

“When There’s Good, There’s Good. When There’s Harm, There’s Harm”:

Diverse Voices on Community Engagement

A DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

Service learning and community engagement, pedagogical strategies combining work in the community with academic learning, have become near ubiquitous across U.S. higher education. While scholarship has demonstrated positive student learning outcomes of community engaged pedagogies and practices, there has been unequal consideration towards understanding the experiences of communities involved.

Calls for elevating community voices and perspectives in service learning and community engagement are not new but have all too often demonstrated lofty rhetoric without subsequent practical application. What is even more concerning is that critical scholars have argued that service learning has been shaped by white supremacy and neoliberalism. Yet, these racial and economic realities have rarely been discussed in detail and scholars also have neglected to consider these issues from the perspectives of communities.

Because community perspectives have been largely missing from the community engagement scholarship, this qualitative inquiry, drawing on a case study research approach, as well as the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism, aimed to engage a multivocal account of how one community described and understood their experiences with community engagement by one college. Specifically, this inquiry took me back to the college that I graduated from, Providence College (a regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic, liberal arts college in Providence, Rhode Island that had an academically situated undergraduate community engagement program) and the Smith Hill neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island (a predominantly lower-income, multiracial community that abutted the southeast corner of the campus) where I

was first introduced to and participated in service learning and community engagement as a college student.

Findings from this study revealed how a range of community members experienced Providence College's community engagement work within Smith Hill as well as how community members described a perceptual harm imposed on the community by the college's community engagement work. By listening to community voices and perspectives, this inquiry offers a key implication for practice and future research that more fully considers community members in the context of service learning and community engagement in higher education.

*Keywords:* higher education, service learning and community engagement, community perspectives, whiteness, neoliberalism, qualitative inquiry

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

Annex	Providence College/Smith Hill Annex
BCTH	Brooklyn Coffee and Tea House
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
CBBA	Chad Brown Alumni Association
CDC	Smith Hill Community Development Corporation
CU	College Unbound
CWS	Community Work-Study
DCYF	Department of Children, Youth, and Families
GST	Department of Global Studies
FIPS	Feinstein Institute for Public Service
I-95	Interstate 95
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISPN	Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence
JWU	Johnson and Wales University
Library	Smith Hill Community Library
NLC	New Life Church
PASA	Providence After School Alliance
PC	Providence College
PHA	Providence Housing Authority
PSP	Department of Public and Community Service Studies
Rec Center	Selim Madelin Rogers Recreation Center
RI	Rhode Island

RIC	Rhode Island College
SHARP	Smith Hill Advocacy & Resource Partnerships
SHPI	Smith Hill Partners' Initiative
Youth RAP	Youth Resident Activity Program

## Key Participant Descriptions

The following introduces and provides brief descriptions of a number of Smith Hill community members who informed this study. These brief introductions and descriptions demonstrate the relationships between various community members and community organizations within the Smith Hill neighborhood and community and aim to serve as a guide throughout reading this study. Some community members chose to have their real names be used, while others have been given pseudonyms.

- Alan** Alan was the Manager of the Library where he had worked since 1995. At the Library, Alan worked with Ms. Althea's late mother and community activist, Mary Jones, who had worked at the Library for 40 years. The Library had an over 20-year campus community partnership with PC, mainly FIPS and PSP, working with students from FIPS' co-curricular Feinstein Community Fellows and CWS programs as well as students from community engaged learning courses. Students largely supported the Library's afterschool Homework Help program. With Jennifer, Alan represented the Library on SHPI. Alan formerly served as a board member on the CDC's Board of Directors. Alan identified as a White man. Alan was a lifelong Providence resident, but he did not live in Smith Hill.
- Heather** Heather was a Smith Hill resident-parent and landlord who was the Vice Chair of the CDC's Board of Directors. Shortly after moving to Smith Hill in 2006, Heather began working for ISPN where she met Tou and Keith and helped with the development of the Rec Night program. Through Rec Night and other community projects, Heather worked with FIPS and PSP students. Heather also formerly acted as a PSP Community Advisor, co-teaching a community engaged course with Keith. Heather identified as a White woman with a biracial family.
- Ian** Ian moved to the U.S. in 1999 from a small Caribbean island. While attending Brown University, Ian lived in Smith Hill and never left. Ian was a board member on the CDC's Board of Directors. Ian had interacted with PC students, staff, and faculty at various community meetings and events, including at community clean-up type events, what Ian described as "beautification stuff."
- Janice** Janice was a Smith Hill resident and member of SHARP. Janice formerly worked at Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen at St. Patrick's Church. Through her work at Mary House, Janice worked with FIPS students, mainly through CWS, and other students from across the college, including Campus Ministry. As a member of SHARP, Janice worked with a community engaged Philosophy course where students were developing an online/social media presence for SHARP and a resident e-newsletter as

part of their course's community service requirement. Janice self-identified as a White, Italian American, woman.

- Jean was the Executive Director of the CDC where she had worked on and off, and in various roles, since the late 1990s/early 2000s. The CDC had partnered with FIPS and PSP on various community projects, including Youth RAP, Rec Night, the Annex, and Common Grounds Café, since it was established in 1992. The CDC also worked with the college at large through, for instance, community clean-up type events. Jean represented the CDC on SHPI. Jean also was a board member on the Providence Community Library's Board of Directors, which included the Library. Jean self-identified as a "White, freckled, woman with blonde hair that is sometimes red, sometimes brown." Jean said that she was a "Providence bred person," but she did not live in Smith Hill.
- Jennifer worked with Alan at the Library where she was the Youth Services Specialist, running the Library's afterschool Homework Help program and much of the Library's local outreach efforts at Harry Kizirian Elementary School and with other local community organizations. Jennifer had worked at the Library for 17 years and there had been a campus community partnership between PC, mainly FIPS and PSP, and Library that entire time. With Alan, Jennifer represented the Library on SHPI. Jennifer's father taught political science at PC for 48 years. Jennifer did not live in Smith Hill.
- In 2018, at the age of 21 years-old, Kat was elected to the Providence City Council representing Ward 12, which included the majority of Smith Hill, downtown Providence, and parts of the East Side, Elmhurst, and Valley neighborhoods of Providence. Kat ran against a long-time incumbent who was first elected to the City Council when Kat was born. Originally from Providence, Kat moved to Smith Hill after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2017. As a young White woman who was not from Smith Hill, community members were skeptical of Kat's City Council run. However, she ultimately received community support throughout her election and tenure as Councilwoman. SHARP grew out of conversations among residents at Kat's Ward 12 Community Meetings in 2019. Ms. Althea, Janice, Patricia, and Sally were all members of SHARP. Kat was known in the local media for being "outspoken," "radical," and "ruffling feathers" due to her calls for defunding the police, decriminalization of prostitution, and support of vandalism of a statue of Christopher Columbus. Kat did not plan to run for reelection at the end of her four-year term.
- Kate was a PSP alumna and was completing a Master of Business Administration degree from PC, where she focused on nonprofit

management. As a Graduate Assistant, Kate was the Annex Coordinator. During her time as an undergraduate student, Kate worked in Smith Hill through the CDC, half full, llc., the Library, and the Rec Center to support community projects, such as Youth RAP, Rec Night, and a community garden project. Kate had lived and continued to live in what was known as the “Twitchell House,” a home in Smith Hill owned by the family of the late community activist, Tom Twitchell. Adults participating in various volunteer programs (e.g., AmeriCorps VISTA) throughout Providence often lived in the Twitchell House. (Tom Twitchell’s daughter, Rebecca, owned and founded half full, one of FIPS and PSP’s community partners in Smith Hill.) Kate represented the college and, specifically, FIPS on SHPI with Keith and was connected to SHARP as a Smith Hill resident. Kate identified as a White woman from an upper middle class Catholic family. In spring 2020, Kate was hired by the CDC as their Youth Program Developer.

- Keith Keith, who was one of my former college professors, was the founding Associate Director of FIPS in 1994. As the Associate Director of FIPS, Keith’s primary role included developing relationships and partnerships with communities external to the campus, including Smith Hill. Keith was intimately involved in community projects, including Rec Night, the Annex, and Common Grounds Café. As a PSP faculty member, Keith often co-taught courses with a Community Advisor (i.e., a community co-instructor), including Heather, Rebecca, Tou, and Wole. At the time of this inquiry, Keith was the Director of FIPS and Faculty Chair of PSP. However, Keith was stepping down as Director of FIPS at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. Keith represented the college and, specifically, FIPS on SHPI with Kate. Keith also was a Vice Chair of ISPN’s Board of Directors. Keith identified as a White man. Keith did not live in Smith Hill.
- Kendra Kendra was the newest PSP faculty member and the only Woman of Color faculty member. Kendra worked with several community partners through the courses she taught both within and just beyond the geographic bounds of Smith Hill. Kendra also had co-taught courses with Community Advisors, including Ms. Althea. Kendra was a board member on the Providence Community Library’s Board of Directors, which included the Library. Kendra lived in Elmhurst; a neighborhood adjacent to Smith Hill.
- Melissa Melissa was the FIPS Program Coordinator, overseeing the co-curricular Feinstein Community Fellows and CWS programs as well as the curricular Global Service-Learning program in collaboration with GST.
- Ms. Althea Ms. Althea was an older, Black woman who had lived in Smith Hill her entire life. Community members frequently described Ms. Althea as the

“godmother” or “matriarch” of the neighborhood. Ms. Althea was a PSP Community Advisor for 11 years, where she co-taught community engaged courses with several faculty, including Kendra. Ms. Althea was a Community Advisor for a course that I took during my sophomore year of college, entitled, “Community Organizing.” Ms. Althea had deep ties to the Library where her late mother and community activist, Mary Jones, had worked for 40 years. (Ms. Althea also grew up and continued to live around the corner from the Library.) With Tom Twitchell and other residents, Mary Jones helped start the CDC, serving on their Board of Directors for close to 20 years, while also serving on several other boards, committees, and commissions throughout Smith Hill, Providence, and RI. Mary Jones, along with Tom Twitchell, also was one of FIPS/PSP’s first Community Advisors beginning in the 1990s. Ms. Althea was one of the co-founders of SHARP. Ms. Althea and Patricia often represented SHARP on SHPI.

- Patricia Originally from Providence, Patricia moved to New Jersey to attend Seton Hall University where she resided for over 20 years. Patricia had moved back to Providence and, specifically, to Smith Hill three years ago. Patricia lived about two blocks from the Annex. Patricia was a co-founder of SHARP with Ms. Althea and other residents. Patricia and Ms. Althea often represented SHARP on SHPI. Patricia identified as a Black woman.
- Rick Rick, who was one of my former college professors, was the founding Director of FIPS in 1994. Over the past several decades, Rick had held a joint faculty appointment in PSP and Political Science. Rick worked with several community partners through the courses he taught both within and just beyond the geographic bounds of Smith Hill. Rick self-identified as a White man. Rick did not live in Smith Hill.
- Sara Sara was a senior PSP major at PC. Sara had worked in Smith Hill through the Library, half full, and another community organization that was located outside of Smith Hill but worked within K–12 schools in Smith Hill. Sara was completing her yearlong Feinsein Community Fellowship with half full where she was specifically working with Wole on several time-limited projects for SHPI.
- Sally Sally was a resident-parent and member of SHARP. Sally’s son regularly participated in the Library’s afterschool programs, including Homework Help, where he interacted with community engagement students from PC. Sally also periodically volunteered at the Library. Sally lived around the corner from the Library. Her landlord was Ms. Althea.
- Tou Tou was a PSP Community Advisor for a course I took during my junior year of college with Keith, entitled, “Smith Hill: A Study in Community

and Place.” Born in California, Tou moved to Smith Hill in the early 1990s. Tou was a former member of Laos Pride, a gang based in Smith Hill, before becoming a streetworker with the ISPN, working to prevent gang-related violence in Smith Hill and other neighborhoods throughout Providence. Tou met Keith (and later Heather) through ISPN and, in 2007, they co-founded Rec Night together. Tou and his family had bought a house in a different neighborhood in Providence but Tou said that Smith Hill “is always my neighborhood.” Tou self-identified as a Laotian man.

Alex Alex was a resident-parent. Alex and her family had lived in CDC housing and Alex was a former board member on the CDC’s Board of Directors. Alex’s three daughters participated in Youth RAP, as well as Youth RAP’s summer programming, where they had interacted with community engagement students from PC. Alex self-identified as coming from a “multiracial family.”

Wole Wole had lived in Smith Hill for about 17 years. Wole first moved to the neighborhood with his parents at the age of 12. As a youth, Wole was a participant in Youth RAP. While attending RIC, Wole also was a mentor for a Boy’s Group that was funded through Youth RAP. After graduating from RIC, Wole moved back to Smith Hill and began working for the Capital City Community Center, a nonprofit in Smith Hill. In 2015, Wole started working for half full as the Youth Development Program Coordinator. In this role, Wole worked with Tou, Heather, and Keith on the Rec Night program. Wole also was, as Keith described, the “convener and sparkplug” of SHPI, which included the Capital City Community Center, CDC, half full, Library, PC/FIPS, SHARP, and other local community organizations. Both half full and SHPI worked with students from FIPS’ co-curricular Feinstein Community Fellows and CWS programs and students from PSP community engaged learning courses. Wole, as well as other staff from half full, also were PSP Community Advisors, co-teaching community engaged courses with Keith and other faculty. Wole identified as a Black man. His landlord was Heather.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Problem Statement

Service learning and other community engaged pedagogies and practices have become near ubiquitous across U.S. colleges and universities (Butin, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Since service learning combines work in the community with academic learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), community placements become a site for student learning. Undoubtedly, issues of race and class are present not only in these community placements, but also because service learning has been viewed as the “‘Whitest of the White’ enclave[s] of postsecondary education” (Butin, 2006, p. 482). Despite a growth of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students and faculty involved in service learning (Antonio et al., 2000; Harper, 2009; Hutson & Wulliford, 2018; Wheatle & BrckaLorenz, 2015), the pedagogy and practice has historically been implemented predominantly by White faculty from White institutions who send White, middle-class students to “help” and “serve” low-income Communities of Color (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Butin, 2006; Green, 2001, 2003).

Consequently, studies have found that service learning can result in a number of racial and economic power dynamics in communities by perpetuating political neutrality (Hyatt, 2001), color-blind racism (Becker & Paul, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2012), and

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that this inquiry is explicit in examining service learning and community engagement within the U.S. higher education context and not abroad. Despite similarities between the U.S. and other countries’ approaches to service learning, emerging literature has critiqued the U.S. approach to the pedagogy and practice, suggesting that it is not necessarily transferable to international contexts (Regina & Ferrara, 2017).

deficit-based thinking and discourse (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Houshmand et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2012; Rougeaux Shabazz & Cooks, 2014; Vaccaro, 2009) among participating students. These ways of thinking, knowing, and being can position students to show up at their community placements through a charity or white savior mentality (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012). Accordingly, studies have found that service learning can reinforce white privilege and white supremacy (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Green, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2012; Rost-Banik, 2018) and serve as a pedagogy of whiteness (Mitchell et al., 2012).

While the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education has rarely discussed these racial and economic power dynamics in detail (Stoecker, 2016), critical scholars have argued that these power dynamics exist because service learning has been developed, institutionalized, and, in turn, partly shaped by the racial and economic realities of white supremacy (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Green, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2012; Rost-Banik, 2018) and neoliberalism (Hyatt, 2001; Kliwer 2013; Phillion, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015; Simpson, 2014). Even less attention has been devoted to understanding how these racial and economic realities impact the communities in which service learning occurs. In fact, there is an overall dearth of scholarship that aims to understand the experiences of communities involved in service learning.

Service learning and other forms of community engagement require “campus community partnerships,” which the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement for Teaching defines as “collaborative interactions with community and related scholarship

for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources” (as cited in Welch, 2016, p. 48). However, even though service learning would not exist in the absence of campus community partnerships (Sandy & Holland, 2006), and despite notions of balanced working relationships and partnerships between campuses and communities being assumed as an inherent principle of service learning (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989), scholars have argued that community voices and perspectives have been largely missing from the scholarship (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Cruz & Giles, 2000; d’Arlach et al., 2009; Giles & Eyler, 1998; Leiderman et al., 2003; Stoecker, 2016; Stoecker et al., 2009).

In an early critique of service learning, Eby (1998) wrote:

Often service-learning is organized to respond to the needs of an academic institution which sponsors it, the needs of students, the needs of an instructor, or the needs of a course. The needs of the agency and the community often come last. (p. 2)

Over a decade later, Bortolin (2011) analyzed 25 articles from the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, a widely recognized journal of community engaged scholarship, for the word “community,” finding that campuses continued to be privileged over the community in discourses on higher education’s community engagement work. Specifically, Bortolin found that “community” was often discussed in scholarship as a means by which: (a) campuses enhanced their academic work, (b) as a recipient of influence by campuses, (c) as a place which campuses make better, and (d) as a factor in the financial interest of campuses.

Much of the existing service learning scholarship has documented positive effects of the pedagogy and practice on students' learning and development.<sup>2</sup> The studies that have explicitly engaged community voices and perspectives have often used “community organizations”—nonprofits, K–12 schools, and government agencies with whom service learning courses and programs partner—as a proxy for “the community” to examine, for instance, components of effective collaboration as well as service learning's benefit and impact on community organizations (see Blouin & Perry, 2009; Cronley et al., 2015; Geller et al., 2016; George-Paschal, 2019; Leiderman et al., 2003; Miron & Moely, 2006; Sandy, 2007; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker et al., 2009; Warren-Gordon et al., 2020; Worrall, 2007). Yet, due to the influences of white supremacy and neoliberalism among other systemic power dynamics on service learning, as well as within communities, those involved in service learning cannot assume that the interests of community organizations “are the same as those of the people and places they serve” (Morton & Bergabauer, 2015, p. 26).

While there are areas in the field of service learning and community engagement where community plays a more prominent role through various anchor institutions (Dubb et al., 2013) and place-based community engagement initiatives (Yamamura & Koth, 2018), the voices and perspectives of communities and, specifically, residents are largely

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<sup>2</sup> Seider and colleagues (2013) wrote that more than 200 studies have been published over the last several decades on the effects of service learning on students' learning and development. For example, early studies revealed that service learning can lead to enhanced academic learning, social and emotional development, and career and citizenship development among participating students (see Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler et al., 2001; Markus et al., 1993; Sax & Astin, 1997; Sax et al., 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Early studies also found that the pedagogy and practice can lead to increased satisfaction and higher retention rates among participating students (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Eyler et al., 2001). Other studies have supported similar student learning and development outcomes (Beaumont et al., 2006; Bringle et al., 2010; Scott, 2012).

missing in higher education. To date, limited scholarship has asked actual residents, or the “consumers” and “clients” of community organizations (Stoecker, 2016, p. 52) and, in turn, of service learning, how they describe and understand their experiences with the pedagogy and practice. Though some studies have aimed to engage the voices and perspectives of residents (d’Arlach et al., 2009; Ferro & Watts, 2012; Hathaway & Kuzin, 2007; Jorge, 2003), these studies have often focused solely on the positive benefit and impact service learning can have on communities and have reinforced the trend in scholarship to utilize service learning as a teaching and learning strategy to increase specific disciplinary student learning and development outcomes. Summarizing this scholarship, a key informant to this study, Keith, reflected, “[t]he most neglected part of the whole field—under theorized, under researched, under resourced, just under recognized—really is the community contribution. Who is the community? How are we partnering with them? What’s at stake for everybody?”

Though there has been an increase in scholarship calling for more critical (Mitchell, 2007, 2008) and decolonizing (Dillon et al., 2019; Hernandez, 2018; Santigao-Ortiz, 2019; Yep & Mitchell, 2017) ways to implement service learning as a teaching and learning strategy, scholars have still neglected to take seriously community voice as well as consider the racial and economic realities of service learning from the perspectives of communities. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) wrote, “By not knowing what service learning does to the communities it purports to serve, we risk creating unintended side effects that exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the problems those communities suffer from” (p. 7). These unintended side effects are further exacerbated because of white supremacy and neoliberalism.

## **Statement of Purpose**

As a result of the dearth of scholarship aimed at understanding the voices and perspectives of communities involved in service learning, including a lack of attention as to how the racial and economic realities of the pedagogy and practice impact communities, the purpose of this inquiry was to center community experiences by giving an empirical account of service learning from the perspectives of a range of powerful community voices. This qualitative inquiry aimed to explore how various members from one neighborhood and community described and understood their experiences with community engagement by one college. Specifically, this inquiry took me back to the college that I graduated from, Providence College (PC) (a regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic, liberal arts college in Providence, Rhode Island (RI) that had an academically situated undergraduate community engagement program) and the Smith Hill neighborhood of Providence, RI (a predominantly lower-income, multiracial community that abutted the southeast corner of the campus) where I was first introduced to and participated in service learning and other forms of community engagement as a college student.

It is necessary to note the significance of the research setting and context not only because of my relationship to it, but also because of PC's unique history with service learning and community engagement. After receiving a five-million-dollar grant from a local RI philanthropist in 1993, the college established the Feinstein Institute for Public Service (FIPS) and later the Department of Public and Community Service Studies (PSP, the designation given to the academic department by the college). PC credited itself as the first higher education institution in the country to offer a bachelor's degree in public

and community service (PC, 2021d), which was designed, in part, by the pedagogy and practice of service learning (Battistoni, 1998; Hudson & Trudeau, 1995; Morton, 2012). While the college, notably FIPS and PSP, offered curricular and co-curricular service learning and community engagement experiences for students within several neighborhoods and with community partners throughout the City of Providence, early on, FIPS and PSP built a “core” relationship with Smith Hill (Morton, 2019, p. 29). Over the past three decades, there have been several concerted community projects that FIPS and PSP had worked on with Smith Hill community organizations and community members. (A more comprehensive historical understanding of the research setting and context is detailed throughout Chapter Two and Chapter Three.)

### **Overview of Methodology and Research Questions**

Because community perspectives have been largely missing from the service learning scholarship, this qualitative inquiry, drawing on a case study research approach (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018), as well as the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies (Leonardo, 2013) and neoliberalism (Steger & Roy, 2010), aimed to engage a multivocal account of how Smith Hill community members described and understood their experiences with community engagement by PC with specific attention to FIPS and PSP. To better understand how various community members described and understood their experiences with community engagement, this inquiry, which was primarily informed by interviews, aimed to engage, interpret, and record the voices and perspectives of a range of community members. This multivocal account included the voices and perspectives of residents who community organizations and, in turn, community engagement work by the college intended to support. This multivocal account also included those who worked for

community organizations and were responsible for training, supervising, and evaluating students as well as working with college staff and faculty. Finally, this multivocal account included the voices and perspectives of campus stakeholders, including students, staff, and faculty. Guiding this inquiry were two research questions:

- How do Smith Hill community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement by Providence College?
- How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within Providence College's community engagement work impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

The empirical materials generated from the research setting and context included observations of numerous community engagement interactions and artifacts, both of which offered insights into how community members engaged in the college's community engagement work. However, to deeply investigate the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill, this inquiry was primarily informed by interviews. Smith Hill community members were interviewed using an in-depth interview process (Seidman, 2019) to record how they described and understood their experiences with the college's community engagement work, including the racial and economic realities of this work.

As this study shifted to analysis, community members' understandings and lived experiences with the college's community engagement work became the focus of this inquiry. Drawing on the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism, this process involved making and analyzing thematic connections within and across the empirical materials, with particular attention to the words of community members



(Seidman, 2019). This analytical shift provided a means to better understand various community voices and perspectives on service learning and community engagement in intricate and multifaceted ways.

### **Rationale and Significance**

It is noteworthy that calls for elevating community voices and perspectives in service learning and community engagement are not new but have all too often have demonstrated lofty rhetoric without subsequent practical application (Stoecker et al., 2009; White, 2012). Accordingly, one significant outcome of this inquiry was a deep investigation of service learning and community engagement, including its racial and economic realities, from the perspectives of a range of powerful community voices.

Revealing and further understanding how Smith Hill community members described and understood their experiences with PC's community engagement work is significant because it can allow the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education to examine their work from the vantagepoint of standing in "the community" and looking into the campus, rather than the other way around. In doing so, Morton and Bergabauer (2015) argued that the field can: (a) (re)imagine how service learning and community engagement can more intentionally understand and support the interests of community members, (b) support community assets, and (c) allow for neighborhoods, communities, and campuses to more intentionally engage in critical conversations around systemic social issues.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In January 2020, I observed a class session of "PSP 320/321: Practicum," which was a year-long course for PSP majors where students were in the process of designing

and implementing a community-based action research project. Part of this particular class was dedicated to students checking in about their initial planning phases of identifying and initiating relationships with a community partner with whom they would be working for their action research project. Students engaged in a discussion guided by the following questions: “What lies behind your choice of a community partner?” and “How are/will you negotiate your presence and research project with them?” (Morton & Twitchell, 2020, pp. 4-5). During the discussion, the professor, Keith, who was one of my former college professors and, at the time of this inquiry, the Director of FIPS and Faculty Chair of PSP, asked if I could share a bit about my dissertation research approach, including the choices I had to make in conducting my study back in the neighborhood where I once was a service learner and how I negotiated entry back into the community. Keith, whose physical characteristics were described to me by a fellow PSP graduate as resembling David Letterman, with a full salt and pepper colored beard and frameless eyeglasses, was the founding Associate Director of FIPS in 1994 and had been intimately involved in the college’s community engagement work within Smith Hill.

My doctoral courses had prepared me well to give my elevator speech; to talk about the purpose, approach, and significance of my study—this study. My courses also prepared me to talk about my positionality in relation to my research; the fact that my identities of being a White, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender male came with an enormous amount of power and privileges in society. And that these multiple and intersecting identities, coupled with my subjectivities of being a former PC student who once worked in the neighborhood where I was now conducting my dissertation, undoubtedly influenced my research.

As I talked about my research project in this class, however, I was trying to be hypercautious about not appearing to know everything about how the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill because I did not. I also was trying to distance myself from being "too close" to my research and position myself as more of an "outsider" to Smith Hill, despite my previous experiences in and relationships with some community organizations and community members in the neighborhood. Then, one student raised their hand and quietly and inquisitively said, "You talk about Smith Hill with a sense of 'home'" and asked if I could talk a bit more about how I was wrestling with that in relation to now conducting my research in the neighborhood. Though a fair comment and question, I was taken aback and annoyed, at myself and the student, and rambled a response back to the student trying to distance myself from the word "home," which I imagine came off somewhat defensively.

The next morning, I started my day about half a mile from campus at the PC/Smith Hill Annex (Annex), which was a space for campus community collaborations that the college had rented in the neighborhood since 2011. Here, I was sitting in on a weekly meeting of a grassroots organization founded by and made up of Smith Hill residents, the Smith Hill Advocacy & Resource Partnership (SHARP). One of the co-founders of SHARP was Ms. Althea, an older, Black woman who had lived in Smith Hill her entire life. Community members frequently described Ms. Althea as the "godmother" or "matriarch" of the neighborhood. I had known Ms. Althea since 2007 when I took my first PSP courses as an undergraduate student. Ms. Althea had worked at the college for 11 years as a PSP Community Advisor, co-teaching PSP community engaged courses,

including a course that I took during my sophomore year of college, entitled, “Community Organizing.”

A representative from the Providence Mayor’s Community Relations team, LaJuan, joined this particular SHARP meeting to discuss various neighborhood and city-wide initiatives. LaJuan, a younger Black man, was the Deputy Director of Community Relations for the City of Providence. As I arrived at the Annex, I said hello to Ms. Althea, who was dressed head to toe in red, from a red headwrap to a red velour tracksuit, and the other residents and was invited to join them at the long rectangular table that they were sitting around. LaJuan arrived a few minutes after me and before taking his seat greeted Ms. Althea by leaning down and giving her a kiss on her cheek. Ms. Althea turned towards me with a scowl and told me to take a cue from LaJuan and not be disrespectful when I was “back home.” I immediately got up and properly greeted Ms. Althea before the meeting got started.

Though I had spent time reflecting on my multiple and intersecting identities and researcher roles—both as an “insider” and “outsider”—within this study prior to arriving in Providence, these two moments early on in my research process provided what Weis and Fine (2000) called “speed bumps” or moments where I was forced to pause and reflect on my identities, researcher roles, and overall research approach. On the one hand, I interpreted the student’s use of the word “home” as me being too comfortable in the ways I was talking about Smith Hill. Though I now believe the student was asking an important question about my researcher positionality, in the moment, I was too quick to interpret this closeness as something negative. On the other hand, I was called out by Ms. Althea for being disrespectful “back home.” As I reflected on these “speed bumps,” I was

reminded of bell hooks (2003) who, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, wrote about being criticized throughout her career for speaking of “love” in relation to her teaching; how society often views the emotional feeling of love as “imped[ing] one’s capacity to be objective” (p. 128). Perhaps my discomfort with the word “home” was connected to me trying to maintain some type of distance, neutrality, or objectivity throughout my research process? I ran into the student on campus later that week who thanked me for joining their class and who remarked at the difficulty they perceived in me having to balance multiple researcher roles.

As I stated above, I had spent time reflecting on my identities and researcher roles—both of an “insider” and “outsider”—in planning for this study, but I did so in a binary. I neglected to consider the complexity of my identities and researcher roles and how to negotiate them “in the field.” Michelle Fine (1998) has notably referred to this as “working the hyphen,” wrestling with and constantly negotiating one’s authority, identities, power, and roles throughout the research process.

In discussing how objectivity is viewed in society, Parker Palmer (1983) wrote in *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, “the ideal of objectivism is the knower as ‘blank slates’...The aim of objectivism is to eliminate all elements of subjectivity, all biases and preconceptions, so that our knowledge can become purely empirical” (as cited in hooks, 2003, p. 129). Yet, I did not enter this research as a blank slate. Rather, I entered this research as someone with multiple and intersecting identities, roles, and subjectivities as well as allegiances, beliefs, commitments, concerns, contexts, and experiences in relation to the research setting and context. For example, I entered this research with identities and subjectivities that shaped not only how I showed up in

society, but also how I approached this study. My whiteness, for instance, shaped how I consciously or unconsciously showed up in spaces throughout this inquiry as well as what others may or may not have shared with me in these spaces due to my racial identity. I also entered this research with allegiances, beliefs, and commitments to PC, FIPS, PSP, and Smith Hill based on my experiences as a former student and service learner in these spaces. In many respects, this study was me going back to my “intellectual home”—an “intellectual home” where I learned and developed as a young adult from teachers and mentors both on- and off-campus, and a “home” where I shopped, ate, built relationships, brought my family to, and the “home” where I first met my, now, wife.

Through my professional and educational experiences, including my doctoral work and role as a researcher, I also entered this research being shaped by having read much literature on my research topic. Thus, I entered this study with concerns about the absence of community voices and perspectives in the field of service learning and community engagement. I also entered this study with concerns about whiteness and neoliberalism embedded within service learning and community engagement based on my own experiences as well as my engagement with the literature; theoretical perspectives that I most certainly did not have when I was a service learner in Smith Hill, but that have since helped inform and shape my understandings and this study. Because of all of this, I cannot fully occupy status as an “insider” or an “outsider.” The hyphen, or the space in-between, allowed me to occupy multiple roles and perhaps afforded a deeper knowledge of the experiences I aimed to study.

## **Definitions of Key Terminology**

### ***Service Learning and Community Engagement***

Stoecker and Tryon (2009) wrote, “very little service learning conforms to a narrow definition and, from the community organization’s perspective, hairsplitting academic definitions are so out of touch with the actual practice of service learning in community organizations that they are nearly irrelevant” (p. 12). This claim resonated with this inquiry given that Smith Hill community members, specifically residents, rarely used the academic terminology of “service learning” when talking about PC’s community engagement work within the neighborhood. Most often, community members referred to students as “volunteers” and, like past research has suggested (Bell & Carlson, 2009), did not necessarily know that students’ community work was at times connected to their academics.

For the purpose of this inquiry, I drew on Welch’s (2016) definition of “community engagement” as “cannot[ing] a pedagogical and sometimes even a moral relationship between the academy and neighborhoods” (p. 34). Service learning,<sup>3</sup> a form of experiential education where students combine work in the community with academic learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), is one strategy of community engagement. Yet, Butin (2006) noted that service learning can be an “amalgam of experiential education, action research, critical theory, progressive education, adult education, social justice

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars often place a hyphen between “service” and “learning” (e.g., “service-learning”) to represent a balance between the student learning and service outcomes of the pedagogy and practice (see, for instance, Sigmon, 1994 for a discussion on a typology of service and learning). However, given the dearth of scholarship aimed at understanding the voices and perspectives of communities involved in service learning, including a lack of attention as to how the racial and economic realities of the pedagogy and practice impact communities, I intentionally omit the hyphen given that service learning more often than not fails to do the work in ways emblematic of the hyphen.

education, constructivism, community-based research, multicultural education, and undergraduate research” (p. 490). In fact, early studies found there to be 147 different terms used to define and describe service learning across higher education (Kendall, 1990). An array of terms to define and describe the pedagogy and practice has continued across higher education today (Mitchell & Perrotti, 2020b). Welch (2016) said the variance in terminology and, therefore, definitions and understandings of service learning was due to the “complex combination of philosophical, pedagogical, political, cultural, and systemic factors within higher education” (p. 33).

In recent years, however, the variance in terminology also has been in direct response to some practitioners, scholars, and institutions who have intentionally moved away from the concept of service learning, which has been critiqued for hierarchies imposed by labels of “service” (Cooks et al., 2004; Hernandez, 2018; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016; Varlotta, 1997). Most notably, Mitchell (2007, 2008) has advanced a “critical service learning” model, calling on the pedagogy to have a greater focus on social justice by challenging the status quo through an analysis of power, privilege, and oppression. With similar aims to Mitchell (2007, 2008), Costa and Leong (2013), drawing on feminist pedagogy, have called for a “critical community engagement” model. Hicks Peterson (2018) has called for a “critical, contemplative community engagement,” providing a framework for how campuses and communities can create effective partnerships for social justice. Doerr (2019) also has called for a “subversive service learning,” shifting “the focus of students’ work from marginalized groups to the groups that marginalize them” (p. 59).



Perhaps for some of the reasons discussed above, FIPS and PSP made the decision around 2018 to move away from the traditional concept of service learning. Though service learning pedagogy and practice undergirded FIPS and PSP's curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs (Battistoni, 1998; Hudson & Trudeau, 1995; Morton, 2012), FIPS and PSP broadly referred to their work as "community engagement." FIPS and PSP's community engagement programs included curricular community engaged courses, including community-based internships, research, and capstone courses as well as a co-curricular Feinstein Community Fellows program, Community Work-Study (CWS), and a Global Service Learning program in partnership with the college's Department of Global Studies (GST, the designation given to the academic department by the college). Accordingly, while I draw heavily upon service learning scholarship throughout this inquiry, I employ the term "community engagement" as an umbrella term for service learning and the many other forms of community engaged teaching and learning used by postsecondary institutions across the country.

### ***Community***

A full text search of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* for the word "community" resulted in 20,523 references across 362 articles. The phrase "the community" resulted in 3,345 references across 334 articles. Yet, despite community being "ever present in the institutionalized service learning literature" (Stoecker, 2016, p. 63), the field of service learning and community engagement has rarely assigned meaning to who and what "the community" is within its work. Accordingly, Stoecker (2016) argued that within the field, "[t]he word *community* means everything and nothing" (p. 63, emphasis in original).

From my experiences as a service learner and throughout my subsequent academic and professional experiences within the field of higher education, community has tended to mean the places colleges and universities partner with (e.g., students' community placements). Thus, as previously stated, community organizations—nonprofits, K–12 schools, and government agencies with whom service learning courses and programs partner—have become a proxy for “the community.” Notions of service in relation to community have often been discussed in the field through an assets-based approach of working with community organizations and community members to help address community defined concerns, issues, or problems. The idea that service learning and community engagement can contribute to “building effective communities” has been frequently framed in the literature in terms of the benefit and impact campuses and their students can have on communities through service and community work (Bortolin, 2011). Therefore, community has often been described as a place beyond the campus, somewhere “out there,” or this abstract place that students arrive in to do “good” work.

These understandings of community have often been discussed through scholars and texts, such as Block's (2008) *Community: The Structure of Belonging*; Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*; McKnight's (1995) *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterparts*; McKnight and Block's (2010) *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*; Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*; Wheatley's (2002) *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, among others, including the works of Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, John Dewey, Myles Horton,

and Martin Luther King Jr. While all of these scholars and texts have provided me with a deeper understanding of the idea of community and have certainly contributed to the development of this inquiry, like the service learning and community engagement literature at large (Bocci, 2015; Evans et al., 2009; Stevens, 2003; Yep, 2011), these understandings of community have most often come from White (and male) scholars, neglecting more complex and nuanced understandings of community from BIPOC voices and perspectives (see, for instance, Penetito, 2009).

Because communities are not monolithic, the word community can take on a number of different interpretations and meanings to different people and places depending on a variety of factors, including how individual people and groups of people experience the community or communities that they are a part of. With the aim of centering community experiences, I took seriously how Smith Hill community members talked about their understandings of community through the interviews I conducted as part of this study. In short, community members most often talked about community as the significance of relationships between people and places and as multiple communities nested within one. Therefore, for the purposes of beginning with a broad understanding of community here, I draw on several of my conversations with community members and several scholars who have helped me better understand community in the context of this inquiry.

Morton and Bergabauer (2015) defined community as “a place-based system of persons and relationships” (p. 26). People within community, as described by Heather, a Smith Hill resident-parent and landlord, and echoed by many other community members I spoke with, can include “everyone.” Heather stated, “I think about business owners,

residents, youth, social service providers, visitors, college students.” With regard to place, Chavis and Less (2015) wrote that as a place-based system, communities are not represented by one place, building, or organization, rather a feeling of trust and a sense of belonging within the relationships built between people and places. The relationships between people and places can be developed through both formal community organizations (e.g., nonprofits, K–12 schools, and government agencies) and informal community organizations or individuals and groups of residents and other community members who come together for a common cause, including, for instance, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious networks of people. Understanding community through this lens encourages “reflective and working relationships with individuals and groups of community members alongside the community institutions” (Morton & Bergabauer, 2015, p. 27). Morton (2019) added that the goal of community as a complex system of people and places was for everyone: (a) to have access to a meaningful livelihood, (b) to have opportunities for learning and creativity, and (c) to provide and receive support when they need it.

However, community as a place-based system is complicated by the fact that multiple smaller communities, often with varying interests and priorities, can be nested within one. Neighborhoods, such as Smith Hill, can be defined by geographic (e.g., city streets) and political (e.g., City Council) boundaries (Ohmer et al., 2019), but community members can experience these boundaries and the places within them differently. For example, Jennifer, a 17-year staff member at the Smith Hill Community Library (Library), said that there were various “parameters” that “define where you are in the neighborhood.” Janice, a Smith Hill resident and member of SHARP, joked that there

were about 15 different communities all within Smith Hill. Residents can live in and/or engage in/with multiple communities that are nested within each other based on the abovementioned social, cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious communities as well as communities of different ages or needs (Chavis & Less, 2015). Some of these multiple smaller communities may engage with the larger community, while others may exist in silos or be excluded from the larger community based on structural inequities.

Accordingly, communities are organized differently depending on a number of complex factors. By broadly framing community through this understanding, I began this inquiry by considering “community” in relation to the research setting and context.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Here, in Chapter One, I have introduced the need for a greater consideration of community voices and perspectives in the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education with specific attention to better understanding how issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within community engaged pedagogies and practices have impacted communities. I also provided an initial overview of my methodology and statement of the research questions that guided this inquiry as well as discussed my researcher positionality and key terminology. In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of FIPS and PSP in relation to the history of the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education. I also introduce my theoretical perspectives of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism and discuss them in relation to the service learning scholarship. In Chapter Three, I present a more thorough overview of the qualitative research approach used for this inquiry, including the steps of data collection and analysis. Then, in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I present my findings on

how community members described and understood their experiences with the community engagement work by PC, including the racial and economic realities of this work. Chapter Four reveals how community members experienced the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill. Chapter Five focuses on how community members described a perceptual harm that was imposed on the community by the college's community engagement work. Finally, in Chapter Six, I present a key implication for practice and future research as a result of conducting this inquiry.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Background**

Service learning proliferated as a popular teaching and learning strategy to promote civic and democratic engagement across U.S. higher education throughout the 1990s as a result of the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Through these pieces of legislation, the Corporation for National and Community Service was created and national service initiatives, such as Learn and Serve America, provided significant funding to develop and institutionalize community service programs on college and university campuses. As a result of this federal support, individual campuses also began to invest significant resources into developing certificate programs, majors, and minors in, for instance, civic and community engagement, public and community service, among other names (Butin 2010; Butin & Seider, 2012). One such program was the major and minor programs in PSP at PC.

### **Public and Community Service Studies at Providence College**

PC had been routinely recognized with the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll (PC, 2021d) and FIPS and PSP, specifically, were recognized by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2017 for their curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs (Longo et al., 2017). However, their work promoting public and community service among students through concepts, such as "community, justice, and leadership" began more than two decades earlier (Longo et al., 2017, p. 31).

The history of FIPS and PSP has been well documented in the service learning and community engagement literature (see Battistoni, 1998; Hudson & Trudeau, 1995; Morton, 2012), as PC credits itself as the first higher education institution in the country to offer a bachelor's degree in public and community service studies (PC, 2021d). In 1993, RI philanthropist Alan Shawn Feinstein issued an invitation and challenge to all RI colleges and universities to establish an undergraduate academic program in public and community service. Given that PC's mission has historically been "committed to...service of God and neighbor" (PC, 2021b, para. 1), Hudson and Trudeau (1995) wrote that the college administration quickly formed a faculty committee to apply for Feinstein's five-million-dollar grant. After outcompeting four other institutions, the college was awarded its largest single grant in the history of the college to establish what is now FIPS and PSP.

In the summer of 1993, PC announced an open application process for faculty as well as a national search for a Director of what would become the college's public service coordinating office, FIPS. FIPS would support the work of developing an interdisciplinary academic program in public and community service (i.e., PSP). A Research Team was established, including eight faculty and three students from across several academic disciplines, as well as four community partners, including several residents from Smith Hill, to design the academic program. With support from the college community and community partners, the college's Faculty Senate approved pilot programs for the spring and summer of 1994, as well as throughout the 1994-1995 academic year, focused on "an academic curriculum stressing the study of community" (Hudson & Trudeau, 1995, p. 151). Morton (2012) later described the academic



curriculum as developing “from the ground up as an interdisciplinary, developmental, experientially grounded, liberal arts curriculum” (p. 90). While launching the pilot program, Rick Battistoni, a Visiting Associate Professor at Rutgers University’s Citizenship and Service Education Program, was hired as the Director of FIPS, and Keith Morton, who was the former Executive Director of the University of Minnesota YMCA and was then working as the director of Campus Compact’s national Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study, was hired as the Associate Director. Rick and Keith were both hired with faculty lines at PC. The Faculty Senate approved the PSP curriculum in April 1995, with the first minors completing the program in 1996 and majors in 1997. The PSP academic program was later granted departmental status in 2007.

