson City (discussed in his participant background section) was based on the information that he gathered from his fellow residents. Had he not been on the ground communicating and interacting with the residents and understanding them in their cultural context, it would have been more challenging to establish a business that catered to the needs of the community.

Everett came into the community understanding the importance of building trust and learning about the residents of Carson, purporting:

What I'm trying to do with [the Carson Community Development Corporation] is get it out of the four walls here, and get it out to the community to identify the assets within the community so we can help them connect with each other. And, in doing that, help the people in the community talk to one another, and begin to build community, because I think that's what's really missing. From my standpoint, I look at myself more as a convener and collaborator. I don't have to do it all, all I've got to do is see a need, find out who can cover the gap in the system, and cover the gap. And so, that's pretty much what I try to do from my standpoint.

These four men took steps to understand more deeply the culture in which they were already embedded. They believed that they could have the greatest impact in their

communities by investing in the time to learn more about the people in the Carson community and thereby also strengthening their passion for their neighborhood.

Unfortunately, another trait of the racism that existed in this neighborhood was the unwillingness of the White residents and partners to understand the unique culture of others. Sociocultural learning theory maintained that understanding the culture of other groups required the immersion into cultures where one was unfamiliar (Alfred, 2002b). I would add that for this cross-cultural competency to take place, one must be committed to such an approach, open to what one learned, and be willing to adjust how they think and operate as a result of what is learned. McGrath's (2018) Ted Talk (an online nonprofit organization that devoted to publishing a series of speakers who spread ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks in eighteen minutes or less) on the challenges of service learning in impoverished countries, spoke to the need for the importance of a learning only mentality as a foreigner to any community. She states that:

Discussions about development theory in general and about the political, historical, economic, and sociocultural situations of the country that you are going to in particular should be learned about and discussed both prior to the trip and throughout as these concepts are put into context. This makes volunteers think about how the work that they're doing fits in to the development of the community, the country, and the world as a whole and it both educates and humbles the volunteer. It is so important that these people question the motives and abilities to create necessary, lasting and impactful change. [10:23]

Although McGrath is speaking of foreigners who volunteer in underdeveloped countries, I believe that the concept applies to this and any other community engaged efforts. Essentially, McGrath is sharing the importance of entering a culture with the understanding of simply learning about the culture and resisting the temptation to exact immediate change. Part of having an impact, she asserts, is learning about the associated

with the people and history of the community. I have witnessed few Whites who engaged the Carson community that consider this concept. It is typically evidenced by the ongoing patterns of racism, inequitable practices, and microaggressions designed in hurry up, quick-fix approaches and ignoring the idea of first learning about the residents and their desires.

An example of how the impact that this deep embedding of grassroots engagement can have on a community is the life of Paulo Freire. Because his national literacy program in Brazil was deemed threatening by a Brazilian military coup that was supported multi-nationally, he was exiled, but ultimately found political asylum in Bolivia (Ledwith, 2011). Freire returned to Brazil after sixteen years and “spent at least two afternoons a week with people in their communities, listening to their experience and analysis and, in this way developing a critical praxis out of lived experience” (Ledwith, 2011, p. 56). In this regard, Freire’s deeper understandings of the Brazilian communities, which humanized the experiences of the students by simply listening to them, developed the capacity of these individuals to critically engage the world and “question the contradictions that shape their lives” (Ledwith, 2011, p. 58). In connection with the sociocultural learning theory tenet of communities (Alfred, 2002b), these men, who participated in this study, situated themselves within the Carson community in a way where they could understand the discourse and critically examine the contradictions (Gee, 2015).

Like Freire, the participants in my research (Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David) believed that a critical praxis approach could only be attained by understanding the community culture of their neighborhood for the sake of transformation. For the sake of

my role as convener for the neighborhood and researcher, understanding and learning about the culture and how foreigners/outside positioned themselves in this community was critical. It was a way in which I was able to effectively advocate for the community and support its transformation from the inside-out as opposed to from the outside in.

In this regard, I believe that community development becomes sustainable.

Unfortunately, I also believe that this was never the goal of the so-called *partners* of this community. In fact, their top-down, White supremacist, and colonizing approaches to neighborhood development continues to counter, even stall, the community's ability to move toward transformation in a holistic manner. Recognizing the self-serving ways in which these community partners tend to think, I have surmised that it is Larry's reason for speaking about the concept of long-term planning discussed in the next theme.

Long-term Planning

Focusing specifically on the people of Carson, one challenge that the men hoped to communicate was the importance of establishing a mindset that looked more into the future and to then plan accordingly. Larry communicated his concern for the lack of this way of thinking when he reported:

You put crabs in a bucket. As soon as one gets ... Uses his claw to kind of get out, pull himself up, the other crabs are pulling back down. And traditionally, we as a people have had a crab syndrome. And to a certain point, it still exists. That is ... And you see it surface when . . . If a child in a school gets tutored or gets recognized for his intellect, and he gets good grades, and he's striving, moving, and he gets showered with some accolades, his peers will ridicule him, 'You're trying to be white!' That's crab syndrome. Pulling this kid back because he's striving to do something different. Relating that to doing good in the neighborhood, people have been beaten down so much that they don't think anything is ever going to change. And you get out there, look at that dummy, he thinks he's going to

make something different happen. Ain't nothing happening. White people ain't going to change. They ain't going to let this happen.

In essence, Larry believed that many of the challenges in the Black community came from other Black people who refused to plan ahead and instead, lived for that day. Additionally, he believed that Black people were very skeptical about other Black people who were striving to improve the neighborhood. This fuzzy “crab syndrome” that Larry referenced to was the negative discourse in Carson towards Blacks who sought to advance the neighborhood. It was something that he believed limited the progress of the community.

I agreed to some extent with Larry as I have also been privy to this discourse. However, an understanding of the history of this community (The Research Institute, 2001) created a context for why these conversations occurred. Notwithstanding, many in the Carson Community have expressed a distrust in the neighborhood leaders who partnered with outsiders such as the Capital City government, Central University, and The Trojan Horse organization. From previous experiences, similar partnerships in the past were left with limited results in their economic development. Because many residents have experienced disappointing results because of outsider interference in the past, it has led to much of the skepticism that Larry mentioned. Consequentially, Larry seemed to understand that as a leader in his community, part of the long-term planning required the priority of reestablishing a trusting relationship with his fellow residents. Understanding the community required what Alfred (2002b) referred to as recursive identity. That is, Larry was beginning to see the importance of reflecting on his own identity and the importance of “incorporating new perspectives, theories, and practices” (Alfred, 2002b, p. 10) into his strategy of neighborhood revitalization. A negative

discourse among residents stifled the progress of the community's growth, but the socio-cultural history of Carson provided insight into resident skepticism. Thus, relationship re-building through recursive identity development can provide the process through which Larry's strategy for progress could begin.

Everett saw this lack of forward thinking manifested in how the neighborhood organizations were coordinated. He said:

That's why we're always behind the eight ball in everything that we're doing, and any community change that we're trying to do. The restaurant up here asked for a takeout liquor license, drinking and take out license. They spent a week and a half discussing it. I'm like, this is a two-minute discussion. Either you want them to do take out or you don't want them to do take out. There's no discussion.

What Everett was referring to was how the fuzzy neighborhood meetings often got hung up in lengthy discussions that he believed could have been resolved or concluded in a more efficient manner. For example, Everett shared how on a few occasions, he was contacted by a lending institution to discuss the management of a grant that was awarded to a neighborhood organization without his knowledge. To his surprise, he found out, after the fact, that the community development corporation that he led was responsible for managing a grant that he knew nothing about. Although he did not believe that these groups needed to report everything to him, this lack of collaborative communication as a collection of neighborhood partners, workers, and volunteers hindered the community's ability to foster continuity and trust in their economic revitalization. Additionally, a lack of planning and collective thinking produced confusion, frustration, and a group of individuals who became overextended.

David did not speak to this specifically, but he did mention the necessity of a neighborhood having a plan in place. Frustrated by how many of the neighborhood

leaders and organizations operated, he decided to take a more individualized approach to planning ahead, reporting:

Yeah, like the value in it. I'm working on getting chess tables at Sharon Park (pseudonym), Denver Park (pseudonym) and the whole concept is to... like butterfly structures, and it's to beautify the park. Because if we make the neighborhood more beautiful, it will have a ripple effect.

I believe that operating in silos, as these men mention, occur because of a leadership gap. In my time in the Loving Neighborhood, I observed very little leadership development to teach individuals the skills necessary to manage the complex groups seeking a foothold in the neighborhood in the name of improvement. In fact, my first assignment on my first day in the role as community builder was to support the residents in stabilizing its neighborhood organization. This was a process that should have been in place prior to the previous leadership team's transition. As these scenarios have shown, a neighborhood without a long-term plan, in this case regarding leadership, led to complex operations that were what Trice and Beyer (1993) called fuzzy. Laverne also saw the importance of a long-term leadership plan. He said:

Someone once told me about community centers, the turnover in leadership. It's somewhere between three and five years. For someone who is early in their career, they could probably move into environments where they're going to receive better pay than they would at a nonprofit community organization. That's really important work so you get a lot of guys like me on their third retirement that decide to step into the role. You know, I think that it would be nice to have someone in that role who can spend their career, they can spend 10, 12, 15 years and really develop the organization.

Without question, Laverne recognized the benefits of taking a long term-planning approach. He believed that this could happen with the hiring of young, vibrant individuals with intentions to establish themselves as leaders in the neighborhood's community development organizations. According to these men, Carson could soar as

opposed to simply thriving if it had leadership development, leaders with attitudes of long-term thinking, leaders who were respected, and leaders who respected others. Unfortunately, the mechanism for fostering this level of leadership was not in place for the Carson community specifically, or the Loving Neighborhood as a whole.

Further context helps us to understand how fuzzy practices can stifle leadership development within and among communities. Alfred (2002a) notes that, “we must understand that even as a discourse community facilitates learning, it may work to constrain as it sets up boundaries, parameters, and criteria for membership thus engendering exclusionary practice” (p. 10). Keep in mind that in 2017, the Carson community reorganized its neighborhood association, and when they did, they ushered in a new leadership who were mostly new to the community and had not established trust with the residents. Beyond this, the previous leader was not given a formal role in the restructured organization. As a result, she began to spread dissension by speaking negatively about Carson (This included meetings involving all four communities that made up the Loving Neighborhood). The power play in this regard was not the conflict itself. Instead, I found it interesting to watch the community partners respond to this conflict by remaining silent. As the resident leaders in the Carson community clashed, the community partners’ plans for their version of community development ensued. This tactic of flying under the radar while the community worked through its conflict was a power play and from my perspective, highly unethical. Cervero and Wilson (2001) referred to this as silent power which is when groups become so complicit in their own oppression that they contribute to its very existence. Out of this, perceptions and preferences were established, and company managers used this approach to “define what

behaviors were not only appropriate but also natural and unchangeable, then any question of those definitions becomes impossible” (Cevero & Wilson, 2001, p. 53). This use of silent power by the community partners of the Loving Neighborhood was manifested by ignoring the need for people and leadership development, and instead focusing on projects.

Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David all recognized this silent power play and thus they communicated the need for long-term planning perspectives among the residents. They consistently conveyed the idea that the transformation of the Carson community must begin with a different way of thinking for every resident interested in joining the effort. This is not to say that there was something wrong with the people. Instead, I believe that these men were alluding to the need for everyone to come together into a collective body to make changes. Every resident did not have to take the same approach, but a foundation of harmony was needed so that there can be a collective impact. Stoecker (2009) helped to synthesize the participants’ perspectives on this point when he shared:

At its root, community organizing isn’t about big organizations or charismatic leaders, or about specific political agendas or ideologies. Rather, it’s about activating people at a local neighborhood and to claim power and make change for themselves. It’s the process by which grassroots organizations form and grow, their members develop leadership skills, and ordinary people learn to change social policy. (p. 22)

In bringing together the idea of long-term planning, the participants in my study believed in an urgent call to action because they were first-hand witnesses of how some community partners interacted and the ways that neighborhood leaders in the community operated in silos. It is to this point that these men were hesitant about accepting external

funding, such as grants and other financial gifts from outsiders, for the sake of neighborhood revitalization. This will be discussed in the next section.

External Funding Skepticism

From my observations of the Loving Neighborhood, finding funding streams to support community engaged work was extremely important. It was discussed in a variety of capacities at just about every community meeting that I attended. Raising money to support projects, as I have witnessed, was a daunting task in terms of both seeking the funds and in managing the resources. Such was the case in the history of the Loving Neighborhood because they were awarded a grant by The Trojan Horse organization. The award was given to establish a thriving economic and cultural district in the area where the four communities intersected. The previous director of the Carson Community Development Corporation (CCDC) applied for the grant. When it was awarded, there was a major buzz of excitement that resonated throughout the neighborhood. The sentiment was that this would be the financial break that the community needed to change its image and spur on economic growth and development. Unfortunately, The Trojan Horse organization did not feel comfortable with the CCDC's capacity to manage such an enormous initiative. Therefore, they suggested that Central University serve as the fiscal manager for this project. Central University was the ideal choice as they had the capacity to oversee resources and to provide staff to facilitate the grant initiatives. However, it became an issue because the residents had little trust for Central University. Another reason that the residents did not trust Central University was that because it was such a large institution, it could take up to thirty working days for resources to be allocated.

Because of such scenarios, individuals like Everett believed that external funding could sometimes become more of a burden to a neighborhood than a help, noting:

I mean, it goes back to that same piece about helping people understand the dialogue and leading them in the dialogue. You can bring a lot of money to bear on a problem, but you can't sustain it. The fact is that given enough time, most of the problems in this community can be solved without outside money. What we do is we bring in outside money to try to get a quick fix on things. The reality is in the long run it's really not needed. In the long run, nobody cares whether you're here or not here. Not the people here, anyway. Do they want to see the neighborhood improve? Sure. But, they really don't need that. So, when you go about chasing dollars you become beholden to outside matrix. The outside matrix, you track things, and you're doing things that are not always what the community needs.

According to Everett, when community organizers “chase dollars,” they become obligated to the benefactor in ways that restrict instead of allowing them to engage the community freely and effectively within their own limits and desires. In addition to this, Everett recently shared with me that he was consistently pressured by The Trojan Horse organization to apply for other sources of funding. He repeatedly questioned how his small staff could effectively manage these resources as well as meet the other responsibilities of his office. He further stated that many of the grants that were awarded required a fuzzy reimbursement process. That is, before these organizations could receive the funding, they had to first make purchases up front and then follow a process for the resources to be reimbursed. In many cases, these small not-for-profit organizations did not have the up-front cash to make such purchases, which was the reason why many of them applied for grants. Ultimately, this led to delays and failed projects. Due to a lack of a critical examination of the socio-historical events that have occurred, not-for-profit organizations and/or the residents that lived in the communities were blamed for such collapses.

David was also skeptical about external funding. From what I have observed, his reservations about the funding seemed to stem from the secondary discourses that he acquired with others in the neighborhood as well as his preference to work alone. He shared:

You don't always need money. That's how I feel. I mean, I'm a prime example of making things happen without having a grant and that people want to help and you got to make it as easy as possible and smooth as possible for the other person to help out because they're not built like you and don't have the same connection.

David further confirmed this by declaring that he has "put the whole grant system on its head" by adding:

You know what? I really don't need you. Actually I want to cut you out, like you're the middleman and I'm not trying to cut you out and get the money that you're getting. I just want to go to fund my own self by my own thing I got going on. I want to be Neighborhood Empowerment (pseudonym) and be like, you know what? I want to put a clean up the park and give out ice cream. So I don't have to beg for money from somebody else. I just don't like it. I don't want to be asking other people for help. If I have an idea I would be like, 'You want to match me?' And that's that.

Like Everett, David saw the entire grant and funding process as an exercise of entrapment. He seemed to think that the resources that the community needed already existed with the people who lived and worked in the neighborhood.

Laverne agreed with this idea of an inward and self-reliant method of neighborhood funding, but his focus extended beyond the residents in that he thought about the business owners in the community. He reported:

The other thing is, I think community engagement means, maybe not this term but forcing businesses to engage in the community. Sometimes, you know, you get businesses that put their own money in one pocket and then they take it outside the community. It should invest, re-invest.

Laverne seemed to reject the idea of relying on others for neighborhood initiatives because he discovered that he could foster community development efforts without the help of outsiders. In another statement, he concluded that working with these organizations was discouraging because the bureaucracy would slow down the neighborhood's ability to react in a timely manner.

The idea of being at the mercy of external funders was a strong point of contention for me as an insider/outsider in this neighborhood. I found myself excited when listening to these men expound with a 'we don't need them' attitude. I agreed that this dependence on others financially was a burden. I saw this play out towards the beginning of my tenure in this neighborhood when The Trojan Horse organization awarded the community \$50,000.00 worth of what they called, "early action funds." These resources were to be used for small neighborhood improvements (facades for businesses, crosswalks, bike racks, and so on) and then catapulted into larger projects where the community leaders would seek further funding. The fuzziness with this was the timing. The announcement of these resources was made at the same time as the resident leaders were in the middle of updating their neighborhood's quality of life plan. In addition to this project, these resident leaders were also putting together the last pieces of the leadership structure for the community. Furthermore, they had to obtain approval from The Trojan Horse organization concerning how they would spend the money. This process involved a meticulous and time-consuming line of questioning that included a detailed report. This required an exorbitant amount of time from a group of residents, most of whom were working full-time, married, and volunteering. Under these circumstances, many residents refused to be involved in such neighborhood-related

activities. According to the four men in my study, this was an example of how funding from outside sources could serve more as a hindrance to neighborhood progress than as a help.