Through 2017, 228 majors and 254 minors had graduated from PC with a bachelor’s degree in PSP (Longo et al., 2017). During the time of this inquiry, there were 15 majors and 21 minors enrolled in PSP. There were seven tenure-track faculty members who had a faculty line in PSP. All but two of those seven faculty members had a joint appointment with another academic department, including GST, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Theology. In spring 2020, PSP was in the process of hiring an additional tenure-track faculty member who would have a joint appointment with Black Studies. In spring 2020, PSP also had four Adjunct Faculty members as well as seven Community Advisors who co-taught community engaged courses alongside a faculty member.

Service learning and other forms of community engagement, including community-based internships, research, and capstone courses, had been at the core of the

PSP curriculum since 1994. However, since 2018, the PSP curriculum had moved away from the traditional concept of service learning (i.e., direct service and counting service hours) and, more broadly, referred to the experiential learning component of the curriculum as “community engagement,” which, Keith, as the Director of FIPS and Faculty Chair of PSP, reflected, “covers a multitude of forms from service to research to deep collaboration.” However, Keith said that since moving away from the traditional concept of service learning,

I think [FIPS and PSP’s language is] up in the air a little bit...I think we're trying to track with the rest of the field. Do we call it “community engagement,” “critical community engagement,” “critical community service?” I think the word “community” is in there for sure.

Regardless, Keith said that FIPS and PSP students, staff, faculty, and community partners aimed to “take seriously the idea of community” and were “thinking deeply about it.”

The PSP curriculum itself also has been well documented in the service learning and community engagement literature (see Battistoni, 1998; Kelly & Lena, 2006; Longo et al., 2017; Morton, 2012) for what Butin and Seider (2012) have called a “new intellectual movement” in higher education to offer certificate programs, majors, and minors focused on civic and community engagement (p. 1). Rick, who held a joint faculty appointment in PSP and Political Science, reflected that many of the emerging certificate programs, majors, and minors that were developing around the same time as PSP resembled a graduation requirement that were “a mile wide and an inch deep.” Rather, Rick reflected that embedded within the PSP curriculum was “a more ladder development” that had the potential to offer “depth.”

The PSP curriculum included courses that introduced and problematized the concepts of “service,” “community,” “justice,” and “democracy” (Longo et al., 2017, p. 32). While the curriculum had developed and changed since I was a student, Longo and colleagues (2017) wrote that several core values continued to undergird the PSP curriculum, including “*democratic education, engaged scholarship, and reciprocal community partnerships*” (p. 32, emphasis in original). In fact, the PSP curriculum was under review by the college’s Faculty Senate for several curriculum revisions throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. Table 1 displays the PSP major requirements that were approved by the Faculty Senate in spring 2020, which were effective as of fall 2020 with the Class of 2024.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the requirements shown in Table 1, PSP majors chose a track in conjunction with their faculty advisor of three courses from the college’s course listing that demonstrated a relationship with the major. Students often chose tracks in community health, the environment, politics, public administration, public policy, and women’s studies (PSP, 2021a). PSP minor students took the first four courses shown in Table 1, one additional upper-level interdisciplinary PSP course, and a separate “PSP 480: Capstone Seminar” course designed for minor students. “PSP 101: Introduction to

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<sup>4</sup> Besides the move away from the traditional concept of service learning, the most notable curriculum changes since I was a student included: (a) the addition of “PSP 102: Foundations of Community Partnerships,” which followed PSP 101 as a “second introductory course based on an expectation of deep community partnership, and deep engagement with the ethics and practices of engagement” (PC Faculty Senate, 2020, p. 3), and (b) the move away from a two-semester practicum course (PSP 320/321) that required PSP major students to take on a leadership role as a “Community Assistant,” “acting as service-learning coordinators and reflection leaders with a community-based organization” (Garcia-Pletsch & Longo, 2016, p. 66; also see Kelly & Lena, 2006). The two-semester leadership practicum had been disaggregated and replaced with one course on “ethics and best practices in community engagement” and a second course on “community engaged research” (PC Faculty Senate, 2020, p. 1).

Service in Democratic Communities,” as well as several upper-level interdisciplinary PSP courses, also satisfied the college’s Core Curriculum Civic Engagement Proficiency, which went into effect in 2010. Research has suggested that the PSP curriculum, as well as other similar certificate programs, majors, and minors not only prepared students “to engage collaboratively in and with communities for positive social change” (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 115), but also built students’ civic identities for life after college (Mitchell et al., 2013).

**Table 1**

*PSP Major Requirements*

Course Designator	Course Title
PSP 101	Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities
PSP 102	Foundations of Community Partnerships
PSP 303	Community Organizing
PSP 302	Diversity, Community, and Service
PSP 320	Perspectives on Ethics and Best Practices
PSP 321	Community Engaged Research
PSP 450	Internship in Community Service
PSP 480/481	Capstone Seminar (2 semesters, 6 credits)

*Note.* PSP 302 also could be fulfilled with several pre-approved courses from across the college’s course listing focused on cultural diversity/cultural boundaries.

FIPS primarily supported the PSP major and minor academic programs for its first two decades. For example, FIPS acted as a liaison between PSP courses and community partners, managing students’ community placements. However, in recent years, Kendra,

who was the newest PSP faculty member and the only Woman of Color faculty member, said that FIPS and PSP decided to “divorce.” Though, there continued to be some overlap between FIPS and PSP students, staff, faculty, and community partners. In short, PSP faculty members began to maintain their own community partnerships and FIPS turned its efforts towards developing and working with campus and community partners around youth leadership and equity, specifically to collaboratively address questions related to racial and economic equity and justice locally and globally (PC, 2019). FIPS supported additional forms of curricular and co-curricular community engagement, including: (a) a Feinstein Community Fellows program, where students were matched with a community partner for a year-long community-based fellowship, (b) CWS, where students with a Federal Work-Study award worked at a community organization and were paid through their Work-Study funding, and (c) Global Service Learning travel experiences in collaboration with the GST.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to working with students, staff, and faculty through FIPS and PSP’s various curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs, community partners had opportunities to co-teach or guest lecture PSP (and GST) courses with a faculty member as well as additional opportunities for partnership. Campus community partnerships often included some type of ongoing financial relationship between FIPS and PSP and community partners, typically in the form of community partners receiving “small stipends” to co-teach PSP courses as a PSP Community Advisor (Longo et al.,

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<sup>5</sup> GST was established in 2005 and had worked closely with both FIPS and PSP to promote global citizenship through service learning and community engagement (see Alonso García & Longo, 2013; Alonso García & Longo, 2017; Battistoni et al., 2009; Garcia-Pletsch & Longo, 2016).

2017, p. 32).

It is noteworthy that though service and community work were often associated with FIPS and PSP, community engagement was not centralized or institutionalized within one campus office or academic department at PC. PC, like many colleges and universities, had its own internal ecology for community service rooted in the college's Catholic identity and mission, which will be further examined in Chapter Four. PC's internal ecology for community service included a range of approaches and interpretations to service and community work. FIPS and PSP were known more for their curricular and co-curricular approaches to service learning and community engagement rooted in "community building, racial and economic equity, and organizing for social justice" (PSP, 2021b, para. 3). Other curricular community service was included into courses by individual faculty across academic departments who had their own personal and academic motivations and reasons for incorporating work in the community with academic learning. And other co-curricular community service programs were offered by several student activities, clubs, and organizations, such as Campus Ministry.

Morton (2012) said that FIPS and PSP "were intentionally organized as academically situated service-learning initiatives, framed by higher education's growing interest in service and civic engagement" (p. 89). This interest in service and civic engagement grew out of several efforts throughout the mid-1980s that emphasized "service" and "learning," which later resulted in the national service legislation of the 1990s. First, the National and Community Service Act was signed by President George H. W. Bush in 1990. The Act created the Commission on National and Community Service, which was designed to create service learning programs for higher

education. Next, the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 was signed by President Bill Clinton to establish the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent agency of the U.S. government. The Corporation, which served as an umbrella organization for national service initiatives, established AmeriCorps and the Learn and Serve America Higher Education Program, awarding over \$100 million to approximately 100 colleges and universities between 1995 and 1997 (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). It is noteworthy that President Donald Trump eliminated funding for the Corporation in 2020. However, AmeriCorps, a domestic program supporting adults in public service work, continued to be funded.

Regardless if campuses received funding from these pieces of legislation, this national support led campuses, including PC, to subsequently “[pump] resources into their service-learning infrastructure” (Battistoni, 2012, p. xiv). This infrastructure was intended to build an institutional framework (i.e., a safe and permanent base) for service learning and community engagement within higher education (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016; Stanton et al., 1999). Colleges and universities established community service offices similar to FIPS to offer faculty development (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016) and create partnerships with community organizations to “link campus and neighborhood resources” (Battistoni, 2012, p. xiv). Additional federal grant programs, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Office of University Partnerships, supported efforts to strengthen commitments between campuses and communities (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). Through federal support and the infrastructure built on campuses, a period of “‘institutionalization’ of service-learning” across higher education began (Battistoni, 2012, p. xiv). Though the contemporary field of service learning and

community engagement has often been linked with these national efforts beginning in the 1990s, there is a deeper historical context that is worth examining for the purposes of this inquiry.

### **Historical Context of Service Learning and Community Engagement in Higher Education**

Scholars have traced the underpinnings of the contemporary field of service learning and community engagement to the historical commitment of higher education to prepare students to become civically engaged (see Battistoni, 1997; Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Hartley, 2011; Rocheleau, 2004; Stanton, et al., 1999; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004). For example, scholars have analyzed service learning in relation to 17th century writings on the civic purposes of higher education (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Rocheleau, 2004) and linked the pedagogy and practice to the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, promoting education for citizenship through the establishment of land-grant universities (Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Hartley, 2011; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004).

Concurrently, community engaged pedagogies and practices are often associated with John Dewey's theory of experience (see Giles, 1991; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Harkavy & Hartley, 2010; Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy, 1999; Jacoby, 1996; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Rocheleau, 2004; Saltmarsh, 1996; Sheffield, 2011; Shumer et al., 2017; Stanton et al., 1999; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004), which stated that education is grounded in experience as a basis for learning (Dewey, 1998). Stanton and colleagues (1999) argued that through this linkage to Dewey the contemporary form of service learning broke ground throughout the 1990s "by connecting education with democracy



and conceptualizing the importance of experiential learning in citizenship development” (p. 192).

Still, service learning is not monolithic in its philosophical and theoretical origins (Speck & Hoppe, 2004). Scholars also have linked the historical roots of service learning to late 19th and early 20th century activists and educators, including settlement activist Jane Addams (Daynes & Longo, 2004; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004); social activist Dorothy Day (Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997); Civil Rights activist Myles Horton and the student movements throughout the Civil Rights Movement and anti-war era (Stanton et al., 1999; Stoecker, 2016; Zieren & Stoddard, 2004); as well as to critical pedagogues, such as Paulo Freire (Bocci, 2015; Butin, 2010; Rocheleau, 2004; Sheffield, 2011; Simpson, 2014; Stanton et al., 1999). Perhaps because of these various philosophical and theoretical origins, the literature on service learning is replete with discussions on the many different purposes of the pedagogy and practice (see Boyle-Baise, 2002; Butin, 2003, 2010; Morton, 1995; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Pollack, 1999; Simpson, 2014; Speck & Hoppe, 2004; Varlotta, 1997). Perhaps also because of the various philosophical and theoretical origins, the literature is replete with a range of terms associated with service learning, as discussed in Chapter One.

### *Paradigms of Service*

The “complex combination of philosophical, pedagogical, political, cultural, and systemic factors within higher education” have led service learning to be implemented differently across postsecondary institutions (Welch, 2016, p. 33). While there are a number of scholars who I can draw on to discuss the various paradigms associated with service learning, I draw on Morton (1995) who describes three paradigms of service—

charity, project, and social change—in the context of creating the PSP program at PC in the mid-1990s.

First, Morton (1995) described the charity paradigm, which can be understood as direct service with two groups of people, the service providers and those being served. The service providers identify the service to be performed for those who are viewed as not being able to provide it for themselves, which can lead to deficit-based thinking and discourse among service providers. The service associated with the charity paradigm is limited in time and impact. For example, though the charity paradigm does not consider the root causes of social problems that required the need for service in the first place, it can be appropriate in some contexts, such as disaster relief efforts following a hurricane. Still, inherent to the charity paradigm is that it creates dependency and tends to view those being served through a deficit-based framework, rather than focusing on individual and community-based assets and strengths. Jane Addam's *The Subtle Problems of Charity* (1889), Nadine Cruz's (1989) *A Challenge to the Notion of Service*, John Eby's (1998) *Why Service-Learning is Bad*; Ivan Illich's (1968) *To Hell with Good Intentions*, John McKnight's (1998) *Why Servanthood is Bad?*, among others have documented these critiques of the charity paradigm.

In the context of this inquiry, charity can be associated with (whiteness, neoliberalism, and) religious or faith-based service often performed by Catholic institutions, such as PC. However, scholars have challenged the charity paradigm associated with Catholic institutions and have argued that religious or faith-based service learning can move beyond charity to include more social change and social justice-

oriented aims (Glenister Roberts, 2008; Gunst Heffner & DeVries Beversluis, 2003; Ray, 2017; Reed-Bouley & Kyle, 2015). Still, Hernandez (2018) wrote:

Within service learning, the colonizing relationship between those who are served and those who provide service (students, faculty, the institution, etc.) must be understood within the historical contexts of slavery, religious assimilation, and positivist-influenced disciplines that have served as a series of negations for those that are poor, ‘served’, and ‘oppressed’ (p. 28).

Thus, while there are times when the charity paradigm can offer potentially needed services and resources, Hoppe (2004) wrote it is “paternalistic and marginalizes those it seeks to help” (p. 140).

Next, Morton (1995) described the project paradigm of service, which focuses on defining problems and solutions as well as developing plans to implement solutions. Service projects can include building affordable housing for those who do not own a home or developing an afterschool tutoring program for students who need help with their homework. With a focus on problems and solutions, the project paradigm has an emphasis on building campus community partnerships who, together, can leverage the necessary resources to develop and implement service projects. However, Morton (1995) said that the project paradigm can result in “unintended consequences” through the “inequalities of power” between campuses and communities (p. 22). The project paradigm of service also can have an overemphasis on measurable project outcomes over reflective practices.

Finally, Morton (1995) described social change as the third and final paradigm of service. The social change paradigm focuses on “building relationships among or within

stakeholder groups, and creating a learning environment that continually peels away the layers of the onion called ‘root causes’” (Morton, 1995, p. 22). The social change paradigm aims to not only include a critical analysis of the conditions that created the need for service in the first place, but also “effective strategies for addressing them” (Morton, 1995, p. 23).

Simpson (2014) said that though many campuses and service learning practitioners position their community engaged pedagogies and practices in relation to the social change paradigm—or what Simpson has advanced as the social justice paradigm—they often “lack anything beyond a verbal commitment” to social change or social justice (p. 100). Instead, Simpson (2014) asserted that with a lack of critical analysis of systemic social issues, many contemporary approaches to service learning and community engagement can be linked with the charity paradigm.

Likewise, because service learning often has been associated with educating for citizenship, scholars have argued that the contemporary (charity) model of service learning often focuses on neutral forms of citizenship development (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), which prioritize student learning and development over community impact (Stoecker, 2016). While outcomes related to preparing students to be civically engaged can certainly be connected to social change and social justice, a historical understanding of the contemporary form of service learning explicates why the pedagogy and practice falls short of meeting Morton’s (1995) social change paradigm and Simpson’s (2014) call for social justice.

### ***Sigmon and Ramsay's Founding Service Learning Model***

When the term service learning was first coined in 1966 by Bob Sigmon and Bill Ramsay, it described internships that developed partnerships between Southern universities and local communities (Ramsay, 2017; Sigmon, 2017). Touched by the progressive social movements of their time, Sigmon and Ramsay linked their service learning model with the social, economic, and political contexts of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., the Vietnam and Cold Wars, racial tension, and voter and civil rights legislation) to promote community development and change (Sigmon, 2017; Stanton et al., 1999). Thus, Hyatt (2001) said that service learning was originally not formalized as a teaching and learning strategy but, rather, “a way for politically engaged professors to involve their students in activities associated with the Civil Rights and anti-war movements” (p. 8).

Jacoby (1996) said that the 1960s and 1970s “challenged both institutions of higher education and students to participate in the burgeoning demand for social justice” (p. 11). Though Sigmon and Ramsay’s service learning model was committed to the learning and development of students, including educating for citizenship, it was rooted in a “philosophy of performing service to others in order to bring about social justice” (Shumer et al., 2017, p. 5). While connecting service learning with educating for citizenship is what historically undergirds the pedagogy, scholars argue that “when understood from its roots, [service learning] is inherently ‘critical’” (Sheffield, 2011, p. 38) and grounded in developing community partnerships rooted in social justice (Kielsmeier, 2017; Shumer, 2017; Sigmon, 2017; Stanton et al., 1999).

### *Service Learning's Evolution Towards Workforce Goals*

Though social justice was a primary goal of service learning (Butin, 2010; Jacoby, 1996; Kendall, 1990; Kielsmeier, 2017; Sheffield, 2011; Shumer, 2017; Sigmon, 2017; Stanton et al., 1999), educating for citizenship superseded it as the pedagogy and practice developed and gained traction throughout the 1970s (Sigmon, 2017). Higher education advocates and the federal government viewed service learning as supporting national service initiatives from the 1960s, such as the Peace Corps, Volunteers in Service to America, and the CWS program (Sigmon, 2017; Stanton et al., 1999). Additional federally funded service programs, national organizations (e.g., National Center for Service-Learning), and a research base also emerged throughout the 1970s to support and legitimize service learning as a beneficial higher education practice (Jacoby, 1996; Shumer et al., 2017).

As efforts aimed to support and legitimize service learning, the economic recession of the mid-1970s resulted in public criticism that colleges and universities were not preparing students for the workforce (Perkin, 1991; Thelin, 2011). With this public uncertainty in higher education's economic return, colleges and universities began to replace traditional liberal arts programs, which became increasingly popular throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Perkin, 1991; Thelin, 2011), with preprofessional programs in an effort to position higher education "as an engine for national economic growth and individual gain" (Orphan & O'Meara, 2016, p. 217). These decisions not only negatively impacted liberal arts programs, but also service learning (Rocheleau, 2004; Sheffield, 2011).

Given that critics saw service learning as too political a form of education and one that did not truly prepare students for the workforce, federal funding for programs, such as the National Center for Service-Learning, were eliminated (Rocheleau, 2004; Sheffield, 2011; Shumer et al., 2017). In fact, during this time federal funding for higher education at large was significantly reduced compared to previous decades (Bok, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Thelin, 2011). Though higher education looked to corporate-university partnerships as a mechanism for economic growth (Bok, 2003; Brint, 2011; Orphan & O'Meara, 2016), campuses had no choice but to raise tuition costs, which subsequently led to a decline in student enrollment (Thelin, 2011). Because higher education responded to the recession with a market-centered approach, including to educate students for personal and career development (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Thelin, 2011), Hartley and Saltmarsh (2016) argued that the idealistic student population of the previous decades and, in turn, the social justice roots of service learning shifted to “the materialist and career-minded college students of the 1980s” (p. 35).

Yet, early service learning advocates criticized the “passive, impersonal nature of instructional methodologies” that developed out of the recession and reemphasized the importance of pedagogies that were “more active and involving” (Shumer et al., 2017, p. 14) to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States” (National & Community Service Act of 1990, §12501) by educating for citizenship and democracy. Consequently, service learning reemerged as a possible strategy to expand higher education throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016; Shumer et al., 2017). To sustain the renewed support for service learning, Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher

education, was established in 1985 by several campus presidents (Campus Compact, 2021).

Despite efforts to sustain service learning, pioneers became concerned that the foundational concept of service was being replaced with service as a voluntary act (Stanton et al., 1999). They were troubled that the service learning being promoted had too great a focus on workforce goals rather than a balance between student learning and development combined with community development and change (Sigmon, 2017). Sigmon (2017) noted that though he was supportive, he was,

Disappointed that we were not doing well finding ways for the communities and those with needs being listened to and engaged as partners. The larger focus on student learning outcomes and curricular shifts were honorable, but in some ways a half a loaf in my pantry. (p. 73)

Nevertheless, pioneers generally welcomed the “high-profile support for a narrow concept of voluntary service” (Stanton et al., 1999, p. 167) with the hope that these renewed efforts would advance service learning as a legitimate higher education practice. However, the pedagogy remained marginal across higher education (Shumer et al., 2017).

In 1989, a significant milestone for service learning occurred through the Wingspread Conference that, sponsored by The Johnson Foundation, brought together over 70 organizations interested in service and learning to develop definitional guidance for the pedagogy (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). The conference resulted in a report which, for instance, deemphasized service as volunteerism and encouraged practitioners to move students towards grappling with the root causes of social issues as well as called for more



balanced working relationships and partnerships between campuses and communities (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Through definitional guidance and a research agenda that resulted from the Wingspread Conference, service learning reemerged as an effective instructional strategy and practice of higher education.

### ***Moves Towards Institutionalizing Service Learning***

As a result of the traction gained from Campus Compact and the Wingspread Conference, the federal government restored its efforts in recognizing service learning as a viable higher education practice through the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

The institutionalization of service learning became crucial not only to demonstrate higher education's commitment to its core civic values (Rubin, 1996), but also to gain support from faculty, administrators, and the higher education community (Furco, 2002a; Zlotkowski, 1995). Hence, scholars increasingly began to analyze the implementation of service learning in order to share best practices (Zlotkowski, 1998). In the early 1990s, a Campus Compact survey identified a shift in service learning offices being moved from student affairs to academic affairs (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016), signifying support that later paved the way to legitimize service learning and community engagement as an academic subject of study (Butin, 2010; Butin & Seider, 2012; Zlotkowski, 2000, 2006).

Scholars developed models for institutionalizing service learning across campuses (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Holland, 1997). Noting that service learning would look different according to institutional missions, Holland (1997, 2001) suggested that campuses develop the role of service as an aspect of their mission. To do so, campuses needed to assess their current conditions and monitor progress towards their desired level

of institutionalization (Holland, 1997, 2001). Matrices were developed for campuses to assess their efforts to institutionalize service learning (Furco, 2002b). These efforts to institutionalize the pedagogy further legitimized service learning as meaningful and beneficial to institutional learning and workforce goals (Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000; Inman, 2004; Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999).

Still, despite these efforts to institutionalize service learning across higher education, Stanton (2017) questioned whether institutionalization had resulted in a “broader, and in some minds fuzzier, concept of community engagement” (p. 90), which Hartley and Saltmarsh (2016) said does “not always mean engagement with local communities” (p. 46). Accordingly, scholars have argued that institutionalization has prohibited service learning from meeting its original social justice aims (Hyatt, 2001; Stoecker, 2016).

### ***Inherent Tensions of Institutionalizing Service Learning***

Scholars have argued that the institutionalization of service learning was important during its early formative years throughout the 1990s, given the inherent tensions that practitioners faced during, and in response to, the 1970s’ economic recession (Zlotkowski, 1995). Writing during the early formative years of the pedagogy, Zlotkowski (1995) argued that, without the formal structure of institutionalization, service learning would be no more than a “fringe phenomenon” because some viewed the pedagogy as lacking academic rigor, limiting educational benefits for students, and unworthy of faculty time and attention (p. 10). Zlotkowski (1995) asserted that though the advancement of community development and change, as well as student learning and

development, would have been the ideal situation for service learning, priorities had to be set and strategies established if the pedagogy was going to be accepted as a legitimate practice of higher education.

Accordingly, to sustain service learning as a legitimate practice of higher education, scholars called on the pedagogy to focus on the improvement of undergraduate education (Howard, 1998; Kramer, 2000; Morton & Troppe, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1995). For example, Zlotkowski (1995) advocated for the integration of service learning into undergraduate education to be “the central task at hand” (p. 9) and respond to “the needs of today's students, in today's economy, in today's society” (p. 14). As such, Stanton and colleagues (1999) suggested that advocates of the institutionalization of service learning during its early formative years did not view higher education as the place to pursue social justice. Instead, Hartley and Saltmarsh (2016) inferred that advocates saw the pedagogy as “an end in itself—a better way to convey traditional disciplinary content” (p. 42) to avoid becoming a “fringe phenomenon” (Zlotkowski, 1995, p. 10).

Opponents of institutionalization saw this process as maintaining the status quo and robbing service learning of its social justice aims (Stanton et al., 1999). Arguing that this development was in conflict with Sigmon and Ramsay’s founding model of service learning, Stoecker (2016) questioned, “How did we go from higher education community engagement located in and focused on the community to an institutionalized service learning bureaucracy?” (p. 19).

Though service learning gained traction as a legitimate higher education practice beginning in the 1990s, neoliberalism was becoming deeply entrenched in U.S. economic

policies and had, and continues to have, a negative impact on higher education. Thus, the broader economic context presented above that fomented service learning and community engagement in higher education today is now understood by scholars as neoliberalism (Orphan & O'Meara, 2016). Similarly, Cabrera (2014b) and Omi and Winant (2015) argued that higher education's market-centered behaviors (in response to the 1970s' economic recession and neoliberalism) had led to the hegemonic (re)formulation of whiteness across college and university campuses.

Accordingly, this inquiry drew on the theoretical perspectives of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism to understand how the influences of white supremacy and neoliberalism has negatively affected service learning and community engagement and, in turn, the communities these pedagogies and practices place students in. The following introduces these theoretical perspectives as well as relevant scholarship on the theoretical and empirical understandings of whiteness and neoliberalism on service learning and community engagement in higher education.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

#### ***Racial Realities: Considering Critical Whiteness Studies***

This inquiry drew on Critical Whiteness Studies, an interdisciplinary field of study exploring the ideologies and enactments of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2013). For Morrison (1992), critically interrogating whiteness means to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers” (p. 90). Through centering whiteness, Critical Whiteness Studies scholars seek to make whiteness visible in order to disrupt and transform it (Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2003; Morrison, 1992).

While Critical Whiteness Studies did not emerge as a field of study until the early 1990s, undergirding it is the writings of Black scholars, including W. E. B. Du Bois (e.g., “The Souls of White Folk”) and James Baldwin (e.g., “White Guilt” and “On Being White and Other Lies”). These historical origins are of importance not only for their scholarly contributions to the field but also because, despite Black scholars studying whiteness prior to the 1990s, Critical Whiteness Studies did not emerge as a field of study until White scholars began studying whiteness, revealing, even in the field of Critical Whiteness Studies, white supremacy’s inherent connection to knowledge production (Cabrera et al., 2016; Leonardo, 2009, 2013).

**Considering the Concepts of White Supremacy and Whiteness.** White supremacy has permeated all aspects of society for nearly 500 years (Allen, 2012; Feagin, 2013; Mills, 1997; Roediger, 2007). Mills (1997) defined white supremacy as “a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” for White people (p. 3).

The ideologies and enactments of white supremacy are sustained by whiteness, which Hikido and Murray (2016) defined as “hegemonic racial power that privileges white groups while subordinating racialized ‘others’” (p. 391). Drawing on Frankenberg (1993), Hikido and Murray (2016) further situated whiteness as “an identity and performance...a position of racial privilege, a standpoint perspective, and a set of cultural practices that often remain unmarked” (pp. 391-392). Though Cabrera and colleagues (2016) asserted that “Whiteness is real in that it has material impacts on people in U.S. society,” they also said that whiteness “escapes precise definition” (p. 18).

Still, scholars have theorized whiteness as White people's: (a) unwillingness to name the contours of systemic racism, (b) avoidance of identifying with a racial experience, and (c) minimization of the U.S. history of racism (Cabrera et al., 2016; Leonardo, 2002). Through this understanding, whiteness shapes the consciousness of White Americans through discourses (e.g., racial interpretations, narratives, and stereotypes) and processes (e.g., governmental actions, decisions, and policies) that uphold whiteness as normal and sustain and further perpetuate white supremacy (see Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Cabrera et al., 2016; Feagin, 2013; Hikido & Murray, 2016; Leonardo, 2002, 2004, 2009; Miles, 2009; Roediger, 2007). Hence, as a set of racial discourses and processes, a central tenet of whiteness is that it is socially constructed (i.e., an identity constructed by White people for their own benefit) (Feagin, 2013; Leonardo, 2002, 2004, 2009; Mills, 2015; Roediger, 2007; Thandeka, 1999). For this reason, Leonardo (2009) asserted that whiteness is an ontological status. While a comprehensive analysis of white supremacy and the construction of whiteness are important, both are beyond the scope of this inquiry. (See Mills, 1997 for historical tracings of white supremacy and Casey, 2016 and Roediger, 2007 for a historical analysis of whiteness in the U.S.)

**Considering the “Critical” in Critical Whiteness Studies.** It is noteworthy to make explicit that contemporary Critical Whiteness Studies scholars have been intentional in contextualizing whiteness through a white supremacy framework, even though whiteness often has often been conceptualized through a white privilege framework. McIntosh's (1998/2008) well known article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” defines white privilege as,

an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions. (p. 123)

Despite McIntosh’s (1988/2008) white privilege framework often being associated with the study of whiteness and commended for its widespread use across educational spaces, scholars argue that the discourse of white privilege stops short of a complex analysis of whiteness (Blum, 2008; Cabrera, 2017; Casey, 2016; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Lensmire, 2017, 2018; Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2004; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Logue, 2005; Thandeka, 2001).

Lensmire and colleagues (2013) argued that though examining white privilege may be “a consciousness-raising exercise for individual white people,” white privilege alone does not necessarily equate to lessening oppression for BIPOC (p. 413). Therefore, through a discourse of white privilege, Lensmire and colleagues (2013) concluded that “there is no call to activism, unless activism is conceived of as individual white people somehow lessening their own white privilege” (p. 413). Accordingly, scholars have called for whiteness to be conceptualized through the system of white supremacy, which calls for a more rigorous review of systemic racial oppression (Casey, 2016; Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2004).

**Considering the Influence of White Supremacy on Higher Education.** Given that the dynamics of larger society play out on college and university campuses (Cabrera, 2009), the influence of white supremacy has historically and contemporarily been situated as socially dominant within the context of higher education (Brunsmas et al., 2012; Cabrera, 2014a; Collins et al., 2021). Scholars posit that since the inception of

higher education, colleges and universities were founded as white settler colonial property (Wolfe, 2006) through enactments, such as the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862, that implicitly and explicitly excluded BIPOC, as well as women, from gaining access to a higher education (Cabrera et al., 2016; Patel, 2015; Thelin, 2011). While many scholars today may argue that the Morrill Act of 1862 aimed to expand access to higher education and educate for citizenship, access and pathways to citizenship were disproportionately for whites (Cabrera et al., 2016). Thus, whiteness scholars have argued that educating for citizenship, including through community engaged pedagogies and practices, has historically been aligned with white supremacy (Cabrera et al., 2016).

Likewise, Patel (2015) asserted that regardless of higher education's present-day call for increased "diversity," historic oppressive practices, including the erasure of Indigenous peoples, who was and was not allowed access to higher education, as well as the use of slave labor to build and maintain campuses and the use of research to position race as a biological difference, are systemically engrained in the fabric of college and university campuses. As a result, scholars have argued that institutional histories, missions, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, beliefs, assumptions, policies, pedagogies, and practices have all been implicated under the influence of white supremacy (Cabrera, 2009; Cabrera et al., 2016; Collins et al., 2021; Harper & Hurtado, 2011; Leonardo, 2004, 2009).

Specific to service learning and community engagement, Hill-Jackson and Lewis (2011) wrote that the existing scholarship "omits a critical dialogue about the construction of service-learning knowledge, community engagement, and Whiteness" (p. 296). As such, it is necessary to understand how the influence of white supremacy



implicates service learning through a critical whiteness lens—revolving less around white privilege and more around the “direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137).

**Considering the Influence of White Supremacy on Service Learning and Community Engagement.** Though the original model of service learning was developed to promote community development and change throughout the social, economic, and political contexts of the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of white supremacy on higher education has implicated community engaged pedagogies and practices. Today, scholars have inferred that service learning operates as a pedagogy of whiteness that favors student learning and development, as well as institutional goals, while having a minimal impact on communities (Mitchell et al., 2012).

As a pedagogy of whiteness, Mitchell and colleagues (2012) argued that service learning sustains and further perpetuates whiteness through the conscious or unconscious reinforcement of “norms and privileges developed by, and for the benefit of, White people” by sending predominantly White, middle-class students with little or no experience of working with individuals who are “different” from themselves into low-income Communities of Color to “help” and “serve” (p. 613). Since White Americans often do not see race in relation to themselves (Feagin, 2013; Roediger, 2007), service learners can enter communities without having inquired about the power and privilege associated with their own racial identity and then return to campuses where they likely do not have to think about race (Endres & Gould, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012).

Cann and McCloskey (2017) argued that this lack of identifying with a racial experience is reinforced by colleges and universities who “want to ensure that the

environment surrounding the institution is as safe as possible for its students” (p 84). Consequently, scholars have written that students are often placed in safe or comfortable community placements (Eby, 1998), which have less potential for making visible the privileges of whiteness (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012). Referencing hooks (1994), Mitchell and colleagues (2012) asserted that “safety precludes critical learning about issues about racism” (p. 622).

Over the past several decades, scholarship has suggested that service learning develops students’ awareness about systemic social issues (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Battistoni, 1996; Everett, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999), including increasing students’ racial awareness and attitudes (see Astin & Sax, 1998; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Dunlap, 1998; Eyler et al., 1997; Moely et al., 2002; Morgan & Streb, 2001; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Osborne et al., 1998; Rice & Horn, 2014; Sedlak et al., 2003). But other scholars have found that White service learners tend to avoid discussing issues of race and racism all together and, instead, identify classism as the primary issue they observe in their service placements (Becker & Paul, 2015; Green, 2003; Houshmand et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2012; Wetzel et al., 2011).

Regardless, “having an awareness of Whiteness and White privilege does not automatically result in the ability to renounce it or change practices” (Endres & Gould, 2009, p. 424). In other words, reflecting critical whiteness as a theoretical perspective, developing increased awareness and attitudes on complex social issues, including systemic racism, does not necessarily equate to action and change. Furthermore, at the core of the outcomes seems to be the assumption that students develop racial awareness and attitudes through engagement with individuals and communities who are “different”

from themselves. Yet, why is it the community's responsibility to raise students' (who are mostly white) racial awareness and attitudes?

Dunlap and colleagues (2007) offered a theoretical model aimed at understanding the process White students experience as they become more aware of their white privilege, as well as their class, through participation in service learning. Titled, "The Socioeconomic and White Privilege Awareness Process," Dunlap and colleagues' (2007) model involved five stages beginning with "trigger event(s)," which they defined as an event that "stimulates service-learner awareness of their own socioeconomic status and/or white privilege in contrast to community partners" (p. 20). The remaining four stages pertain to how students process the trigger event. While Dunlap and colleagues' (2007) model is noteworthy, it stops short of action and does not take up the systemic nature of white supremacy. Because Dunlap and colleagues' (2007) model suggested that a student is "triggered by a situation or event...with another's circumstance involving a great deal of disadvantage" (p. 20), it can be assumed that the trigger event occurs at the student's community placement. Thus, Dunlap and colleagues' (2007) model seems to suggest that it is the community's responsibility—through a trigger event—to make students aware of their own white privilege and class.

Though studies previously cited have revealed that service learning can increase students' awareness about complex social issues, including racial awareness and attitudes, the same question remains in the case of Dunlap and colleagues' (2007) study: Why is it the community's responsibility, through a trigger event, to raise students' racial awareness and attitudes? Sperling (2007) raised a similar question through their analysis of teaching White service learning students. Sperling (2007) reflected:

So far, no researcher has asked the truly difficult questions such as how it feels to be a parent of an “underachieving” child who is being tutored by an anonymous 19-year-old. Or, is asked about the type of person they would most like to have with their child, whether most Black and Latino parents would indicate a preference for a White college student who is thought to be in need of stereotype reduction. Or, for that matter, whether most parents would agree that it is their child's responsibility to convince White college students not to be racist? (p. 314)

The above quote not only demonstrates the lack of empirical studies on the unequal racial and economic power dynamics embedded within service learning but also the overall dearth of research that aims to understand the voices and perspectives of communities involved in service learning.

As a pedagogy of whiteness, studies have found that service learning can result in and perpetuate color-blind racism (Becker & Paul, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2012) and deficit-based thinking and discourse (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Houshmand et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2012; Rougeaux Shabazz & Cooks, 2014; Vaccaro, 2009) among participating students. These ways of thinking, knowing, and being can position students to show up at their community placements through a charity or white savior mentality (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012).

*Service Learning as Color-Blind Racism.* Bonilla-Silva (2018) has conceptualized White people's unwillingness to name the contours of systemic racism as color-blind racism—an ideology suggesting that race does not influence one's lived

experiences. Developed as a form of post-Civil Rights racism, Bonilla-Silva (2018) theorized that color-blind racism promotes “racism without racists.”

Green (2003) stated, “Because racism and white privilege do not work according to ‘rational’ logics, white students move to dismiss racism as a part of the past or, at best, something performed by racists ‘out there,’ not on the university campus” (p. 288).

Scholars have argued that, with the focus on classism as the primary issue students often observe in their service placements, color-blind racism is positioned as normal within service learning through racially coded language (Becker & Paul, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2012). Racially coded language within service learning becomes a code for talking about race without naming it, avoiding a more rigorous review of systemic racial oppression (Mitchell et al., 2012). Scholars have asserted that racially coded language in service learning can suggest to students that “urban youth” and “inner city schools” are not able to advance without the services provided by White students (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 616). These racial codes work by conjuring mental associations by using language that “invokes race without explicit mention” (Bennett & Walker, 2018, p. 690). Boyle-Baise (1998) asserted that these abstractions reinforce white supremacy.

*Service Learning as Deficit-Based Thinking and Discourse.* Through whiteness, service learning can create a hierarchical relationship between privileged students and the communities they work within by “allowing students to position themselves as superior and view the communities with which they work as having deficits” (Endres & Gould, 2009, p. 422). Houshmand and colleagues (2014) found that service learners had a desire for “rehabilitating,” “improving,” and “fixing” what they identified as “misguided and unfortunate” communities (p. 30). In agreement, numerous other studies have suggested

that service learning can result in White students unequally placing the blame for the lack of success of those they are working with in communities as individual deficiencies rather than identifying and naming the contours of systemic social issues (see Becker & Paul, 2015; Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Rougeaux Shabazz & Cooks, 2014; Vaccaro, 2009). This literature contradicts earlier studies, which suggested that service learners were more likely to attribute “personal hardship” and “misfortune to circumstances beyond the control of the service clients” (Giles & Eyler, 1994, pp. 333-334).

Further explicating these claims, Becker and Paul (2015) found that service learners often felt bad for the youth they were working with at their community placement “because their parents made bad decisions” (p. 192). Assuming that White students were the solution to the perceived problems observed at their community placements, students continued that service learning provided opportunities for “kids from broken families” to be “taken care of by good people” (Becker & Paul, 2015, p. 192). Overall, Becker and Paul (2015) found that service learners understood their role at their community placements as aiming “to support and try to fill in that empty space in the children’s lives” (p. 192).

Likewise, the following quote from a student reflecting on their service experience in Houshmand and colleagues’ (2014) study exemplifies the presence of deficit-based thinking and discourse within service learning: “I feel like many residents in East St. Louis are content with the living conditions because they lack the want or the motivation for change” (p. 33). As a result of deficit-based thinking and discourse, Mitchell and colleagues (2012) said that service learners may think the goal of their community-based learning is to make “them” more like “us” (p. 616). Vaccaro (2009)

asserted that this way of thinking can position service learners to believe that certain injustices are inevitable rather than the result of ongoing discriminatory processes.

*Service Learning as Charity or White Saviorism.* Referencing Morton's (1995) paradigms of service, Moely and colleagues (2008) found that service learners may not embrace outcomes related to the social change paradigm given their preferences for charity over advocacy. In addition to color-blind racism and deficit-based thinking and discourse, scholars have argued that understanding service learning as a form of charity or white saviorism limits considerations for social change and justice (Becker & Paul, 2015; Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Endres & Gould, 2009; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2011; Houshmand et al., 2014; Philipsen, 2003).

Scholarship has demonstrated how White service learners justify their personal white privilege as a form of charity or white saviorism. One student in Endres and Gould's (2009) study said:

I am in the position to use my Whiteness to help them [community members] out. If I see that they need something and their case manager isn't giving it to them, my request could carry a little more weight than theirs. (p. 429)

Another student in the same study said:

Because me and my group are White, I believe people will respect us more just because it is a typical view of society. I think they will especially respect the fact that we are White people *trying* to make a difference. (Endres & Gould, 2009, p. 426, emphasis in original)

While one can interpret these students' comments as doing what they have been asked to do with their white privilege (i.e., using it in a way to redistribute resources for people

who have not been afforded the same types of power, privilege, and resources in society), Endres and Gould's (2009) argued that these students failed to account for how their notions of charity or white saviorism uphold their whiteness. Accordingly, these student quotes demonstrate how some White service learners may think being white makes them automatically capable of making a difference in their community placements (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012).

Of course, this inquiry does not assume that all service learning and community engagement is bad or perpetuates whiteness. Yet, given the predominance of whiteness supported by the scholarship reviewed above, it seems accurate to suggest that whiteness continues to perpetuate community engaged pedagogies and practices through efforts that prioritize white normativity. Seider and colleagues (2013) said that even community engaged courses and programs that are intentionally designed to disrupt whiteness can inadvertently uphold white privilege and, in turn, white supremacy.

While the above literature demonstrates how color-blind racism, deficit-based thinking and discourse, and a charity or white savior mentality can perpetuate white supremacy, as well as pose harm in communities, reflecting the quote from Sperling (2007), the field of service learning and community engagement has rarely devoted attention to understanding these issues from the perspectives of communities.

Accordingly, this inquiry aimed to take seriously the voices and perspectives of Smith Hill community members involved in community engagement work by PC with specific attention to the racial and economic realities of community engagement pedagogies and practices. The following considers the economic realities of service learning and community engagement in relation to neoliberalism.