These men had a desire to change the community engaged discourse. Conventional understandings about neighborhood development were dominated by the central notion that grants, donations, early action funds, and the like were the keys to community revitalization (McNeal, & Buckner, 2012; Tendulkar et al., 2011). However, according to what these men have learned in this and other similar situations, outside resources only served to further marginalize an underserved community. Deep and thorough relationships must be established first with the residents *and* the leaders in order to establish capacity. Stated differently, funding during questionable capacity building efforts was like adding paint to a car without the primer. Without the foundation, the paint quickly peeled away, and the car was in worse condition than before. To illuminate this process, Alfred (2002a) noted that “each discourse culture had its own culture and recursive identity. By recursive identity, I mean that members were constantly reshaping and negotiating the identity of the community” (p. 9). As a result of what Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David discovered, it was pertinent that traditional perspectives of funding for the sake of community development be reconsidered. Based on my conversations with them, they were in the process of beginning to change the discourse of community development and revitalization. I also believed in this idea, but according to my own interactions in this neighborhood, it was a notion that was met with little fanfare.

Simpson, Wood, and Daws (2003) commented on such occurrences in communities suggesting that many benefactors threw resources at communities looking

for “quick fixes” (p. 282), as Everett called them, to community development. Through a series of presentations, typically held in community-based town hall meetings, the quick fixes were sold to residents as ideal solutions to restore or reestablish the economic and educational viability of the community. Such approaches sounded enticing when the ideas were presented. What was missed Simpson, Wood, and Daws continued, was the necessary community consultation to assure that “the project could be shaped to meet the actual needs of the people in the community, rather than being imposed upon them as a solution determined by outsiders” (Simpson et al., 2003, p. 282). Organizations such as The Trojan Horse believed that they could gain neighborhood buy-ins because they had met with a few neighborhood leaders. However, I have come to understand that these individuals rarely represented the sentiment of the actual residents. In fact, I have discovered from various conversations, that many community members distrusted leaders of the neighborhood organizations because of the cozy relationships that they developed with outsiders.

Consequently, many community partners have not conducted adequate due diligence regarding community needs because they simply have not taken the time to engage and learn about the community, the context, and the culture of the people. For this reason, projects that have been funded by outsiders have failed before they even began due to a faulty depiction of neighborhood desires. As such, the men who participated in this study believed that the thinking of the residents needed to include a mindset of self-sufficiency for the sake of sustainability. Also, this concept needed to be conveyed to community business owners, community workers, and community partners. Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David discovered that as a majority, community partners and the

strings attached to accessing their resources has done and will continue to do more harm than good to the Carson community.

Reflections

All four men commented on how they had experienced racism in some shape, form, or fashion as they navigated the Loving Neighborhood. Each account was unique due to their individual experiences, but harmful to their personhood. Omi and Winant (2015) wrote:

From the very inception of the republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of identity. . . While groups of color have been treated differently, all can bear witness to the tragic consequences of racial oppression. (p. 8)

Thus, what the White residents, business owners, and partners of this neighborhood failed to acknowledge was not only the deep racism that continued to exist, but also how they perpetuated its harmful effects on the nonwhite residents. For the Loving Neighborhood, racism has been ingrained into its culture and history in ways that have rendered it almost invisible and, in many cases, denied (The Research Institute, 2001). This invisibility (or denial) of racism was played out in the exchange between David and Karen, the President of the Summerville Neighborhood Association, when she was so offended by David's defense of his right to be heard, that she left the meeting instead of taking the time to engage in self-analysis (Alfred, 2002a; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014).

It is this lack of self-analysis that continued to allow racism to be perpetuated within the Loving Neighborhood. From my observations, White residents, business owners, and neighborhood partners continued to speak and act in ways that reflected a

lack of sympathy for how their actions may have impacted nonwhite residents and partners. In the Loving Community, the lens of the dominant culture served as the means through which Whites have and continue to operate. Absent was a personal, introspective analysis which, according to Alfred (2002a) placed the oppressor in a position to recognize how their own dominant views and behaviors marginalized those who were culturally disadvantaged. This self-analysis must be applied not only by the dominant culture but by the oppressed as it allows for “broader perspectives and differing ways of knowing” (Alfred, 2002a, p. 91). Thus, as the men in this study and I have become keenly aware of inequities and micro aggressions, we engaged in what my grandfather called, *pulling one another’s coattail*. In other words, the cultural bond that we developed helped to provide insight into how we saw one another or some other person of color being mistreated, which would then prompt private and informal discussions on ways that these actions could be addressed. This counter-logic (Fanon, 1963) provided us with a support system to strategically engage and counterattack the racism we experienced, engage in self-analysis, and be continually assertive to the slightest hints of racism. At the heart of the matter of racism in this community was the unwillingness of those in power to relinquish their power because it created dissonance with their self-serving agenda (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Whites in power in the Loving Neighborhood stood behind the veneer of “improving the community” (quotes added) as a way to conduct business by any means necessary, while ignoring the simple needs of a community.

When I first began my role as the convener for the Loving Neighborhood, I attended every meeting and arrived home late practically every night of the week. This high level of attendance allowed me to immerse myself in the community in order to

develop a greater understanding of the culture as well as to deepen my relationships with the residents and other community partners (Simpson et al., 2003). Although my children were in their early to mid-teenage years at the time, and my wife was very supportive, I felt that I neglected them and eventually acquired more of a “pick and choose” approach to community participation. This meant that I did not attend some of the meetings, or I preemptively left meetings because my children had activities that I wanted to support. Surprisingly, I later discovered that some of the residents were incensed about me leaving early, which caught me completely off guard. Because of the stress associated with such work, I had to pay close attention to the time I spent with my family so that our bond could continue to be cultivated. I also to offset the emotional rollercoaster I was experiencing.

More alarmingly, I recall one resident who boldly shared that other residents had mentioned that I was not committed to the work because of the times I had chosen to leave meetings early. Later, he backed off and expressed a level of sensitivity when I informed him that I left because of the importance I placed on being active in the lives of my children. Despite his perceived concern, I considered his questioning of my commitment as another microaggression. I often encountered such scenarios with Whites in the Loving Neighborhood.

Additionally, I also experienced the silent treatment from different community members within the Loving Community, although it surfaced in slightly different ways. I noticed that on many occasions, my opinion was requested only when it was about something that served to provide a financial advantage for the community. Referring to the leadership transition meeting in Chapter I, the Carson community was not represented

on The Council and therefore did not have a voice in the meeting agendas. I suggested that there be a mentoring process established to cultivate new leaders to provide a smooth transition during elections. A representative from the Midtown community was resistant to this idea as he felt that the current leadership, which was nearing a third-year term, was performing adequately. He believed that the neighborhood should not “rock the boat” (quotes added) if what they were doing was “working” (quotes added). Conversely, I believed that it was working for the three predominantly White communities of Midtown, Capella, and Summerville because they were all represented in the leadership. Notwithstanding, it was failing the Carson community.

To be fair, the three individuals who served on the Loving Neighborhood leadership team were all asked and agreed to serve in their roles during the leadership restructuring process that occurred in 2017. Carson residents were also asked to serve, but no one wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. After almost three years, I believed that it was important that a representative from the Carson community serve with this team, especially given the fact that they were restructured as a neighborhood. With this understanding, I hinted to a representative from the Carson community to push the idea of changing the leadership so that a representative from their community could be included. The events that occurred in this meeting provided an example of how the Carson community began to become victim to inequity in terms of community governance.

Despite my recommendations, my suggestions were ignored by all four communities. This experience reminded me of one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory called interest convergence. It is when “the majority group tolerates advances for racial

justice only when it suits its interest to do so” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 165).

Changing the leadership structure to include the Carson community was a stand for social justice, but it did not benefit the three predominantly White communities. Thus, the restructuring of leadership was not considered and like David, my voice was also silenced.

Under these circumstances, I had to exercise a great degree of restraint while working in this neighborhood. My dignity as a human being was constantly challenged on any work-related activity connected to this community. The silencing, racist jokes, and microaggressions from residents, outsiders, and even colleagues from Central University challenged me in ways that I have rarely experienced. The only group in this community that always treated me with respect was the predominantly Black Carson community.

As I listened to Everett and Larry talk about how they were influenced and mentored by their grandparents, I could not help but think about how my primary discourse was also shaped by my maternal grandfather and my mother’s brothers. I spent a great deal of time with them when I was a child. What they shared with me and what I observed in their behavior was always with me as I interacted in the Loving Neighborhood. My grandfather and uncles were both very friendly in every environment in which they lived or worked. I sometimes saw their approach to interacting with people as embarrassing at times, but the kind of men that they were eventually had a deep effect on how I began to interact with others. It is important to note that my grandfather sternly cautioned me not to be what he called a “shuffling negro.” This was a term he used to caution me not to be what was referred to in the Black community as a “sell-out” or an

“Uncle Tom” around White people. For him, this was a disgrace to our culture, and I was always mindful of his warning to maintain my dignity as a man.

Summary and Conclusion

The men who participated in this study continued to grow in their journeys to improve the quality of life in the Carson community. They maintained a spirit of determination even though they encountered many ongoing obstacles and barriers. Working in their neighborhoods, they formulated their own perspectives of how to navigate their communities and they came to an understanding of what it meant, as Black men, to be concerned about the improvement of its overall development. One challenge for the men was having to constantly face racism, colonialism, white supremacy, microaggressions, and having their abilities questioned (Guy, 2014). There were many initiatives that the men wanted to implement, but they were unable to do so because of limited resources. Another barrier to their ability to execute their initiatives were the disorganized neighborhood groups, both inside and outside of the neighborhood, that lacked confidence in their abilities to make a difference in their neighborhoods. As I examined the interviews of these four Black men, what became evident was their awareness that the community’s development needed to disconnect from outsiders to allow a sense of healing and self-awareness. Their impression of disengagement was captured in all four of the themes: mentoring, community and cultural learning, long-term planning, and the skepticism of external funding. Undergirding these themes leaked a narrative that conveyed the idea of self-reliance. That is, these four Black men encouraged Carson to mentor members of the community, to make stronger strides

towards building relationships in the community, to develop forward thinking perspectives, and to fund their own efforts if necessary and under careful scrutiny.

Although viewed from different perspectives, all four men referenced that the greatest lesson that they learned was their ability to interact with the people. The Loving Neighborhood served as the classroom environment for these men to develop effective navigation capacities thus, "... learning and knowledge are therefore intertwined with the context within which they occur" (Alfred, 2002b, p. 5). Building on Alfred's (2002b) idea, the lessons that these men learned was continually filtered through their culture and cultural identity. Having full view of this context allowed for a better understanding of how and why they developed the necessary tools conducive for their learning as they sought to improve the neighborhood's quality of life. I asked all the men to share their stories, including the challenges, related to their community-engaged journeys. Their responses were all matter of fact and frank, which was surprising as I expected them to be more reserved. I came to realize that they appreciated the opportunity to communicate their stories, as well as the fact that someone was interested in what they had to say.

Despite the challenges that they encountered, I observed that these men demonstrated an urgent sense of resilience and resistance. These two attributes "were ways in which African American boys and men and systems rejected White mainstream culture hegemony and oppression" (Bush & Bush, 2003, p. 9) and developed an engagement practice derived from their own culture. Although I applauded the resilience of these men, as it served as a catalyst for change, I found resilience troubling as it communicated the reality "that we have survived yet another day of racial attacks, lived through battle fatigue, and whipped microaggressions in the butt" (Hughes, 2017, para.

9). The resilience of these men declared their determination to persevere in their improvement efforts for the sake of their community. Additionally, their resilience was also evidence of the oppressive atmosphere that continued to loom heavily in the Loving Neighborhood. This made community organizing and mobilization even more challenging.

Next in Chapter Five, I will explore the themes presented in Chapter Four. I will also discuss, based on their interviews, implications for how these men can move forward in their quest for neighborhood improvement.

CHAPTER FIVE

“The world won't get no better if we just let it be.
The world won't get no better. We gotta change it yeah, just you and me”
(Harold Melvin & the Bluenotes, 1975).

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of four adult Black men in an urban community in the Midwest. Specifically highlighted in this study were how these men learned to navigate a predominantly Black neighborhood that had been subjected to racist policies, practices, and oppressive concepts of revitalization. The focus of this research study was to understand the following research questions:

1. What were the learning experiences of adult Black males who were active in their communities?
2. What impacted an adult Black males' decision to become active in their communities?
3. What were the tools that adult Black males believed were essential as they actively engaged their communities?

This study also examined the *deficit* practices of community engagement and racism as they were manifested in this community and how it affected the ability of these men to offer support in ways that they believed to be culturally relevant. Using the shared stories of the men, the study gave voice to their learning and how it impacted the ways that they engaged the Loving Neighborhood. Although their paths of engagement were unique (two were resident leaders of Carson and two were executive directors of two different but prominent not-for-profit organizations in Carson), the data collected from their

interviews provided rich insight into their experiences as adult learners of the Carson community.

My concluding comments serve as an opportunity to return to the research questions that steered the project. This section also provides an in-depth discussion of the results, particularly in relation to the literature covered in Chapter Two. This chapter also connects the meaning of the study to the literature while also pointing out any incongruence or dissension. As a summary, I have provided responses to the research questions as well as other noteworthy considerations that are critical and relevant for the study. Implications are also detailed, including contributions to the fields of adult education, community engagement, and my experience as an insider/outsider.

My Results in Relation to the Literature

As was discussed in Chapter II, internalized racism can significantly impact the ability of Black men to successfully navigate learning spaces (Guy, 2016), which includes the ways in which Blacks ignore contextualized racism. They choose instead to side with dominant ways of thinking which blames oppressed communities for their condition (Pyke, 2010). Pyke (2010) describes internalized racism as “the individual inculcation of racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by White dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and/or oneself” (p. 553).

The concept of internalized racism never emerged with these men as I observed their interactions with others (both White and non-White) throughout the community or in our conversations pertaining to this study. In fact, these men expressed a deep sense of

joy and pride about Black culture and about being Black men. I was not surprised to learn that these men had an endearing passion and love for their culture and that they were aware of the external factors that caused and continued to affect the socioeconomic conditions of Carson. It was challenging work to support neighborhood revitalization and to improve its quality of life. It could have been tempting not to take on the viewpoints of outsiders with economic interests and deep pockets who had deficit perspectives about underrepresented groups. To my delight, these men were able to gain a level of success without compromising the integrity of their culture as they continued to learn in their community engaged work. As such, they earned the trust of the community as fellow residents (Larry and David) and co-laborers in the community (Laverne and Everett).

It became clear with the men that they were not convinced that developing projects would save the community. Instead, they believed that investing in relationship building was a key component to neighborhood transformation. As residents and leaders of this community, Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David developed the people skills that were crucial to making connections with the residents and other constituents of the community while reinforcing pride in Carson. Such skills obtained during their youth, prior employment experiences, and academic training became transferrable in the context of the Loving Neighborhood. The conversations I had with these men, along with my own observations while serving in this community, supported the research on community capacity building (Beazley, Griggs, & Smith 2004, Graeme 2014, and Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003) that emphasized the importance of people-focused neighborhood work. When projects created for the sake of public image took precedence over the development of the people who lived and worked in the community, it did more damage

than good. According to Stone (2012), project-based community engagement has a more short-term as opposed to a long-term outlook which ultimately leads to neighborhood harm. This approach, according to Simpson et al. (2003) stifles the sustainability of the community. These four Black men understood this concept and adjusted the way that they engaged the Loving Neighborhood, even in the face of opposition.

The men who participated in this study felt strongly about being present in the community to develop deep understandings about the people, the community, and the culture. For an individual to become active in their community, whether they lived or worked in that neighborhood, it was their opinion that taking the time to build relationships was key to its sustainability. Unfortunately, relationship building often moved at a pace that did not fall within the time limits of those who awarded grants. This reality seemed to be the reason why the men were cautious about using outside resources to rectify internal challenges. For them, to be beholden to funds from a benefactor further placed their neighborhood under unnecessary pressure. Further, Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David believed that these were not the programs that would lead to the success of the community. Instead, they expressed the importance of neighborhood efforts originating with the residents that could ultimately produce long-term success.

What is perceived as a successful transformation should be determined by the people who reside within the community. Community engaged scholars, such as Beazley, Griggs & Smith (2004), Graeme (2014), and Simpson, Wood, & Daws (2003) all support the idea that programs will not liberate communities. Instead, successful community building will be achieved through the collective actions led by the residents. To

understand the culture more profoundly, one must establish a network of relationships with the people. This takes time and a willingness to embed oneself in the culture.