### *Economic Realities: Considering Neoliberalism*

In addition to the influence of white supremacy, service learning and community engagement has been influenced by neoliberalism—a global economic theory that urges: (a) privatization of the public sphere, (b) deregulation of businesses, and (c) liberalization of trade and industry (Steger & Roy, 2010). As a theory of practices aimed at advancing the economy (Harvey, 2005), Casey (2016) inferred that neoliberalism is “the application of business logics to those areas of society that are not businesses” (p. 100). Spence (2015) elaborated on this understanding by stating that neoliberalism not only shapes businesses, organizations, and institutions in society according to market principles, but also individuals.

A main driver of globalization (Colás, 2005; Litonjua, 2008), neoliberalism as a global phenomenon of economic competition can be traced back to the 1940s’ pro-business and anticommunist efforts of the post-World War II era (Casey, 2016; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Melamed, 2011). For example, scholars have pointed to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which were established in 1945, as advancing the growth of global capitalism (Casey, 2016; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Melamed, 2011). Within the U.S. context, however, scholars have argued that neoliberalism came to fruition as a response to the 1970s’ economic recession and President Ronald Reagan’s decision to dismantle Keynesian economic policies, which eliminated many social welfare programs previously run by the government (Duggan,

2003; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Melamed, 2011; Spence, 2015).<sup>6</sup> This decision operated, and continues to operate, under the logic that the market was and is “better than the state at distributing resources” (Melamed, 2011, p. 39). While a comprehensive analysis of the history of neoliberalism is important, it is beyond the scope of this paper. (See Harvey, 2005 for a historical tracing of neoliberalism in both the U.S and globally.)

Harvey (2005) wrote that as the elimination of federally funded social welfare programs continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the physical infrastructure for these programs that were formerly run by the government began to be increasingly overseen by nonprofits—the same nonprofits with whom service learning courses increasingly partnered with throughout the 1990s. Though nonprofits may aim to address social inequalities, and some have explicit social justice aims, federal regulation restricts nonprofits from engaging in political activities (Internal Revenue Service, 2021), which limits their impact (Hall, 1992; Philion, 2017; Stoecker, 2016). Furthermore, under neoliberalism, nonprofits began to resemble private corporations, increasingly dependent on private rather than public sources of funding (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2019; Wagner, 2000). This private funding is often tied short-term measurable outcomes, which determine whether or not more funding (public or private) will be made available (Fisher, 1983; Philion, 2017; Sakamoto & Hustedde, 2009; Samini, 2010). As a result, Stoecker (2016) argued that “nonprofits have no choice but to follow the money,” becoming a part of the neoliberal political economy (p. 53). This political neutrality

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<sup>6</sup> Keynesian economic policies were developed in the 1930s under President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, which responded to the Great Depression by expanding social provisions to education, employment, housing, and other federally funded social welfare programs (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Melamed, 2011).

coupled with constantly striving to achieve short-term measurable outcomes in order to compete for private resources has resulted in questions of whether nonprofits under neoliberalism can truly represent the interests of those they aim to “help” and, ultimately, address root causes of social issues.

Accordingly, Levin (2007) asserted that this shift in the physical infrastructure for social welfare programs has led, and continues to lead, “to a weakened social state, replacing the social contract and the public good with personal responsibility and a competitive and vicious individualism” (p. 50). As a result, scholars have argued that neoliberal economic practices have moved resources away from social welfare programs and towards production functions, viewing nonprofits and people as individual economic actors (Ah Kwon, 2013; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Larner, 2000; Melamed, 2011; Spence, 2015). Of course, these logics apply to higher education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, higher education became increasingly privatized and commercialized in response to the 1970s’ economic recession and, in turn, neoliberalism, viewing students as consumers who attend college for individual benefit and financial gain (Giroux, 2014).

Yet, neoliberalism is not monolithic to its economic practices. Instead, neoliberalism can be understood as a confluence of economic practices and modes of governance, both of which shape subjectivity. Larner (2000) made the distinction between government and governance, arguing “that while neo-liberalism may mean less government, it does not follow that there is less governance” (p. 12). Larner (2000) expounded:

While on one hand neo-liberalism problematizes the state and is concerned to specify its limits through the invocation of individual choice, on the other hand it

involves forms of governance that encourage both institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market. (p. 12)

Accordingly, in addition to neoliberalism being understood as a set of economic practices, neoliberalism also can be understood as a form of social control rooted in Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality—the ways in which governments produce organizations and individuals as “apparatuses of security” by employing “calculations and tactics” that prioritize the nation's economy and provide social control (p. 102). Deflem (2008) noted that the techniques of social control—especially “continuous supervision, examination, and normalization of behavior”—are “[o]riented at the production of docile bodies” and are intended to be “useful economically, politically, and socially” (p. 3).

Through the development of citizen subjects, Foucault (1991) argued that governmentality results in “the development of a whole complex of *saviors*” (p. 103, emphasis in original). In other words, Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality implied that governments intentionally employ organized practices through their close affiliates, including higher education, to produce citizens, or subjects of the government, who not only uphold government policies and who are valuable to the economy, but also who manage other populations (e.g., low-income Communities of Color) via social control (Brown, 2003; Deflem, 2008; Larner, 2000; Mirowski, 2013). This understanding of governmentality translates to nonprofits who now directly manage social welfare programs that were previously run by the government as well as to individual service learners who work directly with nonprofits as part of their academic coursework. Simply put, neoliberal governmentality works to shape institutions and people to promote social

control of specific attitudes, behaviors, and bodies, both the self and others, into ones that are useful for the nation. This social control is a form of hegemony in action.

Accordingly, Larner (2000) said that common civic discourses of “a national community of citizens,” “active society,” and “public service” have all been manipulated under neoliberalism (p. 13).

**Neoliberalism and the Politics of Race.** Neoliberal economic practices and modes of governance result in “a form of rhetoric disseminated by hegemonic economic and political groups,” developing “the framework within which people represent their lived experience” (Larner, 2000, p. 12). Scholars have warned that this framework is shaped by rhetoric that reinforces and results in social inequality (Duggan, 2003; Larner, 2000).

Duggan (2003) asserted that though advocates of the deregulation of social welfare programs contend that neoliberal economic practices promote a form of equality for all, equality under neoliberalism is “a stripped-down, nonredistributive form of ‘equality’ designed for global consumption...and compatible with continued upward redistribution of resources” (p. XII). In agreement, scholars have argued that neoliberalism promotes a false sense of equality under the guise of multiculturalism (Case & Ngo, 2017; Duggan, 2003; Melamed, 2006, 2011; Mills, 2015). Melamed (2011) posited that under this guise of multiculturalism, neoliberalism encompasses the ways in which the individualized and privatized rhetoric of neoliberalism comes together with coded discourses of political neutrality and color-blind racism to justify neoliberal practices. This is one example of how whiteness and neoliberalism are entangled.

Consequently, scholars have argued that neoliberalism caused, and continues to cause, systemic social issues to be reduced to individual flaws (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Lerner, 2000; Melamed, 2011; Mills, 2015). Scholars have posited that social issues, such as those dealing with race, have largely disappeared from public concern under neoliberalism (Duggan, 2003; Oforiwaa Gtamera & Burke, 2018). Duggan (2003), for instance, pointed to President Bill Clinton's 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families as examples of neoliberalism masking issues of race through a discourse of promoting "self-esteem" and "empowerment" through work "opportunity" (p. 16).

The individual and personal responsibility promoted through these pieces of legislation under neoliberalism can be interpreted as a form of governance and power (Ah Kwon, 2013) that aimed to improve the economy by positioning individuals' values, habits, and desires as wanting, for instance, to graduate from high school, attend college, get a job, and buy a home. Notably, these values and goals are similar to those of whiteness (Fraser-Burgess & Davis, 2017; Sue, 2016), which Leonardo (2004) described as historical processes that have enabled white supremacy. Hence, Duggan (2003) further reflected that under neoliberalism, race and class, as well as gender and sexuality, are "dismissed as merely cultural, private, or trivial" despite always intersecting with the neoliberal project (p. XIV). Here, again, we see how neoliberalism can converge with, for instance, the color-blind racism and other contours of whiteness and white supremacy.

**Considering the Influence of Neoliberalism on Higher Education.** Much of neoliberalism's influence on higher education was previously discussed. For example, earlier in this Chapter, I discussed how higher education became increasingly privatized

and commercialized in response to the 1970s' economic recession and, in turn, neoliberalism, viewing students as consumers who attend college for individual benefit and financial gain (Giroux, 2014).

Contemporary scholars have continued to theorize the impact and implications of neoliberalism on higher education as a direct threat to colleges and universities (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Melamed, 2011; Oforiwaa Gtamera & Burke, 2018; Saunders & Blanco Ramirez, 2017). Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux (2002, 2014), born in Providence, RI, has been a vocal critic on the matter, arguing that neoliberalism poses direct threats to students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Summarizing these threats, Giroux (2014) asserted that neoliberalism has implicated higher education through

the increasing pace of the corporatization and militarization of the university, the squelching of academic freedom, the rise of an ever increasing contingent of part-time faculty, the rise of a bloated managerial class, and the view that students are basically consumers and faculty providers of a saleable commodity such as a credential or a set of workplace skills. More striking still is the slow death of the university as a center of critique, vital source of civic education, and crucial public good. (p. 17)

For these reasons, Giroux (2002) has called neoliberalism's influence on higher education "the most dangerous ideology of the current historic moment" (p. 428).

**Considering the Influence of Neoliberalism on Service Learning and Community Engagement.** While this shift in the physical infrastructure for social welfare programs under neoliberalism was occurring, Hyatt (2001) and Raddon and Harrison (2015) wrote that service learning was simultaneously gaining considerable

national attention due to federal efforts promoting and funding national community service programs throughout the 1990s. For example, Hyatt (2001) and Raddon and Harrison (2015) pointed to the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and argued that these federal policies can be viewed as efforts to mobilize citizens, including college students, to work directly with nonprofits, supporting social welfare programs previously run by the government. Other federal programs specifically provided funding to colleges and universities to create partnerships with their local nonprofits. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Centers Program invested \$45 million in campus community partnerships between 1994 and 2002 (Hartley & Saltmarsh, 2016). Yet, Castañeda and Krupczynski (2018) questioned if these various funding streams permitted campuses to view communities as a source of revenue rather than transformative partnerships.

Accordingly, scholars have questioned if these various funding streams have allowed colleges and universities "to present a kinder face" by fashioning their campuses into a corporate brand of "giving back" through service to the local community (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 141). Scholars have argued that campuses use student engagement surveys and high-profile exemplars involving students' community engagement experiences as ways to market themselves, including attracting and retaining students as well as competing for private funds (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015; Scott, 2009). For these reasons, Scott (2009) reflected that under neoliberalism, service learning and community engagement, to administrators, have



become akin to the market-driven and public relations aims of corporate employee volunteer programs.

Though Radest (1993) did not explicitly name neoliberalism, writing in the early formative years of national community service programs, he acknowledged the tensions that contemporary service learning scholars have raised. Radest (1993) wrote that, while national community service programs responded to social issues in a way that mobilized citizens, including college students, some viewed such programs as relinquishing the government from its responsibility to social welfare. Others, Radest (1993) said, “saw service as a way of providing cheap labor to meet social needs” (p. 32). As such, questions have been raised as to whether the emergence of national community service programs were created to develop “a more enlightened or more affluent economy” (Radest, 1993, p. 32) by developing citizens who were aligned with federal economic priorities (Dennis, 2009; Hyatt, 2001; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015).

Given efforts by the government and higher education to facilitate service learning through formalized “credit-bearing education experience[s]” (Hyatt, 2001, p. 8), students are “incorporated into this larger social agenda of vilifying ‘big government’” (Hyatt, 2001, p. 12) and valorizing “citizen-volunteer identities” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p.145). Accordingly, Hyatt (2001) and Raddon and Harrison (2015) theorized that service learning has become a strategy of the government to produce neoliberal citizens. Hyatt (2001) described neoliberal citizens as those,

Who accept a state that is now ostensibly much less interventionist and regulatory than was previously the case and who are given to understand that part of their

obligation as ‘good’ citizens is to participate vigorously in the voluntary sector organisations and activities. (p. 6)

Further demonstrating the values of neoliberalism, Raddon and Harrison (2015) wrote, “To be a neo-liberal citizen is to valorize individualism; to self-identify as a consumer; [and] to naturalize and accept the discipline of competitive markets” (p. 138). As a strategy of the government, scholars have argued that service learning and community engagement can reproduce institutional roles within the market, while constructing, rationalizing, and regulating society through neoliberal citizenship (Hyatt, 2001; Orphan & O’Meara, 2016; Raddon & Harrison, 2015).

While a paradox of neoliberalism may suggest that students perform in their best interest by focusing on personal success and gainful employment, these notions “merely [obfuscate] the reality that such ‘choices’ have been narrowly circumscribed by bureaucratic systems and political interests” (Fletcher & Piemonte, 2017, p. 398). Likewise, Kliwer (2013) asserted that though the federal government and higher education have historically promoted service learning as educating for citizenship, their efforts can be “completely defined in relation to a market society” (p. 73). In other words, the federal government (and higher education) are responsible for shifting state responsibility to volunteers who “perform” service and are involved in community work and, in turn, receive a credential that can be placed on a resume, transcript, and highlighted in an employment interview as a way to make one more marketable for the workforce (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Hyatt, 2001; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015).

Dennis (2009) argued that in addition to “privatism,” “consumerism,” and “an ethos of hyper-competition and radical individualism,” neoliberalism, as both economic practices and modes of governance, emphasizes civic discourses, including the importance of civic engagement within higher education (p. 155). Yet, Dennis (2009), like Foucault (1991), warned that civic engagement under neoliberalism is always facilitated by the government. Dennis (2009) said neoliberalism consists of an “apolitical notion of community and unproblematic definition of civic engagement as a priori virtue” (p. 156). This results in a service learning pedagogy and practice that under neoliberalism (and whiteness) positions communities through political neutrality and color-blind racism (Hyatt, 2001). Concepts explicitly naming and dealing with social issues, such as systemic issues related to race and racism, are often left out of service learning courses and replaced with “depoliticized terms like ‘social capital’ and ‘capacity building,’” abstractions that seem to suggest that damaged communities can be rebuilt wholly from within if only enough good will and volunteer labour is made available” (Hyatt, 2001, p. 9).

Thus, Dennis (2009) asserted that though neoliberalism may appear to foster civic engagement, it represents an “intensive restatification at a distance” (p. 158). Dennis (2009) continued to say that while neoliberalism aims to advance the economy, it also shapes institutions and people to deliver services to “specific populations” that, in turn, provide social control for the government (p. 158). Hence, it is noteworthy to restate that though higher education has seen a growth in the number of BIPOC students and faculty involved in service learning (Harper, 2009; Hutson & Wulliford, 2018; Wheatle & BrckaLorenz, 2015), historically, the pedagogy and practice has been predominantly

implemented by White faculty, who send White, middle-class students into low-income Communities of Color (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Butin, 2006; Green, 2001, 2003). This mirrors the all-too-common narrative of White bodies surveilling and controlling BIPOC, a foundational dynamic of white supremacy (Mills, 1997). Therefore, the reproduction of a service learning and community engagement that is often presented from a place of “goodness” and charitable work may replicate the process of surveillance and social control under neoliberalism and whiteness.

Mitchell and colleagues (2012) inferred that service learning operates as a pedagogy of whiteness that favors student learning and development, as well as institutional goals, while having a minimal impact on communities. Similarly, Kliewer (2013) argued that because the current form of service learning was developed, institutionalized, and, in turn, partly shaped by neoliberalism, “communities still confront many of the same injustices and inequalities that inspired the contemporary civic engagement movement” (p. 72). Despite more recent measures to support a national service agenda and higher education’s civic work under President Barack Obama (e.g., the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 and a National Task Force for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement), scholars have continued to argue that service learning and community engagement favor student learning and development, having a minimal impact on communities (Butin, 2010; Mitchell, 2015; Stoecker, 2016).

Kliewer (2013) insisted that “There needs to be an extensive consideration of how neoliberal ideology shapes the civic engagement movement” (p. 77). In drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism, as well as the literature reviewed throughout this Chapter, I agree and further contend that extensive

consideration for both the influences of white supremacy and neoliberalism are not only necessary to better understand what is happening with service learning and community engagement in higher education, but more specifically how community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement work. Before presenting my findings in relation to these theoretical perspectives, Chapter Three presents a thorough overview of the qualitative research approach used for this inquiry, including the steps of data collection and analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

Because community voices and perspectives have been largely missing from the service learning and community engagement scholarship, this qualitative inquiry, drawing on a case study research approach (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018) and primarily informed by interviews (Seidman, 2019), as well as the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism, aimed to engage, interpret, and record a multivocal account of how one neighborhood described and understood their experiences with community engagement by one college. Specifically, I explored how community members from the Smith Hill neighborhood in Providence, RI described and understood their experiences with community engagement, including its racial and economic realities, by PC, with particular attention to FIPS and PSP. I engaged multiple community voices and perspectives involved in the college's community engagement efforts within Smith Hill, ranging from residents to staff, leaders, and board members from community organizations to campus stakeholders. Guiding this inquiry were two research questions:

- How do Smith Hill community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement by Providence College?
- How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within Providence College's community engagement work impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

The following outlines the usefulness of qualitative research methods in answering these questions by first describing the research approach. Then, I outline the design of this inquiry, including the research site and context, sampling procedures, and the specifics of

data collection and analytic methods. Finally, I discuss this study's limitations and delimitations.

### **Research Approach**

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks to inform the study of a research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through various data collection methods (e.g., interviews and informal conversations, observations and field notes, memos to self, document collection, photographs, etc.), qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2). While “in the field” collecting data, Luttrell (2010) stated that prior assumptions and “theoretical plotting” often are met with “serendipity and surprise,” which causes research questions and the overall approach to shift and evolve throughout the research process (p. 160). Through an iterative and concurrent process with data collection, qualitative researchers analyze their data to establish patterns and themes in an attempt “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 2).

With a commitment to critical community-based qualitative research, Fine (2018) argued, however, that “‘voices’ alone will not suffice” (p. 21). Because community voices and perspectives often have been left out of traditional academic research, Fine (2018) stressed that qualitative researchers

[C]arry the responsibility to theorize, historicize, make visible, re-present, and re-circulate their stories...And we are obligated to animate the histories, structures, policies, ideologies, and practices that have spawned their social exclusion, and perhaps have fomented their deep commitments to justice. (p. 12)

Fine (2018) continued that critical community-based qualitative research is a collective practice of not only bearing witness and documenting community voices and perspectives, but also “revealing resistance [to injustices], forgoing common interests and provoking possibilities” (p. 122). Drawing on these understandings of qualitative research, the aim of this inquiry was to not only make sure that community voices and perspectives were heard, but also to: (a) (re)imagine with Smith Hill community members how higher education’s community engagement work can more intentionally understand and support the interests of community members, (b) support community assets, and (c) allow for neighborhoods, communities, and campuses to more intentionally engage in critical conversations around systemic social issues (Morton & Bergabauer, 2015). To do so, I drew on case study as a research approach, which is introduced next.

### ***Case Study as a Research Approach***

Miles and colleagues (2014) defined a case “as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 28). The study of a case(s) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting is known as case study research (Yin, 2018). Yet, qualitative researchers differ on how they understand and utilize case study research, ranging from a research approach or strategy to a methodology. For the purpose of this inquiry, I drew on Stake (2005) and others who believe case study research is not a methodology but a choice of what is to be studied; an in-depth exploration into a phenomenon bounded by contextual factors, such as time and place. Schwandt and Gates (2018) contended that this choice of what is to be studied is not from a predetermined list, but something that is already out there.



Yet, in having to make the choice of what is to be studied, case study research acknowledges that not everything can be studied. Stake (2005) wrote, “the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing and anyone’s telling” (p. 456). A single case, like the one in this inquiry, contains multiple subcases that all have their own unique contexts—much like the way multiple communities can be nested within one larger community, as discussed in Chapter One. For example, the multiple community members and groups involved in their inquiry (e.g., Smith Hill residents, community organizations, campus stakeholders) all have their own unique contexts. Though “[q]ualitative case study calls for the examination of the complexities,” the story presented through case study research will always be partial and ongoing (Stake, 2005, p. 449).

In drawing on case study as a research approach, I acknowledge that, like all research I would argue, this inquiry is bounded by several contextual factors. These factors include the geographic location of the Smith Hill neighborhood and PC (on the East Coast in Providence, RI), the institutional context of PC (a regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic, liberal arts college that has an academically situated undergraduate community engagement program), and the timing of this inquiry, which partially occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, this inquiry is partial, ongoing, and is not necessarily generalizable to all colleges and universities who engage in service learning and community engagement. However, Stake (1995) argued that “[w]e do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case” (p. 4).

Still, single cases can have “some utility beyond itself” (Schwandt & Gates, 2018, p. 34) and are likely representative of a broader set of cases (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). Yin

(2018) argued that a single case can be vivid and illuminating into the phenomenon and has “the opportunity to shed empirical light about some theoretical concepts or principles” (p. 39). With a critical orientation, a single case can “represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory. Such a study even can help to refocus future investigations in an entire field” (Yin, 2018, p. 49). Thus, this inquiry, despite being a single case, can provide insights into the local or micro level of PC’s community engagement work within Smith Hill and other local neighborhoods as well as the larger macrolevel processes of service learning and community engagement across U.S. higher education.

### **Research Setting and Context**

#### ***Smith Hill, Providence, Rhode Island***

As one of three neighborhoods immediately surrounding PC, the Smith Hill neighborhood of Providence, RI abuts the southeast corner of the college’s campus. Smith Hill was originally Narragansett tribal territory prior to the erasure of Indigenous peoples through conquest, theft, and establishment as part of the Providence Plantations in 1636 by Roger Williams and later named after John Smith (Calloway, 2019; City of Providence, 2020). As part of the Providence Plantations, Smith Hill became a common land for livestock by early European settlers (City of Providence, 2020).

Throughout the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, industrialization and immigration transformed Smith Hill into “a dense urban neighborhood” (City of Providence, 2020, p. 19). The neighborhood originally attracted immigrants from Ireland and later Eastern Europe and Balkan countries given its proximity to the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers, which provided power for industrial mills.

Morton (2019) described Smith Hill's immigration history throughout this time as connected to the:

Irish fleeing the famines of the 1850s, Jews fleeing the pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Armenians who survived and fled the genocide that took place under cover of World War I, [and] black families moving north during the Great Migration of the 1940s and '50s. (p. 30)

When PC was founded in 1917, it primarily served students from local, White, Catholic working class and immigrant families, including from Smith Hill (Morton, 1997).

However, during my data collection, community members were not able to identify anyone they knew from Smith Hill who had attended the college.

Many of the industrial mills, as well as factories, in Smith Hill and the surrounding neighborhoods began to decline and eventually closed following the end of World War II. By 1940, Brien and Harlam (1997) wrote that about one in five Smith Hill homes were vacant due to the closing of industrial mills and factories and white suburban flight. It also did not help that in the early 1960s, the neighborhood was physically split in two by the construction of Interstate 95 (I-95), which demolished parts of the neighborhood. Yet, immigrants, specifically exiles and refugees, continued to settle in the neighborhood since the 1980s. Cambodian and Laotian families settled in Smith Hill following the Vietnam War during the late 1980s and 1990s. Immigrants from Central America (e.g., Guatemala and El Salvador) also settled in Smith Hill throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. By 1997, Brien and Harlam (1997) wrote there were some 44 nationalities and 26 languages represented in the neighborhood. More recently, refugees from civil wars in Africa and the Middle East have settled in Smith Hill. Much of this

immigration history is embedded within buildings and structures throughout the neighborhood.

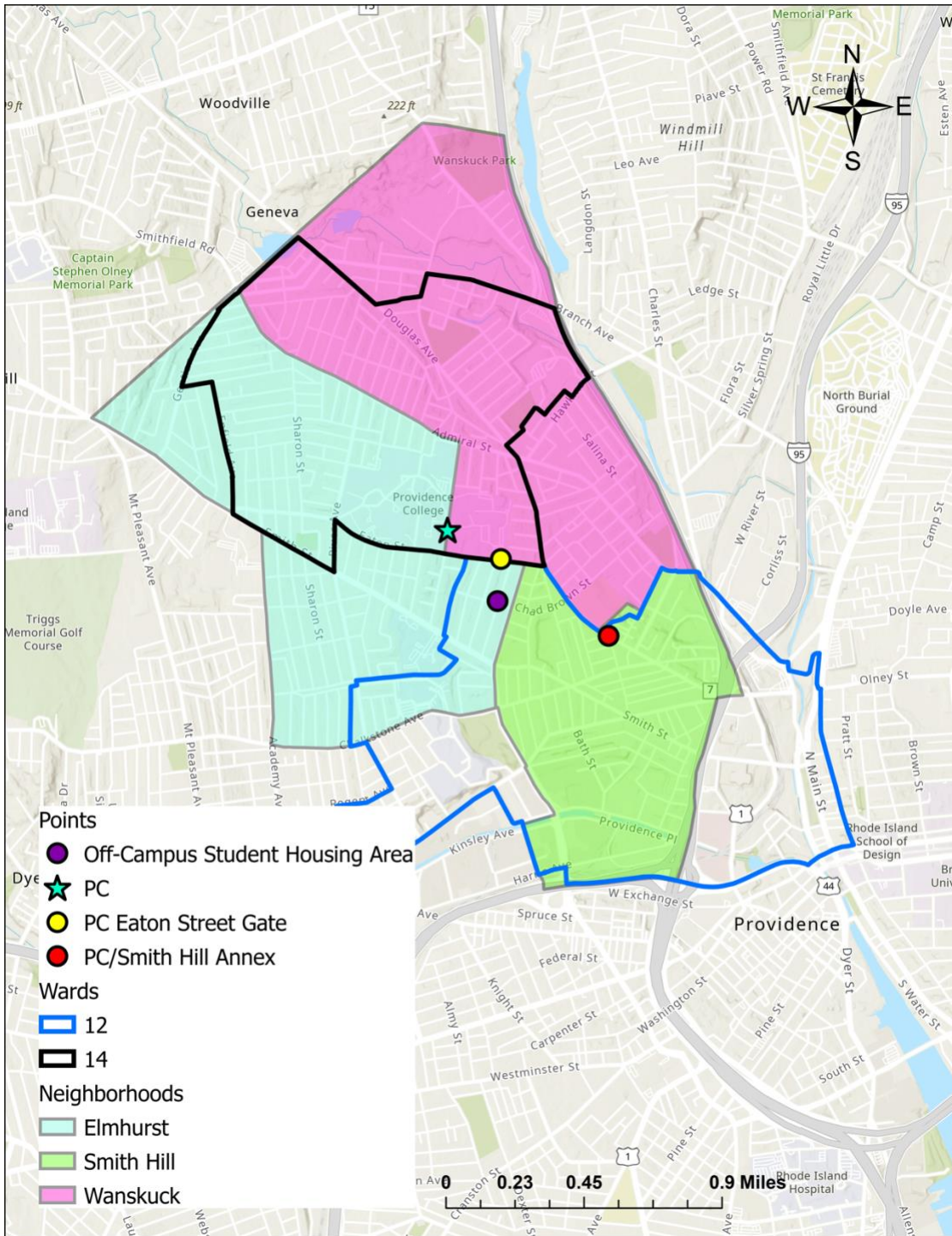
**A “Community Walk.”** As a PSP student, my courses often included a “community walk” around Smith Hill with Keith and residents. For example, I remember one community walk specifically focused on the history of Cambodian and Laotian families immigrating to Smith Hill with Tou, a Laotian Smith Hill resident. Tou, was a PSP Community Advisor for a course I took during my junior year of college with Keith, entitled, “Smith Hill: A Study in Community and Place.” Tou grew up in Smith Hill and was a former member of Laos Pride, a gang based in Smith Hill, before becoming a streetworker with the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence (ISPN), working to prevent gang-related violence in Smith Hill and other neighborhoods throughout Providence. Tou met Keith through ISPN and, in 2007, they co-founded Rec Night together, which was a “youth positive” space for Smith Hill gang-involved youth (Morton, 2019). (I will elaborate on Rec Night later in this Chapter.) During this community walk, I remember Tou organizing a meeting for the class with a group of Laotian adults who regularly gathered behind the Smith Street 7-Eleven, on Violet Street, about half a mile from the college. The meeting was an opportunity for residents and college students (who likely would have otherwise not had a reason to talk to one another) to meet and have conversations. Still, I recall what seemed to be an invisible line physically separating the residents and students; with neither group willing to cross that line. (When I met with Tou in February 2020—almost a decade after I first met Tou as a college student—he told me how he, too, was incredibly uncomfortable and nervous about bringing students to this community space.)

As a researcher, I participated again in one of these community walks as part of my data collection. I walked into Smith Hill from PC's Eaton Street Gate, where a tall wrought iron fence perched upon a stone wall surrounded the college's lower campus. Walking out of the college's lower campus from the Eaton Street Gate placed me almost immediately in Smith Hill and Ward 12. (Wards were the City of Providence's City Council Districts.) It is noteworthy that the college was situated within a conflux of three neighborhoods' geographic boundaries and two Ward boundaries. The college itself technically fell within the Elmhurst and Wanskuck neighborhoods and Ward 14. However, right outside of the Eaton Street Gate was the political boundaries of Ward 12 and less than two blocks away was the geographic bounds of Smith Hill. This area immediately outside of the Eaton Street Gate was known as the college's off-campus student housing area.

Many community members I spoke with saw Smith Hill and Ward 12 to be one and the same. Likewise, though the college itself was not technically in Smith Hill and Ward 12, community members often viewed PC as part of the neighborhood and community given its proximity to both. For example, Ian, a Smith Hill resident stated, "I do consider PC part of Smith Hill. For me, not geopolitically—I don't really consider the lines—there's a lot of bleed." Figure 1 displays where PC was situated in relation to Smith Hill and Ward 12 as well as Elmhurst, Wanskuck, and Ward 14.

**Figure 1**

*Providence College and the Community*



From here, I walked to St. Patrick's Cemetery, located about half a mile from the college, walking along the 600-foot long, five-foot high concrete wall that fronts Douglas Avenue. Filled to capacity with over 18,000 burials, many Irish immigrants and their families are buried in this cemetery. The cemetery was generally associated with St. Patrick's Catholic Church on Smith Street. Continuing down Douglas Avenue, I passed the Annex and directly next door to that was the Brooklyn Coffee and Tea House (BCTH), which was once the Armenian Cultural Center. I held a handful of interviews and other conversations with community members at the Annex and BCTH, as well as Baba's Original New York System, Dunkin', and the Capitol Hill Taqueria, all on Smith Street. Behind BCTH was Times<sup>2</sup> STEM Academy, a K–12 charter school, which was a popular service learning community placement when I was a college student. Not far from the Annex, BCTH, and Times<sup>2</sup> was the Armenian Heritage Park, located at the corner of Douglas and Chalkstone Avenues with a 30-foot circular, granite stone memorial engraved with, "Wherever Armenian is spoken, there is Armenia."

Another historic marker down Douglas Avenue was the Sons of Jacob synagogue, which, though struggling, was the only one of three synagogues that was still open in the neighborhood. In front of the Sons of Jacob synagogue, at the corner of Douglas Avenue and Orms Street, was a sign that reads, "WELCOME to Historic SMITH HILL." Driving from Connecticut to PC with my mother, I saw this sign every time we got off of Exit 23 from I-95 North and turned right onto Douglas Avenue, commonly referred to as the "corridor" to PC. Standing in front of the Sons of Jacob with the RI State House on the right, looking across I-95 towards the Marriott Hotel was "Hard Scrabble" and "Snow Town," two once Black neighborhoods devastated by mobs of working-class whites in

1824 and 1831 respectively. Later, before the Marriott Hotel, this area was home to the Celebrity Club in the 1950s, a racially integrated jazz club. Musicians like Louis Armstrong and Count Basie performed and lodged at the Celebrity Club because they were not allowed to stay in the white only downtown Providence venues where they performed.

From the Sons of Jacob synagogue, as I made my way up Smith Street, I passed St. Patrick's Church and Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen, another one of the college's community placements. Diagonally across the street from St. Patrick's Church was Carroll Towers, a public housing development operated by the Providence Housing Authority (PHA), where I spent much of my time as a service learner from 2007-2011, helping to organize adult literacy and English as a Second Language courses, BINGO and other activities, and cultural programming for residents. In addition to St. Patrick's and Sons of Jacob, I passed the other two, now closed, synagogues and an old bathhouse, which served Eastern European and Armenian families who did not have running hot water. The bathhouse became a brothel in the 1950s and was now owned by the Love Divine Cherubim and Seraphim Inc., a Nigerian American congregation. There also were several other places to worship in Smith Hill representing the various racial and ethnic communities in the neighborhood, including a storefront style church, Iglesia de Dios de la Profecia, serving as both a place of worship and social service provider mainly for Central American residents. Also, along Smith Street were several Black, Hispanic, and Southeast Asian markets and restaurants, such as the Lao Lanexang Market, a Southeast Asian market, which further represented Smith Hill's immigration history.



Harry Kizirian Elementary School (Camden Avenue Elementary School until 2001) was another stop on this community walk. Harry Kizirian, which had been and continued to be one of the college's community partners since 1994, was named after the son of Armenian refugees who lived in the neighborhood. The school historically had represented the diversity of the neighborhood. However, today, Harry Kizirian, like the Providence Public School District at large, had been known for low student achievement and widespread dysfunction, which led the state of RI to take over all Providence public schools in 2019 (John Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, 2019).

Weaving throughout the streets of Smith Hill, the abovementioned immigration history also is characterized through four U.S. National Register Historic Districts, representing various densely built residential properties and sections of the neighborhood from around 1870-1930: The Smith Hill Historic District, The Cottages Historic District, The Pekin Street Historic District, and The Oakland Avenue Historic District. These historic districts provide a glimpse into what living in Smith Hill once was like, ranging from seven workers' cottages built on a lot that would legally hold two homes today to densely built triple-decker homes.

**Smith Hill Demographics.** In spring 2020, Smith Hill's 0.65 square miles was home to a total population of about 6,100 residents with a median age of 32. A majority of residents identified as BIPOC, with 45% of residents identifying as Hispanic, 16% as Black, and 12% as Asian. Twenty-two percent of residents identified as White and 5% identified as other. Thirty-two percent of residents identified as foreign-born.

Smith Hill has had a long-standing reputation throughout Providence for being a "dangerous place." This has largely been attributed to the neighborhood's youth gangs,

such as Laos Pride as well as street violence and drugs. Morton (2019) wrote that community members often viewed youth violence “as a root cause of much that is wrong with the neighborhood,” including poverty, unemployment, unstable living conditions, the neighborhood’s transiency, and poor schools (p. 42).

The median income in Smith Hill was \$41,161, which was comparable to the City of Providence’s median income of \$42,150. The median income in both Smith Hill and the City of Providence at large were less than PC’s \$53,440 annual tuition (not including room and board). The unemployment rate in Smith Hill was 8%. Many community members identified Smith Hill as a “transient neighborhood.” Therefore, it is noteworthy that 80% ( $n=2,520$ ) of Smith Hill’s 3,150 total housing units were renter occupied. On the one hand, many community members said that these renter occupied housing units were often owned by absentee landlords. On the other hand, community members said that local private housing developers and managers who specialized in off-campus housing for college students owned much of the renter occupied housing units in the area immediately outside of the college’s Eaton Street Gate.

Overall, there was a growing demand for apartment rentals in this area not only by PC students, but also by Johnson and Wales University (JWU) and Rhode Island College (RIC) students. Smith Hill was known for being more affordable and having a larger selection of rental units than other neighborhoods closer to JWU and RIC. The other 20% ( $n=630$ ) of Smith Hill’s total housing units were owner-occupied. The median home value in Smith Hill was \$170,089. (All demographic data presented in this section was from the City of Providence’s July 2020 report, *Smith Street Revitalization Plan*.)

**Smith Hill Community Organizations.** Since the 1970s, nonprofits and other community organizations, including informal groups of residents, had come together through various initiatives to focus their efforts on community development, including providing affordable housing and other social services as well as expanding small business opportunities in Smith Hill (City of Providence, 2020). For example, the Smith Hill Community Development Cooperation (CDC), which was originally established by residents, including Ms. Althea's late mother, Mary Jones, in 1992, was a nonprofit "dedicated to providing safe, affordable housing" as well as offering "resident services, community garden beautification, youth programming, and neighborhood events" both in Smith Hill and the adjacent Wanskuck neighborhood (CDC, 2021, paras. 1-3). Other community organizations included the Capital City Community Center, Capitol Health Center, Carroll Towers, Harry Kizirian Elementary School, the Library, Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen, Selim Madelin Rogers Recreation Center (Rec Center), Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center, Sojourner House, Times<sup>2</sup> STEM Academy, among others. All of these community organizations provided social services in the neighborhood and had campus community partnerships with PC, mainly through FIPS and PSP. half full, llc. was another community organization in the neighborhood who had a partnership with FIPS and PSP. half full was a marketing and strategic consulting small business that helped individuals, teams, and organizations "utilize an optimistic and common sense approach to help...achieve goals perceived as impossible" (half full, 2021, para. 1). half full's owner and founder, Rebecca, grew up in Smith Hill and her late father, Tom Twitchell, had helped start the CDC with other residents, including Mary

Jones. Mary Jones and Tom Twitchell also were original FIPS/PSP Community Advisors beginning in the 1990s.

These various community organizations and community members all had their own relationships and partnerships with PC and, specifically, FIPS and PSP. In other words, not all of these campus community partnerships existed for the same reasons. Some community organizations like the CDC and the Library had been consistent partners with the college over the past several decades, working with students each semester through various curricular and co-curricular programs. The Library, for instance, had been supporting community engaged courses with direct service requirements for nearly 30 years. The CDC did less with community engaged courses but had partnered with the college on several key community projects since 1994, which will be discussed later in this Chapter. Other campus community partnerships had been episodic over time. For example, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 limited the work students could do with the Smith Hill Health Center. Sojourner House, which offered a number of services to victim-survivors of domestic and sexual abuse also had a volunteer onboarding program that did not fit into a traditional academic semester time frame, limiting service learning opportunities for students. The Smith Hill Health Center and Sojourner House tended to support, for instance, longer-term community-based internships.

While I talked with community members from a number of the abovementioned community organizations as part of this inquiry, I predominantly engaged with them through the Smith Hill Partner's Initiative (SHPI). SHPI was established in 2015 and was made up over one dozen Smith Hill nonprofits and other community organizations. SHPI

did not have its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, but it served as the official Neighborhood Association of Smith Hill (City of Providence, 2021). Through SHPI, of which FIPS was a founding member, representatives from community organizations met monthly to support Smith Hill community members through, for instance, sponsoring research on neighborhood concerns, collaborating on and submitting grants to support community initiatives, and planning an annual block party held each summer. In addition to working directly with community organizations, FIPS and PSP students were involved in SHPI through their PSP course work, Feinstein Community Fellows, and CWS. For example, Sara, a senior PSP major was completing her yearlong Feinstein Community Fellowship with half full, though she was specifically working on several time-limited projects with SHPI.

While SHPI was open to residents, it was largely made up of nonprofits. However, the Smith Hill Advocacy & Resource Partnership (SHARP), which grew out of conversations among residents at the Ward 12 City Councilwoman’s meetings in 2019, was mainly made up of residents. SHARP, of which Ms. Althea was a co-founder of, had about 30 resident members in spring 2020. SHARP, whose slogan was “Focusing on Results,” had a mission of being a “grassroots workforce of neighbors, residents, and stakeholders” from Smith Hill and surrounding neighborhoods to “work together as a community to develop a problem solving process where we identify problems, share information, brainstorm and implement solutions in an effort to solve those problems.” Because service learning and community engagement has largely operated in a binary of “campus” and “community,” with “the community” most often represented by nonprofits, the college was most positioned to work with the community organizations involved in

SHPI given their infrastructure to support service learning and community engagement. However, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary closure of the Annex, SHARP held their weekly meetings at the Annex. And during the spring 2020 academic semester, about 18 PC students enrolled in “Philosophy of Catholic Social Thought,” a course that satisfied the college’s Civic Engagement Proficiency, were working with SHARP to develop an online/social media presence and resident e-newsletter as part of their course’s community engagement requirement.

It is noteworthy that throughout my data collection there was ongoing tension between SHARP and SHPI, specifically between SHARP and the CDC. With the transiency in the neighborhood, it was difficult for both groups to get residents to engage in community meetings and events. Still, SHARP worried that the community organizations in the neighborhood did not necessarily represent residents, mainly because an overwhelming majority of the community organization staff were white and did not live in Smith Hill. Thus, SHARP believed that the interests and priorities of the community organizations were different from residents’ concerns. In an effort to engage, interpret, and record the voices of a range of community members, I worked with both SHARP and SHPI to understand both nonprofit and other community organizations’ and residents’ perspectives on PC’s community engagement work in Smith Hill.

***Providence College’s Service Learning and Community Engagement Work within Smith Hill (1994-2020)***

While PC was positioned at the conflux of three neighborhoods (Elmhurst, Smith Hill, and Wanskuck), early on, FIPS (and later PSP) built a “core” relationship with

Smith Hill (Morton, 2019, p. 29).<sup>7</sup> The relationship was in large part due to the community's receptiveness to FIPS. In 1992, the CDC was established by local residents, including Mary Jones and Tom Twitchell, whom also had been on the Research Team tasked with designing the PSP academic program and had expressed an interest in finding ways to work with the college, specifically through FIPS and PSP. There also was interest among the then Camden Avenue Elementary School (now Harry Kizirian Elementary School) to find ways to work with FIPS and PSP. From the college at large and, specifically, FIPS's perspectives, working and developing a relationship and partnerships with community organizations like the CDC and Camden Avenue Elementary School not only offered service learning opportunities that were proximate to the college, but also the opportunity for the college to build a relationship with Smith Hill, which had been relatively negative up until this point. Prior to 1994 when FIPS was established, the college had little, if any, curricular or co-curricular community engagement initiatives occurring within Smith Hill.