Later in this chapter, I provided an explanation distinguishing community development, community organizing, and community building. To summarize briefly, Hess (1999) explained that community development seeks partnerships with nonresidents to foster neighborhood revitalization. Hess also shared that community organizing (also called community activism) is when residents focused more on gaining control over their neighborhood by political means. Finally, Hess shows that community building seeks to empower residents to make change in their neighborhood by employing their own assets and thereby becoming less dependent on others. I reported how community development seemed to be the dominant path of change that I observed for the entire Loving Neighborhood. However, what the participants learned, through their experiences in neighborhood work, was the importance of recognizing grassroots ideas about how to rebuild their communities. In other words, the men's philosophies aligned with the process of engaging the community to encourage community development. They learned that before change can occur through community building, one must be willing to invest in the residents (Hess, 1999). Thus, not only did these men believe that the neighborhood initiatives should be led by residents, but they also began to assume a proletarian, community engaged focus in their work.

An interesting theme that emerged from the data analysis was how the men questioned the use of external resources such as grants and early action funds. They were particularly concerned about the awarding of grant dollars for the following reasons: underserved neighborhoods rarely had the capacity to manage such funds, they were

placed under very stressful time restraints, and they were often obligated to give the funder very meticulous reports about the progress of the agreed upon projects. The men agreed with Beazley, Griggs & Smith 2004, Graeme (2014), and Simpson, Wood & Daws (2003), who warned against relying on external resources as it could inflict more harm than good through ineffective quick-fixes. Wendel et al. (2009) noted that most neighborhood-led initiatives should endorse a long-term mindset when it comes to community work because it better aligns with supporting the development of residents that leads to long-term sustainability.

Crosscombe (2013) had a very interesting take on how outsiders used resources to disenfranchise challenged communities. From his experience:

Funds and resources being sent in from the outside are most likely to end up first in the hands of Outsiders who determine where the funds will be allocated. Once again, this is a natural thing. If the community is viewed as being needy, full of broken people, then it could be seen as a poor stewardship to entrust these people with outside resources when they have clearly not been able to entrust these people with outside resources when they have clearly not be able to manage their own local resources. If the Outsider has a higher level of formal education, more experience managing larger finances and natural relationships with those sending resources, it would make perfect sense for the Outsider to be the one in control. Unless, that is, we look deeper into the long-term effects this allocation of power and resources has had on the community. (p. 6)

Crosscome's point speaks to how outsiders exercise *power* over marginalized communities by awarding funds to the neighborhood but controlling the management and use of the resources. Such decisions are typically made through faulty assumptions connecting residents' living conditions to their inability to steward large grants.

According to what these men have shared, grants are not the answer to addressing the deep, sociocultural issues that are embedded in Carson's history. Although in some cases necessary, grants are often short-term attempts to address neighborhood problems that

required relationship focused solutions and a great deal of time. In addition, and according to Crosscombe, “Those coming from the Outside tended to raise money based upon the ‘needs’ of the community they are going to” (p. 6). Again, outsiders that determined the needs of the community served their own interests, not the interest of the community. Such tactics demonstrated how individuals in power controlled marginalized communities.

Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David believed strongly in a community development approach to neighborhood revitalization because of the voice it gave to the residents. In traditional community work, residents tended to have little say in their own neighborhood planning. When they did speak, they often echoed dominant ways of thinking (Ledwith, 2001), which further supported oppressive ideas. When residents spoke, in other scenarios, they were ignored when their suggestions were unconventional. Community building dismantled traditional and oppressive neighborhood revitalization efforts because the residents became the drivers, pacesetters, and sustainers of everything associated with their community. The men also learned how community building approaches could create an environment where the motives of outsiders were questioned, and limits were placed on the outsiders’ ability to control the resources of neighborhood development agenda.

Another lesson that Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David learned while working for improvement in their neighborhood was that understanding the community and culture took a lot of time. They all explained that they found that it was important to take the time to allow the people to grow, to develop, and to build healthy relationships. The thoughts of these four Black men were aligned with the scholarship of Simpson, Griggs,

and Smith (2001), which was discussed in chapter two. Given enough time, the work of these four Black men in their neighborhood revitalization efforts encouraged patience, established trust among the residents, and helped to showcase skills of the residents that they had not realized even existed. Undoubtedly, this approach centered the voices of the residents and gave them an even greater sense of pride in themselves, their community, and their ability to accommodate any changes for the betterment of the community. Typically, lengthy time accommodations that lead to sustainable neighborhood transformation were incongruent with corporate developers who had mindsets that only considered the bottom line. Accordingly, it is my belief that those who refused to appreciate a more organic form of community empowerment were not acting in the neighborhood's best interests.

Another bridge between the literature and the responses of the participants was the imbalance of power that existed between the residents of the Carson community and those who made decisions for the community. As stated previously, many external groups imposed their will on this neighborhood, disguised in language that appealed to the residents' desires to improve their overall quality of life. As an insider/outsider in this community for almost three years, I discovered that support from outside partners was often shrouded in language, expectations, and obligations that confined the neighborhood to restraints that hindered their ability to engage in grassroots, emancipatory efforts for the community. In alignment with the work of Freire (2000), the knowledge, training, and wisdom of Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David tilted the power scale in the neighborhood. What they have learned prior to coming to Carson and what they have learned about neighborhood power structures particularly from outsiders, served as the foundation for

their ability to liberate and advocate for the residents. Ledwith (2011) suggested that such knowledge created a critical consciousness that empowered individuals, such as these four men, which then became the avenue of sustainable progress in blighted and oppressed communities.

It is for the reasons mentioned above that I chose sociocultural learning theory to analyze the men's interviews. As a Black man exploring the experiences of other Black men, most mainstream adult education scholarships did not resonate. For example, it became apparent that Knowles' (1973) assumptions for adult learning would not serve as an appropriate method of analysis for my conversations with these men. In fact, I felt that because of what it did not speak to regarding the learning of Black men, Knowles' assumptions for adult learning would further silence their voices (Sandlin, 2005). Andragogy also failed to capture how Black men were situated in a White-dominated society. Without theoretical frameworks such as sociocultural learning theory, the racist experiences of Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David would not have emerged. As proponents of community building ideology, they were seeking to disrupt traditional notions of community work dominated by White culture. Therefore, I chose sociocultural learning theory as a framework because I felt that it allowed for a deep and critical analysis of the experiences of Black men who were pursuing a socially just community without compromising their cultural identities or integrity.

Ultimately, each of the men in my study used what they learned in their youth, from their formal training, and from their professions for the benefit of the neighborhoods in which they worked and lived. Essentially, these men combined their formal and

informal education (English, 2000) to navigate, to overcome, and to address community and social injustice efforts in this neighborhood.

Community Building, Community Organizing, Community Development

To provide clarity on approaches to engaging in community, a brief discussion on its various aspects is necessary. Before these concepts are explained, it is important to note that all three approaches are what can be called *grassroots*, which is the resident support that emerges in the form of community self-help. Thus, “as communities identify problems and potential solutions, the creative process of collective adult learning itself mobilizes change in the social institutions that organize public life” (Roumell, 2018, p. 48). Thus, grassroots becomes an exercise of mobilization taken on by a group or organization at its most fundamental level, the people.

To effectively achieve and sustain a grassroots movement, strong relationships among the people is central to impact change. These relationships, also “known as public relationships, are different from private or intimate relationships and professional relationships. It focuses specifically on the principle technique for building public relationships, semi-structured conversations between two people known as one-on-ones” (Christens, 2010, p. 888). It is through these one-on-ones that residents are empowered to challenge quick fix approaches and learn how to broaden the social impact of their work. These skills are further developed and as they learn to form “connections with others, participants in grassroots organizing gain an understanding of how they and others fit into and interact with local government, the marketplace, organizations, and various social systems” (Christens, p. 892).

To summarize, community engagement at the grassroots level is “about activating people at a local, neighborhood level to claim power and make change for themselves. It’s the process by which grassroots organizations form and grow, their members develop leadership skills, and ordinary people learn to change social policy” (Stoecker, 2009, p. 22). Residents of the Loving Neighborhood have all used grassroots forms of community engagement hoping that their voices would impact neighborhood change. Unfortunately, the structures of oppression (Ledwith, 2007) continue to overwhelm and further marginalize the residents of this community.

Hess (1999) explains the stark differences in the ways that individuals and groups engage oppressed and depressed communities. For example, Hess writes about how *community building* starts with firmly established relationships that will in turn, foster neighbor led initiatives. This perspective identifies the assets in the community and employs them to address community challenges, create sustainable structures, and improve the neighborhood’s quality of life. In essence, “community building values change through participants doing it for themselves” (Hess, 1999, p. 5). Hess continues to explain that in community building, participation, relationships, and group processes fosters little, if any, conflict. An environment with limited conflict allows the residents to identify and agree upon which initiatives to address. As projects and assets are determined, and, “new relations and opportunities [arise], participants in community building develop a new vision for the community, one that external actors would not have been able to discover without them” (Hess, 1999, p. 5). This concept or approach to community building empowers the community with a sense of control over their own

economic conditions and reduces their dependence on external stakeholders for the continued improvement of their quality of life (Dubb, 2016).

On the other hand, the goal of *community organizing* (Hess, 1999) or what can also be referred to as *community activism*, is to “control the future of the community through permanent politically powerful, organized body of participants” (Hess, 1999, p. 3). Thus, a community activist approach has limited interest in gaining expertise to address community issues. Instead, supporters of community activism seek to galvanize the support of as many people as possible, particularly residents, believing multiple voices is the key to change. Thus, developing new members and leaders is central to the ideology of community activism. Additionally, community organizers engage in conflict and demand, as opposed to negotiation. Efforts of community organizers are usually more political in nature and according to Pantas, Miller, and Kulkarni (2017), community activists believe that when communities neglect to organize for the sake of change, the sufferings of a community intensifies.

Finally, Hess (1999) explains that *community development* focuses on a few residents establishing strong partnerships with external partners such as funders and anchor institutions to support community related projects. In this sense, the aim of community development is less on leadership and participation and instead is more concerned with expertise. To be clear, supporters of this approach prefer to partner with community development corporations and funders to utilize their resources, both technical and financial, to create programs for revitalization.

Of the three approaches, I found that community development was the most frequently used approach in the Loving Neighborhood. In my time in this community,

rarely did I encounter residents who assumed a radical, activist approach to community organizing, or the partnership approach to community building. From what I observed, the leadership of the Loving Neighborhood adopted a strategy to connect with external partners to support their neighborhood initiatives. This occurred because many of the residents and business owners of the neighborhood believed that external resources were the key to their successful community revitalization efforts. For example, on many occasions I was asked to write recommendations for neighborhood awards that were accompanied with monetary gifts to support their efforts. Additionally, the Carson Neighborhood Association established itself as an incorporated entity squarely positioning the organization and the neighborhood to be recipients of various grants offered by the city and other funders.

The International Association for Community Development (2017) agrees with the three aspects or components of community engagement and further add that community building, community organizing, and community development are complementary. Although elements of each can be used within the different contexts, there is usually one dominant approach. The perspective of the International Association for Community Development is that these three approaches of community engagement exist along a continuum and more assistance is needed in supporting communities to select the style of engagement that works for their neighborhood and provide some form of training for their particular strategy. Hess (1999) also recognizes the continuum of community engagement stating that “the emphasis of these practices . . . is the same: organizing community members to take on powerful institutions in their community through direct public confrontation and action” (para. 3). Also recognizing the

continuum, McConnell (2017) warns that within the many definitions of community engagement, the concepts may be “used by organizations that might not share the same values and our firm commitment” (p. 3) to neighborhood led methods. The Center for Economic and Community Development (2020) defines community engagement as a blend of approaches to address and support neighborhood initiatives. The goal is not to develop a community engagement model. Instead, the idea is to employ “a framework for guiding principles, strategies, and approaches” (Center for Economic and Community Development, p. 2) for the benefit of community change.

For the sake of this study, I have chosen to use *community engagement* to describe the continuum of neighborhood work: community building, community organizing, and community development in communities. The Centers for Disease Control (2015) supports the idea of a continuum of community engagement which includes community building, community organizing, and community development, but also adds that it “is grounded in the principles of community organization: fairness, justice, empowerment, [and] participation,” (p. 4). Thus, despite the unique differences in how the work of community is undertaken, community engagement serves as a generic term that I used in this study to capture the full spectrum of my understanding of community work, both in my experience in the Loving Neighborhood in general and also more specifically, the Carson community. Furthermore, this idea of community engagement forefronts the values that I believe undergird community engaged work.

Implications

Because of how their friends, families, and colleagues influenced Laverne, Larry, Everett, and David to become active in depressed communities, I felt there was a vital need to support other Black men in similar neighborhoods through mentoring. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2015) reported how the young Black men they worked with “expressed a considerable degree of anger over the absence of their fathers and that manifested itself in conflicts with authority figures” (p. 34). Indeed, part of addressing issues for adult Black men should have begun with the mentoring that they received when they were young. Unfortunately, those opportunities were not always available for young boys whose fathers were not present for crucial life stages.

Black men who are active in their communities should seek to form relationships with other Black men whether they are adults or adolescents. As David expressed in his interview, Black men are influenced by what they see, and what they need to see are other Black men who are concerned about and invested in the needs of those in their culture. Black men need to be keenly aware of other Black men and make special efforts to connect with them, either formally or informally, and to marshal them into community engaged activism. Fostering this type of coalition building aids in the healing of a community (Ginwright, 2016), particularly regarding Black men. Given the White supremacist policies that are continually pressed on this community, I see this as a vital means of empowering other Black men to address oppressive practices from the inside out.

That being said, I suggest that part of the Carson community’s emancipation can occur through leadership development. Indeed, the current leadership is strong, but the

Achilles heel in this structure, as I have discovered, is the transition of new leadership. When leaders step into new roles, they should have been mentored and developed by the outgoing leadership. Likewise, these same leaders who have stepped into their new roles should prepare future leaders for their current roles. What is needed is formal or informal (Christens, 2010) leadership development embedded in all aspects of the community building process. This will help to sustain continuity among the people and the leadership. When developing new administration alongside current administration, the lines of communication remain open, which benefits the community and their partners.

I have witnessed external neighborhood partners and residents either become frustrated with or take advantage of neighborhoods when arrangements were made with previous leadership teams and not communicated to the leadership team that followed. If a leadership development and transition process had been firmly established within the fabric of Carson's community development efforts, this could have helped to minimize and circumvent any gaps in communication that would stall the initiatives established in the previous administrations. It could also have minimized the opportunities of any outsiders who attempted to take advantage of new leadership, because the new leadership would already have the tools to offset any racist policies or practices that would undermine a community's continuity.

Another implication that I suggested regarding this study was the reality that anyone who entered a new community must take the time to understand the culture, the history, and the residents. From my time in the Loving Neighborhood, I have far too often witnessed potential partners, developers, and not-for-profit organizations enter the community having conducted only preliminary research. This limited understanding of

the community usually served as an impetus for self-righteousness which was a way to overcome the guilt of privilege, or an economic bottom line, all of which did little for the revitalization of an oppressed community.

I believe that the Black church has a process for neighborhood entry that urban communities can adopt. As far back as I can remember, I have been a part of the Black church. As a child, my grandfather was the pastor of the church I attended when we lived in Dayton, Ohio for three years. I observed then and I have learned over the years how protective pastors are about new preachers who become members and possibly attempt to mislead or steer the congregation away from what they believe to be sound doctrine. I often heard pastors proclaim that they were “obligated” by God to protect the sacred desk (or the sound doctrine of the church). This often meant that pastors were very skeptical of who they would allow to teach and preach to the congregation of their stewardship. To evaluate the motives of these preachers, the pastors that I observed would meet with new preachers and their families to determine why they left their former fellowships and why this current church was selected. It was also communicated to them that they would not be teaching or preaching for at least one to two years which would give the pastor an opportunity to “observe” their lifestyle and interaction with the other congregants. After this time, the pastor would then train the preacher before he would then be allowed to preach or teach in that assembly.

In the same vein, I recommend a similar process for anyone who is not a resident of an underserved community, particularly for outsiders looking for footholds that rarely benefit the neighborhood. Supporting this idea, McGrath (2018) suggests the following:

Trying to work in a culture that you don’t understand can have drastically negative implications and good intentions are absolutely not enough. . .

These [short term missions] trips make complicated issues seem simple. . . That being said, I think there is one aspect of [going into challenged neighborhoods] that is invaluable and that is a chance to see [a] completely new part of [urban life] and the impact it can have on your perspective. . . We should enter foreign spaces with the aim of learning which first requires an open mind and an asset based perspective. . . We should not go into these [neighborhoods] with the assumption that we can help [urban communities] better than the [residents]. . . Volunteers are guests in these communities and need to act as such. Not only respecting but appreciating the host [community]. The aim shouldn't be to serve them. It should be to learn about and from them.

Therefore, I suggest that anyone with a desire to support the efforts of a neighborhood be required to go through a process of relationship building for at least one to two years.

This will give the potential partner an opportunity to learn about the community and the people. More importantly, it will give the community a chance to determine the parameters of the relationship and their desire to connect with the potential partner. This should be a resident-led effort and Black men should be intricately involved in the evaluation of the potential partner, the development of the training process, and the training of outsiders. I believe that what they know, have learned, and understand is integral to the development of any community and every resident's voice should be given an opportunity to be heard.