As the founding Associate Director of FIPS, Keith's primary role included developing relationships and partnerships with communities external to the campus, including Smith Hill. Early projects that FIPS and PSP collaborated on with Smith Hill

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<sup>7</sup> Developing a "core" relationship with Smith Hill did not mean that FIPS and PSP did not work within Elmhurst and Wanskuck. While the research setting and context of this inquiry specifically focused on Smith Hill, it is noteworthy that FIPS and PSP worked and had continued to work within Elmhurst (e.g., Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School, Nathanael Green Middle School, St. Pius V Catholic Church) and Wanskuck (e.g., Wanskuck Community Library) through various curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs. This does, however, lead to questions about whether or not Elmhurst and Wanskuck were not as receptive to FIPS and PSP and/or were they not approached in the same ways as Smith Hill. Though beyond the scope of this inquiry, it is noteworthy that the field of service learning and community engagement tends to focus their work on materially poor communities (e.g., Smith Hill). What if materially wealthier communities (e.g., Elmhurst, which was predominantly white and more affluent than Smith Hill) were prioritized in service learning and community engagement for needing to interrupt their values of, for instance, white supremacy that create inequality in the first place?

community organizations, specifically the CDC, included plans to develop an integrated initiative of housing, involving students conducting research on how to start a community land trust, collaborating on a microfinance project that used investments from residents to establish “The Smith Hill Neighborhood Fund,” and managing the rehabilitation of one of the CDC’s properties through homeownership. A key service learning project, however, was the development of a 10,00 square foot community garden directly adjacent to Camden Avenue Elementary School. Through a Learn and Serve America grant under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, a Child Opportunity Zone was created and ties between the elementary school curriculum and the garden were made. Two local supermarkets also sold produce from the garden. Donations were collected from the neighborhood to hire several neighborhood youth to run the garden and, at its prime, several hundred community members from residents to PC students, staff, and faculty volunteered in the garden.

Over the past three decades, community engagement initiatives had continued in partnership with Smith Hill community organizations, ranging from traditional service learning courses (e.g., direct service); to community-based internships, research, and capstone courses; to the Feinstein Community Fellows and CWS programs. The college at large also had sponsored one time day of service type activities, such as community cleanups and other neighborhood beautification type projects and had made financial investments in community organizations, including the CDC. A major financial investment by the college included a 2014 pledge of \$750,000 over three years to support the CDC’s affordable housing development projects (Troop, 2014). However, community members I talked with most often mentioned several community projects that college



students, staff, and faculty were involved in throughout the early 2000s. With the exception of the Annex, each of the following initiatives were elements of the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill that no longer existed. However, these projects remained important to this study because they shaped how community members talked about their experiences with the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill.

**Youth RAP (2002-2018).** The Youth Resident Activity Program (Youth RAP) was a program originally funded by RI Housing. The mission of Youth RAP, which resembled that of an afterschool program for youth residing in CDC housing, was “to provide neighborhood based programming that motivates youth to achieve excellence through living healthy lifestyles, fostering strong support systems, and becoming active members of the Smith Hill Community.” Youth RAP took place at 47 Goddard Street, a CDC completed housing complex, which included a relaxation space; a room for homework help, meetings, and crafts; a kitchen space; and an outdoor space for games. Youth RAP also included summer employment opportunities and outdoor recreation trips. Service learning and community engagement students were involved in Youth RAP through community engaged courses (e.g., service learning and internship courses) as well as co-curricular community engagement (e.g., CWS). Funding for Youth RAP was cut in 2013. Youth RAP then moved under the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) for a period of time, but PASA was not able to accommodate the number of youth participating in the program. In 2018, the CDC ended the Youth RAP program.

**Rec Night (2007-2015).** The idea for Rec Night started with Tou, who at the time was working as a streetworker for ISPN and was trying to gain access to the Rec Center in Smith Hill for the gang-involved youth he was working with. The Rec Center sat on what once was the 10,00 square foot community garden near Camden Avenue/Harry Kizirian Elementary School that the college had previously been involved in throughout the 1990s. (There was a much smaller community garden on that site during the time of this inquiry that FIPS and PSP were still involved in.) Because gang-involved youth are often considered “bad kids,” the Executive Director of the Rec Center was resistant to provide Tou access to the space. Tou connected with Keith through ISPN to help gain access to the space, which both Tou and Keith described as a political battle that included ISPN, PC/FIPS, the CDC, City Council representatives, police leadership, City of Providence and Recreation leaders, among others before Rec Night could be established.

In 2008, Rec Night began taking place at the Rec Center (and in a nearby park during the summer months) as a year-round, weekly, “safe-space” program for about 75-90 neighborhood youth to play basketball, table and board games, break-dance, eat pizza, and have conversations. Through Rec Night, youth also had opportunities to participate in activities and programs, such as attending PC basketball games and participating in nonviolence and leadership programs through the ISPN. Morton and Bergabauer (2015) wrote, “[m]ost nights, the participants represented one or two gangs, two or three ‘crews’ (less organized groups of 10 or so youth and young adults), and their friends and families” (p. 22). Staff from ISPN (many of them ex-gang members trained in nonviolence and youth development), staff from the Rec Center and other community

organizations, residents, college students, staff, and faculty, and, at times, local police also participated in Rec Night.

Service learning and community engagement students were involved in the program by “hanging out” with the youth, playing games, participating in other activities, and, when requested, offering homework help and tutoring. Rec Night began as a completely volunteer run program with decisions being made and resources provided by community partners involved in the program, including FIPS. Later, an anonymous donor made a donation to FIPS specifically to cover Rec Night’s operational costs. Though Rec Night became associated with significantly reducing youth-on-youth violence in the neighborhood, the program ended in 2015 for a number of reasons, including recurring issues with accessing the Rec Center as a space for Rec Night and funding.

**Providence College/Smith Hill Annex (2011-Present).** With the success of Rec Night, the college, mainly FIPS, and community partners began to imagine what a “free space” (Evans & Boyte, 1986) or a “third space” (Oldenburg, 1999) might look like as a method of community engagement. The result was the Annex, a 1,000 square foot storefront on Douglas Avenue, which was part of a CDC housing project of six commercial storefronts and 13 condominiums. Originally leased by the college from the CDC, during the time of this inquiry the college was leasing the space from a chiropractic firm. (The CDC’s housing mixed-use commercial/condominiums opened the same week as the 2008 national real estate and financial markets collapsed, which resulted in the CDC later losing the property to foreclosure.)

Located about half a mile from the college’s campus, the Annex was a space made available for free “with the simple purpose of fostering conversation between

members of the College community and the Smith Hill community — resulting in increased mutual understanding and opportunities for collaboration” (FIPS, 2021, para. 1). Campus stakeholders referred to the Annex as taking seriously the challenge of public scholar Margaret Wheatley, who argued that, by “turning to one another,” listening to each other, and engaging in difficult conversations, we can restore hope for the future (Wheatley, 2002).

Since 2012, the Annex has supported short-term initiatives, such as art, dance, and enrichment programs; campus and community classes; meetings for community partners; potlucks; retreats; and workshops. For example, several PSP and GST courses had taken place at the Annex, including “The City And...” “The City And...” was a course periodically offered at the Annex that included PC students, College Unbound (CU) students,<sup>8</sup> and local community members (most often local high school students). Versions of the course have included, “The City And Its Youth,” “The City And Its Storytellers,” and “The City And Its Generations.”

During my data collection, about one dozen community groups were regularly using the Annex, including SHARP who not only was holding their weekly meetings at the Annex, but also two community classes: “Community 101A: Introduction Into Community Engagement” and “Community 101B: Introduction of Community Resources.” Other community groups using the space almost weekly included, the

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<sup>8</sup> CU was an independent college in Providence that largely served low-income working adults returning to college to earn their first degree. In 2015, CU was authorized as the 13th college in RI. In 2020, it was approved for regional accreditation, though CU had administered Pell Grants for its own students since 2019. Through CU’s Organization Leadership and Change major (the only major offered through the college), each student led a community-based action research project on an issue of public significance and integrate this effort with their family, work, and community lives.

Guatemalan Center of New England; Honduran Association of RI; New Life Church (NLC) United Holy Church; and Project 401, a grassroots Hip Hop collective.

NeighborWorks also was hosting a weekly landlord class at the Annex. Finally, informal groups of community members, including a young professionals group, a gaming community, and a support group for victim-survivors of sexual trauma also were using the Annex space during my data collection. The Annex temporarily closed in March 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Common Grounds Café (2014-2015).** Though the community members I talked with most often mentioned Youth RAP, Rec Night, and the Annex when talking about their experiences with PC's community engagement work, it is noteworthy that in the same complex as the Annex, also once included Common Grounds Café. Common Grounds Café opened in 2014, in one of the storefronts that a private owner had built out for a café but abandoned the project shortly after an official opening. The mission of the café was to create an additional space for PC and the Smith Hill community to come together. Morton and Twitchell (2016) wrote,

[T]he immediate goals of the Café were hiring a mix of 10-12 workers from campus [through CWS, undergraduate internships, and Graduate Assistantships] and community; serving fair trade coffee and locally sourced products; building a regular customer base; hosting events and meetings; displaying the work of local artists and crafts persons; catering events at the Annex (next door) and occasionally at other sites), and moving rapidly toward financial viability. (p. 6)

Startup resources were provided by the CDC (the official "owner" of Common Grounds Café) and PC (through FIPS, the School of Business, and executive

administration). Opening Common Grounds Café was student-driven, with PSP, GST, and students from the School of Business involved in crafting the mission statement, drafting initial financial and permitting/licensing documents, and creating marketing plans (e.g., a blog, Facebook page, flyer communication, GoFundMe page, and Twitter). half full provided ongoing consultation. While the café was marketed to the campus community and Annex users, there was limited outreach to Smith Hill residents. During its first year in operation, the café closed during the college's winter break and had limited summer hours, which "communicated to the community that Providence College, rather than the local community, was the main focus of the café" (Morton & Twitchell, 2016, p. 6). It also became known that the café's menu items and prices did not appeal to residents. The café's operational expenses exceeded its revenue and the café closed in 2015. Morton and Twitchell (2016) reflected that for the fate of the café to have changed, the operating budget and marketing plan should have been "pegged" to an annual calendar, "identifying busy and slow times" and "a customer base in both campus and neighborhood" (p. 8).

Morton and Bergabauer (2015) stated that Rec Night, the Annex, "The City and..." courses, and Common Grounds Café were all informed by models of critical service learning (see Mitchell, 2007, 2008) where relationships with community organizations and community members were placed at the center of the work over community impact and development. These various initiatives were largely informed and inspired by spaces, such as Jane Addams School for Democracy in Saint Paul, Minnesota and Miami University's Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, the college's lack of emphasis on centering relationships with

residents through, for instance, Common Grounds Café ultimately led to the café's closure. This particular community project leads to questions (that are beyond the scope of this inquiry, but still important to recognize) about what it means to center relationships in and amidst community when also relying on a capitalist model. Still, these projects remained important to this study because they shaped how community members talked about their experiences with the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill.

**Providence College's Community Engagement Work within Smith Hill (Winter/Spring 2020).** During my data collection, the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill was ongoing. As previously mentioned, Sara, a PSP major and Feinstein Community Fellow was working with SHPI through half full. A PSP practicum student also was working with half full on their youth-focused initiatives. The owner of half full, Rebecca, was a PSP Community Advisor in the "PSP 320/321: Practicum" with Keith, and half full's Events Coordinator, also a PSP alumna, was a PSP Community Advisor in one section of "PSP 101: Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities" with an Adjunct Faculty member.

Six PSP 101 students were completing their community engagement requirement at Harry Kizirian Elementary School with Walking School Bus, a Family Service of RI program. Another six PSP 101 students and two CWS students were completing their community engagement requirement at the Library. The PSP 101 students were specifically working with the Library's afterschool Homework Help program. One CWS student was working with the CDC and five CWS students were working at the Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center.

In addition to FIPS and PSP students working within Smith Hill, the college was donating left over food from their dining hall to Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen several times per week. Campus Ministry, who also engaged in service and community work throughout Providence, had on average about six students each week volunteering at Mary House. Campus Ministry had another 5 to 15 students volunteering each week at the Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center. And, as previously mentioned, about 18 PC students enrolled in “Philosophy of Catholic Social Thought” were working with SHARP to develop an online/social media presence and resident e-newsletter as part of their course’s community engagement requirement. Figure 2 displays these various community placements as well as some of the episodic partners previously mentioned. After having established the research setting and context, the following provides more procedural information about the research sample, data collection sources, and methods.

### **Research Sample, Data Collection Sources, and Methods**

Navigating entry into the field is an important part of the research process that can influence subsequent interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Luttrell (2010) said that research relationships are “at the heart of the research journey” (p. 160). Though I was an outsider to Smith Hill, my familiarity with the neighborhood, as well as with PC, FIPS, and PSP, allowed me to navigate entry and build research relationships differently than if I had not attended college, lived, and worked in this neighborhood previously.

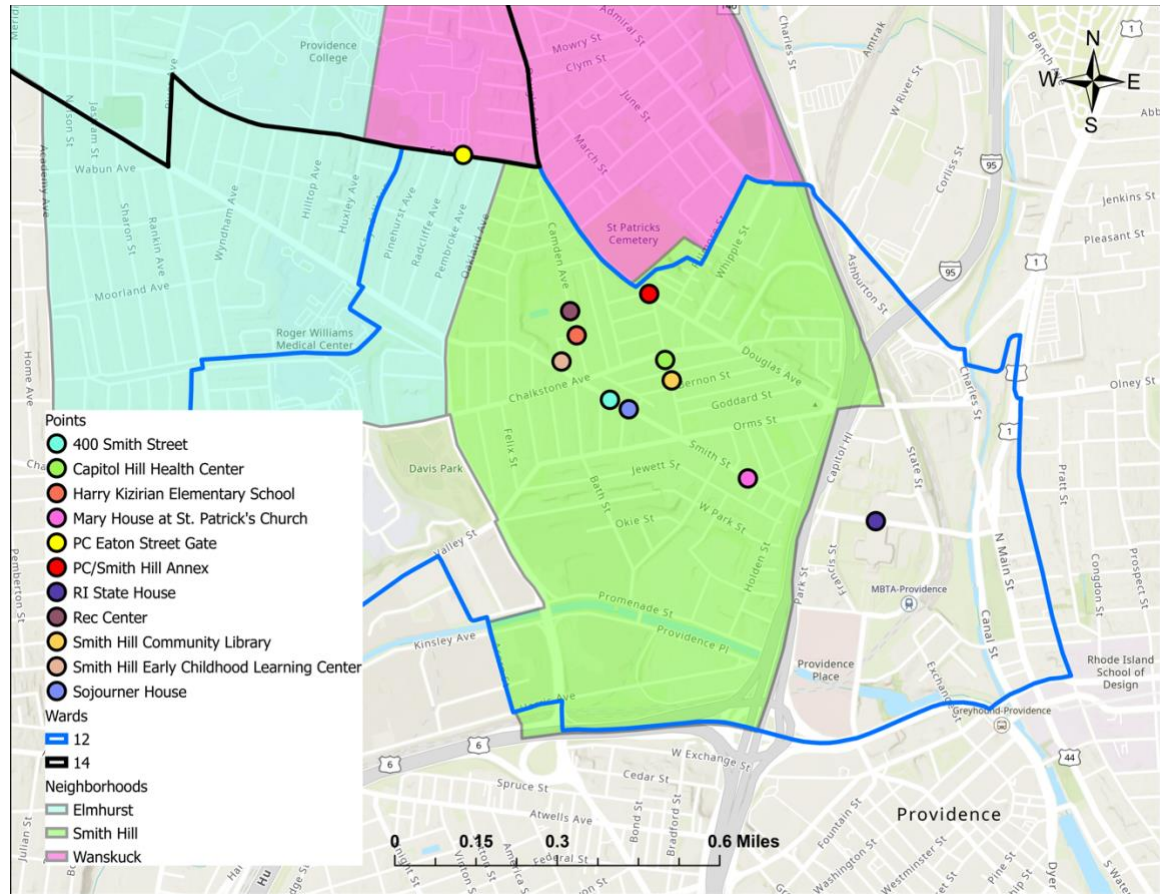
Throughout summer and fall 2019, I began having conversations with several PSP faculty members to gain a better understanding of what was happening with community engagement at the college and, specifically, within Smith Hill. I had maintained mentor



relationships and friendships with several of my former professors since graduating from PC in 2011, so reaching out to them to have these conversations was not out of the ordinary.

**Figure 2**

*Smith Hill Community Placements*



*Note.* “400 Smith Street” includes the CDC, half full, and SHPI. “PC/Smith Hill Annex” includes SHARP.

Through these initial conversations I learned, for instance, more about FIPS and PSP’s decision to turn away from the traditional concept of service learning. Though there were still several ways students could participate in community engagement work

within Smith Hill, faculty had various opinions on the level of community engagement happening within the neighborhood and whether or not the college was having an impact on the community. One PSP faculty member, for instance, described FIPS and PSP's overall community engagement work as "weak" and having minimal impact on the community. Another faculty member described FIPS and PSP's work as focused on "ethical capacity building" and the "idea of working deeply with the smallest set of organizations as possible." Deciding to pursue these contradictions, Keith became what Creswell and Poth (2018) would call my initial gatekeeper given his work and relationships within Smith Hill since 1994. As a gatekeeper, Keith helped reconnect me to the Smith Hill neighborhood and community, including FIPS and PSP's community partners.

With Keith's help, I made initial contact and had conversations with several Smith Hill community organization staff who had been working with the college for a number of years, including Jean, the Executive Director of the CDC. Keith also connected me with residents like Wole who, like many participants in this study, wore multiple hats in the neighborhood. Wole, a tall Black man who each time we met was wearing half full "merch" and a Nike hat, was the Youth Development Program Coordinator at half full. Though a small business, Wole described "the full" in half full's name as a "public give back." Wole primarily worked on the "the full" side running various youth programs, including personal leadership and college access programs and workshops. Wole also was a former participant of Youth RAP, co-ran Rec Night with Keith in 2015, had served as a PSP Community Advisor, and, as Keith described, was the "convener and sparkplug" of SHPI.

Through these conversations, I aimed to listen and learn more about what was happening with the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill from community members' perspectives. I also shared my research interests and gained feedback on my proposed study. Almost immediately, community members began to describe what I interpreted as issues of whiteness and neoliberalism within the college's community engagement work. Jean, for instance, expressed frustration in trying to get students to create a connection with community members and "not be afraid of people who live beyond the walls of the college." Likewise, Wole talked about how the White college students "are not invested in the community" and are "scared to talk to residents."

Following these preliminary conversations, I continued to talk specifically with Keith and Wole about identifying a range of community members who would be able to best inform my proposed study. Here, I wanted to determine a strategy to purposefully sample a group of community members—both representatives from community organizations like the CDC and half full as well as residents—who would be able to best inform my proposed study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2019). To identify a range of community members to interview—or a maximum variation sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2019)—I worked with Keith and staff from FIPS to develop a list of Smith Hill community organizations in which FIPS and PSP were actively partnering with through PSP courses, Feinstein Community Fellows, and CWS. I then worked with Wole who helped develop a list of key community members based on his work as the convener of SHPI. This list of community members ranged from residents to community organization staff, leaders, and board members, many of whom overlapped in their roles and wore multiple hats in the community. Some of these community members I knew

from my time as a college student, some overlapped with the introductions Keith had previously made for me and the list of FIPS and PSP community partners, and others I had no prior introduction or relationship with. Wole made initial email introductions for me with this list of community members, and I followed up individually with each person on the list, further introducing myself and providing additional details about my research interests and proposed study, including a Research Information Sheet (see Appendix C).

This led to additional phone calls with community members and a trip to Providence in November 2019, what Seidman (2019) referred to as a “contact visit.” Here, I attended a SHPI meeting and had the opportunity to share more about my research interests and proposed study with the group. I also had the opportunity to meet individually with community members, most notably several residents whom Wole had helped identify for me on his list. There was one resident in particular that Wole suggested I spend time with to gain “buy in” for my research, Ms. Althea, who I introduced in Chapter One. Wole suggested that with Ms. Althea’s “buy in” and connections throughout the neighborhood, I would more likely be able to not only reach residents, but also have residents participate in my study.

Through working with Ms. Althea, Wole, and Keith, I was able to identify a diverse sample of community members who were able to speak to the college’s community engagement work in Smith Hill. This sample was intentionally developed with community members and grew over time. After each initial conversation with community members and later after each participant interview, community members inevitably suggested people with whom they thought I should talk. Consequently, my initial list of key community members from Ms. Althea, Wole, and Keith grew to include

a diverse participant-driven sample or what some refer to as snowball sampling, chain sampling, or sampling for range (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

While I interviewed 21 community members as part of this study, by the time I completed my data collection in summer of 2020, I had a list of approximately 75 individuals and groups that community members suggested I talk with. In deciding who to talk to, I took seriously the advice from Ms. Althea, Wole, and Keith on who would be able to speak to the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill. In deciding who to interview for this study, I also thought about whose lives were impacted by the college's decisions to be a community engaged campus. The following identifies in further detail my sample of interview participants as well as other data sources and methods.

### ***Interview Participants***

Cruz and Giles (2000), concerned that the community was nowhere to be found in service learning scholarship, advocated for a model of doing research with community partners on the process and outcomes of the pedagogy and practice. They explicitly called for research to focus on campus community partnerships as a unit of analysis. Since then, and as discussed in Chapter One, community organizations—nonprofits, K–12 schools, and government agencies with whom service learning courses and programs partner—have become a proxy for “the community.” Thus, as mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the field of service learning and community engagement has largely operated in a binary of “campus” and “community,” again, with “community,” in the literature, most often being represented by community organizations (e.g., nonprofit staff). Yet, as discussed in Chapter One and will be further revealed in subsequent chapters, those involved in

service learning and community engagement cannot assume that the interests of community institutions “are the same as those of the people and places they serve” (Morton & Bergabauer, 2015, p. 26).

My sample of interview participants moved beyond the binary of “campus” and “community” to further complicate who “the community” is within higher education’s community engagement work. But, due to the complexity of community, categorizing interview participants from this inquiry was not an easy or linear task given the multiple and overlapping roles and responsibilities individuals took on within their local community. (And attempting to categorize participants in a table did not necessarily simplify the multiple and overlapping roles and responsibilities community members held.) The following demonstrates this complexity of community and who represented the Smith Hill community throughout this inquiry.

**Residents.** Of the 21 interview participants, 10 were current Smith Hill residents, one was a former resident, and two were residents of Elmhurst. Focusing on the 11 (current and former) Smith Hill residents:

- Five were parents, two of whom had children who participated in Youth RAP and/or the Library’s afterschool Homework Help program.
- One was a former youth participant of Youth RAP and later co-ran Rec Night.
- One was the co-founder of Rec Night.
- Four had served as PSP Community Advisors, co-teaching community engaged courses with a PSP faculty member and two others had previously been invited to speak in PSP courses and/or other PC courses (e.g., Social Work).

- One received her bachelor's degree in PSP and was completing her Master's in Business Administration with a focus on nonprofit management from PC. This resident also was the Annex Coordinator. (This resident was not originally from Smith Hill but had lived in the neighborhood for several years at the time of this inquiry.)

**Community Organizations.** Of the 21 interview participants:

- Eight participants worked (currently or formerly) at a community organization in Smith Hill and/or worked (currently or formerly) at a community organization located outside of Smith Hill but who did work in the neighborhood. All eight of these participants worked at a community organization that was considered one of the college's community partners.
- Seven participants (currently or formerly) had served as a member on the board of directors for a community organization located in Smith Hill or located outside of Smith Hill but worked in the neighborhood. All seven of these participants served as a member on the board of directors at a community organization that was considered one of the college's community partners.
- One participant was the Ward 12 City Councilwoman who represented the majority of Smith Hill, downtown Providence, and parts of other nearby neighborhoods, including Elmhurst.

**Campus Stakeholders.** Of the 21 interview participants:

- Three were college students. (One was a senior PSP undergraduate student. This student also was a Feinstein Community Fellow. Another was a freshman

undergraduate student in the CWS program. And one was the graduate student and Smith Hill resident mentioned above.)

- Four were PC faculty members who had incorporated service learning and community engagement into their courses within Smith Hill. (Three were PSP faculty members, one who was cross listed with Political Science. One was a Social Work professor.)

### ***Interview Methods***

My data set included over 30 hours of interviews (face-to-face, via phone or Zoom) across 21 participants. Interviews occurred between November 2019 and June 2020. Face-to-face interviews were conducted during three week-long trips to Providence in November 2019, January 2020, and February 2020. Originally, all interviews were expected to be conducted face-to-face. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to cancel two additional week-long trips to Providence in March 2020 and April 2020, which resulted in interviews moving to phone or Zoom beginning in March 2020. Six participants were interviewed more than once given their deep knowledge of the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill. For example, Ms. Althea, Wole, and Keith became key informants to this inquiry and were interviewed more than once given their deep knowledge and involvement of the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill over a period of time.

All interviews were audio-recorded and/or video-recorded and transcribed (near verbatim). Individual interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to over two hours, with the average interview duration being approximately 70 minutes. Phone and Zoom interviews, especially with resident-parents, were inevitably shorter in length due to the



implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals, families, and communities. The average face-to-face interview duration was about 80 minutes, while the average phone or Zoom interview duration was around 50 minutes. Of the six participants interviewed more than once, I talked with them (via a combination of face-to-face, phone or Zoom) for an average total of about three hours each.

Face-to-face interviews took place at locations and times convenient for each participant. Many of the face-to-face interviews took place at community organizations in Smith Hill as well as the Annex and on PC's campus. Other face-to-face interviews occurred over coffee, tea, or lunch and, in one instance, driving around Smith Hill in a resident's car.

Interview participants were provided with an Interview Consent Form to review and sign prior to beginning each interview, either in-person or via email (see Appendix D). The consent form explained the purpose, risk and benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. In some instances, interview participants, specifically residents, preferred to communicate via text message and did not share with me or have access to email. Therefore, while all participants verbally consented to being interviewed and audio- and/or video-recorded before starting each interview, only nine participants signed the Interview Consent Form. In addition to not providing or having access to email, some participants expressed not finding meaning or value in signing a consent form. For example, some community members said that they expected me to use their real names if I was going to quote them in my writing as opposed to pseudonyms, giving them ownership over the words they shared with me during interviews. Therefore, throughout this inquiry, some participants' real names are used, while others have been

given pseudonyms. One participant, Heather, a resident-parent and landlord who was on member of the CDC's board of directors, encouraged me to be honest and transparent about my research intentions with community members but reminded me about the disconnect between traditional, hierarchical academic research processes and how those do not necessarily translate to community settings.

Consistent with Seidman's (2019) in-depth interviewing process, interviews aimed to explore and understand how participants described and constructed meaning of their experiences with community engagement by the college as well as its racial and economic realities. I began all the interviews with initial questions that included, for instance, "Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and how you are involved in the Smith Hill neighborhood?" as well as questions around the meaning of the term "community," such as "What does community mean to you?" and "Who do you think represents the Smith Hill community?"

Questions then varied depending on each participant. For example, interviews with residents focused on their awareness of, descriptions of, and experiences with community engagement by the college within Smith Hill. Interviews with resident-parents whose children had participated in Youth RAP and/or the Library's afterschool Homework Help program also focused on questions, such as "As a parent, what type of person do you most want to have working with your child at these youth programs?" and "Can you tell me a story about an interaction you or your children have had with the college students?" Interviews with a range of representatives from community organizations also engaged their descriptions of and experiences with community engagement by the college as well as aimed to understand the nature of the

work/relationship/partnership between the community organization and college over time. Likewise, interviews with campus stakeholders aimed to better understand how and why curricular and co-curricular community engagement was implemented by the college; the work, relationships, or partnerships with Smith Hill community organizations over time; and students' experiences with community engagement within Smith Hill.

Because qualitative research begins with theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Giardina, 2019)—a broad explanation of behaviors and attitudes that the researcher hopes to find (Creswell & Poth, 2018)—my analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism also informed interview questions. For example, interview questions across all participants included: “What has been your experience with the predominantly White middle to-upper-class PC students working in Smith Hill?” and “How have the racial and class identities of PC students impacted the community work they intend to do in Smith Hill”?

### ***Other Data Collection Sources and Methods***

The empirical materials generated as part of this dissertation study also included observations of numerous community engagement interactions and document collection, both of which offered insights into how various community members engaged with community engagement work by the college. Data also included a number of informal conversations with community members.

**Observations, Fieldnotes, and Memos.** Creswell and Poth (2018) wrote that observations are “the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer” and a key method in collecting qualitative data (p. 166). In

agreement, Corbin and Strauss (2015) argued that observations are essential to qualitative research because during interviews,

Persons are not always aware of, or able to articulate, the subtleties of what goes on during interactions between themselves and others. Observations place researchers in the center of the action where they can see as well as hear what is going on. (p. 41)

As an observer at various Smith Hill community meetings and events, at students' community placements, and at various college meetings and events, I toggled back and forth between an observer watching and taking notes to a full participant-observer engaging in the activities that I was observing (Green, 2014).

In Smith Hill, I joined the monthly SHPI meetings (November 2019 through May 2020), first in-person and later via Zoom. I also joined the weekly meetings and community open houses hosted by SHARP at the Annex during my in-person site visits (November 2019, January 2020, and February 2020). I also was an observer at other local community organization meetings and events. Though limited, I visited some students' community placements in Smith Hill, including the Library's afterschool Homework Help program. I spent about 30 hours at various Smith Hill community meetings, events, and at students' community placements.

To better understand how community engagement was positioned within Smith Hill by the college, I also was an observer in various curricular and co-curricular community engagement courses and meetings, as well as at other service-oriented campus-wide meetings and events. For example, I joined PSP students in their "PSP 320/321: Practicum" course for a class session, one of the monthly Feinstein Community

Fellows Meetings, and a CWS student meeting. I also joined one of the college's Service Board monthly meetings. The Service Board included representatives from Athletics, Alumni Relations, Campus Ministry, Career Services, College Relations and Planning, the Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies office, FIPS, Office of Residence Life, the School of Professional Studies, Student Activities, Involvement and Leadership, and Student Congress. The board was "responsible for collecting and coordinating information on community service and making recommendations to the President's Senior Cabinet regarding off-campus community service initiatives" (PC, 2021e, para. 1). Attending this meeting offered a broader understanding of "service" across the college campus. I spent about 10 additional hours as an observer at these various campus meetings and events. In total, I spent about 40 hours "in the field" (in-person and virtually) as an observer over the duration of my data collection.

During each observation, I jotted notes which were subsequently typed into fieldnotes to detail each observation, including the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, and conversations as well as my own behaviors, feelings, and emotions during observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The fieldnotes allowed me to document various noticings and interactions "in the field." For example, my fieldnotes included descriptive scenes of interactions between community members and students, staff, and faculty at community meetings, events, and community placements. I also paid close attention to moments of perceived tensions related to issues of race and class between community members and campus stakeholders (e.g., moments when issues of race were salient but not named or discussed).

I also wrote analytic and reflective memos that accompanied my fieldnotes. Analytic memos allowed me to make initial and ongoing attempts to interpret my fieldwork in relation to my analytic lenses. Reflective memos were important in providing a space for me to make sense of my own subjectivities, perceptions, and practices as a former service learning and community engagement student in Smith Hill in addition to critically reflecting on those experiences in relation to my fieldwork and role as a researcher. For example, reflective memos often sparked personal memories and enhanced my understanding of self in the context and setting of this inquiry (Chang, 2008). These memos also allowed me to reflect on my research processes, including what I was learning methodologically about myself as a researcher (Chang, 2008). Corbin and Strauss (2015) wrote that all of these various forms of writing provide a “continual internal dialogue” with the data and research processes (p. 118).

*The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Observations.* While I had planned to be “in the field” to conduct observations over four to six weeks between November 2019 and April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the total number of observations I was able to conduct, especially at students’ community placements. Beginning in March 2020, the college moved all courses online and all of their in-person community engagement interactions came to a halt, much like that of colleges and universities across the country. While the field of service learning and community engagement was putting out various resources on how to continue remote community engagement (DiEnno et al., 2020; Global SL Blog, 2020; Kransy, 2020; Seligsohn, 2020; Valliant, 2020), many of FIPS and PSP’s community partners, especially youth and school-based partners, also were shutting down as a result of the pandemic. Other community partners, specifically

in Smith Hill, moved towards providing direct services, needing, for instance, drivers to drop off food, supplies, and other resources to families. With students being sent home from campus, Keith said that FIPS and PSP tried to “get out of the way for partners,” while also checking in and communicating with them about the evolving changes to the college’s campus operations.

Some community engagement activities (e.g., research, interviews, oral histories, remote tutoring) eventually took place virtually before the end of the spring 2020 academic semester, however, it was limited and varied by community partner, program, course, and student. And, even for those students who were able to continue their community work virtually, some did not necessarily have the capacity do so. In May 2020, I talked to one PSP student, Sara, who also was a Feinsein Community Fellow at half full working with SHPI. Reflecting on the impact of the pandemic on her community work, Sara said, “I really was not able to continue doing much work in my fellow position, not because I didn't have the opportunity to, I became extremely overwhelmed.” After the college moved all courses online in March, Sara moved back home with her family; to an area of New Jersey just outside of New York City that was hit hard by COVID-19. Sara said it was difficult “to process everything and being present here and dealing with COVID-19 in my own community. I couldn't really also handle talking about it in Providence when I wasn't there.” Despite not being able to observe students at their community placements as much as I had originally planned, I was still able to observe various interactions that offered a deeper understanding of community engagement by the college as well as the work, relationships, or partnerships between Smith Hill residents, community organizations, and the college.

**Artifacts.** In addition to in-depth interviews and observations, I collected various artifacts ranging from written documents to photographs and videos to personal items. Written documents included, for instance, SHPI and SHARP meeting minutes and other related community meeting and event materials. Written documents also included information related to the college's curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs, including current and past PSP syllabi and other written documents to better understand where, how, and why community engagement had taken place within Smith Hill over time. I captured language, photographs, and videos from various community organizations' websites and social media accounts. For example, the video, *Restoring Smith Hill*, which aired on RI PBS in 2014 and documented the work of the CDC, became an artifact. A video of the former college President, Rev. Brian Shanley, giving remarks at the opening of the Annex also became an artifact. I also took photos of places in and around Smith Hill and PC. Similarly, I took photos and audio recorded a community walk, which I previously drew upon to discuss the research setting and context of this study. Personal items included course writing assignments from my time as a service learning and community engagement student and photographs from my community engagement experiences within Smith Hill. Like my reflective memos, these personal items often sparked personal memories and enhanced my understanding of self in the context and setting of this inquiry (Chang, 2008). Each of these artifacts provided insights into the work, relationships, or partnerships between Smith Hill residents, community organizations, and the college over time. The artifacts also influenced my thinking and analysis of the rest of my data.



**Informal Conversations.** While I was not able to interview all 75 individuals and groups that community members suggested I talk with, in addition to the 21 participants interviewed for this study, I documented 12 informal conversations with community members throughout my data collection that assisted in building rapport and eliciting insights both shared and not shared during interviews. Some of these informal conversations occurred with community members, for instance, before or after SHARP and SHPI meetings, while others took place over coffee or tea. Informal conversations also took place with campus stakeholders, including FIPS staff members to better understand the various curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs offered within Smith Hill. Notes from my informal conversations were captured in my previously mentioned fieldnotes.

Overall, my data set included over 30 hours of interviews (in-person, by phone, and via Zoom) across 21 participants; approximately 40 hours of observations (in-person and via Zoom), with fieldnotes, analytic memos, and reflective memos; written documents, photographs, videos, and personal items; and 12 informal conversations with community members.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

While data collection and analysis methods are presented as separate, I recognize them as iterative and concurrent practices. Each interview transcript, fieldnotes and memo writings, and artifacts were read as part of the data set.

All interviews were transcribed (near verbatim) with assistance by Temi, a transcription computer program. Because of its 90-95% accuracy rate (Temi, 2021), Temi served as an initial transcription of each interview. I then listened to each audio file

multiple times and edited each transcript accordingly. I also re-read each transcript multiple times to increase my immersion in and presence with the data.

Since qualitative research relies on the participants' views as an insider and often reports them in quotes, participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcription(s) for review and, if needed, to further elaborate on or clarify points (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This member checking process occurred primarily through email with specific clarifying and follow-up questions.

I drew on Seidman's (2019) in-depth interview analysis approach, which begins by reading and marking up each interview transcript on paper before transferring the work to a computer. I first read and marked brackets around interesting passages throughout each transcript. I also followed a similar process in my initial reading of my fieldnotes and memo writings and in reviewing artifacts. Some passages stood out as what appeared to be instances of regular social interactions between Smith Hill community members and campus stakeholders. Other passages stood out because they connected back to the service learning and community engagement scholarship, specifically the literature I reviewed in Chapter Two on how service learning and community engagement were implicated by whiteness and neoliberalism. Thus, because qualitative inquiry begins with theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Giardina, 2019), the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism ultimately informed how I interpreted and made meaning of the data.

As I reread the data, I began to reflect upon the research questions guiding this inquiry and paid particular attention to how participants talked about the Smith Hill community and who represented Smith Hill; described their experiences with the

college's community engagement work within Smith Hill; and (specifically in interviews and fieldnotes) any quotes, interactions, or stories where participants expressed conflict, tension, or discomfort related to, for instance, issues of race and racism embedded within the college's community engagement work.

After rereading the full data set multiple times, I not only continued to mark up each individual transcript, fieldnotes and memo writings, and artifacts, but also began to keep a running list of tentative patterns and themes that I saw emerging within and across the data. I then reread and marked up the data again with these patterns and themes in mind. As patterns and themes became clearer, I established what Erickson (1986) has called empirical assertions. Assertions are not positivistic "truths," but declarative statements of summative synthesis supported by empirical evidence (Erickson, 1986; Miles et al., 2014).

As I transferred my work to a computer, I created an individual Word document for each assertion. (I began with two assertions; one related to each research question.) I began to file marked passages, including quotes, interactions, and stories from interviews and fieldnotes; excerpts from fieldnotes and memo writings; and images, links, and notes from artifacts under each assertion. I also included evidence that contradicted each assertion, providing both confirming and disconfirming evidence for each assertion. Inevitably, each assertion evolved to include a series of subassertions.

It is necessary to briefly return to how I drew on the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism in analyzing the data. While traditional qualitative analysis often moves from coding to analysis to writing (Miles et al., 2014), Jackson and Mazzei (2018) wrote that thinking with theory is an ongoing interpretive process that

calls for a multilayered reading/rereading of the data. As I read/reread, marked up, established patterns and themes, and established assertions, I continually reflected on the analytic lenses used in this inquiry. For example, when I sensed that participants or an interaction that I observed revealed a conflict, tension, or discomfort, I took note, trying to acknowledge and be attentive to the existence of the various forms of power involved in what I was observing. For example, I tried to acknowledge and be attentive to whether my sensed tension or discomfort was related to my multiple and intersecting identities, researcher roles, subjectivities and/or a broader conflict or tension to/from/between the college and Smith Hill. Inevitably, my identities of being a White heterosexual able-bodied cisgender male came with blind spots throughout this data analysis process.

In some instances, participants shared interactions or stories about the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill that I immediately interpreted as connecting to whiteness and/or neoliberalism. Here, I reflected on my understanding of each analytic lens and asked myself if the community members and/or organizations involved in the interaction or story were actively taking up and embracing whiteness and/or neoliberalism or perhaps responding to these broader social systems at play. I also was careful not to assume that whiteness and neoliberalism were always closely aligned, as in some instances one analytic lens presented itself more than the other. Ultimately, in drawing on these analytic lenses, I aimed to better understand how the impact of whiteness and neoliberalism both within the college and community could help better understand what was happening with service learning and community engagement in higher education.

Despite this iterative data analysis process of reading/rereading, marking up, establishing patterns and themes, and establishing assertions, Erickson (1986) argued that conclusive proof of each assertion is often not possible. Instead, the process of interpretative data collection (e.g., in-depth interviewing, observing, collecting artifacts, etc.) and analysis are “fragments that must be pieced together into mosaic representation[s]” but “are inherently incomplete” (Erickson, 1986, p. 147).

As this study shifted to analysis, community members’ understandings of and lived experiences with the college’s community engagement work became the focus of this inquiry. Drawing on the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism, this process involved making and analyzing thematic connections within and across the data, with particular attention to the words of community members (Seidman, 2019). This analytical shift provided a means to better understand community voices and perspectives on community engagement in intricate and multifaceted ways. In the chapters that follow, I provide transcribed portions of my conversations with participants through our interviews and informal conversations to offer a sense of how they described and talked about their understandings of and experiences with the college’s community work within Smith Hill. I also offer some stories from my fieldnotes and reflections from my memo writings to provide a sense of how I was constructing my understanding of the data during and after data collection. Finally, I draw on collected artifacts to help provide both historical and contextual background information on the college’s community engagement work within Smith Hill (some of which has already been presented throughout this inquiry thus far).

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

There are multiple measures taken to enhance the trustworthiness of this inquiry related to my overall research approach (e.g., interview sample, use of multiple data sources, reflexivity, and data analysis, including member checking,), Institutional Review Board (IRB) review, and faculty mentorship (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

First, there are numerous ways in which my qualitative research approach enhanced the trustworthiness of this inquiry. Since the goal of in-depth interviewing is to understand how participants understand and make meaning of their experiences, Seidman (2019) wrote that interviewing a number of participants can enhance the trustworthiness of an inquiry as the researcher can then better understand participants' experiences in relation to one another. My data set not only included 21 participants and 12 additional informal conversations with community members, but also participants that represented a range of experiences from residents; to community organization staff, leaders, and board members; to college students, staff, and faculty.

While this inquiry was primarily informed by interviews, additional data sources also were collected, including observations and artifacts. Through my fieldnotes and memo writings, thick descriptions of various noticings and interactions “in the field,” as well as my analytic memos and reflective memos, strengthened the trustworthiness of the data and reflect a more in-depth presence with the data for analysis purposes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, through reflective memo writing, I recognized that my subjectivities were an inherent part of my research. Through these reflective memos, I attempted to create space to critique myself—my positionality and experiences as a former service learning and community engagement student in Smith Hill—within the

larger macrolevel contexts at play throughout this inquiry. Thus, critical lenses were established to demonstrate alignment with my research approach. My fieldnotes and memo writings also allowed me to document personal reflections regarding data collection efforts and what I am learning methodologically about myself as a researcher.

Furthermore, ongoing measures were taken to ensure that I intentionally worked with participants to design, implement, analyze, and represent the various community voices and perspectives in this inquiry. For example, and as previously discussed, the interview sample was established with community members. Participants also were invited to review and comment on their interview transcripts, their description presented at the start of this study in the “Key Participant Descriptions” section, and excerpts from my analysis. Although these measures alone do not guarantee equitable participation in the research process for participants, they moved this inquiry towards a more collaborative research model between the researcher and participants.

Other measures to enhance this inquiry included IRB review and faculty mentorship. Prior to beginning this inquiry, I submitted my research proposal to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities’ IRB for review. Because of the case study nature of this inquiry, my research was deemed exempt by the IRB (See Appendix A). As such, signed consent for interview participants to participate in my research project was not required. However, to uphold ethical standards of research, I obtained a letter of support from FIPS and PSP (see Appendix B) and used the following materials throughout my research process, including Research Information Sheets (see Appendix C) and an Interview Consent Form (see Appendix D).

Finally, throughout the design, data collection and analysis, and reporting processes, this inquiry was overseen by my faculty advisor, Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, and members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Andrew Furco, Dr. Timothy J. Lensmire, and Dr. Elizabeth Sumida Huaman. The guidance of these content and methodological experts helped to ensure that this inquiry was carried out methodically and ethically. Taken together, these various measures all aimed to enhance the trustworthiness of this inquiry.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

### ***Limitations***

Multiple contextual factors limited the scope of this inquiry, including time, institutional context, and methodological and theoretical perspectives. Originally, both family obligations and financial reasons were going to limit my time in Providence to four to six weeks of data collection between November 2019 to April 2020. Then, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to cancel two week-long trips to Providence in March 2020 and April 2020, which resulted in interviews moving to phone or Zoom beginning in March 2020 and, as previously discussed, fewer observations than I had originally planned. Despite the limitation of time, I was able to collect substantial data across multiple sources and methods, allowing me to explore my research questions.

The institutional context of PC also can be a limitation in more fully understanding the voices and perspectives of communities involved in service learning and community engagement beyond the specific research setting and context of this inquiry. As discussed in Chapter One, service learning and other community engagement efforts by U.S. colleges and universities have manifested in a variety of different ways



due to the “complex combination of philosophical, pedagogical, political, cultural, and systemic factors within higher education” (Welch, 2016, p. 33). At PC, regardless of what some participants described as FIPS and PSP’s more critical orientation, service learning and community engagement had been influenced by several contextual factors, including the fact that the college was a regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic, liberal arts college in Providence, RI. This combination of contextual factors undoubtedly influenced the findings of this inquiry. Communities involved in service learning and community engagement with different institutional contexts than PC may have varying understandings of and experiences with community engaged pedagogies and practices. For example, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) found that a more balanced relationship often exists between Minority Serving Institutions (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions) and their surrounding neighborhoods and communities compared to Predominantly White Institutions.

Likewise, because of the many contextual factors within higher education, defining and understanding service learning and community engagement vary across colleges and universities (Kendall, 1990; Welch, 2016). Because “very little service learning conforms to a narrow definition” and definitions “are nearly irrelevant” to community organizations (Stoecker et al., 2009, p. 12), it was difficult at times to discern if community members were describing their understandings of and experiences with community engagement tied to, for instance, PSP courses, co-curricular forms of community engagement employed by FIPS (e.g., Feinstein Community Fellows or CWS

programs), or another service-oriented program on campus. Despite various curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs by the college, community members, and specifically residents, often saw them all as one in the same—students “volunteering” in Smith Hill—and did not necessarily know that student’s service and community work could be connected to their academics. Again, considering my same research questions within a different research setting and context than the one of this inquiry may result in different findings.

Finally, the findings of this inquiry are limited by both the methodological frameworks and the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism. Marshall and Rossman (2006) reflected that there are always trade-offs in qualitative research depending on the research approach and theoretical perspectives that are used. As such, different research approaches could result in different findings. One limitation within my research approach and data collection methods is how I navigated entry into the field. While my familiarity PC, FIPS, PSP, and Smith Hill allowed me to navigate entry differently than if I had not attended college, lived, and worked in this neighborhood previously, I ultimately worked through the campus (e.g., Keith) to gain access to community members (e.g., Ms. Althea and Wole). Overall, Keith, as a key informant to this study, had a significant impact on not only connecting me with community members, but also providing institutional knowledge of FIPS and PSP’s work within Smith Hill given his administrative and faculty roles with the college since 1994. The findings of this inquiry may have looked different if I was able to navigate entry directly with community members, and specifically residents, from the start.

In deciding who to interview for this inquiry, I took seriously the advice from Ms. Althea, Wole, and Keith on who would be able to speak to the college's community engagement work within Smith Hill. In deciding who to interview for this study, I also thought about whose lives were impacted by the college's decisions to be a community engaged campus. However, because communities include many communities nested within one (Chavis & Less, 2015), there is no way that my sample was representative of the entire Smith Hill community. A future line of scholarship may take up "third spaces" with whom campuses often do not work/partner (e.g., barber shops, cultural clubs, laundromats, markets, restaurants, etc.) to ask if residents are aware of the college's community engagement work in the neighborhood; and, if so, how they feel about it and how they would describe it. For example, Heather suggested a follow up study may talk to community members from the Lao Lanexang Market, a Southeast Asian market on Smith Street, to engage these questions within a specific ethnic community's context who are less likely to be represented within the dominant community's perspective. Similar to a different research approach, conducting this inquiry with different analytical lenses also can result in different findings. Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism are two (of many) analytical lenses that could inform this inquiry. For example, a critical feminist theoretical perspective may have offered more complex and nuanced understandings of service learning and community engagement in the context of this inquiry, resulting in different findings.

Despite the limitations of time, institutional context, and methodological and theoretical perspectives, I believe this inquiry provides insights into the local level and the larger macrolevel processes embedded within community engagement across higher

education. Marshall and Rossman (2006) wrote, “Although no qualitative studies are generalizable in the probabilistic sense, their findings may be transferable” (p. 42). Accordingly, though this inquiry may or may not be indicative of how all colleges and universities might work with communities, findings can be transferable, having the ability to be applied to similar community settings and institutional contexts as Smith Hill and PC, as well as result in broader implications for the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education.

### *Delimitations*

This inquiry imposes several delimitations to narrow its scope. First, because service learning and other community engagement can be manifested in a variety of different ways across institutional context, I intentionally focused this inquiry on one college’s community engagement work. Likewise, while the college worked with neighborhoods and communities across Providence, RI through various forms of community engagement, this inquiry also intentionally focused on the neighborhood and community immediately surrounding the college’s campus (and the neighborhood where I spent most of my time as a service learning and community engagement student while attending PC as an undergraduate). Finally, I intentionally focused this inquiry to be a study of service learning and community engagement as well as issues of whiteness and neoliberalism within this work. In doing so, despite various power dynamics existing within service learning and community engagement, I intentionally drew on the analytic lenses of Critical Whiteness Studies and neoliberalism given my scholarly interests in studying the racial and economic power dynamics embedded within community engaged pedagogies and practices.

## Conclusion

Drawing on Denzin and Lincoln (2011), Creswell and Poth (2018) wrote that qualitative research “use[s] an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry” (p. 8), which begins with: (a) assumptions and the use of theory to inform a study, (b) “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (p. 8), (c) analysis methods that establish patterns and themes, and ultimately represent the voices of participants, and (d) the reflexivity of the researcher. In this Chapter, I presented the emerging qualitative research approach that guided this inquiry, including the site and sampling procedures as well as the specifics of data collection and analysis methods.

In what follows, I present an empirical account of the college’s community engagement work within Smith Hill from the perspectives of a range of powerful community voices, guided by the following research questions:

- How do Smith Hill community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement by Providence College?
- How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within Providence College’s community engagement work impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

Chapter Four engages the first research question by revealing how community members experienced the college’s community engagement efforts in Smith Hill. Chapter Five focuses on the second research question and, specifically, how community members described a perceptual harm that was imposed on the community by the college’s community engagement work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### On Community Engagement

*My first trip to Providence for data collection was the week before the 2019 Thanksgiving federal holiday. During many of the community meetings and conversations, there were mentions of the Smith Hill Turkey Drive, which took place at the end of the week on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. The Turkey Drive was an annual event organized by the CDC in partnership with several other local community organizations as well as PC, specifically FIPS and Campus Ministry. By collecting both food and monetary donations from individuals and organizations throughout the neighborhood and broader Providence community, the Turkey Drive has provided hundreds of Smith Hill residents “all the works for a Thanksgiving dinner,” as noted on the event’s flyer. Since 2011, the event has been held at the Annex.*

*In addition to providing the physical space for the event, the college also has donated many of the canned goods for the Turkey Drive. Kate, a PSP alumna who was the Annex Coordinator, said the college, specifically Campus Ministry, “always made a big thing out of it with the canned vegetables...They always found some creative way to get students to collect 800 cans of vegetables.” This was done through a competition among campus buildings, offices, and student organizations to see who could collect the most canned food items. But this competition has created problems in the past. Kate continued, “you had Campus Ministry leaders thinking they were doing good things by going into Aldi [the only grocery store in Smith Hill] and purchasing all of the canned vegetables that existed and totally eliminating the supply for the neighborhood.” This also resulted in many donated food items, such as canned tomatoes, that are not*

*necessarily associated with what many Americans traditionally view as a Thanksgiving dinner. Kate, rolling her eyes, asked me, “What do you like to eat at your Thanksgiving dinner? Do tomatoes really sound like a side?”*

*I attended a SHPI meeting on the Thursday before the Turkey Drive, where I sensed confusion and, at times, tension around the event, in part, because there were several food drives taking place in Smith Hill and in the abutting Wanskuck neighborhood for the Thanksgiving holiday. In total there were four holiday food drives: 1) the CDC’s Turkey Drive (which also involved SHARP); 2) SHARP’s smaller food drive for members of the NLC United Holy Church; 3) Capital City Food Pantry’s food drive (a local nonprofit operating within Smith Hill and Wanskuck); and 4) Chad Brown Alumni Association’s (CBAA) Turkey Drive. CBAA was a community organization of current and former residents of Chad Brown, a public housing development operated by the Providence Housing Authority (PHA) in Wanskuck. (I was told that because the CDC also did work in Wanskuck, the CDC and CBAA Turkey Drives used to be held together, but tension between the two organizations resulted in separate events in recent years.) The CDC and SHARP’s Turkey Drives were both being held out of the Annex on the same day and at the same time, so the nonprofit and grassroots organization had to collaborate and coordinate on several logistics, including donations coming into the Annex, the timing of the event, and set-up for and clean-up after the event.*

*During the previously mentioned SHPI meeting, Jean, the Executive Director of the CDC, shared that some resident members of SHARP had expressed concern with prior practices of students (mainly Campus Ministry students) volunteering at the Turkey Drive. Instead, SHARP suggested that residents volunteer at the event to make other*

residents feel more comfortable and welcomed when picking up their food. Jean continued, "To be more sensitive to residents," students would only volunteer prior to the event by helping to stuff the grocery bags of donated food items that residents would pick up with their turkey. Wole later told me that this was because unlike the FIPS and PSP students whom he had worked with, Campus Ministry and other campus groups often entered the community with a "white savior complex," which was noticeable to residents, making them feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed. Wole continued that staff on the college's Service Board also often would show up at events like the Turkey Drive to take pictures of students "serving," which, again, made residents feel uncomfortable. Kate joked that this is one way the college "markets that they're connecting with the community." So, with the goal of making residents feel more comfortable and welcomed, students did not volunteer on the day of the event. Jean later told me that some staff on the Service Board were frustrated by this decision. Kate expanded, "especially Campus Ministry because they are just very much the like, 'Oh, Jesus wants us to help our neighbor' kind of thing and they're not thinking about how race, class, and all these different things impact the situation."

*I traveled back to Minnesota on the afternoon of the Turkey Drive, but shortly thereafter I received an email from Keith that read:*

*The Turkey Drive...has turned out to have an interesting ripple, as it does nearly every year. This time around it has surfaced some ongoing tension between SHARP and the CDC. PC/Feinstein are on the periphery of this tension, but we are a part of the mix...You will definitely catch the energy your next visit.*



## **Promoting “the Common Good”**

A food drive or volunteering at a similar type of event as the Turkey Drive (in addition to volunteering at a food pantry or soup kitchen) are forms of service often associated with traditional service learning and community engagement. Within Smith Hill, for instance, students enrolled in community engaged learning courses, Campus Ministry students, CWS students, and other campus programs had worked at the Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen at St. Patrick’s Church. Yet, the Turkey Drive demonstrates how, even on the periphery, common forms of service provided by colleges and universities consciously or unconsciously contribute to tensions within the community. One tension was reflected by resident members of SHARP who requested that students not volunteer during the Turkey Drive event, citing reasons of the college (i.e., students and staff) making them feel uncomfortable and unwelcomed. Wole described this discomfort as stemming from the college’s “white savior complex,” including the ways staff would document students’ service by taking pictures of them working in the community. Kate said this is one way the college “markets that they’re connecting with the community.”

While I intended to focus this inquiry primarily on FIPS and PSP’s curricular and co-curricular community engagement efforts within Smith Hill, the tensions I observed almost immediately during my data collection leading up to the Turkey Drive led me to consider, more broadly, how community members described and understood what the college referred to as their “vast array of voluntary community service opportunities” (PC, 2021c, para. 2). Thus, this Chapter primarily engages my first research question:

How do Smith Hill community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement by Providence College?

I will further elaborate on what the college at large referred to as their “community service” programs throughout this Chapter, but, in short, curricular community service was supported by PSP and GST as well as through the college’s Civic Engagement Proficiency as part of the Core Curriculum. Co-curricular community service was supported by campus offices and programs, including Campus Ministry, FIPS, FriarServe, Student Activities & Cultural Programming, and the Citizenship & Off-Campus Life office. The college saw these curricular and co-curricular community service programs as “a tangible expression of our mission-stated commitment to promote ‘the common good, the human flourishing of each member of the campus community, and service of neighbors near and far’” (PC, 2021c, para. 1). Though the college had its own internal ecology for community service, the abovementioned community service programs were not centralized within one academic department or campus office. Instead, each community service program included a range of approaches and interpretations to service and community work.

Similar to past research (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009), unless community members had intimate knowledge of the college’s service and community work, they often spoke about the various community service programs without the college’s internal terminology of, for instance, Campus Ministry, FIPS, or PSP. Rather, students often were vaguely referred to as “volunteers.” Still, community members, and, specifically, residents often described a specific moment, community project, or where in the community they had interacted with students, which allowed me, as a researcher and someone with knowledge

of the college's community service programs, to identify whether they were talking about a PSP, GST, or other community engaged course or Campus Ministry, FIPS (e.g., CWS, Feinstein Community Fellow), or other co-curricular community service program.

In recognizing the various ways the college worked, partnered, and/or was in relationship with Smith Hill, I first consider how community members described the broad campus community relations between Smith Hill and PC, before considering how community members experienced the college's curricular and co-curricular community service programs. Then, I focus on how community members talked about their experiences specifically with FIPS and PSP. Taking up how community members described the campus community relations, as well as how community members experienced the college's broader community service programs, are important because they shaped how people then described and understood their experiences with FIPS and PSP. Throughout all of this, I consider how whiteness and neoliberalism are key drivers of the college's community service work.

### **Campus Community Relations: "Fortress PC"**

Being embedded within a neighborhood (rather than in downtown Providence like JWU and Roger Williams University), community members had hoped that the relationship between Smith Hill and PC would be stronger. Yet, residents largely expressed feeling alienated from the college. Residents referred to students, staff, faculty, and administrators as "insular" as well as the "outsiders" and "others" in the neighborhood. Describing the physical campus, residents described an "elite, exclusive place" that was "over there," a "gated community," an "exclusive country club," a "fortress." These feelings of alienation were not unique to the timing of this study. In a

1997 report prepared by a former Smith Hill community organization, Brien and Harlam wrote that residents often referred to the college as “Fortress PC” (p. 22).

The powerful metaphor of the college being a fortress was supported by residents who described the tall wrought iron fence perched upon a stone wall that surrounded the college’s lower campus, directly abutting Smith Hill, but not around the upper campus in the predominantly White and more affluent Elmhurst neighborhood. Residents, especially Black and Brown residents, extended the fortress metaphor as they described the security and surveillance presence of the campus. Ms. Althea, an older Black resident, recalled times throughout her 11 years as a PSP Community Advisor when she had been stopped and questioned on campus by the college’s Public Safety Officers. Another resident, Ian, who had moved to Smith Hill over two decades earlier from a small Caribbean island, said, “It’s pretty much all walled off or gated. So, it’s sort of a fortress. Going for a walk, you don’t walk through campus.”

The fortress metaphor extended to how residents talked about broader campus community relations between Smith Hill and PC. First, as displayed in Figure 1, residents pointed to the fact that though the college may be positioned at the conflux of several neighborhoods (i.e., Elmhurst, Smith Hill, and Wanskuck) and City Council districts (i.e., Wards 12 and 14), a majority of the students who lived off-campus resided in apartments on Eaton Street, Oakland Avenue, Pembroke Avenue, Radcliffe Avenue, Pinehurst Avenue, and Tyndall Avenue—all of which fell within the geographic and or political boundaries of Smith Hill and Ward 12. The Ward 12 Councilwoman, Katherine Kerwin, who everyone called Kat, said this area was “unequivocally Smith Hill.”

Some residents described this area of the neighborhood as being “taken up” by a private housing developer and manager who catered to college students. Other residents said that the off-campus student housing was well-kept, increasing the value of their homes. Despite these various perspectives, residents agreed that the off-campus student housing area had historically been known for its “house parties.” Residents described these parties as taking place throughout the weekends into the early morning hours, resulting in a “red cup village” (i.e., the streets being filled with plastic red SOLO drinking cups). Because of the frequency and intensity of the student parties, residents said that the college had no choice but to make an arrangement with the Providence Police Department to detail the off-campus student housing area more frequently on the weekends, extending the security and surveillance of the college off campus. Ms. Althea exclaimed, “It’s not the taxpayers’ responsibility to pay for this...Now, it’s like PC has their own club security detail.” Yet, some residents appreciated the additional police presence in the neighborhood, which had helped calm down the student house parties in recent years. Residents also said that they appreciated the additional police presence because there had been an uptick of violent crimes in the neighborhood during the winter and spring of 2020. One resident-parent said, “there’s more security here because we have Providence College and, to me, as a parent, that’s a plus.”

Additionally, residents expressed anger, disappointment, and frustration with a series of racially charged incidents perpetuated by White students both on and off-campus. Residents pointed to a series of racial incidents in 2016 that they had read about in the local news that led students to organize a 13-hour sit-in outside of, then college President, Rev. Shanley’s office, with a list of demands, including cultural-sensitivity

training for students, staff, faculty, and administrators. One of the incidents involved female Students of Color who were denied entry into an off-campus student house party where White students yelled racial slurs and threw bottles at them.

Racial incidents continued to be perpetuated by White students in the neighborhood throughout my data collection. In May 2020, a White student told a resident to “fall down the stairs” when the resident voiced concern about a student house party (GoLocalProv, 2020, para. 7). In the wake of the murders of Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, Kat released a public statement calling the college “racist” and demanding “an apology from these students and a conversation with the College about how they will remedy this hurt that they have caused Smith Hill and my neighborhood” (GoLocalProv, 2020, para. 8). Kat continued, “The Providence College community must learn to be more sensitive about their positionality in the community which they continue to gentrify and benefit from” (GoLocalProv, 2020, para. 8).

Along these racial lines, residents expressed frustration that PC, as a regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic college, had historically done little, if anything, to recruit and financially support Smith Hill youth to attend the college. Growing up in the neighborhood, Tou, a former resident, said he thought “Wow! That’s one of those top ten colleges. [Laughter.]” But beyond knowing the college was physically nearby, residents, like Tou, said they knew that the college was unattainable to them and their children. Frustrated by the fact that the college did not pay income-taxes, Alex, a resident-parent, argued:

[I]f [PC is] going to have these tax breaks then they should be giving more to the community...PC should make it more attainable for the community that lives here

to get in. Mentor our kids...Let them know that if they want to go to PC the option is there.

Still, Alex and other resident-parents said it was significant to be able to talk to their children about the importance of college and be able to point to PC right in their back yard, even knowing that the college was unattainable.

During a February 2020 SHPI meeting, SHPI's Youth Development Committee, which consisted of Wole, Kate, Sara (a PSP undergraduate student who also was a Feinstein Community Fellow at half full), and the Associate Director of FIPS, reported that they were working with several area high schools, both in and outside of Smith Hill, to get 20 students per school to participate in a daylong college access event, including a tour of PC, workshops on campus, and a luncheon program in October 2020. Patricia, a resident member of SHARP, was appreciative of SHPI's work but asked, "Why doesn't PC already have a similar program in place?" "It's February and if you gotta wait till October to cherry pick only 20 students from each school," Patricia continued, "that's not so much welcoming. It's more like PC saying, 'All right. Fine. You can come.'" This frustration came at the heels of the college making a \$100,000 grant to Catholic schools within the Diocese of Providence, including St. Pius V Elementary School in the adjacent Elmhurst neighborhood, when the college celebrated its centennial in 2017. Commenting on who the ideal PC student was, Rev. Shanley was quoted saying the following about the college's centennial donation: "There is no better preparation for an education at Providence College than the academic rigor and spiritual formation provided at a Catholic elementary and secondary school" (Clem, 2018, para. 3).

### *Providence College/Smith Hill Annex*

Aside from the off-campus student housing, the college had an investment in the neighborhood through the Annex. Community members involved in SHARP and SHPI identified the Annex as a “saving grace” and an “example of community relations” between the college, though mainly FIPS and PSP, and Smith Hill. As discussed in Chapter Three, about one dozen community groups regularly used the Annex throughout the spring of 2020 before the Annex temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, however, residents argued that the Annex had fallen short of what it was intended to be—a bridge between the campus and community. Ms. Althea explained:

This was a bridge. Now, a bridge means to connect from one spot to the other spot. It wasn't supposed to be, “This is it. End of story. We did great! Let's pat each other on the back and walk away.” This was a step...but I think there should be a counter space on campus. I think we should be going back and forth. They should have people from the community and people from campus going back and forth because they need to learn the meaning of community engagement a hell of a lot more than some of the people here.

Ms. Althea continued that because residents often did not have “letters behind their name,” their voices and perspectives were kept in the community—at the Annex—and, apart from FIPS and PSP, typically were not invited to campus. Kate, wearing her hat as the Annex Coordinator, expressed something similar to Ms. Althea. Referencing Project 401, a local grassroots hip hop collective who used the Annex almost weekly, Kate said she got the impression from some college staff and administrators that she had worked



with in her role at the Annex Coordinator that “teaching a hip hop dance class is not as valuable as someone coming to give a campus talk or whatever.”

Other residents said that they only knew about the Annex given their various roles and involvement in the neighborhood but did not think it was accessible to those who were not as involved. For example, Heather, who wore a plethora of hats from being a resident and landlord to CDC board member to a former PSP Community Advisor, questioned whether her tenants knew about the Annex and, if they did, if they saw it as a community asset. Supporting Heather’s questioning, Alex, who like Heather had previously served as a CDC board member, said, “I know it’s there. I know PC is there, but I don’t know what the Annex is for. I haven’t seen a flyer. I don’t think the community does anything there.” Alex continued, “I really haven’t seen much besides for people outside congregating there.” Alex, as well as several other community members, said that unless a resident was involved in a group that met at the Annex, residents tended to associate the space with the CDC’s annual Smith Hill Turkey Drive, which was held out of the Annex.

The Annex had a \$20,000 line in the college’s annual budget, which mostly paid for rent and a Graduate Assistant Coordinator (i.e., Kate). The space was managed by a team of college representatives from FIPS, the Offices of Academic Affairs, Financial Services, and General Counsel as well as an Advisory Council made up of both campus and community representatives. Together, the management team and Advisory Council made decisions about how the Annex space was utilized. Yet, like Heather’s question on whether residents knew about and viewed the Annex as a community asset, it was questionable whether the campus community knew about and or viewed the Annex as an

asset. Out of more than 4,800 students (undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education) and over 300 full-time faculty members (PC, 2021d), there had been about a dozen student organizations, staff, and faculty members in total who had utilized the Annex (e.g., for courses, meetings, workshops, etc.) between 2012 and 2020, mostly all from FIPS, PSP, and GST (FIPS, 2020). As such, it seems fair to say that the broader campus community was not necessarily aware of the space. For example, Sara said that she did not think her friends who were not PSP majors or minors or involved with FIPS knew about the Annex. Even some of those who were involved in FIPS did not know about the Annex. For example, one CWS student working at the Smith Hill Early Childhood Learning Center said that they were not aware of the Annex despite their community placement being around the corner from it. Was the \$20,000 line in the college's annual budget anything more than a symbolic gesture to campus community relations?

Given the lack of knowledge about the Annex both in the community and on campus, Patricia, who spent a lot of time at the Annex through her involvement with SHARP, wondered if the space was something the college maintained to “keep the neighborhood quiet” and avoid “any negative publicity.” In other words, Ms. Althea said sometimes she thought the Annex was intended to “shut up” the neighborhood. Janice, another resident member of SHARP who formerly worked at Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen, also thought that the Annex served in the college's own self-interest—as a talking point to market the college, including to prospective students and parents who had to drive along the Douglas Avenue “corridor” and pass the Annex to get to campus. While the Annex was meant to be accessible, was appreciated by community

members, and was regularly utilized by several community groups, some community members expressed that it was still problematic and contributed to the community's feelings of alienation from the college.

***What Does Smith Hill and Providence College Mean to One Another?***

When asked, "What does Smith Hill mean to PC?," most community members strongly asserted that they did not believe Smith Hill meant much to the college besides a physical location. Community members responded similarly when asked, "What does PC mean to Smith Hill?" Some resident-parents, as previously mentioned, said that despite PC being unattainable to their children, they thought the symbolism of having the college in their neighborhood was important for their children to experience. Other residents, like Janice, who had a thick RI accent, quipped, "they mean nothing to us." When I asked Ian what PC meant to Smith Hill, he took a long pause, then, noting that he was speaking specifically from the perspective of a resident, said, "I don't think it has a particularly significant meaning to Smith Hill. And I'm trying to think what it would be like if Providence College just wasn't here and I don't see a big difference." Ian's remarks are revealing and lead to questions around place-based community engagement. How might residents (re)imagine Smith Hill without PC (or at least PC as residents described it at the time of this inquiry)? How might Ian's comments have changed if PC was a more accessible college (e.g., a state or public university) that served as a resource for more residents from Smith Hill and the surrounding neighborhoods?

Taking up how community members described the broader campus community relations sets up a necessary foundation to this Chapter. The ways in which community members described the broader campus community relations shaped how they then talked

about the college's "vast array of voluntary community service opportunities," including FIPS and PSP's curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs (PC, 2021c, para. 2). In what follows, I more fully consider why resident members of SHARP did not want students volunteering at the Turkey Drive. What was it about the college's community service programs, like those run by Campus Ministry, that made Wole position the service and community work provided by Campus Ministry as different from FIPS and PSP? What was behind Wole describing Campus Ministry and other groups on campus as entering the community with a "white savior complex," and Kate saying that the college's Service Board "markets that they're connecting with the community" by taking photos of students "serving" in the community? The following considers the college's broader internal ecology for service and community work.

### **"A Vast Array of Voluntary Community Service Opportunities"**

A major curricular initiative outside of PSP and GST was the college's Civic Engagement Proficiency, which went into effect in 2010. The proficiency required that all undergraduate students complete a designated civic engagement course as part of the college's Core Curriculum. Among a number of courses in PSP and GST, other courses that satisfied the proficiency from across the college's academic departments included: "Faith and Spirit in the Black Family and Community," a course cross listed in American Studies and Black Studies; "Cities and Urban Life" in Anthropology; "Service Learning in Biology" in Biology; "Introduction to Public History" in History; "Ethics, Moral Leadership, and the Common Good" and "Philosophy of Catholic Social Thought," both in Philosophy; "Current Issues in the Addiction Field" and "Community and Political Practice," both in Social Work; and "Catholic Social Thought" in Theology.

Each of these courses had some type of community service requirement incorporated by individual faculty members who had their own personal and academic motivations and reasons for incorporating work in the community with academic learning.

Beyond FIPS (e.g., CWS, Feinstein Community Fellows), there were several co-curricular community service programs across the college, including:

- Campus Ministry, which had several different “Service” programs that students could be involved in, ranging from children and youth education and outreach, “Hunger and Poverty Awareness,” adult literacy and English as a Second Language services, and elderly outreach. Campus Ministry also sponsored several local, domestic, and international service-immersion trips;
- FriarServe was a volunteer program run out of the College Relations and Planning office. Volunteers (e.g., students, staff, faculty, and administrators) worked at five local Catholic Pre-K–8 schools as classroom assistants, including at St. Pius V Elementary School in the adjacent Elmhurst neighborhood. FriarServe was a companion program to the \$100,000 grant the college made to Catholic schools within the Diocese of Providence in 2017; and
- The offices of Student Activities & Cultural Programming and the Citizenship & Off-Campus Life office had near one dozen “Religious and Service Clubs & Organizations” that students could participate in, ranging from service to the campus, service to the local communities, and service through students’ involvement in national and international chapters of service-oriented programs, such as “Best Buddies” and “Circle K.”

During my data collection, I attended a Service Board meeting where members of the Service Board told me that the college's curricular and co-curricular community service programs all contributed to the college being a "service-oriented campus." Across these various programs, 1,096 undergraduate (and graduate) students performed 37,041.25 hours of service at 63 community institutions during the 2017-2018 academic year (PC Service Board, 2018).<sup>9</sup>

Similar to many colleges and universities across the country (see, for instance, Rosing, 2015), the Service Board, which was made up of a number of campus offices, tracked service data to make "recommendations to the President's Senior Cabinet regarding off-campus community service initiatives" (PC, 2021e, para. 1). This data also had helped the college gain recognition for their community service programs. For example, PC had been routinely recognized with the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll (PC, 2021d) and FIPS and PSP, specifically, were recognized by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2017 for their curricular and co-curricular community engagement programs (Longo et al., 2017). The college also had regularly been recognized as "a top school for service in the northeast" by the Catholic Volunteer Network (Catholic Volunteer Network, 2021, para. 8).

During the previously mentioned Service Board meeting, a representative from Suitable, a student engagement software program, gave a presentation about the college creating an app-based platform where students could log their service hours. The Service

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<sup>9</sup> The college's service data for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years were not available when I was writing this dissertation. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Service Board was delayed in processing the college's service data.

Board was interested in working with Suitable not only to make it easier to track students' service hours, but also to allow students to gain recognition for their service and community work. For example, through Suitable, students would be able to work towards a digital badge in "Community Engagement" for a certain number of community service hours completed, which they could then add to their resumes and LinkedIn pages. A handout distributed during the Service Board meeting read that Suitable acted as a "co-curricular' or 'skills' transcript," which "can be used to maintain holistic growth during enrollment and for career readiness and preparation following graduation." One member of the Service Board advocated for the college to work with Suitable to "help students realize that service is important...to their professional development."

***In "Service of God and Neighbor"***

I did not have in-depth conversations with campus stakeholders in Campus Ministry and other campus groups beyond informal exchanges (in-person and by email) and attending the only Service Board meeting that was scheduled during my data collection prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, because of the tensions I observed leading up to the Turkey Drive, I invoked the public discourse from the college about their curricular and co-curricular community service programs beyond FIPS and PSP to better understand the tensions I observed.

Because service learning and community engagement are often tied to institutional missions (Furco, 2002b; Holland, 1997, 2001), the college's curricular and co-curricular community service programs were undoubtedly tied to the college's Catholic identity and mission of being "committed to...service of God and neighbor" (PC, 2021b, para. 1). As previously cited, the college recognized community service as "a

tangible expression of our mission-stated commitment to promote ‘the common good, the human flourishing of each member of the campus community, and service of neighbors near and far’” (PC, 2021c, para. 1).

All of the community service programs outlined in the previous section were undergirded by discourses that affirmed the “goodness” of charitable work often associated with service in relation to the college’s Catholic identity and mission. For example, the aim of the Civic Engagement Proficiency was to educate students to “serve and critically reflect on service” (PC, 2021c, para. 3) while “grow[ing] into responsible citizens” in “[t]he Dominican tradition” (PC, 2021a, para. 2). Across descriptions of Campus Ministry’s different “Service” programs, community service was positioned as “a great opportunity to...delve into questions about faith and justice” (Campus Ministry, 2021a, para. 4) by “perform[ing] service work for vulnerable populations” (Campus Ministry, 2021a, para. 2), “underprivileged residents, groups, and neighborhoods” (Campus Ministry, 2021a, para. 3), “families living in poverty” (Campus Ministry, 2021b, para. 1), and for those who were “underprivileged and suffering” (Campus Ministry, 2021c, para. 1). Finally, a description of “Urban Action,” one of the programs run by Student Activities & Cultural Programming and the Citizen & Off-Campus Life “Religious and Service Clubs & Organizations” stated: “Urban Action is a group of students dedicated to improving the Providence community beyond the borders of the Providence College campus. Students help those less fortunate than themselves...and in the process, build friendships.” (Student Activities & Cultural Programming, 2021, para. 7).



### *Linking with Theory*

What was undergirding Providence College's "vast array of voluntary community service opportunities" (PC, 2021c, para. 2)? Miller (2021) argued that there is a connection between the formation of whiteness and Christianity. Specific to this inquiry, the connection between whiteness and Christianity was demonstrated through the college's broader community service programs, which were all undergirded by discourses that affirmed the "goodness" of charitable work often associated with notions of "service" in relation to the college's Catholic identity and mission. Stoecker (2016), among others, has referred to this "goodness" of charitable work as "noblesse oblige;" the idea that it is the obligation of those with more privilege (i.e., the regionally selective, predominantly White, Catholic, liberal arts college) to "give back," "help," and "serve" those with less privilege (i.e., the lower-income, multiracial community). Yet, Stoecker (2016) stated that the reproduction of service and community work that affirms the "goodness" of charitable work often does little to challenge persistent inequalities within communities.

Service as a form of charity (or what Wole described as a "white savior complex" in the Turkey Drive narrative) is limited in time and impact; assumes that the service provider (i.e., White college students) has something to offer those who are "less fortunate," "living in poverty," "suffering," "underprivileged," or "vulnerable," as described by the college's public discourse; and does not consider the root causes of social problems that required the need for service in the first place. Rather than creating a connection between the service providers and those being served, short-term, transactional forms of direct service (e.g., community clean-ups or tree plantings,

working at a food pantry or soup kitchen, etc.) position colleges, including students, to think they are “giving back,” “helping,” or “serving” communities despite likely having minimal impact.

Because whiteness is socially constructed and ideological, it is “adhered to discursively” (Cushing-Leubner, 2021, p. 133). Discourse is used to “socialize others into racial logics that both define the norms of whiteness and the formations of racial others” (Cushing-Leubner, 2021, p. 134). The public discourse used by the college’s community service programs to describe the reasoning behind the purposes of “performing” service and who was being served is a “product of racist systems designed to meet white needs” (Sleeter, 2017, p. 157). Despite “racial considerations shad[ing] almost everything in America,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 2), colleges and universities often send students into communities with little or no experience of working with individuals who are “different” from themselves. As discussed in Chapter Two, to be fair and impartial, students are taught politically neutral and racialized codes through service learning and community engagement under whiteness and neoliberalism that, in turn, exploit racialized others (Hyatt, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2012; Mitchell & Perrotti, 2020a). Hyatt (2001) argued that politically neutral and racialized coded discourse serves as abstractions that suggest “that damaged communities can be rebuilt wholly from within if only enough good will and volunteer labour is made available” (p. 8). This, in turn, upholds the community’s perception that college students often entered the community with a “white savior complex.”

The college’s public discourse of “performing” service for those who are “less fortunate,” “living in poverty,” “suffering,” “underprivileged,” or “vulnerable” has been

found to create a hierarchical relationship between privileged students and their community placements (Endres & Gould, 2009; Houshmand et al., 2014). This discourse unequally positions students to place the blame for the lack of success of those they are working with in communities as individual deficiencies rather than identifying and naming the contours of systemic social issues (Becker & Paul, 2015; Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012; Rougeaux Shabazz & Cooks, 2014; Vaccaro, 2009). Not only does this language position students to enter communities with a deficit-based framework and hierarchical mindset of making “them” more like “us” (Mitchell et al., 2012, p. 616), but it also can prime students to believe that “the community” is a dangerous place before they ever even enter it (Bennett & Walker, 2018; Haney-López, 2014). This notion of the community as a dangerous place will be further explored later in this Chapter and in Chapter Five.

Tuck (2009) has warned about the “hidden costs” of initiatives that frame communities as “depleted” (p. 409) and “broken” (p. 412). By analyzing the college’s public discourse about the neighborhoods and communities in which they “perform” service and those who community service programs aimed to “help” and “serve,” it becomes clear why residents requested that students (mainly Campus Ministry students) not participate in the Turkey Drive, citing reasons of discomfort, feeling unwelcomed, and white saviorism.

Furthermore, in more fully considering neoliberalism, in addition to whiteness, it is necessary to question for whom the college’s community service programs were really for. As cited above, Sleeter (2017) argued that politically neutral and racialized coded discourse is a “product of racist systems designed to meet white needs” (p. 157). In the

context of community engagement, the “product” of service and community work seems to be meeting the “white needs” of the college and its students over the community. For example, the quantification of service data through the college’s Service Board connects with neoliberal ideas, which can be interpreted as equating to the larger the number of hours served the greater the contribution is to the community. However, community members voices and perspectives thus far have not suggested that the college at large has made a significant impact on the community. In fact, community members, such as Ian, have suggested that he would not see a “big difference” if the college was not located in Smith Hill. What then is the quantification of service data supposed to mean?

The quantification of service data seems to “serve” the college over the community by allowing the college to use the service data for their own market-driven and public relations purposes, which Scott (2009) has warned upholds neoliberalism. For example, the college has been recognized, in part, for their quantification of service data through the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Catholic Volunteer Network. Likewise, Macfarlane and Tomlinson (2017) have argued that, under neoliberalism, the quantification of service data through app-based platforms, such as Suitable, have encouraged students’ service and community work to become sites of performativity and gamification through “the need to perform, compete, achieve desired outcomes and enhance their future labour market profile” (p. 13). This argument of service learning and community engagement meeting students’ needs (i.e., “white needs”) over community needs has been reiterated by other scholars who have argued that under neoliberalism, higher education has positioned community engagement experiences as something

students can use to highlight on their resumes, transcripts, or in employment interviews to make themselves more marketable for the workforce post-graduation (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Hyatt, 2001; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015). Together, the college's Catholic identity and mission, public discourse about the "goodness" of charitable work, and quantification of service data embody my concerns that whiteness and neoliberalism are key drivers of community engagement work.

### **Community Descriptions, Understandings, and Experiences of Community Engagement**

While the above reviewed the broader campus community relations between Smith Hill and PC, as well as the college's community service programs at large and public facing discourse, what follows considers how community members described and understood their experiences with community engagement by the college, including FIPS and PSP.

#### ***"Community Service" by Providence College***

**"In" Versus "With" The Community.** Community members described much of the college's broader community service programs as transactional forms of direct service, or what Ms. Althea referred to as "a tax write off." In addition to various forms of outreach, community members described the college sponsoring one-time community clean-up and tree planting events—what Ian referred to as "beautification" type events. While Ian thought that these forms of community service were "appreciated," "recognized as beneficial," and did not think "anyone would want it *not* to happen," he also said, "it creates a hierarchical sense." In agreement, Heather thought "it feels like it's very 'us' and 'them.'"

Referencing programs like Urban Action and Campus Ministry's FaithWorks, which, in part, sponsored community service projects for first year students prior to the start of the academic year, Jean recalled several community clean-ups that these programs had co-sponsored with the CDC and other community organizations. Jean said, through these types of community service projects, students would approach their service and community work with a deficit-based framework, automatically questioning why they were picking up other people's trash. Jean said students would assume, "These people don't care about their community." Several years ago, the CDC and half full came up with the idea of a "Smith Hill Treasure Hunt" in place of a community clean-up. Jean reflected,

Yes, students had to pick up trash, but there were five or six different things they had to do along the way. They had to talk to a community member and ask a question or something. They had to walk into one business and maybe purchase something. They had to visit the Library and other community assets to learn more about community resources.

Jean continued, "It was intrinsically different than picking up trash, which doesn't create a connection." Jean, who thought the treasure hunt was successful, said the college had not asked the CDC or half full to co-sponsor another community clean-up or treasure hunt since. Jean said, "Nobody [has] contacted me. So, that's an interesting."

Residents also were frustrated by these types of community service projects, but for slightly different reasons than what Jean, as a nonprofit leader, had expressed. Patricia argued that being "in" the community did not automatically equate to engaging "with" the community.

Patricia explained:

They're a bunch of students picking up trash, gathering things in bags, and they're all together. They're not with "the community" per se. They're at the community park with the CDC who live elsewhere. So, they're all with people that look just like them. They all get to pick up trash together. They're going to bag it, carry it away, and then they're going to go back to campus.

Patricia's frustration with these types of community service projects had to do with the students working with community organization staff who, in Smith Hill, were predominately White women and do not live in the neighborhood, rather than connecting with and working alongside residents. What is interesting here is that the community organizations and the college mirrored one another regarding their work "in," but not necessarily "with" the community as well as with who was "performing" service (i.e., mostly White people). While students may be "in" the community, Patricia questioned whether they were working "with" the community, leading to questions around who campuses tend to partner with and why, and if those partnerships truly represent "the community."

Patricia, among other residents, expressed a similar concern about the differences of being "in" versus "with" the community through the college's Civic Engagement Proficiency. Though Patricia did not use the language of a Civic Engagement Proficiency, she had heard that all students had to take a course that required some type of service or community work. However, Patricia did not think that all students should be involved in community work if they did not want to be. Patricia elaborated:

[I]f you are here to go to school, I don't know that you need to be involved in the community...I don't think you should pay your \$50,000 or \$60,000 to [PC] to have to go walk into the community because [PC] gotta explain where they are.

Patricia continued:

Now, if [students] have a major that is related to social services or community involvement or they're going to do a thesis or they going to do a paper or if they're gonna talk about a health center, if they want to talk about nonprofits, then I think they can make it their initiative to come out into the community...But if that's not their initiative and not related to their major, they can stay on campus.

**“Not Invested in the Community.”** The transactional dynamic and “hierarchical sense,” as Heather described, of the college’s community service programs, coupled with the politically neutral and racially coded discourse previously discussed, not only led students to enter the community with a deficit-based framework and white savior mentality, but also led students to encounter the neighborhood as a dangerous place.