Additionally, I recommend that Black men in marginalized communities strive for a more emancipatory (Freire, 2003) approach to community engagement as opposed to assuming traditional approaches to neighborhood revitalization. In other words, I see Black men serving alongside other neighborhood leaders and openly calling out and addressing the inequities and racist practices in their communities. To this end, I am moved by the statements of Cunningham (1996) who asserts that "The building of civil society and the voluntary sector requires participation. Dominant knowledges need to be

confronted by knowledges created by marginalized persons” (p. 27). If we are to truly liberate our communities, it is imperative that our Black men lead the charge of calling out the racism that is prominent and pervasive in communities. Those of us from oppressed and marginalized groups are the ones who should bear the responsibility for improving our quality of life. Everyone else is a partner.

Unfortunately, White supremacist practices of community engagement (Hunn, 2004), which happens when dominant cultures enter underserved communities and exert their power and control, have been the prevailing means of so-called neighborhood improvement. Black men should take on what Hunn (2004) calls an Afrocentric approach to engaging their communities. Afrocentrism is a philosophy that centers Black culture, it contests racism, and it is guided by a common core of principles. In the case of communities such as Carson, the residents should establish the principles from which they choose to operate. Black men can become empowered to lift their communities alongside fellow residents when they assume an Afrocentric approach. White supremacy, which is what this community has faced since Black families first entered, and its supporters have no desire to give voice to these men or to the Carson community. Therefore, I believe that an Afrocentric approach should be the guiding philosophy for the emancipation of the Carson community and should become the dominant voice emanating from the community.

Future Research

I entered the research space knowing that there are other Black men who are actively involved in this neighborhood striving to improve the quality of life for its

residents and to change the community's reputation. Because of the continuous interactions I had with these four men, I have decided to learn more about their experiences as fellow Black men who were focused on similar projects in the community. However, a closer examination of how other Black men in the Carson community are engaging with this community would also be useful. I suggest future research that centers Black men in other roles such as coaches in athletic leagues, church members, business owners, and those who have developed support groups for youth who have not actively participated in the neighborhood meetings.

In the research process, I learned that many of the external partners that worked with this community typically assumed that the thoughts of the neighborhood associations reflected the sentiment of the neighborhood. This is far from accurate. Understanding other Black men who identify with other neighborhood groups would provide more information about their experiences, the barriers they face, and the contributions they make. I think more research that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Black men in this and similar communities could shape a conversation about community education reform. Such a conversation may encourage depressed communities to dismantle traditional community engagement ideas that dehumanize local neighborhoods. The voice of the community is powerful and soliciting the perspectives of residents could challenge oppressive community-based policies and galvanize residents to become more active in their neighborhoods.

I also entered the research space knowing that these men were heavily influenced by their families. For example, Larry and David spoke very highly of the impact of their grandfathers. Therefore, more attention to the impact that Black grandfathers play in the

identity development of Black men is needed. While the necessity of mentorship of Black men was evident in the literature, this study points a spotlight on the impact of the Black grandfather in the Black family. As I discovered in this study, grandfathers were very active in the participants' communities, including serving in the struggle for civil rights. Regarding adult education and learning, future research could focus on the importance of the Black grandfather and the ways in which they have a positive effect on other Black men, particularly as they are related to community action and education.

Final Thoughts

My immediate thoughts about this work are that it was exhilarating to work alongside other Black men who were committed to bringing about change. I entered the neighborhood under a disposition of working to complete tasks. I also operated under the deficit perspective of "helping" these people to get better, as I knew no better. However, the more I interacted with the residents and the more articles and books that I read on community engagement, the more I learned that I had to change my way of thinking. The readings served as an ideal foundation for community engagement, but the deeper knowledge came from the people. Most of my learning came from my interactions with them, both in formal meetings and informal settings. My transformation from a whitewashed version of neighborhood engagement to a community builder and activist resulted from what they taught me.

I started my work in this community frightened, naive, and a bit confused about my role. The ongoing explanations of the various grants, partnerships, neighbors, challenges, data entry responsibility, and the onslaught of literature about the project I

was taking over left me feeling overwhelmed. My passion for and belief in how our office was attempting to support this neighborhood helped me to push through some very difficult times. Fortunately, the leaders of the Carson community embraced me with open arms. They were supportive and encouraging and seemed to be delighted every time I entered the room. Conversely, I did not always receive the same support from the other three communities.

It took about a year and a half for me to develop confidence in my role as community builder. Unfortunately, this only scratched the surface of who and what I needed to know and the external influences that were at play. Ultimately, I fell in love with the Loving Neighborhood, its people, and its history. Despite my feelings for the neighborhood, I believe that the Carson community should completely disconnect from the Loving Neighborhood. Under the current structure, the Loving Neighborhood only benefits Summerville, Capella, and Midtown. I have witnessed little evidence of how this collection of communities has served to benefit Carson.

From my perspective, Carson is a community poised to surge forward and soar on its own. In other words, they are what King & Swartz (2016) call *subjects with agency*. That is, “they have the will and capacity to act in and on the world – not only as individuals, but as members of their cultural group” (p. 14). For example, out of the four communities, Carson is the largest both in terms of geographic boundaries and number of residents. It already has an established name recognition, and few in the city are familiar with the names of the other three Loving Neighborhood communities. In fact, in many interactions I have had with others, they thought, as I did once, that the entire community was called Carson. For Carson to surge forward on its own, I believe that this community

should renounce their affiliation with the Loving Neighborhood because of their refusal to allow someone from Carson to serve on the steering committee. If the residents from Carson are not given a voice regarding the direction of community by being given a seat on an influential board, how does being part of a collective organization benefit the community? Carson can also surge forward on its own because of the amazing work of its great churches, the Carson Community Center, and other stellar programs and services. These organizations have hired very capable leaders who have personal and professional experiences that have already been a benefit for the community. These leaders, one a Black women, Black men, and emerging youth who have earned the trust of the residents and have been shrewd in their business practices with outsiders. A final reason that Carson city is ready to become self-sufficient is that most of the residents, who remember the time when people of color were not allowed to cross Denver Street for fear of racial attacks, are not now comfortable with the idea of neighborhood collaboration. For these reasons, Carson has the capacity to stand alone, and it should, as there has been little if any evidence that being a part of the Loving Neighborhood has been to their advantage.

One of the most surprising components of this study was how open the men were about sharing their stories. It was clear by their reactions that they felt honored that someone seemed so interested in what they had to say. In fact, Larry was so thrilled about our interview that he asked if we could continue to meet from time to time to explore thoughts on the Carson community. He shared that it seemed awkward to simply leave the discussion at just one interview. Having similar thoughts, I was delighted, and we have scheduled times to meet at least once per month at a local restaurant. He even asked

if his wife could join. Everett never shared his feelings about the interview, but he reached out to suggest we have lunch and “shoot the breeze.” We have met once since I left the position and based on our conversations, there stands a good chance our lunches will also be ongoing. I assume that Everett felt like Larry and I, that there was a bond that developed between us and a respect for how we both were trying to support the Carson community. Laverne has asked me to serve as a board member on a not-for-profit organization in Central City that focuses on supporting Black youth. He even asked me to meet with the founder, who is also the executive director, to get more information about the organization. I was honored, but not surprised that Laverne asked me to get behind this effort as he and Larry have always shown me a great deal of respect. David recently had a baby and texted me photos. A little while after, he sent me a friend request on Facebook, which I thought as a great honor. I mention all these interactions with the men because they demonstrate the compassion, love, and bond that Black men have and can develop for one another. These intelligent, focused, and creative Black men, who felt so passionately about their neighborhoods, were elated that someone took the time to listen to them and to hear their thoughts about community engagement. Their reaction and openness was further evidence that Black men, who are represented in communities, need to be involved in all aspects of the decision-making processes that focus on its development.

I have learned that there is nothing more important in community engagement than relationship development. I believe it is the key to any type of neighborhood revitalization. Thus, I am a community builder (Hess, 1999) and because of the negative impacts I have witnessed first-hand by many anchor institutions, I have concluded that I

do not want to be employed by another organization in my community work. If I am, I will only do it with the understanding that I have the freedom to engage the neighborhood from my perspective and with a critical analysis. To do otherwise would be toxic.

APPENDIX A

Individual Interview Protocol

1. How would you define community engagement?
2. What characteristics would indicate to you that a person is demonstrating effective community engagement?
3. What training did you receive that would prepare you for community engagement?
4. If applicable, how are you using what you learned in your community engagement training program in your community engagement activities?
5. Describe how you feel as a Black male working in community and explain why you feel this way?
6. What do you believe motivated you to participate in this work?
7. Why do you continue to stay involved in your community?
8. Please give examples of things you do now in your community that you consider to be effective community engagement.
9. Describe a personal experience that stands out most in your mind while you have been active in your community that you felt strongly about what you were doing in either a positive or negative way.
10. What have been the major learning points for you as you have become active in this community?
11. What do you wish you had known and learned prior to being active in this community that you believe would have allowed you to be more effective?