On the one hand, the college described the purposes of “performing” service as “helping” those less fortunate,” “living in poverty,” “suffering,” “underprivileged,” or “vulnerable.” On the other hand, Wole stated that he had heard that the college would warn students to stay out of the neighborhood besides for their service and community work where they were most likely working in small groups at a community placement “for fear of being mugged, for fear of getting beat up, or having their car broken into.” In other words, students were receiving mixed messages about Smith Hill; that the neighborhood needed “help,” but it also was to be “feared.” These mixed messages



ultimately impacted how students then showed up at their community placements and acted upon their service and community work.

Kat recalled how these mixed messages from the college impacted students' participating in service and community work. Volunteering alongside students at a community clean-up event co-sponsored by the college and Councilwoman, Kat said, as we're walking down the streets, [students said], "I don't know if we should be going this way." Stuff like that. And I think it's kind of a fear of the neighborhood or some parts of it are perceived as dangerous.

With similar experiences to the Kat, Wole said the perception of the community as a dangerous place made students fearful of being in the neighborhood and talking to residents, especially Black and Brown residents.

Recalling a community organizing event Wole worked on with the college through his role at half full, Wole said that over 100 students were asked to canvas the neighborhood for four hours, knocking on doors to ask residents to complete a brief survey about services they would like to see provided in their neighborhood. Wole said that out of the over 100 students only 30 completed surveys (in a neighborhood of approximately 6,000 people) came back at the end of the four hours. Wole said, "students are scared to talk to residents" and they are "not invested in the community."

While FIPS and PSP did not provide a solution to the abovementioned frustrations with the college's broader community service programs, community members did describe the values undergirding FIPS and PSP's community engagement work as different from the college at large, resulting in a more desirable way to engage both "in" and "with" the community. Part of this was due to the fact that some community

members had a relationship with FIPS and PSP students, staff, and faculty, especially through Keith, while having little, if any, regular connection with Campus Ministry and other PC community service programs. In other words, though FIPS and PSP certainly had aspects of their community engagement work that were problematic, community members' relationships with FIPS and PSP through, for instance, acting as Community Advisors contributed to them favoring the community engagement work of FIPS and PSP over the broader college's community service work.

***“Community Engagement” by FIPS and PSP***

Community members often pointed to FIPS and PSP (frequently speaking about the two programs interchangeably) as engaging students in service and community work, what FIPS and PSP called “community engagement,” differently than the rest of the college's “community service” programs. For example, one resident, Heather reflected, “I have interacted enough with students from PC and other schools, and I think that the service learning component—the Feinstein Institute mentality—is more infused in students.” Heather, who had worked with FIPS and PSP in a number of different capacities, including through Rec Night and as a former PSP Community Advisor, said that FIPS and PSP students seemed to be the “least religious group” on campus and that their values around community engagement felt “more altruistic than it does in other places. It's more genuine.”

Heather wondered if students arrived at FIPS and PSP with different values, or if they were developed through their participation in a FIPS program or their PSP coursework. Regardless, Heather said she has experienced “a vested curiosity” among FIPS and PSP students, “even if it's just academics, it feels better.” Similarly, another

resident, Wole, who also had worked with FIPS and PSP in a number of different capacities, including through Rec Night, half full, SHPI, and as a former PSP Community Advisor, said, FIPS programs and the PSP curriculum engaged students in critical conversations about themselves and the community prior to and throughout their community work, “making sure that these students know not to come in with like a white savior complex and just to come in as a blank slate ready to learn.”

Like all of the college’s community service programs, FIPS and PSP’s community engagement programs were undoubtedly tied to the college’s Catholic identity and mission. However, rather than situating service as a solution to community problems, guiding questions for FIPS co-curricular community engagement programs included: “How can we contribute to the dismantling of racial injustice and inequity, the persistence of which continues to be a major obstacle to community well-being?” and “What opportunities exist for the Feinstein Institute to combat poverty and economic inequality, locally as well as globally?” (FIPS, 2021, para. 2). From a curricular standpoint, the PSP curriculum included courses that introduced and problematized the concepts of “service,” “community,” “justice,” and “democracy” (Longo et al., 2017, p. 32). For example, one learning objective in a spring 2020 section of “PSP 101: Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities,” was to “[d]iscuss and distinguish between the concepts of charity, service, and social justice” (Brewster, 2020a, p. 2). In a spring 2020 course offering of “PSP 302: Diversity, Community, and Service,” students considered “what community and service mean in the context of historical and contemporary oppression” (Brewster, 2020b, p. 1). Other PSP courses offered in the spring 2020 semester focused on ethics and best practices in community engagement as

well as community engaged research (Morton & Twitchell, 2020) and included guiding course questions, such as, “Is there such a thing anymore as ‘good’ service?” (Costello, 2020, p. 1).

Reflecting on the PSP curriculum, Kate, who had worked with the CDC through Youth RAP, at the Library, and Rec Center as an undergraduate PSP student, and was the Annex Coordinator, said she declared the PSP major because she “wanted to help people, whatever that meant.” Kate reflected that the impact of her personal identities of being a White woman from a middle-class family was not “at the forefront of my mind when I would walk into spaces.” But Kate said her PSP courses—a combination of the readings, class discussions, service and community work, and assignments—helped prepare her and her classmates,

in terms of, like, talking about our identity and how we perceive ourselves as well as how other people perceive us and acknowledging the ways in which we grew up and how that challenges what we’re looking at now, kind of looking at those disparities.

In agreement, Sara, another (White female) PSP student, who was specifically attracted to the college because of PSP, said her PSP courses engaged her and her peers in critical conversations about their personal identities in relation to power, privilege, and oppression through reading texts, such as Paulo Freire’s (1970/2016) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Whereas, in other courses across the college, Sara said she had experienced students getting defensive when talking about their personal identities in relation to issues of race and racism.

**Resident Perspectives.** Patricia said, “I hear people say, ‘I’m from Feinstein.’ But what’s Feinstein? Who’s Feinstein? Is that a building? I don’t know about the different schools at PC.” As previously noted, residents often described a specific moment, community project, or where in the community that they interacted with students, which allowed me to identify whether they were talking about a PSP, FIPS, or other curricular or co-curricular community service/engagement program. Residents often pointed to programs where they saw or interacted with students who were from FIPS or PSP, such as the Library’s afterschool Homework Help program, which had mainly worked with FIPS and PSP students (and, on occasion, students from Education and Social Work community engaged courses). Residents also pointed to past programs, such as Youth RAP and Rec Night, where FIPS and PSP students were largely involved. Overall, because residents had been disappointed that PC had historically done little, if anything, to attract local youth to attend the college, residents frequently pointed to these programs as positive and beneficial to the community.

Tou, who worked with FIPS and PSP through Rec Night and was a former PSP Community Advisor, said that the students “made an impact on the neighborhood kids” by maybe making them think, “I might want to go to college, so I should stay out of trouble.” On the flip side, Tou said that the students not only met their service hours but also got to meet and interact with local youth, some of whom were the same age as the students and whom they likely would have otherwise never met. Residents said it was more than just exposure to something “different” that FIPS and PSP students’ participation in these programs provided them. The structure of programs, like Youth RAP and Rec Night, encouraged commitment and relationship building between all of

those involved. For some FIPS and PSP students, this translated into moving beyond the notion of providing direct service to a deeper engagement with the programs and relationship building with youth participants beyond one semester. Though not a resident, Keith elaborated on what residents might have meant by students engaging with the community in deeper and more relational ways over a longer period a time. Keith said:

Up until 2015 or 2016, students could come in through PSP 101 and do their service learning with Youth RAP. Then, if they got really excited, they could start volunteering at Rec Night. As they got to know more people they could get involved with the Annex, Common Grounds Café, or various economic development work that was happening in Smith Hill at the time. They could then take a course at the Annex with College Unbound students and other local folks. And then, the faculty could layer internships into that with the CDC or other organizations.

While projects and programs, such as Youth RAP, Rec Night, and Common Grounds Café no longer exist, they still largely informed how residents talked about and experienced FIPS and PSP students in Smith Hill.

***Resident-Parent Perspectives.*** Sally, a resident-parent and member of SHARP whose son frequently participated in the Library's afterschool programming, including Homework Help, said that as a parent she was very satisfied with the students' involvement in the Library's youth programming. In addition to Homework Help, Sally described her son interacting with students through the Library's arts and crafts programming and during community events, such as the Library's annual Holiday Bazaar.

Sally, whose son required learning assistance due to mental health, said that she wanted someone with patience working with her son. Sally recalled a time when her son was being bullied by local youth at the Library. When Sally arrived to pick up her son at the Library, she said, “he was having a meltdown and there was one of the college kids trying to get my son to play a game with just him and my son one-on-one. That was really nice to see.” Sally said that the Library is one of the few places in the neighborhood that her son was allowed to go by himself. Sally continued, “I know he’s safe there.”

Sally said her son, who “doesn’t like playing with a lot of people,” “would actually go and talk to and interact with a couple of the college kids every day.” So, the college’s winter and summer breaks were difficult for Sally’s son when he was younger. “He doesn’t like change,” Sally said. Sally continued:

[H]e has his own workers that come to the house. So, he has regular people that work with him. They would have to take him to the Library and try to get him introduced to the new people so he could get to know them and trust them.

Though, Sally acknowledged the inevitability of turnover among the students working at the Library, her comment suggested that the often short-term, transactional (and neoliberal) dynamics of community engaged courses and programs (i.e., one academic semester) and the privileging of students and the academic calendar over the community can be harmful to communities, especially youth (Eby, 1998; Martin et al., 2009; Sandy, 2007).

Because service learning and community engagement, especially at colleges and universities that resemble PC (Hill, 2009), have historically been implemented by White

instructors from White institutions who send White, middle-class students to work in low-income Communities of Color (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Butin, 2006; Green, 2001, 2003), Sperling (2007) questioned whether most Black and Latinx parents would want to have their children working with predominantly White students who may be in need of a stereotype reduction. However, Alex, another resident-parent who self-identified as having a “multiracial family,” said that the demographic make up of who mainly attended PC was not a surprise to her, but, rather than race or class, Alex said she was more concerned about how the students interacted with and treated her children.

Alex, who used to live in CDC housing and was a former member on the CDC’s board, had three daughters who participated in Youth RAP, as well as Youth RAP’s summer programming. Alex said Youth RAP was important not only for her daughters to meet other local youth, but also to be exposed to college students and witness firsthand the importance of college from a young age. Alex said that she had heard that the students might have been “Work-Study and things of that nature.” Alex, who participated in Work-Study as a college student herself, said, “I thought it was a good Work-Study activity for the students to see where they actually live and to get to know the neighborhood.”

Alex said, “I didn’t really connect with the college students, but my kids did.”

Alex reflected:

They did after school homework with them. They did things outside with them in the neighborhood or went on field trips through Youth RAP. They talked a lot about what they wanted to be when they grew up. They taught them, like, how to



build things or grow a plant and all kinds of stuff like that, which was good. And a lot of getting to know yourself type of exercises.

Alex said that the students' participation in Youth RAP was "instrumental" to her daughters' involvement in the program. Alex said that the students "all seemed like they had the best hearts for doing it...and they seemed to know that their interactions with the children had impressions on them." Alex continued, "Some kids in this neighborhood don't have families that can be with them afterschool, so whatever ambitions the college students have, I wanted them to just give the kids in this neighborhood a piece of that."

While the above resident-parents did not necessarily know the specifics of FIPS and PSP's community engagement programs, they were aware that students had been involved in the neighborhood programs where their children participated. Other resident-parents, however, were not aware that the FIPS and PSP, nonetheless the college at large, was involved in the neighborhood. Another resident-parent, who noted that they had only lived in the neighborhood for a few years, said they never saw any students when they went to the Library with their children. The resident-parent said they would love for their children to be engaged with students, whom they thought would be "a good role model" and "have a positive influence on my children." Ms. Althea thought that "some parents don't even see the PC students...they think they're part of whatever organization their kids go to. So, they may not necessarily say that it's PC kids." Echoing this statement, Heather said, "had I not been involved with the CDC or engaged in community work through my professional career opportunities the way I have, I wouldn't notice that [students] were [involved in the neighborhood] or not. And, I think, that's probably [true] for most residents."

**Community Organization Perspectives.** Though Ian, with his resident hat on, thought that PC did not have “a particularly significant meaning to Smith Hill,” he also noted, with his CDC board member hat on, that the college likely had a more significant meaning to nonprofit community-based organizations like the CDC. Ian thought “an organization like the CDC finds value in educating younger generations on some of what an organization like CDC does and to hopefully get some new blood in the nonprofit community-based organization fields.” Jean, as the Executive Director of the CDC, expressed something similar to Ian in a separate conversation, but also said that students “fill a void” given the CDC’s tight budget and small staff.

With budgets stretched thin and small staffs, community members suggested that nonprofits, such as the CDC and the Library, could say that the college, specifically FIPS and PSP, were an asset because they had provided resources both through students’ curricular and co-curricular community engagement work (e.g., ranging from direct service to completing administrative tasks to research) and financially (e.g., monetary donations). Other community members also noted times when FIPS and PSP staff and faculty had leveraged their political power with the City of Providence to help, for instance, get residents access to the local recreational center to host Rec Night. Alan, the Library Manager, also said that FIPS and PSP had been “a political voice” during times when the City of Providence was on the verge of closing the Library. Similar motivations for community organizations to be involved with service learning and community engagement expressed by Ian, Jean, and Alan have been previously documented in the scholarship (see, for instance, Bell & Carlson, 2009).

Smith Hill community organizations had historically called on the college to support their community work. For example, Brien and Harlam (1997) called on PC to enter into a “strategic alliance” with community organizations to support a “drive for economic resurgence” in the neighborhood (p. 22). Likewise, during my data collection, community organizations involved in SHPI, as well as SHARP, were in conversations with the City of Providence and planning and market consultants regarding a Smith Street Revitalization Plan. The plan, funded by the City of Providence, identified several cultural, physical, and service oriented improvements for Smith Street and adjacent areas within the Smith Hill neighborhood. A final report of the Smith Street Revitalization Plan, which resulted from a series of community conversations and feedback sessions with residents and community organizations, called on PC to work closely with community organizations to be more actively involved in local schools and the Library’s youth programming as well as work with community members to sustain an online neighborhood social media presence and neighborhood newsletter. Overall, Heather, with her CDC board member hat on, said, “It’s always dollars and cents from the nonprofit perspective; if they’re getting free labor out of it, if we’re getting research done, and there’s actual money that’s coming in.” Heather continued that as a CDC board member, her ask was always “What can [the college] get us?”

In terms of the actual community work students did, Wole described Sara, half full’s Feinstein Community Fellow, as driving much of SHPI’s administrative work (e.g., taking notes during meetings, supporting any follow up with community members after each meeting, and disseminating meeting notes). Though Wole was the convener of SHPI, his full-time job was the Youth Development Program Coordinator at half full. As

such, Wole said having the support of a Feinstein Community Fellow working with him specifically on SHPI “makes my job a lot easier and I can focus on other aspects of things.” At the Library, Alan, the Library’s Manager, and Jennifer, the Library’s Youth Services Specialist, said that the direct services students provided from community engaged courses and programs were essential to their afterschool Homework Help program. Recalling back to the earlier mention of how privileging of the academic calendar can be harmful to communities, especially youth, Alan and Jennifer both said that the students were so essential that during the college’s winter and summer breaks the Library has sometimes had to limit or cancel the afterschool program because staff did not have the capacity to run the program without the support from the students. Alan said, “that parts hurts, but that’s just how it is.”

What Alan and Jennifer are describing here is the classic neoliberal model discussed in Chapter Two of shifting state responsibility to volunteers. Therefore, because the Library’s resources and services were reliant on student volunteers, programs like Homework Help come to a halt when the college was not in session. This example demonstrates both how neoliberalism impacts nonprofits, such as the Library, and is a key driver behind short-term, transactional community engagement work.

While volunteering at an afterschool program is akin to more traditional forms of service learning, community members still thought this more “helping” (e.g., with homework or administrative tasks) form of service and community work was important and could have connections to students’ coursework. Through Homework Help, Jennifer said that students not only supported the afterschool program, but also took on mentorship roles with local youth in the Library. Alan and Jennifer saw the informal

ways that the youth and students engaged with each other beyond homework help (e.g., having conversations, playing board games, etc.) to be important for both the youth and students. Like the resident-parents previously discussed, Alan and Jennifer thought it was important for the local youth to see, as Jennifer said, “life beyond Smith Hill” and that college is an option for them. Alan and Jennifer also said it was good for the students to be exposed to their local community, a neighborhood that was likely racially and economically different than the ones they grew up in. Rather than solely reading academic materials about, for instance, community organizing, nonprofits, or youth studies, several community organization staff, as well as residents like Ms. Althea and Janice, echoed that students’ community engagement experiences had the potential to allow them to connect their coursework with the work they were doing at their community placements.

*Moving Away from the Traditional Concept of Service Learning.* Direct service, most often through traditional service learning courses, has its limits. For example, Jean said that the students who were involved in service learning were often too transient, reflecting, again, the short-term, transactional (and neoliberal) dynamic of direct service work. Whereas service learning students were typically placed at a community organization for a set number of hours each semester, CWS students and Feinstein Community Fellows were often placed at a community organization for at least one academic year and sometimes longer. Community organization leaders, like Jean, said that the longer-term nature of these programs required less training of students at the start of each semester and allowed for more of an opportunity to get to know the students’ abilities, strengths, and interests and train them do other types of work beyond direct

services. Community organization staff from the CDC, half full, and the Library said CWS students and Feinstein Community Fellows were able to work on program development or research projects that interested them, allowing the students to become more embedded within the culture of the organization and the community. Accordingly, community organizations were largely supportive of FIPS and PSP's move away from the traditional concept of service learning, which had allowed students, as well as staff and faculty, to work with community organizations in different capacities beyond direct service.

As discussed in previous chapters, PSP decided to move away from the concept of service learning in 2018, citing reasons in line with the field's critiques of the hierarchies imposed by labels of "service" (Cooks et al., 2004; Costa & Leong, 2013; Doerr, 2019; Hernandez, 2018; Hicks Peterson, 2018; Mitchell, 2007, 2008; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016; Varlotta, 1997). Keith said in addition to "tracking the field," "a lot of the impetus for it came from community members." Keith continued:

It's one of those dirty little secrets in the service learning world that we all know...A group of 15 volunteers from a one semester class suck more energy out of the community than they put into it 9 times out of 10. So, we know that, right? But we keep doing it.

The argument here is with community organizations' budgets stretched thin and small staffs, having a student or small group of students working with a community organization beyond direct services, and preferably over a longer period of time, was a bigger contribution to the organization than having a new group of service learning students each semester that community organization staff had to then train, supervise, and

assess. Supporting what Keith shared, Wole said he found value in having students, for instance, sit on one of SHPI's committees (e.g., Youth Development Committee) for a full academic year alongside community members or work on research projects for SHPI. Wole said that he would rather work more deeply with a smaller group of students, preferably for longer than one semester, than "10 kids who just come in and do their little semester and are out."

Kendra Brewster, who was the newest PSP faculty member and the only Woman of Color faculty member, taught two courses early in the sequence of the PSP curriculum—"PSP 101: Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities" and "PSP 302: Diversity, Community, and Service." Kendra said that by moving away from the traditional concept of service learning (i.e., direct service and counting service hours), she was able to develop deeper relationships with a smaller set of community organizations across her different courses. Kendra said that she was able to create "a trajectory of community engagement" with a small number of community partners across her courses that included a "cross section of direct service, philanthropy, and social support of relationships." Kendra also said that she had been able to experiment with community engaged research projects, such as Youth Participatory Action Research in a local school.

Reflecting on a critical service learning project that included archival and oral history research, Fouts (2020) has referred to this move away from direct service as when "'doing with' can be without, meaning collaboration between community partners and students can still be achieved by working concurrently on projects, but not necessarily interacting in the same space" (p. 30). Fouts (2020) argued that "doing without" can allow students to better understand the structural issues they witness at their community

placements through, for instance, working on a research project with community members.

Still, these views on the move away from traditional forms of service learning were not represented across all community organizations. At the Library, Alan and Jennifer were aware of and understood PSP's decisions for "redirecting" their work, but also vocalized the Library's need for students to participate in direct service, again, reflecting the classic neoliberal model discussed in Chapter Two of shifting state responsibility to volunteers. Jennifer said that because the Library had a small staff, "if the Library staff is helping with homework all afternoon nothing else gets done." Thus, as previously discussed, the direct service students provided from community engaged courses were essential to the Library's afterschool Homework Help program. Jennifer said that the Library as a community placement for PSP students was not suited to support the growth of students as other organizations might be. Though Alan had a similar concern he appreciated that PSP had continued to partner with and support the Library through courses that resembled traditional service learning with direct service components to support Homework Help as well as through longer-term engagement through the CWS and Feinstein Community Fellows programs.

While community organizations were aware of FIPS and PSP's decision to move away from the traditional concept of service learning, as previously discussed, most residents did not have the academic terminology of "service learning," so they did not necessarily see any difference in how students were involved in service and community work. However, residents, such as Ms. Althea, who had intimate knowledge of the PSP curriculum through her former role as PSP Community Advisor, were aware of these



changes. Ms. Althea appreciated that FIPS and PSP continued to support community organizations, such as the Library who needed direct service, but, overall, thought the move away from service learning was a good decision. Frustrated that service learning often positioned students as complacent “daycare people” and “homework people,” Ms. Althea worried that service learning “clipped students’ wings” from doing anything that “formulated something that would be long term and really be deeper.” In other words, Ms. Althea worried that traditional forms of service learning limited students by giving them myopic tasks. Ms. Althea was hopeful that FIPS and PSP’s broader interpretation and approach to community engagement would allow for direct service when needed, but also provide additional ways for students to engage “in” and “with” the community in deeper and more relational ways.

### ***Linking with Theory***

As discussed in the previous “Linking with Theory” discussion, under neoliberalism, higher education has positioned community engagement experiences as something students can use to highlight on their resumes, transcripts, or in employment interviews to make themselves more marketable for the workforce post-graduation (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Hyatt, 2001; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015). Within this argument, whether embedded within the college’s Civic Engagement Proficiency, a co-curricular program, a digital badge that students can obtain through Sutable, or even the PSP academic major and minor program that was intentionally designed to have students engage in critical thinking, PC’s various interpretations and approaches to service and community work can all be situated as upholding neoliberalism.

Expanding this argument to scholarship on whiteness, I reconsider the question I previously raised regarding for whom the college's community service programs were really for. Scholars have argued that, because of who historically has and has not had access to (higher) education in the U.S., academic degrees and credentials have become a form of intellectual property under whiteness (Bierdz, 2021; Cushing-Leubner, 2021). Drawing on legal scholar Cheryl Harris's (1992) concept of "whiteness as property," Cushing-Leubner (2021) asserted, "a person possessing a certificate of education...possesses a form of whiteness: a certificate of possession of the property of an official education" (p. 137). Cushing-Leubner (2021) continued, "the ability to accumulate properties as possessions determine access to whiteness" (p. 137). Thus, when community engagement becomes something for students to accumulate on their resume or transcript, it, too, can be situated as not only upholding neoliberalism, but also whiteness. This argument is not far from those of scholars presented in Chapter Two, who have critiqued service learning and community engagement as a form of neoliberal citizenship (Hyatt, 2001; Raddon & Harrison, 2015) that is facilitated by the government to produce citizens, or subjects of the government, who uphold government policies and who are valuable to the economy (Dennis, 2009; Rost-Banik & Perrotti, 2021). Together, Casey (2021) inferred that schooling and education in general (including and beyond higher education) under whiteness and neoliberalism has become a form of hyperindividualism.

As previously discussed, these same logics presented above apply to campuses, like PC, who have been able to market themselves "to present a kinder face" by fashioning their institutions into a corporate brand of "giving back" through service to the

community (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 141). This was demonstrated in the Turkey Drive narrative that opened this Chapter when Kate said college staff would document students' community work by taking pictures of them working in the community. Kate said this was one way the college "markets that they're connecting with the community." Various national and regional acknowledgments and recognitions, much like those PC has received for their community service programs, also has allowed campuses to gain individual benefit and perhaps financial gain through their community focused work (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017). Scott (2009) reflected that, specifically under neoliberalism, service learning and community engagement have become akin to the market-driven and public relations aims of corporate employee volunteer programs. Thus, recalling to earlier in this Chapter, Ms. Althea described much of the college's broader community service programs as transactional forms of direct service or "a tax write off." Accordingly, under whiteness and neoliberalism, scholars have argued that service learning and community engagement continues to favor student learning and institutional goals while having a minimal impact on communities (Kliwer, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2012).

## **Conclusion**

I began this Chapter by presenting the broader campus community relations between Smith Hill and PC. Then, I considered how community members described and understood their experiences with the college's various curricular and co-curricular community service programs at large. Finally, I presented how community members talked about their experiences specifically with FIPS and PSP. There were many contradictions in what I have presented throughout this Chapter that reveal the

complexity and nuance of community engagement. Several community members summarized these contradictions well. For example, Heather said, “I think there’s a lot of naiveté and a lot of goodwill” within PC’s service and community work. Kat added in a separate conversation, “It’s a double-edged sword. People are angry about the lack of intentionality from PC students sometimes but also, we do need kids in our Library, and they support that. We need community spaces. The Annex offers one.” Finally, Kendra reflected that community engagement “can be both exploitative and it can be students and community members showing up and doing good, authentic work. It can be both/and... When there’s good, there’s good. When there’s harm, there’s harm.”

Service learning and community engagement certainly did not create these contradictions. However, these contradictions have become amplified even as individual campuses’ efforts and the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education have aimed to undo some of the problems at play. Because the field has primarily focused on student learning outcomes, these contradictions, as experienced by community members, presented throughout this Chapter have been rarely acknowledged in scholarship. Revealing and further examining these contradictions are important because they allow the opportunity to look at the higher education’s community engagement work from “the community” into the campus, rather than the other way around.

In the following Chapter, I continue to look at community engagement from community members’ perspectives. In doing so, I further grapple with the contradictions presented throughout this Chapter, specifically in relation to my second research question: How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within

Providence College's community engagement work impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community? Here, I more fully consider something Kendra referenced directly above—the idea that community engagement can be harmful to neighborhoods and communities.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### On Community Engagement and Harm

Chapter Four revealed how Smith Hill community members described and understood their experiences with community engagement by PC, including FIPS and PSP. In doing so, Chapter Four revealed how community members, consciously or unconsciously, pointed to preferring the community engagement work by FIPS and PSP over the college's broader community service programs. For example, Wole stated that FIPS and PSP "students know not to come in [to the community] with like a white savior complex" and, instead, enter their community work "as a blank slate ready to learn." Yet, despite community members describing FIPS and PSP's community engagement work in the neighborhood as more intentional, or what Heather called "more altruistic" than the rest of the college, my conversations with community members also revealed moments when community members described how harm can be perpetuated in the neighborhood through any form of community engagement by the college, including those by FIPS and PSP.

Though FIPS and PSP had made explicit commitments to racial and economic justice, scholars have argued that even community engaged courses and programs that are intentionally designed to disrupt whiteness can inadvertently uphold white privilege and, in turn, white supremacy (Seider et al., 2013). The same can be argued for neoliberalism. Reflecting on my theoretical frameworks in relation to FIPS and PSP, Keith said that even FIPS and PSP's most progressive students are largely "invested in helping," often viewing service and community work through an individualistic lens, rather than a result of structural inequality. This, of course, is a result of the dominant logics students have

internalized for most of their lives, including pervasive blaming of individuals as well as racist and classist logics. These logics run deep and are complex, requiring more than a FIPS co-curricular program or PSP course to undo them. For example, Keith said that students' understandings of community engagement were further complicated when the Catholic context of the college's community service programs were invoked, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Regardless if students were involved in service and community work as part of their PSP major or minor, to satisfy their Civic Engagement Proficiency, as part of their participation in a FIPS co-curricular program, or as part of their participation in another co-curricular community service program, Heather reflected, "the result is still a whole bunch of students doing service because they have to do it for something that they're involved in." Continued analysis of the data in this Chapter further reveals how community members described and understood their experiences with community engagement with a specific focus on my second research question: How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within Providence College's community engagement work impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

### **A Note on Harm**

In engaging the above research question throughout this Chapter, I consider something that several community members referenced during our conversations—the potential for harm to be imposed on Smith Hill as a result of the college's community engagement work. Community members' references to harm resembled the critiques of service learning and community engagement detailed in Chapter Two; that service learning and community engagement has traditionally been positioned as short-term,

transactional experiences that has the potential to perpetuate color-blind racism, deficit-based thinking and discourse, and a charity or white savior mentality among participating students. Community members' references to harm immediately caught my attention given my interest in thinking about how white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within community engagement has impacted the community. Consequently, throughout my data collection, I paid close attention to how community members talked about the potential for harm to be imposed by community engagement.

Community members, however, did not describe a physical harm that was inflicted by the college onto the community. Rather, community members described a perceptual harm—one experienced through feelings of emotional harm—that was imposed on the community through, for instance, the short-term, transactional dynamic of the college's service and community work coupled with the college's, including students', deficit-based frameworks about the neighborhood. Students' deficit-based frameworks, for instance, resulted in harmful discourse and actions that community members had experienced at community placements where students were working. In some instances, however, community members extended their descriptions of this perceptual harm to include a type of harm that moved beyond feelings of emotional harm and had a much wider reach within the community. Both community members' descriptions of this perceptual harm and the more far-reaching harm imposed through community engagement will be discussed throughout this Chapter.

The notion that service learning and community engagement can impose harm on neighborhoods is not new. Most notably, Eby (1998) argued that “dramatic stories” of the benefits of linking service and learning have been masked by “underlying troubling



issues,” including the possibility of imposing harm on communities (p. 2). About a decade later, Vaccaro (2009) argued that despite a “do no harm” ethic (p. 120), service learning upheld the “potentially hidden dangers” of White students perpetuating harm on Communities of Color (p. 124). Decades have passed since these pieces were published, yet questions around the ethics of service learning and community engagement imposing harm on communities remain. Analysis of the data further reveals how community members discussed how harm was imposed on Smith Hill through the college’s community engagement work. Findings throughout this Chapter are presented through engagement with the following questions:

- How did campus stakeholders describe the resulting harm of community engagement?
- How did community members describe the resulting harm of community engagement?
- How far reaching was the resulting harm of community engagement within the community?
- How has FIPS and PSP changed their community engagement practices to reduce harm?

### **Considering Community Engagement and Harm**

Speaking from his experiences in FIPS and PSP since 1994, Keith reflected, “I genuinely am an experiential educator in my bones, and I think...students learn by what we ask them to do and by how they feel when they’re doing it, not by the theory we’re offering to them [in the classroom].” Keith said that community engagement has always had “the potential for [student] learning” about issues of race and racism, poverty, and

other social issues through their community engagement experiences. Yet, because PC, like so many other colleges and universities, has predominantly sent “wealthier White suburban students into a lower income community where they work mostly with Youth of Color,” Keith continued, there also has always been “the potential for White college students to be the bulls in the china shops, kind of stomping all around, stepping on people’s toes, bruising them, breaking things.” Keith said the following was not “a justification,” but, in the early years of FIPS and PSP, he thought, “How else am I going to teach a White suburban student from a professional family background what racism actually does on a daily basis?”

Keith worried that throughout the history of the field of service learning and community engagement, a “rhetoric of care, equity, mutuality, do no harm” had become an irony of what has actually occurred in communities through higher education’s community engagement work. Keith worried that this rhetoric has tried to “describe away the institutional imbalances of power that exist” between campuses and communities. However, Keith argued that there was no way to theorize away issues of race and racism, class, and other imbalances of power between campuses and communities. Trying to theorize these issues away, Keith continued, produced “bad learning” and “reinforce[d] preconceived ideas” that students held about the communities they were working within.

However, in recent years, Keith thought that there had been several scholars and campuses who had theorized community engagement through more critically oriented frameworks (see, for instance, Mitchell, 2007, 2008). These frameworks, Keith stated, explicitly situated “do no harm as the maxim” through emphasizing the significance of deep, collaborative relationships between campuses and communities. For FIPS and PSP,

Keith described, “do no harm as the maxim” as translating into the “idea of working deeply with the smallest set of organizations as possible.” Reflecting on FIPS and PSP’s community work within Smith Hill over time, students, staff, and faculty, as well as other community members, pointed to Youth RAP, Rec Night, the Annex, and Common Grounds Café as examples of projects that had an emphasis on relationship building and deep collaboration between the campus and community. These projects, community members reflected, were ideas generated not by the college in isolation, but by and with community organizations and community members based on the problems, issues, or concerns that were important to them within a specific time and context.

Rather than trying to “solve” problems through service, Keith said, these projects allowed the college to step into the community in more “generous and relational” ways that had the potential for the positive growth of everybody involved—local youth and other community members, students, and the college at large. Still, Keith understood that these programs were not perfect, but he thought:

[T]he only way you can justify the risk of doing harm, not doing harm, but justify taking the risk of that harm could happen is if the learning outcomes long-term really, really outweigh that. But I don’t think we’ve always been able to guarantee that. And I don’t know if we can now, but that’s where we’re trying to get to.

### ***How Did Campus Stakeholders Describe the Resulting Harm of Community Engagement?***

Campus stakeholders, specifically FIPS and PSP students, staff, and faculty, described the harm that community engagement can impose on communities, such as Smith Hill, as a perceptual harm. FIPS and PSP stakeholders suggested that this

perceptual harm stemmed from students' preconceived notions about Smith Hill, which led them to become fearful of and encounter the neighborhood as a dangerous place. These preconceived notions and fears translated into discourse and actions by individual students at their community placements and by some faculty members on campus that imposed harm on the community.

**Justifying Student Safety through “Crime Stats.”** To gain a better understanding of FIPS' various community engagement programs, I met with Melissa, the FIPS Program Coordinator, early in my data collection process. Melissa oversaw the co-curricular CWS and Feinstein Community Fellows programs as well as the curricular Global Service-Learning program in collaboration with GST. While these programs included several community placements within and beyond Smith Hill, Melissa shared where students could engage in service and community work within Smith Hill. As discussed in Chapter Three, during the spring 2020 academic semester, Smith Hill community placements, specifically for CWS and Feinstein Community Fellows, included the CDC, half full, the Smith Hill Early Childhood Center, and the Library. Talking about these community placements, Melissa said students often perceived Smith Hill, as well as other neighborhoods throughout Providence, as a dangerous place, expressing concern about their safety before they ever arrived at their community placements.

Asking Melissa to elaborate on how students expressed fear and concern about their safety, Melissa pointed to a bulletin board hanging in her office. Getting up from behind her desk, Melissa unpinned a set of papers from the bulletin board, handing me a set of “crime stat” reports downloaded from the internet. The reports showed that higher

rates of crimes were reported on campus than in the neighborhoods students worked within, including Smith Hill. Melissa said she often had to use these “crime stat” reports to justify safety not only to FIPS students, but also to students’ parents who sometimes called FIPS, expressing concern for their child being assigned a community placement in neighborhoods like Smith Hill that they perceived as dangerous. Recalling to Chapter Four, Wole worried that students’ perceptions and fear of the neighborhood (and perhaps their parents) was, in part, generated by the college through their warnings to students to “stay out of the community for fear of being mugged, for fear of getting beat up, or having their car broken into.” Melissa worried that students’ preconceived notions about the community effected how they then showed up at their community placements and interacted with community members in potentially harmful ways.

**Students Taking an Uber to Their Community Placements.** Despite the justification of student safety through “crime stat” reports, students’ fear of the community influenced how they then chose to get to and from their community placements. Smith Hill community placements were all less than a mile from campus. Students were encouraged by FIPS and PSP staff and faculty, as well as staff at their community placements, to walk with a partner or in small groups, utilize the free campus shuttle service, or take public transportation to get to and from their community placements. The public bus, for instance, had a stop at one of the campus entrances and students received free public transit benefits with their Student ID. However, Rick, the founding Director of FIPS who was teaching “PSP 303: Community Organizing” during the spring 2020 academic semester, said, in recent years, more and more students were choosing to take an Uber or other rideshare service to their community placements. Rick

thought that some students may argue that taking an Uber was more convenient for their schedules than organizing transportation with the campus shuttle service or taking public transportation, which was known to be unreliable. However, Rick thought that students' fear of the neighborhood also influenced how they chose to get to their community placements.

Reflecting on the possible harm students impose on the community by choosing to take an Uber to their community placements, Rick said,

[I]n the context of working with young people in the community, [students] aren't thinking about how young people have to walk home in the community, have to walk in the community at night, or whatever...So, that's more of a perceptual harm but it brings a notion of racial and economic privilege to the question as well.

Rick worried that taking an Uber to their community placements allowed students another way to further "remove themselves from the experiences of the everyday citizens of Providence." Rick continued, "it's not actually doing physical harm but it's doing other kinds of harm. It's a harmful thing."

**"I Wasn't Just Some Random Black Person."** While Melissa and Rick reflected on how students' preconceived notions about the community affected how they then show up at their community placements in potentially harmful ways, Kendra described an interaction with a student in Smith Hill that directly caused her feelings of emotional harm. "The basic situation," Kendra said, "was that a student reached out to me about an independent study." After meeting with the student and discussing their

interests and what they wanted to do in the independent study, Kendra agreed to supervise the student's independent study course. Kendra continued:

So, a couple months later I'm at the Smith Hill Block Party circulating and I see the student who I'm going to be working with and who I've already talked to and I'm like, "Oh, Hey!" I called the student by name. "What's going on? So, you're working with this organization? I see you out here tabling for them." And the response was super vague. "Oh, this is what we do here." It was like a tabling script, which is totally fine. I don't have a problem with that. But the thing that got me was that the whole time we were talking, which felt like an eternity, even though it was probably 2 minutes and 17 seconds, the student never looked up and never made eye contact with me. And therefore, never knew that I wasn't just some random Black person, but I was Dr. Brewster who they had talked to about supervising their independent study.

Kendra described the harm she experienced from this incident in a similar way that Rick thought students can impose harm on community members by choosing to take an Uber to their community placements—as a perceptual harm. Kendra said the student's harm was not "outright" or "malicious," but, nonetheless, their "implicit" actions caused her feelings of emotional harm. Kendra said that she worried that all too often White students were not attuned to the sensitivity of knowing the harm of "what their othering feels like."

Kendra explained how she brought this experience back to a PSP faculty meeting as "being wholly problematic that students in our program go into the community and don't care about people or are too afraid of people that they're supposedly serving to

make eye contact with them.” However, Kendra said that not all of her colleagues saw her experience as being as problematic as she did. Kendra said that her experience at the Smith Hill Block Party and back on campus in the PSP faculty meeting were reminders of the “mucky space” that she occupied—“feeling like a community member because of my race, but then also feeling like a college professor because of my class and educational experience.”

Kendra’s narrative is significant in thinking about not only the harm that can be imposed by students in communities, but also how that harm can be perpetuated on campus. Kendra first experienced being misrecognized in the community by one of her students. Then, Kendra named that misrecognition in a PSP faculty meeting where she was not necessarily supported as a colleague. How does this misrecognition and lack of support translate into how faculty members respond to the deficit-based frameworks students bring to the classroom? Are students’ deficit-based frameworks and the ways in which they show up at their community placements explicitly discussed and challenged with/by faculty and their peers in the classroom? Scholarship has often suggested that students are the problem for the ways in which they approach service and community work in deficit-based ways, but perhaps students are reproducing what they hear and see in the classroom and other spaces. In other words, faculty members are not exempt from the same ways of problematic thinking (and harm) that students display while engaged in service and community work.



*How Did Community Members Describe the Resulting Harm of Community Engagement?*

Like the campus stakeholders, Smith Hill community members described the harm that community engagement can impose on the neighborhood as a perceptual harm. This perceptual harm, community members understood, stemmed from the ways in which students were prioritized in the college's community engagement work through, for instance, the privileging of the academic calendar as well as the ways students' preconceived notions about the neighborhood led them to become fearful of and encounter the neighborhood as a dangerous place. These preconceived notions and fears translated into discourse and actions not only by individual students at their community placements, but also by the college at large that imposed harm on the community.

**“It's A Shame That We Have 8- and 9-Year-Old Cynical People but We Do.”**

Recalling to Chapter Four, several resident-parents expressed appreciation for students' service and community work through programs, such as Youth RAP and the Library's afterschool Homework Help program. Alex, for instance, said that the students' participation in Youth RAP was “instrumental” to her three daughters' involvement in the program. Alex reflected that she valued the students' service and community work not only because it was beneficial to her daughters, but also because “[s]ome kids in this neighborhood don't have families that can be with them afterschool.”

While Sally, another resident-parent, appreciated students being involved in the neighborhood, she also expressed how the college's winter and summer breaks were difficult for her son who often participated in Library's afterschool programming. Sally,

whose son required learning assistance due to mental health, said, “[h]e doesn’t like change.” Sally continued:

[H]e has his own workers that come to the house. So, he has regular people that work with him. They would have to take him to the Library and try to get him introduced to the new people so he could get to know them and trust them.

Relatedly, Kate reflected on her own community engagement experiences as a PSP alumna and former Feinstein Community Fellow and the challenges she witnessed in the community when her service learning courses came to an end. Kate described how many of the local youth she worked with at her various Smith Hill community placements, including at the Library, Rec Center, and Youth Rap, “had people [in their lives] who had walked out on them.” Kate continued, “So, it was actually pretty traumatic when [my service learning course] ended and, like, yet again, another somewhat adult figure was kind of leaving.”

Notably, the constraints of, for instance, the short-term nature of community engagement as a result of the academic calendar and, in turn, the prioritization of students over the community move beyond imposing harm on individual children and youth with whom students work with to imposing harm on entire community organizations and the resources and services they can offer to the community. As discussed in Chapter Four, Alan and Jennifer at the Library said that the direct services FIPS and PSP students provided were so essential to the Library’s afterschool Homework Help program that during the college’s winter and summer breaks the Library has sometimes had to limit or cancel the program because staff did not have the capacity to run the program without the support of the students. The constraints of community engagement, coupled with the

ways in which community engagement prioritizes students over the community, represents spaces of disruption in the resources and services community organizations like the Library can offer to the community.

Ms. Althea further elaborated on how the constraints and prioritization of students within community engagement imposes harm on the community, specifically the children and youth with whom students work at their community placements. Speaking with various hats on, including her roles as a resident who was deeply involved in the work of the Library and as a former PSP Community Advisor, Ms. Althea said that for the most part, “every semester kids have to get acquainted and learn to trust a whole other group of students.” Ms. Althea continued:

And I’ve heard some of the kids say to the PC students, “Well, there ain’t no sense of me really getting to know you that well anyway because you’re going to be gone in December.” And the PC students would say, “Oh, I’ll be around.” And the kids say, “Yeah, that’s what they all say.” And it’s a shame that we have 8- and 9-year-old cynical people but we do.

**Safety Precluding Critical Learning.** Extending the discussion on the college’s constraints of community engagement and prioritization of students over the community, Ms. Althea reflected on how campuses often limit where students can and cannot do their service and community work based on what and where campuses deem as a “safe” community placement. Ms. Althea described an incident at one of the community placements, a public housing development operated by the PHA just outside of Smith Hill, in a PSP course that she co-taught several years ago. There was a domestic violence incident at the public housing development where a woman shot and killed her abusive

husband. Following the incident, the college made the decision to remove all of the students from the community placement after at least one student expressed concern about continuing their service and community work at the public housing development.

Ms. Althea said,

There's domestic violence in every walk of life. That woman had never been in any other problems, trouble in her life. Her husband had been beating her up for years and she just finally snapped. She's not going to run downstairs and say, "There's the PC students. Pow. Pow. Pow."

Frustrated that the college pulled the students from the community placement, Ms. Althea said the students had never even seen the woman because she did not attend any of the activities and programming that they were involved in.

The explicit harm imposed on the community in this incident was the college's decision to remove the students from the public housing development to, ironically, limit students' exposure to harm. From Ms. Althea's perspective, however, the college's decision was a misrepresentation that students were actually at risk. Ms. Althea did not elaborate on the service and community work students were involved in at the public housing development. However, from my own experience as a former PSP student who worked at a PHA public housing development in Smith Hill as part of several of my service learning courses, I know that students often helped facilitate activities and programming for residents, including adult literacy and English as a Second Language classes, BINGO and other activities, and cultural programming. Therefore, whatever work was happening at the public housing development all of a sudden was halted when the college made the decision to remove the students from the community placement.

Similar to the spaces of disruption in the resources the Library can offer to the community during the college's winter and summer breaks, the college's decision to remove students from the public housing development represented another space of disruption in the work students were doing at community placements.

Ms. Althea said that she understood that the college was liable for the students and had to ensure their safety, but she thought the college's decision to remove the students from the community placement was bad learning. If the college wants students to participate in community work "to learn how to be in this world," Ms. Althea said, then they needed to let students "be in the world and deal with whatever came their way." Instead, Ms. Althea worried that the college's decision to remove students from the community placement not only upheld the students' preconceived notions and fears about the community, but also sent a clear message to students to always "kind of distance themselves" from their community placements. This distancing that Ms. Althea referenced echoes back to the way that Rick discussed students being able to "remove themselves from the experiences of the everyday citizens of Providence" by taking an Uber to their community placements. Like Rick, Ms. Althea said students' ability to distance themselves from their community placements was harmful to the community.

Ms. Althea continued:

You can't handpick these types of things. You can't really do service, true service, if you're gonna say students can only go right here. That's like going to New York City and saying, "Well, I'm not going into Central Park because there's muggings there, but I want to help the people that go into Central Park." Or, "I want to help the Somali immigrant population in South Providence but I'm

not going to go to South Providence. They're going to have to come to me cause that's just my fear."

**"I Don't Understand. What Is This Place?"** While Ms. Althea thought the college wanted students to participate in service and community work "to learn how to be in this world," some community members said that students they had interacted with "don't get it" or they "don't get the real world." When asked what "it" meant, Jean, the Executive Director of the CDC, said, "the community." Jean continued, "[students] fear what is beyond the confines of the college because they don't understand what it means to live in poverty or adversity." In an example of a more traditional community engagement placement, Janice, a resident member of SHARP who formerly worked at Mary House Food Pantry and Meal Kitchen, described an interaction she had with one student. Janice recalled:

[T]his one girl she came into the food pantry and she saw all the food on the shelves, and she said, "I don't understand. What is this place?" So, I said, "Well, have you ever been in a food pantry?" She said, "No." I said, "Well, this is a food pantry. People come in here who are in need of food because they have nothing to eat." She said, "I don't understand." I said, "Well, have you ever been hungry?" She goes, "No." [I asked,] "Have you ever not had food?" She goes, "No." I said, "So, the people who come here are the people who have not had food and who are hungry. We're here to try to do our best to give them whatever we can give them on the shelf so that they can have a meal or two or three or four or five or whatever."

Janice said that though this experience did not occur frequently, it was not an isolated event. Janice said that if students did not understand why and where they were “serving,” then the impact of their community work would be minimal, if any.

Concerned that “sometimes classrooms are not real world,” Janice thought it was important for students to get off campus and engage in community work. She saw community engagement by the college as having the potential to be beneficial to student learning and have a positive impact on the community. However, depending on how students arrived at their community placements, Janice worried that students lack of understanding about why and where they were engaging in service and community work, coupled with their preconceived notions and fears, could impose harm on the community. Janice thought “colleges can do better” in preparing students for their community engagement experiences in “the real world.”

***“You Are Not the Savior. You Do Not Have Any Wings.”*** The ways in which students entered the community, such as in Janice’s interaction above, can lead them to believe that the social injustices they witnessed through their service and community work were individualized rather than a result of structural inequality. Reflecting on her frustration with how some students would talk about their community engagement work in the PSP courses she co-taught, Ms. Althea said she would explain to students:

Do not go into my community looking down, talking about how you’re gonna have to help us because we have no fathers, or our parents don’t really care; that they don’t come to any of the teacher meetings. Don’t think nobody in their family cares about them. You gotta take all that stuff out of your mind. They have fathers. They have uncles. They have brothers. They have cousins. They have

stepfathers. They have the same thing that you have, they have. Are there some broken homes? Yes. But they're broken homes at each and every level of society... You are not the savior. You do not have any wings, so don't come here thinking that.

Worried that students would impose harm on the community through their thoughts, words, and actions, Ms. Althea said she spent a lot of time having conversations with students in the PSP courses she co-taught about not making assumptions about other peoples' lives and about having respect for the people and places in the community where students were working.

***How Far Reaching Was the Resulting Harm of Community Engagement Within the Community?***

One community member extended the above descriptions of perceptual harm to include a type of harm that moved beyond feelings of emotional harm and had a much wider reach within the community. Jennifer, the Library's Youth Services Specialist, described two incidents from several years ago where a more far-reaching harm imposed through community engagement extended beyond individual interactions between a student and a community member, with whom they interact with at their community placement, to include harm that was imposed on multiple community members and organizations.

The first incident Jennifer described included a student, several residents, staff at the Library, and college staff and faculty. Jennifer explained:

A parent called their kid and said to come home, and the child told the PC student, like, "Oh, I have to go home." And the PC student was like, "No, no, we need to



finish your homework before you go home.” Well, the parent who called and told their kid to come home came to the Library and the PC student was still there.

The parent was like, “Who are you to tell me my child they can’t leave the building? I’m the parent.”

Jennifer said the Library staff, who agreed with the frustrated parent, had to intervene, and get the appropriate campus stakeholders involved to make sure the student understood how their decision based on what they thought was “best” for the child was inappropriate and that it would not happen again.

The second incident, which involved the RI Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), was more far-reaching in the community than the first. Jennifer began to describe the incident:

A student was very upset because it was 6:00 pm and a girl, who was 9 or 10 years old, she and her sister walked literally half a block home. The student was like, “It’s dark. How could they walk home by themselves? You should call DCYF.”

Jennifer said that the Library had plenty of very serious cases in the past where they had to call DCYF, but she knew this was not one of them. Jennifer explained to the student that though some states had curfew laws or laws that stated children under a certain age could not be unattended in public places, “I’ve had training from DCYF. This isn’t breaking any rule.” Jennifer said she continued by telling the student, “They live a block and a half away. They’re old enough to be in the Library without an adult.” Still, despite Jennifer having training from DCYF and being knowledgeable of RI laws, Jennifer said,

“the student was like, ‘No. This is wrong. This is really, really wrong.’ And the student ended up calling DCYF themselves to report that they thought this was neglect.”

Jennifer described “[t]he far-ranging effects of calling DCYF,” which not only included the student, the children and their family, the Library staff, college staff and faculty, and DCYF, but also the children’s school given that DCYF later interviewed the children at their school as a follow up to the student’s report of neglect. Jennifer, reflecting on both of the above instances, continued:

It is much more complicated when a student makes a unilateral decision without talking to anyone else. Part of this is because the staff is at the Library every day. If there is fallout, most of the time the student isn’t here to deal with the parent or provide details when the parent arrives.

The fallout in an instance like the one where the student called DCYF has the potential to impose harm beyond that of emotional feelings of harm. Perhaps DCYF’s investigation led to a parent/child separation? Perhaps the investigation was null, resulting in dozens of wasted hours on the part of DCYF staff due to the student’s complaint of neglect? Did the parent sever their relationship with the Library? Without speaking to the specifics of the outcome of this specific instance, Jennifer, reflecting on times in the past when the Library has had to call DCYF, said, “Generally, a call to DCYF doesn't mean we never see a family again.” But Jennifer added, “We have had very upset parents.”

The above two examples demonstrate not only how students can impose harm by questioning the practices and policies of a community organization (Eby, 1998), but also how that harm can then extend beyond a perceptual harm to be a more far-reaching harm within the community. Jennifer acknowledged that incidents like the ones she described

above did not occur frequently throughout the more than 20-year campus community partnership between the Library and PC. Still, Jennifer stressed the significance of these incidents when they do occur.

Though Jennifer, as well as Alan, discussed these two incidents and the far-reaching harm imposed on the community, the incidents were not referenced in conversations with campus stakeholders. However, FIPS and PSP staff and faculty, as discussed early in this Chapter, acknowledged other ways in which community engagement can impose harm. These same campus stakeholders also discussed how changes had been made to their community engagement practices that aimed to reduce harm, which is discussed in the following section.

### ***How Has FIPS and PSP Changed Their Community Engagement Practices to Reduce Harm?***

Recalling previous chapters, FIPS and PSP had made explicit commitments to racial and economic justice through their curricular and co-curricular programs. While the PSP curriculum had historically introduced students to and problematized concepts of “service,” “community,” “justice,” and “democracy” (Longo et al., 2017, p. 32), in recent years, the department has made an explicit commitment to develop “the capacities of students, community partners, and faculty to contribute to community building, racial and economic equity, and organizing for social justice” (PSP, 2021b, para. 3). Likewise, in recent years, FIPS rewrote its Statement of Purpose to include questions to guide their work going forward, including “How can we contribute to the dismantling of racial injustice and inequity, the persistence of which continues to be a major obstacle to community well-being?” and “What opportunities exist for the Feinstein Institute to

combat poverty and economic inequality, locally as well as globally?” (FIPS, 2021, para. 2). These commitments can be interpreted as aiming to reduce harm through the explicit naming and taking up of the racial and economic power imbalances between the campus and communities with whom FIPS and PSP work within.

As discussed in previous chapters, though FIPS offered a curricular Global Service Learning program in collaboration with GST, FIPS and PSP had largely moved away from the traditional concept of service learning, citing reasons in line with the field’s critiques of the hierarchies imposed by labels of “service” (Cooks et al., 2004; Costa & Leong, 2013; Doerr, 2019; Hernandez, 2018; Hicks Peterson, 2018; Mitchell, 2007, 2008; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016; Varlotta, 1997). Talking about the decision to move away from service learning, however, Kendra said the change was not a result of staff and faculty conversations, such as “Oh, you know what, we’re doing harm to Communities of Color and poor communities. Let’s just pause a little bit.” Rather, Kendra said it was more aligned with, as Keith said in Chapter Four, “tracking the field” and through conversations with community partners around need and capacity.

Nonetheless, Kendra said that the move away from service learning, specifically traditional forms of direct service, had allowed individual faculty like herself to not put community engagement “on the back burner” in PSP courses, “but to try to position it so I don’t feel responsible for doing harm in Communities of Color and poor communities.” Concerned about “bringing any old body into communities,” especially White, middle-class students, Kendra said the move away from service learning (e.g., having two or three, typically direct service, community placements per class for students to choose from) allowed her to adjust the community engagement components of her courses to

include a “cross section” of direct service, philanthropy, relationship building, and research. Kendra said that this “cross section” of community engagement allowed her to develop deeper relationships with a smaller set of community partners given that she worked with the same partners across several the courses that she taught.

Still, Kendra explained that though the move away from service learning allowed her to restructure the community engagement components of her courses to reduce harm, it did not eliminate harm. Kendra explained,

[A]t least in the classes that I teach, which are courses early on in the sequence of PSP courses and are taken by a variety of students across campus because they gain proficiency so they can graduate. So, I see such a wide span of students that it doesn't matter to them what it's called or even what the service or the community engagement is actually doing. In my experience, some students are going to be, like, [open to] the notion of partnership and the notion of showing up and having their pores open to experience. And there's also, in my experience, a larger subset of students that are like, “Yeah, I'm here to get the proficiency.”

And I think that's where some of that ethical danger really steps in for me.

Here, Kendra was referring to “PSP 101: Introduction to Service in Democratic Communities,” as well as several other upper-level PSP courses, that counted towards the college's Civic Engagement Proficiency as part of the Core Curriculum. Kendra's concern of “ethical danger” resembled something similar to what Ms. Althea expressed.

Referencing the college's Civic Engagement Proficiency, Ms. Althea said her PSP 101 courses “started getting a lot of Business students” and “they wanted to question everything we were doing.” Ms. Althea said questions that prompted concern for her

were around, for instance, how a child who lives in a low-income neighborhood like Smith Hill could be happy. Ms. Althea recalled telling her students:

[I]f you're poor you can be happy and if you're rich you can be sad. Emotions come from all people. I can be the richest person in the world and be lonely. I can be the poorest person in the world and be rich with friends.

Ms. Althea continued recalling what she would tell her students:

All people can have happy childhoods. I'm going to be truthful with you, I didn't come from a wealthy family. I didn't know we weren't really rich when I was growing up because I had everything I wanted really. I didn't realize until I went somewhere and was like, "Wow. She's got a bedroom all to herself. Oh, my goodness." We didn't have that.

Ms. Althea worried that students' questioning about their service and community work had a potentially harmful effect, or what Kendra referred to as "ethical danger," on how students then showed up at their community placements and interacted with community members.

It is noteworthy, however, that the business students were willing to articulate the questions. Meanwhile, other students, including PSP students might have had a more coded version of the same question that never was expressed in the same ways, and, therefore, did not get countered in the direct way that Ms. Althea did with the business students. This, too, can impact how students then show up at their community placements and interact with community members in potentially harmful ways.

Though PSP 101 was originally designed to be an introductory service learning class for PSP majors and minors, over the past decade, the course had been taken by PSP

majors and minors as well as students from across the college to satisfy their Civic Engagement Proficiency. In other words, the students taking PSP 101 to satisfy their Civic Engagement Proficiency were likely not as invested in combining work in the community with academic learning. As a result of how the Civic Engagement Proficiency had impacted who was enrolling in courses like PSP 101, the PSP curriculum was under review by the PC Faculty Senate for several curriculum revisions during the spring 2020 academic semester. Table 1, as presented in Chapter Two, displays the PSP major requirements that were approved by the PC Faculty Senate in spring 2020. Of particular note is the addition of “PSP 102: Foundations of Community Partnerships,” which followed PSP 101 as a “second introductory course based on an expectation of deep community partnership, and deep engagement with the ethics and practices of engagement” (PC Faculty Senate, 2020, p. 3). In a letter approving the addition of PSP 102, among other curriculum revisions, the college’s Faculty Senate (2020) wrote:

The PSP faculty have noted significant changes in PSP 101 since the course has been designated as fulfilling the Civic Engagement proficiency. As motivations and prior experience of students in the course have shifted, PSP 101 has adjusted to provide a more general introduction to service, community and democracy, and has adapted its community sites to ensure that students *can do no harm if their commitment is variable*. (p. 2, emphasis added)

The reference to students’ variable commitments links directly to Ms. Althea and Kendra’s concerns about students’ investment in combining work in the community with academic learning depending on if they were a PSP major or minor or only enrolled in

PSP 101 to satisfy the college's Civic Engagement Proficiency. The letter approving the addition of PSP 102 from the college's Faculty Senate (2020) continued:

While PSP 101 continues to provide a useful introduction, the PSP faculty recognize the need for a second introductory course for majors and minors based on an expectation of deep community partnership, and deep engagement with the ethics and practices of engagement. This is consistent with the evolution of the field of community engagement over the last decade. PSP majors and minors have consistently requested a second course to be taken immediately following PSP 101 that would allow them to continue and deepen their community engagement and reflective learning. (pp. 2-3)

The idea behind the addition of PSP 102, which was offered for the first time in spring 2021 academic semester, was for PSP majors and minors to have a second introductory course where students became familiar with “putting into practice the theories and ethics of community engagement” that framed the PSP curriculum by initiating or deepening a partnership with a community organization that students then had the potential to work with throughout the entirety of their PSP coursework (e.g., other PSP courses including their community engaged research course, required internship, and Capstone seminars) (Morton, 2021, p. 1). In other words, the move away from the traditional concept of service learning and the addition of PSP 102 aimed to transition the PSP curriculum away from being a place-based community engagement model for each class (e.g., having two or three community placements per class for students to choose from) to being a place-based model for each individual PSP major or minor across their departmental coursework.



The changes to FIPS and PSP’s community engagement practices—from explicit commitments to racial and economic justice, to the move away from traditional forms of direct service, to repositioning PSP 101 as more of a general introductory course for both PSP majors and minors and for non-PSP students to satisfy their Civic Engagement Proficiency, and to adding PSP 102 for PSP majors and minors to initiate and develop a longer-term partnership across their college coursework—can all be interpreted as aiming to reduce harm by campus stakeholders. However, the question remains if any form of community engagement can be taken without the potential for consequences that are undesirable. Because of the shifting contexts and varying perspectives across higher education, there is no “pure” form of community engagement that does not impose the potential for harm on communities. How then can community engagement be done in a way that causes the least amount of harm on communities?

### **Further Considering the Contradictions of Community Engagement**

While FIPS and PSP had made changes to their practices that can be interpreted as aiming to reduce harm, the contradictions of community engagement presented at the end of Chapter Four remain. For example, Kendra stated, community engagement “can be both exploitative and it can be students and community members showing up and doing good, authentic work. It can be both/and...When there’s good, there’s good. When there’s harm, there’s harm.” But Kendra said the contradictions “aren’t about Providence College as much as they are about white supremacy and saviorism and class.” Kendra continued that to reduce the possibility of imposing harm on communities, “it’s about people leaning into [the racial and economic realities of community engagement] and resisting them at the very same moment while they’re in relationship.” What becomes

important here is the ability to work through these contradictions and to end relationships when they become too harmful.

Though community engagement did not create the contradictions, Keith questioned if the field of service learning and community engagement is leaning into and resisting them as Kendra suggested. Keith reflected “if we don’t see ourselves as stepping into that problem to solve collectively, why is it in our interest to be there and to solve it?” Reflecting on the transactional dynamic of service learning and community engagement, Keith said:

I saw a post on one of the community engagement social media platforms where somebody asked, “We keep wanting our students to do transformational work, but they keep ending up in these transactional relationships. What are some ideas you have for how we could do transformational work in our one semester class?”

Frustratedly laughing, Keith questioned, “Really? Twenty-five years of [the field] and that’s the question somebody’s asking?” Acknowledging that FIPS and PSP’s service and community work can be transactional, Keith reflected that he would like to believe that “it’s at the relational end of that spectrum for the transaction” given how FIPS and PSP had been intentional about working on community projects based on the problems, issues, or concerns that were important to community organizations and community members within a specific time and context, how FIPS and PSP engaged community members, including residents, as PSP Community Advisors, among other relational aspects of their community engagement work.

Like Keith reflected at the start of this Chapter, Kendra thought the field had made progress in adopting more critical oriented frameworks for community engagement

in recent years. Still, Kendra worried that if the field did not take another “hard turn” towards “super critical research,” there was a risk of “snap[ping] back...to the, like, super arm’s length distance notions of ‘need’ [and] ‘service’” that had more of a possibility of imposing harm on communities than more relational forms of community engagement.

### **Linking with Theory**

Though the findings presented throughout this Chapter, as well as Chapter Four, may uphold the scholarship reviewed in Chapter Two that argued that service learning and community engagement perpetuates white supremacy and neoliberalism, the differences are twofold. First, the findings presented throughout this inquiry are from the voices and perspectives of community members, whereas much of the previous research investigating the impact of whiteness on service learning and community engagement has been conducted by interviewing participating students or analyzing students’ written reflections on their community engagement experiences. Much of the previous research investigating the impact of neoliberalism on service learning and community engagement has been conceptual or historical in nature. Second, though community members described community engagement in ways that supported the theoretical scholarship reviewed in Chapter Two, community members more broadly contextualized their experiences with community engagement as imposing harm on the community. I interpreted community members’ references to harm as interrelated with the critiques of service learning and community engagement under white supremacy and neoliberalism. These references to harm were connected to white supremacy and/or neoliberalism through the ways in which community members described how community engagement has traditionally been positioned as short-term, transactional experiences that prioritizes

students and the college over the community while simultaneously perpetuating color-blind racism, deficit-based thinking and discourse, and a charity or white savior mentality among participating students as well as staff, faculty, and the college at large.

Eby (1998) wrote that service learning and community engagement “students may reflect ethnocentrism and racism in ways that are harmful” (p. 5). Harm as describe by community members was connected to white supremacy (and neoliberalism) through students’ preconceived notions about Smith Hill, which led them to become fearful of and encounter the neighborhood as a dangerous place. These preconceived notions and fears translated into discourse and actions by individual students at their community placements (and discourse and actions by staff, faculty, and the college at large) that community members contextualized as imposing a perceptual harm—one experienced through feelings of emotional harm—on the community. This perceptual harm, which connected to color-blind racism, deficit-based thinking and discourse, and a charity or white savior mentality was, as Kendra described in this Chapter, not “outright” or “malicious,” but nonetheless, “implicit,” causing feelings of emotional harm.

Community engagement, specifically as short-term, transactional experiences, also can impose harm on communities through the ways in which colleges and universities have historically prioritized students’, staff, and faculty’s personal commitments to service, course objectives, the academic calendar, among other constraints over the community (Eby, 1998; Sandy, 2007; Vaccaro, 2009). Vaccaro (2009), for instance, argued that service learning upheld unequal benefits for students over the community by prioritizing short-term experiences for students to gain “skill enhancement, resume-building experiences, and course credit” (p. 129). This connects

directly to the ways in which scholars in Chapter Two, as well as discussed in Chapter Four, argued that, under neoliberalism, service and community work had become defined in relation to a market society (Kliewer, 2013). Here, scholars have argued that campuses promote service and community work for market-driven and public relations aims (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015; Scott, 2009) while students “perform” service and are involved in community work to receive a credential that can be placed on a resume, transcript, and highlighted in an employment interview to them more marketable for the workforce (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Hyatt, 2001; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Raddon & Harrison, 2015).

Notably, the constraints of community engagement and prioritization of students and the college over the community move beyond imposing harm on individual children and youth with whom students work with, as Kate and Sally described in this Chapter, to imposing harm on entire community organizations and the resources and services they can offer to the community as Alan and Jennifer, as well Ms. Althea, described throughout this Chapter (and Chapter Four). The harm caused by the short-term, transactional dynamic of community engagement that prioritizes students and the college over the community are further demonstrations of neoliberalism at work. They also are further demonstrations of whiteness at work when considering who has historically marketed themselves off of the service they “perform” (i.e., predominantly White campuses and their White students) and where service is “performed” (i.e., low-income Communities of Color). Though beyond the scope of this inquiry, it is noteworthy that the field of service learning and community engagement has tended to focus their work on materially poor communities (e.g., Smith Hill). What if materially wealthier

communities (e.g., Elmhurst) were prioritized in service learning and community engagement for needing to interrupt their values of, for instance, white supremacy that create inequality in the first place? Would this shift help reduce the harm associated with service learning and community engagement in higher education as described by community members in this Chapter?

Relatedly, harm, as connected to white supremacy and neoliberalism, is further imposed on communities when colleges and universities limit where students' service and community work can and cannot take place, as described by Ms. Althea in this Chapter. Recalling to Chapter Two, Cann and McCloskey (2017) argued that colleges and universities "want to ensure that the environment surrounding the institution is as safe as possible for its students" (p 84). Consequently, students are often assigned community placements that are deemed safe by the college, which, in turn, helps to increase the college's liability for students while managing the possibility of any risk. Yet, prioritizing student safety further situates service learning as privileging whiteness (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2012), as well as upholding neoliberalism (Dennis, 2009; Hyatt, 2001), by precluding critical learning related to race and racism and other social issues. Eby (1998) argued that, when colleges deem community placements by safety and liability factors, further harm can be imposed on communities.

In some instances, however, this discourse and actions extended beyond a perceptual harm to be a more far-reaching harm within the community, further upholding white supremacy and neoliberalism. In the examples that Jennifer provided of this more far-reaching harm, neoliberal governance, as described in Chapter Two, further embody my concern that white supremacy and neoliberalism are key drivers of community

engagement work. The examples that Jennifer provided, specifically the example of the student calling DCYF on a family to report neglect, demonstrated how neoliberalism moves beyond economic practices to include modes of governance, which aim to shape subjectivity and promote the surveillance of others. Governance implies that governments intentionally employ organized practices through their close affiliates, including higher education, to produce citizens, or subjects of the government, who not only uphold government policies and who are valuable to the economy, but also who manage other populations (e.g., low-income Communities of Color) via social control (Brown, 2003; Deflem, 2008; Larner, 2000; Mirowski, 2013). This understanding of governmentality translates not only to community organizations, such as nonprofits who now directly manage social welfare programs that were previously run by the government, but also to individuals, including service learners, who work directly with nonprofits as part of their curricular and co-curricular community engagement experiences.

Hence, it is noteworthy to restate one last time that though higher education has seen a growth in the number of BIPOC students and faculty involved in service learning (Harper, 2009; Hutson & Wulliford, 2018; Wheatle & BreckaLorenz, 2015), historically, the pedagogy and practice has been predominantly implemented by White faculty, who send White, middle-class students into low-income Communities of Color (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Butin, 2006; Green, 2001, 2003). This mirrors the all-too-common narrative of White bodies surveilling and controlling BIPOC, a foundational dynamic of white supremacy (Mills, 1997). Therefore, the reproduction of a service learning and community engagement that is often presented from a place of “goodness” and charitable

work may replicate the process of surveillance and social control under neoliberalism and whiteness.

All of this becomes significant when considering the research question: How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within Providence College's community engagement efforts impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

### **Conclusion**

Residents and community organization staff did not speak in specific terms about whether the college's community engagement work can ever be done without imposing harm on the community. However, reflecting the contradictions of the college's community engagement work as being both beneficial and harmful, community members remained hopeful about future possibilities for deepening the campus and community's relationship. This hope was, in part, due to the fact that some community members had relationships with the college, specifically FIPS and PSP. In other words, though FIPS and PSP had aspects of their community work that were problematic and harmful, community members' relationships with FIPS and PSP through, for instance, acting as Community Advisors contributed to them being hopeful about the future of campus community relationships.

At the opening of the Annex in 2012, then PC President, Rev. Brian Shanley remarked:

In addition to being in a city, we're in a neighborhood and this is our neighborhood...This is our local neighborhood and this place [the Annex] represents our anchoring in this neighborhood...and it's long term. (PC, 2012, 2:23).



Community members said that this was the first time they had ever heard someone from the college consider themselves part of the Smith Hill neighborhood and community. Still, as discussed in Chapter Four, community members felt PC's "anchoring" in the community had fallen short of what it was intended to be.

One symbol of hope that numerous community members, including residents, referenced was the fact that PC was undergoing a presidential transition in the summer of 2020. Community members saw the presidential transition as an opportunity for change in the relationship between the campus and community. Janice, for instance, hoped that community organizations like SHARP and the local nonprofits would get the opportunity for meet-and-greets with the new president, both on-campus and in the community.

Resident members of SHARP, like Ms. Althea, Janice, and Patricia, also were hopeful that the college at large, in addition to FIPS and PSP, would broaden its understandings of community engagement and find ways to work with residents, rather than solely working with community organizations in the neighborhood. Recalling to Chapter Two, because of the impact of white supremacy and neoliberalism, among other systemic social issues, on community organizations, residents are often not positioned as power players in their own lives. The same deficit-based frameworks perpetuated on campus and through community engagement also can be perpetuated within community organizations with whom community engaged courses and programs partner. Residents hoped that the college would consider expanding their understanding of community engagement to include working with everyday people—residents—who are advocating on their own behalf and using their power to create change. To this end, Janice hoped that SHARP, for instance, and the college could find ways to engage students in community

work with “less management” from nonprofits and, instead, more ways for students to connect with and work alongside residents. Ms. Althea, Janice, and Patricia, as well as other community members, said that to sustain this level of community engagement would require a strong commitment from college staff, faculty, and college at large.

In relation to developing a strong commitment from staff and faculty, several residents and community organization staff stated that, overall, faculty needed to be more invested in the community engagement work that they required of their students. While Kendra and Rick had developed relationships with several community organizations through the courses they taught both within and just beyond the geographic bounds of Smith Hill, Jean noted that Keith had been the primary “face” of FIPS and PSP (and the college at large) in Smith Hill since their inception in 1994. (Other PSP faculty and Adjunct Faculty had episodically worked with Smith Hill community organizations over time.) Jean thought, “I think it needs to go deeper than Keith. It needs to go to all the other professors that are involved.” Likewise, Ms. Althea remarked, “How do you expect students to be invested if their professors are not?”

Through a deeper engagement with the community, residents, like Heather, hoped that the college’s community engagement work would move beyond being a transactional “give-take expectation.” Heather reflected:

And intrinsic in that dynamic is the give take expectation that the community is there to give something to students that are being educated and that the students in the college have something to give to the community, but I rarely see that it's actually useful...or maybe it's used on an individual level but not on a large scale.

Heather continued that she hoped a “true partnership” could be formed, which she described as “tak[ing] into consideration a relatively equal balance between the give and take. It's not as lopsided as it tends to be.” Ms. Althea, reflecting on her hope for a deeper relationship between the campus and the community, said, “I think it’s going to happen. I might not live to see it, but I think eventually it will happen. What is it going to take to make it happen? I’m not sure, but I think it’s gonna happen.”

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

*When I returned to Providence in January 2020 to continue my data collection, the Turkey Drive was still on people's minds and something they wanted to talk about. A range of community members from residents; to community organization staff and board members; to students, staff, and faculty from the college; to the Ward 12 Councilwoman, all mentioned the Turkey Drive to me during our conversations.*

*The CDC saw themselves as the project owner of the Turkey Drive given that they had organized the event for a number of years in the past. In fact, the CDC had a part-time "Community Outreach Supervisor" who was tasked with organizing the event as part of their job. Because of this, Kate said she thought the CDC had "an expectation of how the event should look and how it should go." Though the CDC questioned why SHARP seemed to be leading certain tasks in the days right before the event, Kate said, "for a lack of a better word, the CDC 'allowed' SHARP to drive the event," specifically preparing the grocery bags of donated food items with the students and other volunteers. Yet, confusion began when donations started coming into the Annex; most were for the CDC's Turkey Drive, but some were for SHARP's separate, smaller food drive for members of the NLC United Holy Church. Tensions rose in the days leading up to the event when both the CDC staff and resident members of SHARP started delegating tasks to one another.*

*The culmination of the tensions surfaced on the day of the Turkey Drive. It was a cooler fall morning in Providence and when resident members of SHARP arrived at the Annex shortly after 9:00am, there was a line of residents waiting outside to pick up their*

*turkey. There had been some confusion among residents, SHARP, and the CDC about what time the event started, which is why residents were outside as early as 9:00am despite the event not starting until 10:00am. Regardless, Ms. Althea unlocked the door to the Annex and invited everyone to wait inside. Ms. Althea said she was not letting her fellow neighbors stand outside in the cold when she could offer them a warm place to wait. This was a surprise (and caused some anxiety) to the CDC staff when they arrived shortly thereafter and found the Annex filled with residents before the event officially started.*

*Because residents had to sign up for a turkey in advance, SHARP and the CDC had to coordinate their lists of residents picking up turkeys. At the entrance to the Annex on the day of the event, Ms. Althea and the CDC's Community Outreach Supervisor sat behind a long folding table with a list of residents who had signed up for a turkey. SHARP and the CDC tried to merge their lists into one but were not completely successful. This resulted in the CDC turning some residents away who were on SHARP's original list or asking them to come back later that day. Ms. Althea said this "gave people a bad taste in their month" and some residents were "pissed."*

*The climax of the event came when Jean, the Executive Director of the CDC, asked Patricia, a resident member of SHARP, to help manage foot traffic outside of the Annex. Ms. Althea said, Patricia, "an older Woman of Color who actually lives in the community" was asked "to go monitor outside while the young White staff were sitting behind handing out the turkeys." Patricia and Jean got into a disagreement outside after Patricia expressed frustration with having to turn some residents away. Recalling their disagreement, Patricia said, "Jean told me, 'We've been doing this for years and we've*

*never had a problem until now. We do this well.” Patricia responded, “You can keep doing this well. Bye.” Frustrated with what had occurred, Patricia wrote a letter to the Ward 12 Councilwoman (Kat) about her concerns with what had transpired at the Turkey Drive and how she felt she was treated by the CDC.*

*While the CDC saw part of its mission as offering “resident services, community garden beautification, youth programming, and neighborhood events” (CDC, 2021, para. 3), Kat said “the CDC shouldn’t be doing community work...they should stick in their lane and do affordable housing because it’s a very small organization and they overextend themselves when they try to do everything.” This notion resonated with other residents who saw the CDC’s community work as talking points for current and future donors and funders, satisfying their Board of Directors, and for individual CDC staff to feel like they were “helping” the neighborhood. Instead, resident members of SHARP saw it as their responsibility—residents’ responsibility—to be the main drivers of community work in collaboration with local community organizations.*

*After a series of informal and formal community conversations hosted by Kat and other local officials, the 2020 Turkey Drive was not sponsored by the CDC. The flyer for the event read, “Brought to you by Councilwoman Kat Kerwin, SHARP, Chad Brown Alumni Association and NLC United Holy Church.” The event was held at St. Patrick’s Church given that the Annex was temporarily closed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.*

### **Centering Community Voices**

There is a dearth of scholarship aimed at understanding the voices and perspectives of communities involved in service learning and community engagement,

including a lack of attention as to how the racial and economic realities of community engaged pedagogies and practices impact communities. In response to these limitations, the purpose of this inquiry was to center community experiences by giving an empirical account of community engagement from the perspectives of a range of powerful community voices. This qualitative inquiry aimed to explore how various community members from the Smith Hill neighborhood and community described and understood community engagement work by PC, with specific attention to FIPS and PSP. Guiding this inquiry were two research questions:

- How do Smith Hill community members describe and understand their experiences with community engagement by Providence College?
- How have issues of white supremacy and neoliberalism embedded within higher education's community engagement efforts impacted the Smith Hill neighborhood and community?

While I engaged these research questions throughout my presentation of findings in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, a series of additional questions emerged from my first data collection trip to Providence in November 2019 with the Turkey Drive event and throughout the conversations I had with community members, specifically Ms. Althea and other resident members of SHARP as well as campus stakeholders like Keith. These questions remained throughout the iterative process of data collection, analysis, and writing: Who is “the community” in higher education's community engagement work? Who constitutes and represents “the community?” How do you balance various claims of ownership and politics in “the community?” These questions, which aim to center community voices in higher education's community engagement work, intersect with my

original research questions and became the primary implication of this study. Though Chapter Six serves as the official conclusion to this study, I present additional data throughout this Chapter to provide insight into these questions. I draw on my conversations with community members in this Chapter to begin to respond to these questions, providing key insights into spaces of redefining how individual campuses can work, be in relationship with, and partner with and alongside community members, especially residents. These questions, however, identify a call for future research in centering community voices in higher education's community engagement work.

### **Recalling Who's Who**

The question of who "the community" is in the context of this inquiry emerged out of the incidents that took place leading up to and during the Turkey Drive event as presented at the start of Chapter Four and this Chapter. The tensions and conflict between Smith Hill community organizations, such as the CDC (a nonprofit), and residents through SHARP (a grassroots organization) were not isolated to this one event. Throughout my data collection, moments of tension and conflict were apparent between residents, the CDC, and other community members and organizations or were reflected throughout my conversations with community members. Before presenting additional data to provide insights into the emergent questions related to "the community" in the context of PC's community engagement work, I first provide a brief reminder of who the key community members and organizations involved in the Turkey Drive incident were and how they had worked with the college.



### ***Smith Hill Community Development Corporation***

The CDC was established as a nonprofit by a group of Smith Hill residents in 1992 and shortly thereafter became one of FIPS and PSP's first community partners. The CDC and FIPS and PSP had partnered on several community projects, most notably Youth RAP (2002-2018), Rec Night (2007-2015), the Annex (2011-present), and Common Grounds Café (2014-2015), among others. In support of these and other community projects, FIPS and PSP provided resources to the CDC in the form of students' curricular and co-curricular community engagement work, ranging from traditional one semester service learning courses (i.e., direct service); to community-based internships, research, and capstone courses; to the CWS and Feinstein Community Fellows programs, where students were typically matched with a community organization beyond one semester. The college at large also had sponsored one time day of service type activities in partnership with the CDC, such as community cleanups, as discussed in Chapter Four. In addition to providing human capital through the service and community work students did to support these various community projects, the college provided financial capital to the CDC through monetary donations, including a 2014 pledge of \$750,000 over three years to support the CDC's affordable housing development projects (Troop, 2014).

### ***Smith Hill Advocacy & Resource Partnership***

While the partnership between the CDC and PC spanned across almost three decades, the college's relationship with SHARP was new. Frustrated that nonprofits, such as the CDC, did not necessarily represent residents, SHARP was established by a group of Smith Hill residents in 2019 with the mission of being a "grassroots workforce of

neighbors, residents, and stakeholders” from Smith Hill and surrounding neighborhoods to “work together as a community to develop a problem solving process where we identify problems, share information, brainstorm and implement solutions in an effort to solve those problems.”

Because service learning and community engagement has largely operated in a binary of “campus” and “community,” with “the community” most often being represented by nonprofits and other community organizations, PC, including FIPS and PSP, were best positioned to work with organizations like the CDC given their infrastructure to support service learning and community engagement. Still, it is noteworthy that about 18 students enrolled in a spring 2020 section of “Philosophy of Catholic Social Thought” (a course that satisfied the college’s Civic Engagement Proficiency) were working with SHARP to develop an online/social media presence and resident e-newsletter as part of their course’s community service requirement.<sup>10</sup>

It also is important to note that FIPS and, specifically, Kate, as the Annex Coordinator, acted as the gatekeeper of the Annex on behalf of the college. Due to FIPS and PSP’s longstanding relationships with some resident members of SHARP, including Ms. Althea who was one of SHARP’s co-founders, FIPS supported SHARP by providing the Annex as a free space for their weekly meetings.

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<sup>10</sup> This work was halted, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time I was writing this dissertation, I was not sure how, if at all, the work between SHARP and the philosophy course had continued into the 2020-2021 academic year.

## **Community Reflections on the Smith Hill Community Development Corporation**

Since 1992, the CDC had renovated over 170 properties into affordable housing (both apartment units and homes) in the neighborhood (Morton & Twitchell, 2016)—what Keith estimated was between \$20 and \$30 million dollars of affordable housing depending on how it was measured. There was no doubt that Smith Hill residents valued the housing development work that the CDC had done in the neighborhood. Residents described the CDC as doing “important work” and acknowledged that they were “doing their part and are needed in the community.” Patricia, for instance, said the CDC had “done more to develop housing in Smith Hill than anyone else.” Alex, a resident-parent who had formerly served as a CDC board member and whose three daughters had participated Youth RAP, said that the CDC “has positively impacted the standard of housing in the neighborhood.” And, Tou, like other residents and resident-parents discussed in Chapter Four, expressed appreciation for the work the CDC had done to support local youth through programming, such as Youth RAP, among others.

Yet, the CDC had a deep history of, as Tou put it, “not always having the best interest of the community in mind.” Keith explained that in order to receive government funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in their earlier years, the CDC “had to move from serving the poorest renters, to serving people who were the next couple of tiers up; this meant moving a large Laotian population out for the rehab, and then not letting them move back in.” Similar decisions made by the CDC to gain access to capital had reverberated throughout their history. Ms. Althea described the ways in which the CDC had prioritized their own survival, through funding over supporting those who were already living in the community, as a shift in the CDC’s mentality from

being focused on “we” to “I and me.” Slamming her fist onto the table during one of our conversations, Ms. Althea exclaimed, “They alienated the Asian community. They alienated a lot of the Spanish community. They alienated the Black community. And now they’re doing it again!” Ms. Althea continued, “There’s too many people in the community that do not like the CDC. I’d rather someone not know about me than not like me.” (The above community reflections on the CDC, of course, only glosses over the deep history and local politics that shaped how residents perceived the CDC, which are beyond the scope of this study.) Because of these frustrations with how the CDC had operated, residents like Patricia thought the CDC operated more like a “housing business” rather than serving as a housing resource for the entire neighborhood. As a “housing business,” Patricia thought the CDC had limited access to and reach in providing affordable housing in Smith Hill, a 0.65 square mile neighborhood with a total population of about 6,100 residents and 3,150 total housing units (City of Providence, 2020).

Patricia expanded on this by describing the CDC as “the housing property manager, the housing builder, the housing provider, and the rent collector.” She said that as a “housing business,” the CDC acted like a “realty company” with a “corporate structure.” Because of the way residents had experienced the CDC as operating like a “housing business,” Patricia said that she did not see the CDC leading in the community with action. When the CDC initiated what Kat referred to as their “community work” Patricia said they only did so “in order to survive...in order to apply for government grants.” This point was shared in the Turkey Drive narrative by several residents who saw the CDC’s community work as talking points for current and future donors and

fundings, satisfying their Board of Directors, and for individual CDC staff to feel like they were “helping” the neighborhood. And yet PC had supported, including financially, the work of the CDC for nearly three decades. While the relationship between the CDC and college was more complicated and nuanced than what was presented above, these community reflections on the CDC lead to questions around who campuses tend to partner with and why, and if those partnerships truly represent “the community.”

### **Considering the Various Claims of Ownership and Politics in “the Community”**

Besides the “corporate structure,” Patricia and other residents’ frustrations with the CDC, as well as other community organizations in the neighborhood, were twofold. First, residents believed that the community organizations were overwhelmingly staffed and led by White people (mostly women) who did not represent the racial make-up of the neighborhood. Residents questioned White peoples’ intentions for working at community organizations, specifically the CDC, as often taking up a “helping” mentality undergirded by charity or white saviorism. Reflecting on the way the CDC had operated and who worked for the CDC, Kat said:

It’s kind of like the classic well intentioned White people thing where they think that they’re doing so much good housing work that they can’t open themselves up to any sort of criticism. So, we cannot have a conversation about the times when they do mess up... There are residents in CDC housing that have called me and have been like, “Hey, I can’t afford to pay my rent right now. I owe them some money.” This has happened before. They’re an affordable housing organization. Sometimes people owe them money and they have to deal with that. And they

say, like, hostile things and the residents will call me and be like, “I don’t think they know how to talk to poor people.”

The frustration of what Kat described as “the classic well intentioned White people thing” resembled that of how community members experienced the community service programs by PC at large (Chapter Four) and the perceptual harm imposed by the college’s community engagement work (Chapter Five).

A second, and perhaps louder concern, specifically among resident members of SHARP, was that the majority of Smith Hill community organization staff did not live in the neighborhood.<sup>11</sup> During my conversation with Janice, a resident member of SHARP, I asked whether or not she was also involved in SHPI, which was made up over one dozen Smith Hill community organizations, including the CDC, and Janice exclaimed:

I’m not joining SHPI. I have no doubt that they’re great people, but they don’t live here. SHPI doesn’t represent the people I want to serve. I mean, they talk about it, but they go home. They don’t live here and I believe strongly that people who live here are the ones who are going to make the change.

Though Patricia often participated in SHPI meetings, in agreement with Janice, she saw a significant difference between “working in” Smith Hill and advocating for residents and “living in” Smith Hill and advocating for residents.

During my data collection, one of SHARP’s issues that they were working on with Kat and representatives from the Providence Mayor’s office was an infestation of

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<sup>11</sup> Wole was the only community member that I interacted with who was employed by a community organization (half full) and was a resident. half full’s owner and founder grew up in the neighborhood but did not live in Smith Hill at the time of this study.

rats in vacant lots throughout Smith Hill. Patricia further reflected on how she understood the differences between “working in” and “living in” Smith Hill:

All the groups work here. The CDC work here. The Health Center work here. half full, one resident lives here, but the rest of the people work here. SHPI work here.

[At] 5:00 PM, six o'clock, they go home. So, you don't get to see our rats cause you're gone by 5:00 PM and [the rats] come out at 6. So, we get to see them.

They crawl under the cars and chew the wires out of our car, but you're home by then. So, you don't see that.

Patricia continued, “SHARP’s interests are so different from all the organizations that exist here.” “The stakeholders,” Patricia emphasized, “their priorities are so different.”

Patricia’s use of the word “stakeholder” is noteworthy. Patricia reflected, “When people say stakeholders, it’s always somebody from the outside.” Speaking about the community organizations associated with SHPI, Patricia continued, “They’re stakeholders because their ‘stake’ is in Smith Hill only through their job. They literally get paid to be here every day.” This raises interesting questions about what then was the college’s “stake” in Smith Hill. Patricia said that though she saw the “stakeholders” as part of the Smith Hill community and acknowledged the work they did to improve the neighborhood, she still “sense[d] a lot of the self interest in their existence in the community.”

Residents’ frustrations on the racial make-up of community organizations and the fact that most staff were not residents were demonstrated in the Turkey Drive narrative when Ms. Althea said that Patricia, “an older Woman of Color who actually lives in the community” was asked “to go monitor outside while the young White staff were sitting

behind handing out the turkeys.” Recalling to Chapter Four, these frustrations also were evident in the ways Patricia talked about how the CDC and the college had worked together on community cleanups and other neighborhood beautification type projects.

Patricia reflected:

They’re a bunch of students picking up trash, gathering things in bags, and they’re all together. They’re not with “the community” per se. They’re at the community park with the CDC who live elsewhere. So, they’re all with people that look just like them. They all get to pick up trash together. They’re going to bag it, carry it away, and then they’re going to go back to campus.

Patricia’s frustration with these types of community service projects had to do with the students working with community organization staff who, again, in Smith Hill, were predominately White women and do not live in the neighborhood, rather than connecting with and working alongside residents. What is interesting here is that the community organizations and the college mirrored one another regarding their work “in,” but not necessarily “with” the community as well as with who was “performing” service (i.e., mostly White people). While students may be “in” the community, Patricia questioned whether they were working “with” the community, leading, again, to questions around who campuses tend to partner with and why, and if those partnerships truly represent “the community.”

Patricia further elaborated, “I hear there’s some [students] at the Library and at the Smith Hill CDC and things like that, but I don’t see them.” Patricia continued, “if you go to volunteer at the CDC...you might be on the phone with a few of their tenants that are around or something like that, but you’re not necessarily interacting with the



community.” While “the community” is not unitary, Patricia’s comments raise concerns about campuses solely partnering with community organizations rather than working alongside resident groups like SHARP who have organized themselves to address community issues but have no real institutional or financial backing.

Reflecting on residents’ frustrations specifically with the CDC, as well as summarizing the various dynamics between Smith Hill community organizations and residents, Heather said:

What sets the CDC apart from other nonprofits...the CDC has this messed up dynamic of being able to evict people. So, on top of all the, “You’re not a resident” or “You don’t look like me,” “Now, you’re kicking me out of my neighborhood?” And so, I think that because of the way that the CDC has chosen to operate and currently still does has also created some significant issues for the organization that probably don’t exist for...other more service-oriented nonprofits. And it’s certainly a service to provide housing, but there’s this messed up component too.

These dynamics impact how the CDC and other community organizations were perceived by residents, especially by resident members of SHARP, when they attempted community work, in addition to their other work, such as affordable housing development. Kat said that because the CDC has not been “super intentional” about how they engage with residents, they have often been met with pushback for taking on more than they can handle. Kat continued, “there’s kind of a misunderstanding because [the CDC] know[s] they provide such great service in the housing [but] I don’t think they always understand that they do a lot of harm in some ways, which is unfortunate.” And

because, as Kat said, the college had placed “most of their eggs in the CDC’s basket” and Ms. Althea said, “[PC’s] chosen [the CDC] to be the organization here that they pass money through,” it is necessary to consider how the college’s, including FIPS and PSP, work and partnership with the CDC has contributed to harm. Hicks Peterson (2018) wrote that the field of service learning and community engagement not only needs to question the ways in which students, faculty, and institutions can cause harm in communities, but also “Are there any ways in which...the partnership itself inadvertently causes harm in the community?” (p. 169). As such, it is necessary to question if the college’s work, relationship, and partnership with the CDC for nearly three decades has further imposed harm on the neighborhood.

### *Various Types of Community Organizations*

Heather said that when considering the various claims of ownership and politics in Smith Hill, it is noteworthy to consider the different types of community organizations in the neighborhood, and how PC has or has not worked with them. Heather described a range of community organizations, both within and just beyond the geographic and political bounds of Smith Hill, from small grassroots organizations (e.g., SHARP) to medium community and social service nonprofit agencies (e.g., CDC, Library) to small businesses (e.g., half full) to larger nonprofit organizations (e.g., PC, a nearby medical center and hospital). Heather said it is necessary to pay close attention to the different types of community organizations because each not only has their own interests and priorities—what Patricia referred to as their own “stake”—in and for the neighborhood, but also because each only has so much access to and reach in the community. In thinking about how community organizations engage in and represent “the community,”

it is necessary to consider: Who is “the community” among each of the organizations? How do the different levels of community organizations engage in and with “the community” in similar and different ways? How does each organization represent “the community?” Which type of community organizations tend to work and partner with colleges and universities and why? And, in turn, who have campuses primarily worked and partnered with and why?

Reflecting specifically on the community organizations in Smith Hill, Heather issued a challenge to those organizations to take on a level of engagement in and with the neighborhood and community that “really engages people on the ground that are connected to the community.” In doing so, Heather reflected that it is about finding who the community leaders are not only within the larger community, such as Ms. Althea, but also within the smaller, nested communities whose voices are often left out by community organizations. For example, Heather questioned what it would take for one of the Smith Hill community organizations to reach out to the Lao Lanexang Market (a Southeast Asian market on Smith Street and key gathering space for Southeast Asian residents) to better understand the needs of the Southeast Asian community in the neighborhood. However, Heather said she was not aware of any of the Smith Hill community organizations taking on this level of engagement.

### ***Seeking the Beloved Community***

Wole saw these challenges with balancing the various claims of ownership and politics in community as Smith Hill working towards becoming what Martin Luther King, Jr., among others, have referred to as the “Beloved Community.” Wole said that though the various interests and tensions between residents (e.g., SHARP), nonprofits

(e.g., CDC), and other community organizations may seem like chaos, “We all have a common goal and that is the advancement and a better quality of life for the people who live here, regardless of what group you’re a part of, what initiative, it doesn’t matter.” In also talking about the idea of a “Beloved Community,” Keith shared that at the core of the meaning of a “Beloved Community” is “a process of interpretation and clarification and learning among relationships,” where the learning is directed toward the goal of building a “Beloved Community.” Keith said that relationships within the community are fluid; sometimes they are aligned, while other times tensions occur, and interests diverge. At the end of the day, however, Ms. Althea reflected:

It takes the whole community. Whether you like each other or not, it takes that whole community to get it together. And it’s for the best for everyone...I got a saw. I got the nails and the hammer. I can draw up the specs. I may say I don’t know how to use a hammer, but I can draw up the specs. [Laughter.] So, that’s what you really need. Do I have to like you? No. But I need to respect you enough to get the job done.

### **Linking with Theory**

Throughout my conversations with community organization staff, “care” was expressed for Smith Hill residents. For example, Jean said, “I may go home at night and lay my head elsewhere, but I dedicate my life to this community and the concerns here and I take it to heart.” Talking about the CDC’s afterhours emergency phone line for their housing residents, Jean continued, “I come back here at night when the phone rings. My husband comes back here at night. My children come back here.”

Drawing on McKnight (1995), White (2012) argued that though individual people who work for community organizations may care, they are “professionals” embedded within larger organizations and systems (p. 6). While residents like the members of SHARP, whose slogan was “Focusing on Results” are concerned with action and “doing,” White (2012) thought that community organizations can have limited impact on communities because they are bogged down with defined missions and objectives that they have to report on to their donors and funders, processes (e.g., protocols, approvals, deadlines), knowledge (e.g., data driven) and expertise (e.g., credentials), and power (e.g., lines of authority). As such, White (2012) said that though individual people within community organizations may care, “institutions don’t care” (p. 5).

John McKnight (1995) wrote in *The Careless Society*, that because community organization are most often run by “professionals,”

Service systems can never be reformed so that they will “produce” care. Care is the consenting commitment of citizens to one another. Care cannot be produced, provided, managed, organized, administered, or commodified. Care is the only thing a system cannot produce. Every institutional effort to replace the real thing is a counterfeit. (p. x)

Therefore, the care of the CDC and other community organization are, consciously or unconsciously, manifestations of larger systems at play, including white supremacy and neoliberalism, which create a top-down relationship between nonprofits and communities.

The CDC was started by a group of local residents in 1992 with a mission of providing affordable housing. However, in doing so, it also became the “the housing

property manager, the housing builder, the housing provider, and the rent collector,” as Patricia described with the ability to evict people, as Heather described. Growing out of an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act in 1966, community development corporations were established by the federal government with “the idea that the private sector should play a central role in solving what many called the ‘urban crisis’” (von Hoffman, 2012, p. 21). (See von Hoffman, 2012 for a historical tracing of community development corporations in the U.S.) Still, the overall steady rise of nonprofits in the latter half of the 20th century, including the creation of community development corporations, has come to resemble corporations, increasingly dependent on private rather than public sources of funding (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2019; Wagner, 2000). This private funding is often tied to short-term measurable outcomes, which determine whether or not more funding (public or private) will be made available (Fisher, 1983; Phillion, 2017; Sakamoto & Hustedde, 2009; Samini, 2010). As a result, Stoecker (2016) argued that “nonprofits have no choice but to follow the money,” becoming a part of the neoliberal political economy (p. 53).

As the shift in funding for social welfare programs transitioned from the federal government to the private sector throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Ah Kwon (2013) argued that the “social disinvestment and corporatization overburden” of nonprofits increasingly situated “these organizations as important sites of care for marginalized groups” to promote individual and personal responsibility rather than social responsibility (p. 5). The “marginalized groups” whom nonprofits intend to care for have been turned into “consumers” or “clients” of nonprofit resources and services (Stoecker, 2016, p. 52). Stoecker (2016) argued that the ways in which nonprofits have come to

operate under neoliberalism does not “necessarily produce what the ‘consumers’—those who access the nonprofit resources—want, or need, as much as they produce what the donors will fund” (p. 51). The individual and personal responsibility promoted under neoliberalism perpetuates a form of governance and power (Ah Kwon, 2013) that aims to improve the economy by positioning individuals’ values, habits, and desires as wanting, for instance, to graduate from high school, attend college, get a job, and buy a home. Notably, these values and goals are similar to those of whiteness (Fraser-Burgess & Davis, 2017; Sue, 2016), which Leonardo (2004) described as historical processes that have enabled white supremacy.

Though nonprofits may aim to address social inequalities, and some have explicit social justice aims, federal regulation restricts nonprofits from engaging in political activities (Internal Revenue Service, 2021). This restriction, which not only operates as a form of political neutrality but also race neutrality (Ah Kwon, 2013), limits the overall impact nonprofits and, in turn, national service programs, including service learning and community engagement, can have on communities (Hall, 1992; Phillion, 2017; Stoecker, 2016). This political and racial neutrality, coupled with constantly striving to achieve short-term measurable outcomes in order to compete for donors and funding, questions whether nonprofits under white supremacy and neoliberalism can truly represent the interests of those they aim to “care” for and, ultimately, address root causes of social issues.

While the Turkey Drive in and of itself was a charity type event (i.e., a food drive), it became a significant focus of struggle for those community members involved. Smith Hill community members had experienced the CDC and other community

organizations transition into what Ah Kwon (2013) said has become the “[t]he institutionalization of nonprofit organizations and their adherence to capitalist reasoning” (p. 16), which is why residents like Patricia referred to the CDC a “housing business” or “realty company” with a “corporate structure” and other residents, like Janice, refused to participate in SHPI. Consequently, because the CDC had assumed the role of lead organizer of the Turkey Drive over the years, resident members of SHARP and other community members saw this as complicated. They saw the Turkey Drive as something positive for the neighborhood (much like the CDC did), but they also saw it is a performance of sorts; a performance by the CDC who needed to show their donors and funders that they are “caring” for and making an impact on the neighborhood and community outside of their housing work. These notions of “caring,” as well as “helping” and “serving,” are deeply entangled with the nonprofits and other community organizations who are implicated by white supremacy and neoliberalism.

Kat said that because PC had supported the CDC through both human and financial capital, the college can be viewed as upholding the CDC’s practices and enabling them to continue to perpetuate harm in the neighborhood. In fact, because the college’s \$750,000 donation to the CDC was made in 2014 following a financially difficult time for the organization due to the 2008 national real estate and financial market collapse, some residents and members of SHARP viewed the donation as an effort to “rescue” and “save” the organization and “keep it afloat.” Though it is notable that one resident, who asked to remain anonymous for this portion of our conversation, said they did not think the college knew “how dire strait” the CDC’s financial situation was in



2014. The same resident said, “had [PC] known, maybe they wouldn’t have supported [the CDC] financially in the same ways.”

White (2009) argued that in order to create change in communities, nonprofits need to move beyond these discourses of “caring,” “helping,” and “serving.” In seeking the “Beloved Community,” Janice said it is all about “love.” Janice continued, “love goes a long way over funding or getting a grant.” However, Janice worried that nonprofits were not “into love.”

### **A Limitation of Place-Based Community Engagement in Higher Education**

Though residents expressed the value of the various community projects that had resulted out of the relationship between the CDC and PC, specifically FIPS and PSP, over the years, residents also expressed frustration with how, as Kat said, the college had placed “most of their eggs in the CDC’s basket.” But Kat, as well as Heather, also acknowledged that this was because there were not enough other established organizations in the neighborhood with a strong infrastructure for the college to invest in. Heather said there were “slim pickins” among Smith Hill community organizations for the college to deeply invest in. Heather thought this lack of “well-established, functioning, healthy organization[s]” also made it difficult for Smith Hill residents who “want[ed] to own and stay and work in this neighborhood and build relationship.” Thus, Kat said it was “easier” for the college “to invest in the infrastructure that already exists than build one.”

Part of what Kat and Heather described above, Keith said, was a limitation in doing place-based community engagement: “you work with who is there to work with; and you work primarily through institutions and community ‘leaders.’” Keith said that

“making a commitment to place” means becoming “a part of the ecology of that place.” Though it may seem on the surface that you primarily work with “this partner or that partner,” Keith continued, “you collaborate with whoever is showing up” and work as part of the “ecological system to leverage positive change.” But Keith said, as “one of the big neighborhood institutions,” PC, and FIPS and PSP in particular, had been wary of assuming any leadership roles in the neighborhood for a host of reasons, including the various power dynamics that exist between the campus and community. Reflecting on his work in Smith Hill through PC/FIPS/PSP since 1994, Keith said that he continuously has had to ask himself:

Do I represent the college’s interests? Am I coming in as an “expert” or as a collaborator? If I am going to support the community’s interests as a top priority, how do I decide, among the competing voices and interests, who counts as the “real” community?

FIPS and PSP’s work within Smith Hill (e.g., Rec Night, the Annex, Common Grounds Café, etc.) was generated through ideas not by the college as a “leader” in Smith Hill’s community work, but by and with community organizations and residents based on the community concerns, issues, problems, or topics that were important to them within a specific time and context. Still, because of both the human and financial capital that the college has provided mainly to the CDC over the years, Kat reflected:

[T]here is a need for someone or a group of people that come to the CDC and address the issues and the harm that they’ve caused to the community and I don’t think that has happened before. And because PC [has] given them so many

resources, they've kind of enabled their culture. But we all have. I'm enabling it by not doing anything about it right now.

Kat added, "I don't think [PC's] gone out and tried to, like, maybe support other people trying to do this work." Therefore, it becomes necessary to ask: How might campuses extend a different invitation to partner with and alongside residents rather than solely nonprofits and other community organizations that can be perceived as harmful? What would it signal if FIPS and PSP situated most of their community engagement work with SHARP rather than community organizations that may be perceived as harmful by residents?

### **Who is "the Community" in Higher Education's Community Engagement Work?**

As discussed throughout this study, nonprofits and other community organizations have become a proxy for "the community" in the field of service learning and community engagement. The field has constructed this understanding of "the community," in part, based on who can minimize risk and help ensure liability for students when they are working off-campus. Yet, because community organizations do not necessarily represent the voices of residents, White (2012) wrote that colleges and universities "fall short of sharing full responsibility, accountability and authority for civic work with our community partners, especially marginalized citizens and residents of economically distressed communities" (p. 5).

White (2012) continued, "the reason residents don't find us relevant is not because we aren't doing anything to help them. It's because they have no stake in what we're doing." (p. 10). White (2012) reflected that residents tend to be viewed as "recipients" of services, but "their longing is to be producers" of community work (p.

10). In other words, “the community” prioritized in the field of service learning and community engagement tends to be nonprofits and other community organizations who, as Kat and Heather said, have the best infrastructure to support students’ community engagement requirements rather than those with the strongest community relationships. Accordingly, service learning and community engagement often are defined by the needs and interests of community organizations but not necessarily by residents. Therefore, PC’s privileging of the CDC, for instance, can be interpreted as another demonstration of neoliberalism at work and perhaps contributed to the tensions between SHARP, the CDC, and other community organizations. It also is another demonstration of whiteness at work when considering the racial make-up of the college and CDC (and other community organizations) staff.

Overall, Heather said she had worked with several RI colleges and universities throughout her career in the nonprofit sector and it felt as if campuses always used the word “community” to describe this abstract place that students arrived in to do “good” work. As such, Heather felt that campuses had turned the word “community” into a “tokenistic term” to fit a “checkbox.” Heather continued that, within her experiences, “community” seemed to be “a nicer, politically correct way of referring to Black and Brown people in this country,” perhaps assuaging the guilt of White campuses and the inequality that they uphold. Heather’s comments raise a larger question of why is it that wealthy White institutions want to do “good” work in materially poor communities that surround their campuses as opposed to changing their own structures and systems on campus so that such material inequality no longer exists.

While there are areas where community is playing a more prominent role in colleges and universities through various anchor institutions (Dubb et al., 2013) and place-based community engagement initiatives (Yamamura & Koth, 2018), the voices and perspectives of residents continue to be largely missing in higher education. Reflecting on Heather's contention indicates that the field of service learning and community engagement has much more to learn about understandings of communities and the impact of the field's work from those that community engagement work purport to "help" and "serve."

With the lack of understanding as to who "the community" is in the field of service learning and community engagement, it is necessary to further consider the following questions: Who does the field intend to work with and why? Can colleges and universities partner solely with community organizations and still consider their work true community engagement? What would it mean for campuses to partner with their neighbors? What would it mean for campuses to act as and be received as a neighbor? How might campuses make more intentional efforts to connect with and work alongside residents and community organizations to increase the impact they can have through their local community engagement work?

### **From Nonprofits to Neighbors**

In continuing questions of: How might working with neighbors change what partnership means in the context of service learning and community engagement? How might campuses partnering with neighbors look different than what currently happens with more traditional nonprofit partnerships? How might shifting the meaning of partnership impact the community work campuses and students participate in?

In finding ways to work alongside residents more intentionally, in addition to nonprofits and other community organizations, campuses may not eliminate the harm associated with service learning and community engagement under whiteness and neoliberalism as discussed in Chapter Five, but they could further reduce that harm by bypassing those community organizations that do not necessarily represent the perspectives of residents and enter into relationships with residents. Resident members of SHARP reflected on the emerging work a group of students who were working with SHARP during my in-person data collection. Ms. Althea and Janice thought that rather than giving students myopic tasks, SHARP was encouraging students to enter their community work with the broad task of developing an online/social media presence and resident e-newsletter. In doing so, students were encouraged to engage directly with residents, as well as attend community meetings (e.g., SHARP, SHPI, etc.), in order to gain a better understanding of the various activities, community events, initiatives, and programs that were happening throughout the neighborhood. Patricia reflected:

[T]here are limited number of groups for PC to get involved with, to invest with, to provide a space for...they have not had the opportunity to get involved with the residents. So, I think SHARP gives them the direct line to do something for residents.

Shifting the locus of partnership from solely nonprofits to working with and alongside neighbors can allow colleges and universities the opportunity to more intentionally be in relationship and partnership with the neighborhoods and communities that surround their campuses. Rather than assuming that nonprofits represent the voices and perspectives of residents, campuses can more fully engage the community's

contribution in their community engagement work. As a result, campuses can then hear directly from residents about their experiences as well as the needs that impact residents. By finding ways to be in relationship and partnership with residents, campuses can remove degrees of separation that often exist when they solely partner with nonprofits. As discussed throughout this Chapter, nonprofits do not necessarily represent the interests of residents when, in the case of the CDC, Patricia said that they are “the housing property manager, the housing builder, the housing provider, and the rent collector” and Heather described how they are able to evict people. In other words, nonprofits take on different roles and, thus, have different purposes and motivations, that may be in conflict with what residents actually think, need, and want.

In partnering with residents, the service and community work that students engage in may or may not look the same as it does now. With SHARP, their main interest in working with students was to have them involved in developing an online/social media presence and resident e-newsletter. This community work may look similar to the service and community work that some students were already involved in with Smith Hill community organizations. In partnering with residents, however, service and community work may not be as predictable as it tends to be when working with, for instance, an afterschool tutoring program, food pantry, or soup kitchen. Partnering directly with neighbors will require campuses to be adaptable and flexible in order to show up in community and build capacity where residents say they are needed.

In relation to whiteness and neoliberalism, partnering with residents will not automatically eliminate how community members experienced more challenging moments with community service programs (Chapter Four) and the perceptual harm

imposed by community engagement (Chapter Five). Whiteness and neoliberalism are deeply entangled with higher education and, in turn, service learning and community engagement. However, partnering with residents does have the possibility of reducing harm by decentering higher education's knowledge, expertise, and ego in community settings. Rather than campuses partnering solely with nonprofits, developing relationships and partnerships with residents can decenter traditional ways of knowing and expertise in community, which often is seen as coming from the campus (i.e., faculty, students, etc.) to the nonprofits (i.e., "professionals") to nonprofits' "clients," "consumers," or residents. Instead, partnering with residents, can refocus the gaze, placing community knowledge and expertise at the center of the work, relationships, or partnerships.

Partnering with residents also has the potential to confront and mitigate the ways in which campuses and their students, as well as the nonprofit and other community organizations they partner with, assume deficits about the communities they work within. While there will always be the potential for individual students to impose harm on communities through, for instance, color-blind racism, deficit-based thinking and discourse, and a charity or white savior mentality, investing in partnerships with residents has the potential to decenter whiteness and neoliberalism by placing students in relationship with residents who are using their agency to change their conditions. Partnering with residents also has the potential to position students to work with, in the case of Smith Hill, predominantly BIPOC residents. This is not intended to be tokenistic nor am I suggesting that it is the responsibility of BIPOC residents to "teach" students about issues of race and racism and other forms of systemic inequality. Rather than



placing White service learning and community engagement students in relationship with predominantly White nonprofit staff who do not live in the neighborhood, partnering with residents can offer complex and nuanced understandings of community and community engagement from BIPOC residents' voices and perspectives. bell hooks (2003) wrote in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, “[a]ll too often we think of community in terms of being with folks like ourselves” creating “a certain kind of exclusivity,” rather than finding community right where we are (p. 163).

## **Conclusion**

During my first trip to Providence for data collection in November 2019, SHARP was wrapping up a series of two “Community 101” classes, entitled, “Introduction Into Community Engagement” and “Introduction of Community Resources.” The classes, which were held at the Annex, were open to anyone in the community who wanted to participate. The curricula for both classes were written by resident members of SHARP and facilitated by Ms. Althea. The five-week curriculum for “Community 101A: Introduction Into Community Engagement” offers insights for not only PC to consider but also broadly for the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education to reflect on how to engage in the communities that surround campuses—as neighbors.

The “Community 101A: Introduction Into Community Engagement” curriculum (see Appendix E) operates as an introduction to community engagement, providing insights into what SHARP, as residents in the community, thinks is important to be an effective neighbor. This work centers on, for instance, neighbors participating in “The Good, the Bad, and the Mundane” of community life, knowing and engaging with your

neighbors and in your community, knowing where to go for support by identifying community assets and resources and recommending them to others. This assets-based approach to community engagement differs from the more deficit-based understandings of Smith Hill that community members described as experiencing from the college's community engagement work throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five. In doing so, the curriculum provides insight into how campus entities and stakeholders in communities can (re)imagine and be in neighborhood with residents and other community members, as shared from their perspectives.

Campuses need to return to what often has been said to be foundational to service learning and community engagement—the importance of relationships and partnerships with communities in pursuit of equity and justice. However, all too often relationships and partnerships between campuses and communities have not been based on equity and justice or have taken seriously the voices and perspectives of residents (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Relationships and partnerships between campuses and communities cannot exist solely for campuses to promote community “impact” and “change.” Campuses also must work towards changing their own structures and systems that uphold inequality in order to make them better neighbors. I read and interpret SHARP's curriculum almost as a starting point for this work—as set of responsibilities that campuses (i.e., students, staff, faculty, administrators) needs to prioritize in order to be seen as effective neighbors in communities.

Upon further reflecting on the curriculum, it seems that campuses need to more fully take into account the knowledge they hold and can offer the community; to take responsibility for what they do not know; and consider what they can and should do to

become a better neighbor. In doing so, campuses can then figure out what it means for them to be involved in service learning and community engagement work as a neighbor. Shifting the locus of partnership from solely partnering with nonprofits and other community organizations to working with and alongside residents can allow campuses the opportunity to more intentionally be in relationship and partnerships with the neighborhoods and communities that surround their campus. This shift does not dismiss nonprofits and other community organizations, but it rather encourages “reflective and working relationships with individuals and groups of community members alongside the community institutions” (Morton & Bergabauer, 2015, p. 27).

As a result, colleges and universities have the opportunity to move beyond the idea that they are “caring,” “helping,” or “serving” the neighborhoods and communities that surround their campuses and, instead, step into a space where they can work to generate commitment, knowledge, and responsibility in understanding their obligation in and to the community as a neighbor. Potentially, from this intentional understanding of and commitment to being a neighbor, campuses may begin to build more generous and relational partnerships across community members—from nonprofits to neighbors.<sup>12</sup>

Still, relationships are complicated and can be full of contradictions of both help and harm, much like the contradictions of service learning and community engagement described throughout Chapter Four and Chapter Five. As previously discussed, Kendra stated, community engagement “can be both exploitative and it can be students and

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<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to acknowledge and honor that this framework of “from nonprofits to neighbors” is not a result of my individual thinking. Rather, it is a result of the community knowledge and contributions shared with me throughout the conversations I had with community members as well as conversations I had with my dissertation committee, specifically Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, who supported this thinking.

community members showing up and doing good, authentic work. It can be both/and...When there's good, there's good. When there's harm, there's harm." But Kendra said the contradictions are not about individual institutions, such as PC, as they are about larger systems at play, including white supremacy and neoliberalism. Kendra continued that to reduce the possibility of imposing harm on communities, "it's about people leaning into [the racial and economic realities of community engagement] and resisting them at the very same moment while they're in relationship." What becomes important here is the ability to work through these contradictions and to end relationships when they become too harmful.

Through SHARP's curriculum, including the weekly topics, guiding questions, and use of songs, campuses have the opportunity to see themselves, as well as those in community, as neighbors. Ms. Althea and Patricia said that all neighbors—including individual residents, groups of residents, nonprofits and other community organizations, and campus stakeholders—must self-reflect on their own actions before gathering as a collective to create needed change. Sitting in the Annex, Ms. Althea and Patricia described SHARP's curriculum to me. Reflecting on the use of songs in the curriculum, Ms. Althea said, "'Man in the Mirror' is my favorite one and that's usually the one that really perks up people in class, the young and old because they're like..." Patricia started singing and dancing in her seat, "I'm starting with the man in the mirror." Recalling people's reactions to that particular song in the class, Ms. Althea and Patricia continued:

Ms. Althea: Yes! They're singing and they're dancing in their seats. Then, they're looking at the lines, "I'm asking him to change his ways?" "Take a look at yourself, and then make a change?" And they're like "Oh wait a minute!"

Patricia: “Change my ways? Why I gotta change my ways?”

Ms. Althea: “I thought I was doin okay?”

Patricia: “What’s wrong with me?”

Ms. Althea: “But maybe there is a little something because there’s always a little something that we all can do a little different.”

Ms. Althea added:

If you don’t start with yourself, look in the mirror and self-reflect, then you’re never going to get the full experience of a community and you’re not gonna really care about it. You’ve got to look at yourself and say, “Okay, I’m always pointing my finger, but what am I doing? How am I affecting this community? Is the problem not someone else, but me?”

As stated in Chapter One, a significant outcome of this inquiry was a deep investigation of service learning and community engagement, including its racial and economic realities, from the perspectives of a range of powerful community voices. This inquiry aimed to better understand and take seriously community voices and perspectives in PC’s community engagement work. Revealing and further understanding the complexities of who constitutes and represents community within the context of higher education’s community engagement work are important because it can allow the field of service learning and community engagement to examine their work from the vantagepoint of standing in “the community” and looking into the campus, rather than the other way around. Not until the field takes seriously the various roles, voices, and perspectives of community members will it be able to (re)imagine community engaged pedagogies and practices that more intentionally understand and support the interests of

community members; support community assets; and allow for neighborhoods, communities, and campuses to come together to engage in critical conversations around systemic social issues. Campuses can begin this work by stepping into the neighborhoods and communities that surround their campuses *as neighbors with neighbors*, and together (re)imagine the work of community engagement in higher education.

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# Appendix A

## IRB “Not Human Research” Determination

### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Human Research Protection Program  
Office of the Vice President for Research

Room 350-2  
McNamara Alumni Center  
200 Oak Street S.E.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-626-5654  
irb@umn.edu  
<https://research.umn.edu/units/irb>

### NOT HUMAN RESEARCH

October 14, 2019

Tania Mitchell

612-624-6867  
tmitchel@umn.edu

Dear Tania Mitchell:

On 10/14/2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Community perspectives: A qualitative inquiry of community engagement at one institution
Investigator:	Tania Mitchell
IRB ID:	STUDY00007843
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	• Perrotti_HRP 503 Human Research Determination Form_100719.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. To arrive at this determination, the IRB used “WORKSHEET: Human Research (HRP-310).” If you have any questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed.

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this activity is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether IRB review is required, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jeffery P Perkey, CIP, MLS  
IRB Analyst

**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**

## Appendix B

### *Letter of Support from FIPS and PSP*



PROVIDENCE  
COLLEGE

Public and Community Service Studies

October 15, 2019

Dear Members of the Faculty Review Committee:

I have talked at length with Carmine Perrotti about the field research he plans for his dissertation, which will explore how various community stakeholders describe and understand their experiences with service learning and other forms of community engaged learning by Providence College's department of Public and Community Service Studies and Feinstein Institute for Public Service (PSP). We understand that this will entail questions about the ways race and class impact relationships between the campus and community.

We understand the methods by which Mr. Perrotti will gather his data, including observations of relevant PSP meetings and/or courses; interviews with various community stakeholders, including PSP students, staff, faculty, and alumni; and reviewing relevant documents about PSP's service learning and community engagement efforts.

The focus of Mr. Perrotti's research is of immediate relevance to our work at Providence College, where we are deeply engaged in an ongoing dialogue about racial and economic equity in community engagement. We expect that his research will shed light on our work, helping us to improve our programs; and that it will contribute significantly to the field of community engagement nationally with its consideration of the ways race and class influence campus/community partnerships.

Sincerely,

Keith Morton  
Professor and Chair of Public and Community Service Studies and  
Director, Feinstein Institute for Public Service

## Appendix C

### *Research Information Sheets*

#### **Community Perspectives: A Qualitative Inquiry of Campus/Community Engagement at One Institution**

##### **Community Research Information Sheet**

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to explore how various community stakeholders describe and understand their experiences with service learning and campus/community engagement by Providence College (PC), specifically through the Feinstein Institute for Public Service (FIPS) and the department of Public and Community Service Studies (PSP). This study also aims to explore how issues of race and class impact relationships between the campus and community. The study will take place from January through May 2020. Interviews with participants may continue into summer 2020.

The study is being conducted by Carmine Perrotti, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development (OLPD) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This study is being overseen by Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, Associate Professor of Higher Education in OLPD at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

You were identified as a possible participant because your familiarity or work with PC/FIPS/PSP related to service learning and campus/community engagement. **I ask that you read this Research Information Sheet and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.**

**Procedures: I am writing to invite you/your organization to participate in this study.** I believe you/your organization's experiences can help me learn more about how various community stakeholders describe and understand service learning and campus/community engagement. If you agree to participate in this study, it will include:

1. Observations in your organization's everyday setting at select times between January through May 2020. Observations may include moments when students are volunteering with your organization as well as at your organization's meetings or events. Observations will offer me insights into how your organization engages in/with service learning and campus/community engagement.
2. Participation in 1-2 sessions of audio-recorded interviews. Each interview should take 60-90 minutes; and will take place at a location and time convenient for each interview participant. Interview questions will aim to explore how participants describe and understand their experiences with service learning and campus/community engagement by PC/FIPS/PSP. Interview questions also will seek to understand how issues of race and class impact relationships between the campus and community.

3. Requests for your organization to share documents related to your work with service learning and campus/community engagement (e.g., annual reports, strategic planning documents, meeting minutes). This will help me learn more about your opinions, interests, and work.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:** This study involves no significant risks of participation. A possible risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. There are no direct benefits to participation in this study. As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with service learning and campus/community engagement with the researcher—and will contribute to an emerging area of scholarship on community voices and perspectives in the field of service learning and campus/community engagement in higher education. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research participant. Research records and data will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Voice recordings from interviews will be destroyed within 3 months of the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** This study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect you in any adverse way. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time. You can withdraw by contacting Carmine Perrotti or Dr. Mitchell ([tmitchel@umn.edu](mailto:tmitchel@umn.edu) or 612-624-6867).

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please ask me at any time. I may be reached at [perro054@umn.edu](mailto:perro054@umn.edu) or 203-206-9634.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the University of Minnesota's [Human Research Protection Program](#) via the Research Participants' Advocate Line (612-625-1650; toll free: 1-888-224-8636) or by mail (HRPP, 350-2 McNamara, 200 Oak St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414).

*If you agree with the terms of this study, please keep a copy of this Research Information Sheet for your records*

**Community Perspectives:  
A Qualitative Inquiry of Campus/Community Engagement at One Institution**

**Providence College Research Information Sheet**

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to explore how various community stakeholders describe and understand their experiences with service learning and community engagement by Providence College (PC), specifically through the Feinstein Institute for Public Service (FIPS) and the department of Public and Community Service Studies (PSP). This study also aims to explore how issues of race and class impact relationships between the campus and community. The study will take place from January through May 2020. Interviews with participants may continue into summer 2020.

The study is being conducted by Carmine Perrotti, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development (OLPD) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This study is being overseen by Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, Associate Professor of Higher Education in OLPD at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

You were selected as a possible participant because your work with PC/FIPS/PSP related to service learning and community engagement. **I ask that you read this Research Information Sheet and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.**

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, it will include:

1. Observations of various campus and community interactions. Observations may take place at community meetings or events where PC/FIPS/PSP is involved. These observations may include moments when students are “serving” in the Smith Hill neighborhood with community groups and nonprofits (e.g., to fulfill service learning hours or other community engagement requirements). Observations also may take place during campus visits, including, for example, during Feinstein Community Fellows meetings and/or PSP class observations.
2. Participation in 1-2 sessions of audio-recorded interviews. Each interview should take 60-90 minutes; and will take place at a location and time convenient for each interview participant. Interview questions will aim to explore how participants describe and understand their experiences with service learning and community engagement by PC/FIPS/PSP. Interview questions also will seek to understand how issues of race and class impact relationships between the campus and community.
3. Requests for documents (e.g., syllabi). This will help me learn more about your opinions, interests, and work.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:** This study involves no significant risks of participation. A possible risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. There



are no direct benefits to participation in this study. As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with service learning and community engagement with the researcher—and will contribute to an emerging area of scholarship on community voices and perspectives in the field of service learning and community engagement in higher education. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research participant. Research records and data will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Voice recordings from interviews will be destroyed within 3 months of the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** This study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect you in any adverse way. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time. You can withdraw by contacting Carmine Perrotti or Dr. Mitchell ([tmitchel@umn.edu](mailto:tmitchel@umn.edu) or 612-624-6867).

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the University of Minnesota's [Human Research Protection Program](#) via the Research Participants' Advocate Line (612-625-1650; toll free: 1-888-224-8636) or by mail (HRPP, 350-2 McNamara, 200 Oak St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414).

*If you agree with the terms of this study, please keep a copy of this Research Information Sheet for your records.*

## Appendix D

### *Interview Consent Form*

#### **Community Perspectives: A Qualitative Inquiry of Campus/Community Engagement at One Institution**

#### **Interview Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to explore how various community stakeholders describe and understand their experiences with service learning and campus/community engagement by Providence College (PC), specifically through the Feinstein Institute for Public Service (FIPS) and the department of Public and Community Service Studies (PSP). The study also aims to explore how issues of race and class impact relationships between the campus and community.

This study is being conducted by Carmine Perrotti, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development (OLPD) at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This study is being overseen by Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, Associate Professor of Higher Education in OLPD at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

You were identified as a possible participant because of your familiarity or work with PC/FIPS/PSP related to service learning and campus/community engagement. **I ask that you read this Interview Consent Form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.**

**Procedures:** Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect you in any adverse way. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by Carmine Perrotti. The interview will be audio-recorded. The recorder may be turned off at any point, upon your request. Interviews will be transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription, you will be invited to review the transcript to further elaborate on or clarify points.

**Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:** This study involves no significant risks of participation. A possible risk of participation is a breach of confidentiality. There are no direct benefits to participation in this study. As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with service learning and campus/community engagement with the researcher—and will contribute to an emerging area of scholarship on community voices and perspectives in the field of service learning and campus/community engagement in higher education. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a

research participant. Research records and data will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Voice recordings from interviews will be destroyed within 3 months of the completion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** This study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect you in any adverse way. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time. You can withdraw by contacting Carmine Perrotti or Dr. Mitchell ([tmitchel@umn.edu](mailto:tmitchel@umn.edu) or 612-624-6867).

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please ask me at any time. I may be reached at [perro054@umn.edu](mailto:perro054@umn.edu) or 203-206-9634.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the University of Minnesota's [Human Research Protection Program](#) via the Research Participants' Advocate Line (612-625-1650; toll free: 1-888-224-8636) or by mail (HRPP, 350-2 McNamara, 200 Oak St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414).

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and I wish to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Carmine Perrotti

*If you agree with the terms of this study, please keep a copy of this Interview Consent Form for your records.*

## Demographic Survey (Optional)

### What is your age?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 or older
- Prefer to Not Answer

### What is your gender identity?

- Female
- Male
- TransMale, TransFemale, Genderqueer
- Prefer to Self-Describe (Write-in): \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer to Not Answer

### What is your race or ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latin(a/o/x), or Spanish
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to Self-Describe (Write-in): \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer to Not Answer

## Appendix E

### SHARP's "Community 101A: Introduction Into Community Engagement" Curriculum

#### Week 1

Introduction: Community Engagement  
Theme Song: Reach Out and Touch  
Ice Breaker: My Ideal Community

#### Week 2

My Neighborhood: The Good, the Bad, the Mundane  
Theme Song: When I Think of Home  
When I Walk/Drive Through My Community  
I See...  
I Feel...  
I Know...

(Take home assignment: What Have I Done or Can I Do to Make it Better?)

#### Week 3

Am I a Good Neighbor?  
Theme Song: The Man In The Mirror  
Am I an Asset?  
What Do I Bring to the Table?  
When I See a Problem I...  
Do I Know the Community Resources?  
Do I Use or Recommend Them to Others?

#### Week 4

My Brother's Keeper  
Theme Song: What's Going On  
Do I Know My Neighbors?  
Why Does it Matter?  
How Can It Effect Me Or My Community?  
Excerpts From *Getting Out* by Keith Morton

(Bring in for next class a quote, poem or song that reflects community)

#### Week 5

Making a Difference Day by Day  
Theme Song: A Change is Going to Come  
We Stand Together!  
I Will Make My Community a Positive One  
Here Is How I Will Do It...