12. What has the most influence on your attitudes and strategies when working in this community?
13. How do you feel your ethnicity and gender play a role in who you are as an active participant in community engagement?
14. How did you learn about and/or what training did you receive that would prepare you for community engagement?

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- Zahn, M. (2018). Inside LeBron James's new \$8 million public school, where students get free bikes, meals, and college Tuition. *Money*. Retrieved from: <https://money.com/>

CURRICULUM VITAE

Myron C. Duff, Jr.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Indiana University (September 2020)

Major: Urban Education Studies

Minor: Adult Education

Master of Science, Miami University (December 1994)

Major: College Student Personnel

Bachelor of Science, Ball State University (June 1992)

Major: Sociology

Minor: Psychology

Minor: Interpersonal Relationships

PUBLICATIONS

Journals

Duff, Jr., M. C., & Bohonos, J. (2020). Adult education in racialized spaces: How white supremacy and white privilege hinder social justice in adult education. *Dialogues in Social Justice: An Adult Education Journal*. 4(3), 1-20.

Duff, Jr., M. C. (2019). Andragogy and Black Males: Is there a goodness of fit? *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 31(3), 1-3.

Book Chapters

Duff, Jr., M. C. (2019). Because of my boys: How my four sons motivate me to the completion of my Ph.D. In. Jenkins, T., Troutman, S., & Glover, C. *The invisible backpack: Narratives of family, cultural gifts and community assets on the academic journey*. Washington, DC: Lexington Books.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Duff, Jr. M. C. (2019, October). The Voices of Black Men Engaged in A Marginalized Community Setting. Assessment Institute. Indianapolis, Indiana.

Duff, Jr. M. C., & Bohonos, J. (2019, June). Navigating Racialized Spaces in Adult Education: Perceptions and Threats of Violence. Incivility, and Violence in Adult, Higher, Continuing, and Professional Education Pre-Conference. Adult Education Research Conference. Buffalo, New York.

- Duff, Jr. M. C., Bray, R., Oglesby, N., & Hillman, K. (2019, March). Telling Our Stories Challenges notions of University / Community Partnerships to Create Social Change. American Association of Blacks in Higher Education. Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff, Jr, M. C. (2018, October). What's going on? How adult learning theory supports social justice in community engagement. American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
- Duff, Jr, M. C. (2018, March 27). Building Capacity for Self-Determination and Power Redistribution: Transformational Community Leadership in University-Neighborhood Partnerships. A panel discussion. Campus Compact National Conference. Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff, Jr, M. C. (2018, March 15) No Limits; Using Adult Education Theory to Support African American Doctoral Students at PWI's. Association for Nontraditional Students in Higher Education. Charlotte, North Carolina.
- Duff, Jr., M. C. (2017, June 1). Space traders: Community activist on the intersections of race, politics, and education. Critical Race Studies in Education Association Conference. Paper Session Chair. Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff, Jr., M. C. (2017, June 2). Transformational politics. Critical Race Studies in Education Association Conference. Paper Session Chair. Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff, Jr., M. C. (2017, June 8). Unfixing the community; Reframing colonizing models of community building in urban settings. Adult Education Research Conference, African Diaspora Pre-Conference. Norman, Oklahoma.
- Duff, Jr, M. C., Murtadha, K. (2017, April 21). Building capacity for community leadership through university-neighborhood partnerships. A panel discussion. Tobias Leadership Engagement and Discovery Conference. Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff, Jr. M. C. (2016, November). African American adult males and andragogy: Is there a goodness of fit? American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- Duff, Jr. M. C., Burke, V., & Woodard, S. (2016, October 7). What up, bruh? A panel discussion of three African American men in a doctoral program. Bergamo Conference, Dayton, OH.
- Duff, Jr., M. C. & Anderson, J. (2016, April 23). Appearance is not a predictor of worth or ability: the Black community's oppression of Black youth. Northwestern Black Graduate Student Association Annual Research Conference. Chicago, Illinois.

- Duff, Jr., M. C. (2016, March 7). The coping strategies of African American males in doctoral programs of study. American College Personnel Association. Montréal, Québec, Canada.
- Duff, Jr., M. C., Coomer, M., McKay, M., Menard, J., Patrick, S. (2016, February 19). The clash of ideologies: W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. A panel discussion. Indianapolis, IN: The Kheprw Institute (a grassroots, predominantly Black, community organization).
- Duff, Jr., M. C., Anderson, J., Bangert, S., Flowers, N., Jordan, P., McKay, M., Scheurich, J. (2015, October 15). Critiquing our own white racism and the “oppressor within:” Creating an anti-racist curriculum. A panel discussion. Bergamo Conference, Dayton, OH.
- Duff, Jr., M. C., Anderson, J., Moore, S., Woodard, S. (2015, October 2). Enduring education in the U.S.: Discussing the continuance of the achievement gap. A panel discussion. Indianapolis, IN: The Kheprw Institute (a grassroots, predominantly Black, community organization).
- Duff, Jr., M. C., Grim, J., Murtadha, K., Oglesby, N. (May 2015). The Coalition for Community Schools University-Assisted Network. Presented workforce development programs offered by the IUPUI Office of Family, Schools, and Neighborhood Engagement, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff Jr., M. C. (2015, April 9). A Successful Advising Model for African-American Men. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Association for Academic Advising, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Duff Jr., M. C., Bonds, V., Currie, B., Cannon, & M., Bangert, S. (2014, Nov. 28). The IUPUI School of Education’s Urban Education Studies Doctoral Program. Presented to the Indiana University School of Education’s National Board of Visitors, Indianapolis, IN.
- Duff, Jr., M.C., & Cunningham, S. & (2012). We’ve Come This Far; Establishing Adult Learning Centers in Public Schools. ACHE South Conference, Lexington, KY.
- Duff, Jr., M. C. & Masterson, L. (2009). Are Advisors Enabling Students? National Association of Academic Advisors, Regional Conference, West Lafayette, IN.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Martin University; Indianapolis, IN

Urban Ministry Adjunct Instructor, January 2020

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis

Undergraduate Teaching

Associate Faculty: Africana Studies, Spring 2020 - current

Teacher Assistant: Biology of Mental Illness, Fall 2014

Instructor: Critical Inquiry, Spring 2008

Team Instruction: Diversity in a Pluralistic Society, Spring 2008

Team Instruction: First-Year Seminar, 2007-2010

Graduate Teaching

Co-instructor: Issues in Urban Education, Fall 2019

Teacher Assistant: Critical Race Theory, Summer 2016

Teacher Assistant: Student Development Theory, Fall 2016

Northern Illinois University; Dekalb, IL

Undergraduate Teaching

Instructor: Introductory University Transition Skills-Building Courses,
1994-1996

Instructor: Academic Skills-Enhancement Courses, 1994-1996

Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center

Facilitator, Community Engagement Workshop, September 2018 and 2019

OTHER SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

Doctoral Student Reviewer for the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE), January 2016 – December 2019

Doctoral Student Reviewer for IUPUI Engaged Journal, 2018

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

November 2019 – April 2020

Associate Director Area Health Education Centers
(AHEC)

Indiana University School of Medicine

July 2014 – October 2019	Office of Community Engagement Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Director of Workforce Readiness and Program Development ○ Community Builder; Indianapolis Near West Neighborhood (February 2017 – Current)
April 2010 – June 2014	Director of Continuing Education; Community Learning Network Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
December 2006 – April 2010	Academic Advisor/Department of Academic and Career Development & Community Learning Network's General Studies Degree Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
September 2001 – May 2006	Director of Church Administration, Solid Word Bible Church, Indianapolis, IN
September 2000 – August 2001	Student Services Coordinator; College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana
May 1998 – September 2000	Senior Academic Advisor; Student Support Services Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
February 1997 – April 1998	Assistant Director of Admissions Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
February 1996 – January 1997	Career Advisor, Office of the Dean of Students Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
June 1994 – February 1996	CHANCE Academic advisor, Educational Services and Programs Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL

AWARDS

- 2018 Award Community Engagement and Partnerships by the Indiana Council for Continuing Education
- Recipient of the Department of Academic and Career Development Discretionary Bonus Award (Spring 2008)
- Completed IUPUI's 14-week course in Leadership in Dynamic Organizations (Spring 2008)

COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Board Member: Community Alliance of the Far Eastside, Inc. (CAFÉ)
Indianapolis, Indiana
- Volunteer: Dayspring Homeless Shelter
Indianapolis, Indiana

ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

- Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Scholar
- American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)
- Adult Education Research Conference (AERC)
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated