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# Authoring Civic Identities in Figured Worlds: A Case Study of a Curricular Community Engagement Program

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**Abstract**

Civic identity is of scholarly import given ongoing investments in community engagement in higher education. Despite extensive scholarship, gaps remain in our understanding of students' civic identity development. This case study explicates the ways in which a curricular community engagement program influenced the development of baccalaureate students' civic identity. Leveraging theoretical borderlands (Abes, 2009), and bringing to bear two theories in identity development—self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999) and figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998)—the study offers a new perspective about the impact of curricular community engagement in shaping students' civic identity. Findings revealed that early experiences influenced students' college choices and subsequent civic work in college. Furthermore, curricular community engagement played a critical role in the evolution of students' identities as civic agents and engaged citizens, highlighting that such experiences are crucial to fulfilling the civic mission of higher education institutions. Findings have important implications for pedagogy, policy, and praxis.

*Keywords: higher education, civic identity, self-authorship, figured worlds*

As democracies grapple with intractable problems, including persistent inequality, climate change, propagation of disinformation, and deep-rooted health and educational inequities, there is ever greater need for engaged citizens and civic leaders (Sun & Anderson, 2012; Youniss, 2011). Participation in civil society is not a default condition. Instead, it is a set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are acquired—they are learned and therefore must be taught (Dewey, 1916). Institutions of higher education play an important role in developing citizens who are critical to finding solutions for systemic challenges (Astin & Astin, 2000). Establishing collective goals and working with others to achieve them are essential components of civic leadership (Christens & Dolan, 2011) and vital for democratic societies (Krause & Montenegro, 2017).

Preparing students for civic participation is recognized as integral to the mission of higher education (Allen, 2016; Daniels et al., 2021; National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012). A core purpose of universities is "effectively educating students to be creative, caring, constructive citizens of democratic societ[ies]" (Harkavy, 2006, p. 9). University-based civic engagement has been recognized as important, particularly since the 1980s with the founding of Campus Compact in 1985 (Campus Compact, n.d., "Our History"). Despite these efforts, civic and political participation among American youth remains low (Kiesa et al., 2022), as does their opinion of our nation's institutions (Pew Research Center, 2023). Therefore, it is vital to better understand and enhance the ways in which college students develop a sense of civic identity.

This instrumental case study leverages "theoretical borderlands" (Abes, 2009, p.

141) as a framework, bringing to bear two important theories on identity development—self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1982, 1994) and the theory of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998)—to glean insights about the ways in which a university-based curricular community engagement program fostered civic identity among students. The following section will provide an overview of relevant literature.

## Literature Review

Civic identity has been described as a form of identity in which one sees oneself as "an active participant in society with a strong commitment to working with others" for the common good (Hatcher, 2011, p. 85, as cited in Hudgins, 2020). It comprises values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge (Johnson, 2017) that together shape one's sense of self as a civic agent—an individual who is able to work across differences to address social challenges (Boyte, 2009).

This framing is in alignment with literature describing identity formation as developing a sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2001), developing a sense of self in relation to others, and developing a capacity for meaning making (Kegan, 1994). Knefelkamp (2008) suggested that civic identity should be considered on par with other identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality, and that developing civic identity should be one of the outcomes of college education. Although some scholars have used the notion of engaged citizenship interchangeably with civic identity (see, for example, Lott, 2013; Youniss et al., 1997; Youniss & Yates, 1999; Zaff et al., 2010), extant literature falls short in investigating the development of civic identity (Johnson, 2017).

Consensus about the role of higher education in preparing engaged citizens with the capacity to effect social change (Mlyn & McBride, 2020; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005), and the proliferation of community-engaged curricular and cocurricular programming, may suggest that civic engagement is inherent to college education. However, there is variability in the nature and extent of civic engagement among college students as well as in our understanding of how it may shape their civic identity (Johnson, 2017; Rhoads, 2009). Dominant theories about college student development have largely centered on cognitive developmental models (King et al., 2009), with less exploration of other modes. Extant research also does not fully account for students from nondominant groups (Taylor, 2016). Given the increasing diversity in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), greater inclusivity in the study of student development is imperative. Finally, current literature is focused more on identifying and characterizing developmental stages and less on contextually specific processes. In other words, we know more about "the producer of change, but not its process" (Granott & Parziale, 2002, p. 2). Addressing this shortfall necessitates answering the call to study development of civic identity in context (King et al., 2009; Patton et al., 2016; Taylor, 2017).

Identity is a complex construct that is conceptualized across psychology and sociology (Deaux & Burke, 2010); it is construed and developed through membership in formal or informal groups, and through socially derived meanings (Bringle & Wall, 2020). Individuals often have multiple coherently organized identities that are enmeshed in the contexts within which they operate (Knefelkamp, 2008). These identities confirm self-worth (Klein et al., 2007), provide purpose (Bronk, 2013; Damon, 2001; Malin, 2018; Malin et al., 2017), and facilitate social and civic interactions (Bringle et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2013; Yates & Youniss, 2006). Knefelkamp (2008) described civic identity as characterized by (a) engagement with others; (b) intellectual and ethical development; (c) holistic practice, encompassing critical thinking and empathy; and (d) individual choice reinforced by repeated action and active reflection. Therefore, civic identity can be thought of as one's self-concept facilitated by one's civic and educational experiences (Steinberg et al., 2011; Bringle & Clayton, 2021). The following section discusses the theoretical framework that undergirds the study.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the theoretical borderlands approach put forth by Abes (2009). Joining other voices arguing for leveraging multiple paradigms in research and analysis, or "paradigm proliferation" (Donmoyer, 2006; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Lather 2006; Tierny, 1993), Abes made the case for bringing together multiple theoretical perspectives not as a methodological "blueprint" but "as one possibility." Thus, utilizing theoretical borderlands provides

a window into "students' complex understandings and experiences with their identities . . . as they navigate their realities" (Abes, 2009, pp. 141–144).

### Self-Authorship and Civic Identity

Building on Kegan's (1982, 1994) work on identity formation, Baxter Magolda applied the notion of self-authorship, or the "capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relationships," to identity development among college students (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269). In her 21-year longitudinal study of individuals aged 18 to 39, Baxter Magolda extended Kegan's findings that epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal factors help build belief systems that shape identity and facilitate the development of authentic and mature relationships with diverse others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Self-authorship occurs through a process of information gathering, reflection, and analysis. With youth in particular, self-authorship includes exploration and reevaluation of values, making meaning of information gathered through experiences, and prioritizing goals that are consistent with one's sense of self.

Baxter Magolda described self-authorship as evolving along a developmental trajectory from relying on external factors, moving toward internal motivators, and arriving at self-authorship—an understanding of self-in-context. The various phases on the journey to self-authorship include following formulas defined by external forces; arriving at the crossroads, where one seeks to become more autonomous; authoring one's life, characterized by reflection and realignment of one's beliefs; and establishing an internal foundation where a "solidified comprehensive system of belief is established" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 155). Self-authorship emerges through a learning partnership model (Baxter Magolda, 2004) by creating contexts that facilitate meaning making. Additionally, principles that optimize self-authorship include validating learners' capacity to know, enabling them to have greater agency in the learning process, and framing learning as a process of mutual construction of meaning. Curricular community engagement experiences during college are a critical avenue for facilitating the development of civic identity, as they enable students to have greater and more structured involvement as well as agency in community-engaged learning. Such work also provides rich contexts for civic work and meaning making. The overarching goal of facilitating the journey toward self-authorship is to "help young adults make the transition from being shaped by society to [then] shaping society" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 630).

### Figured Worlds of Civic Identity

Learning occurs in complex ways, combining acquisition of knowledge and development of identities in the contexts within which knowledge is acquired (Gonsalves et al., 2019). By extension, it is hard to grasp learning and learning outcomes without understanding students' interactions with the contexts within which they are learning (Engeström, 1987). These contexts are shaped by broader discourses and philosophies of the institutions and fields of learning, which in turn are shaped by key figures and relevant actors that are part of these ecosystems (Lemke, 2001). Thus, in applying the theory of figured worlds to understand how civic identity is shaped, it is useful to examine how students navigate the discourses and spaces in which civic learning is facilitated, and how in so doing, they are learning to be civic agents.

Put forth by Holland et al. (1998), figured worlds are psychologically constructed and interpretive worlds or communities that operate "dialogically and dialectically and are defined by power dynamics and spaces of agency and improvisation" (Chang, 2014, p. 30). Figured worlds are metaphorical realms where identities are developed through dialogue, debate, and navigating power dynamics, with relationships playing an important role. They are avenues whereby identities are produced and individuals "figure" who they are in relation to social and cultural contexts of which they are a part. Within these contexts "particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and certain outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Thus, figured worlds shape behaviors and influence actions (Hatt, 2007).

In the context of curricular community engagement where there are a variety of actors and learning occurs in multidimensional ways, figured worlds offer a framework to understand how identity is shaped. Another interesting aspect is the notion of positionality within figured worlds. Positionality has been explicated in educational contexts, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields where students assign

themselves certain positions such as "math nerd" or "science girl," and these positions in turn shape who they are (Carlone et al., 2014; Cipollone et al., 2020; Gonsalves et al., 2019). Thus, "figured worlds rely on cultural models" (Jackson & Seiler, 2013, p. 828) or "schemas that capture or guide attention, help evaluate the value of experiences, or enable the drawing of inferences" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 297). Additionally, some actors and certain positions may hold implicit power and influence within figured worlds without explicit authority or institutional endorsement (Gonsalves et al., 2019). The theory of figured worlds has been used to understand identity formation in many contexts, and offers great potential to understand how civic identity develops—it expands our heuristic models beyond the psychological realm to social and cultural factors. The following section describes the research design and data collection processes; it also includes the author's positionality statement.

## Research Design

Given the dynamic nature of the interactions that the research question raises—how and what are the ways in which curricular community engagement experiences shape students' civic identity—and given that students' identities develop as they actively construct and make meaning of their experiences, this study was informed by the constructivist (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1969/1971) paradigm, and situated within the interpretivist framework (Glesne, 2011). Students simultaneously shape and are shaped by contexts as they interact with them.

### The Case

In accordance with Merriam's (1998) definition of a case as a "single entity or unit, or phenomenon occurring in a bounded context" (p. 27), the study explored how curricular community engagement experiences shape students' civic identity, focusing on a specific curricular community engagement program. The case study was based on a nationally recognized, yearlong, cohort-based curricular community engagement experience for undergraduate students (Colby et al., 2003; 2007) at a private, not-for-profit, research intensive, four-year institution. The program includes two courses that bookend a central community engagement experience, with the initial course (in the spring) designed to prepare students for the community engagement experience in the summer. The program's culminating experience is the second course, which students take during the fall semester following their community engagement project. This course enables students to reflect on their community-based work and envision their civic work going forward.

### Data Collection and Research Ethics

Data were gathered through semistructured interviews with study participants and from secondary sources (obtained with permission) such as course material and websites describing programmatic elements, including course and project details. Secondary data were selected based on their relevance to the case (i.e., the curricular community engagement experience that was the focus of this study), information shared by participants during interviews, and documents accessible in the public domain (websites, etc.).

To ensure trustworthiness in the research, the study was conducted adhering to procedural as well as contextual ethics and best practices, including garnering appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and adhering to ethical processes throughout (such as ensuring participants' agency, safety, transparency, and clarity). Semistructured virtual interviews, lasting 60–90 minutes each, with 13 students all part of one cohort of the program, were conducted by the researcher and probed their past, ongoing, and anticipated community engagement experiences. The interview format incorporated both flexibility and structure (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), navigating the conversation based on contextual cues and information.

### Positionality Statement

In the spirit of critical reflexivity, I would like to acknowledge a deep commitment to pluralism. I am an educator and a proponent of experiential learning, particularly of community-engaged pedagogies. As a scholar, I subscribe to the philosophies of constructivism and pragmatism and believe that we each create our realities and make meaning of our experiences based on our backgrounds, deeply held values, and lived experiences. While recognizing that this lens likely shaped the work, I tried to ensure fidelity to the research process by incorporating reflexivity throughout, and by examining the biases that I might bring to

the research. I strived to maintain fairness, respect, and openness to the perspectives of study participants, and integrity in reporting study findings. I am deeply appreciative of the generosity and vulnerability with which participants shared their stories, and I did my utmost to preserve their voices as shared—it is my sincere hope that participants' own stories shine through.

The next section describes the data analysis process and delves into the findings of the study.

## Data Analysis

Data from primary (interviews) and secondary (content analysis of documents shared) sources were coded and analyzed to seek patterns, and to understand how and the ways in which civic identity was shaped. Coding and interpretation were initially conducted independently by the author and then cross-verified with a colleague. All interviews were recorded after consent was obtained from participants and transcribed using the software tool Otter.ai (https://otter.ai). Leveraging Miles et al.'s (2020) approach, a coding strategy was developed for direction and consistency. MAXQDA (https://www.maxqda.com/), a software tool used for qualitative data analysis, was utilized. A priori codes based on themes from extant literature were initially used, followed by axial codes in later stages (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, an initial code was on civic experiences prior to entering college. Based on this initial coding, axial codes that emerged were experiences with family, experiences in school, and so on. This process resulted in grouping and better interpretation, which enabled delving deeper into themes that emerged. A "dynamic and recursive" approach guided data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Yazan, 2015, p. 145). In other words, analysis of data collected in the initial stages helped shape data collection in ensuing phases. Questions were sharpened or dynamically shifted, and a winnowing process was utilized for data analysis, moving from broad themes that emerged across multiple sources, narrowing to more specific themes. Findings represent participants' own words and language (Miles et al., 2020). To triangulate, secondary data were mined for themes that stood out or that corresponded with primary data (Bowen, 2009).

### Study Participants

Interviews yielded diverse and wide-ranging narratives about students' community engagement experiences and civic journeys. Pseudonyms of interviewees, along with their self-reported identities including self-identified gender, pronouns, and ethnicity/race, are listed in Table 1.

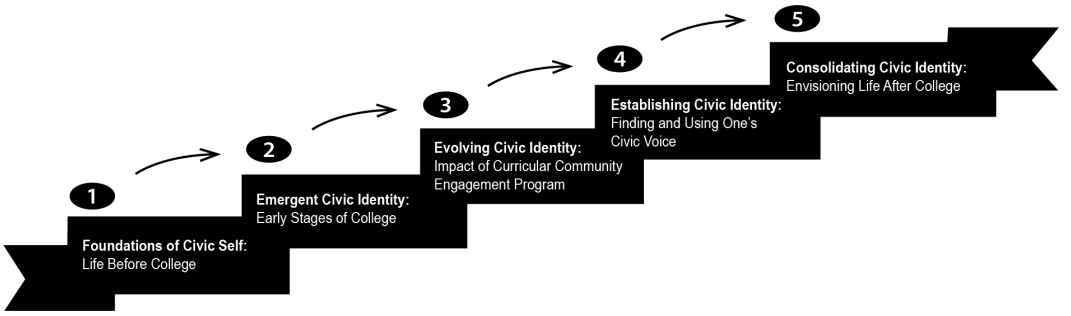
## Findings

Informed by models proposed by Baxter

**Table 1. Self-Reported Identities of Student Participants**

| Pseudonym | Self-reported identities: Gender identity, preferred pronouns, race/ethnicity |
|---|---|
| Brandon | Male, he/him, African American |
| Danielle | Female, she/her, Biracial (Black/White) |
| Jay | Male, he/him, Asian American |
| Kayla | Female, she/her, Biracial (Mexican/White) |
| Leonard | Male, he/him, Asian |
| Michelle | Female, she/her, White |
| Olivia | Female, she/her, Asian American |
| Paz | Two-spirit, they/them, Latine/Native American |
| Raina | Female, she/her, Asian American |
| Ron | Male, he/him, Asian American |
| Sam | Male, he/him, Asian American |
| Sara | Female, she/her, Biracial (Arab/South Asian) |
| Sofia | Female, she/her/ella, Hispanic/Latinx |

**Figure 1. Trajectory of Authoring Civic Identity**




Magolda (2001) and others (Johnson, 2017; Nagaoka et al., 2015), the findings of this study indicate that civic identity is shaped in five phases along a developmental trajectory as described and illustrated in Figure 1.

### Phase 1. Foundations of Civic Self—The Influence of Early Experiences

Early experiences were central to discovering civic life and shaping civic identity for all students. These experiences paved the way for a sense of belonging, a desire to give back, and finding purpose. For instance, one of the students, Olivia, noted, "I wasn't the person running marathons, you know, I was the one who'd go to the beaches and pick up trash to protect the environment." Some students volunteered with family, church groups, or schools, shaping their values and aspirations. Others, from less civically oriented families, leaned toward community service in pursuit of a sense of belonging. Social connections that come with community service served both in catalyzing and sustaining civic work. Early influences on students' civic identities weren't just about finding their place, which they were; they were also journeys toward personal growth, empowerment, and self-efficacy. Students transitioned to college not as "blank slates" but with foundational identities shaped by formative experiences.

### Phase 2. Emergent Civic Identity—Transition to College

Having entered college during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants experienced complex and multifaceted journeys in transitioning to college. They adapted to change, overcame challenges, and built resilience at a pivotal stage in their lives. They also found belonging and navigated their academic and extracurricular activities in interconnected ways. For instance, Paz, a student who described themselves as Latine, spoke about their involvement in a student-run ESL training program for Latino/a adults as "empowering"; Sofia, a student from a migrant farmworker family, spoke in similar terms about her involvement with Define American, a student-run organization that advocates for immigrants, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; Leonard, who came to college with a background in the performing arts, was engaged in civic outreach through his involvement with a student-run performing arts group; and Jay, who had a long-standing commitment to combating climate change, engaged with organizations advocating for environmental issues. All of these factors made for a rich narrative of growth and reaffirmation of purpose, but also continued evolution and fine-tuning of their civic identities.

Narratives provide a glimpse into values, aspirations, and experiences, and how they continued to shape students' evolving identities during a transformative period in their lives. Although participants did describe encountering developmental obstacles, they also reflected on the critical role these experiences played in helping them build resilience, and in finding alignment between personal values and societal needs. For instance, Sofia spoke about feeling at a disadvantage in comparison to many of her peers who came to college with "an elite private school education," and felt she "had to work twice as hard." Many students, especially those like Sofia who were first in their families to attend college, also felt that their civic identities were deeply intertwined with a sense of responsibility to uplift the communities that they were

from. Sofia spoke about her work in college and her future aspirations thus: "The work I am doing now, the work I'm going to continue to do isn't just for myself, it's for every person from my community who didn't have the chance to make it."

### Phase 3. Evolving Civic Identity—Impact of the Curricular Community Engagement Program

The yearlong curricular community engagement program was cohort-based and comprised two courses bookending a summer experiential community-based project. The program emphasized ethical community engagement, with facilitated discussions and open dialogue in place of traditional lectures. As the students described it, faculty made space for authentic and occasionally difficult conversations, which facilitated reflexivity, deep listening, and a collaborative approach to working with communities. For instance, Michelle said that the program "challenged me to ask myself about the civic purpose of my education," enabling her to make linkages between academic work and civic work. Combining academic preparation with independently designed projects enabled students to pursue causes that had personal resonance, thereby fostering a deeper and more sustained sense of civic responsibility. Paz, whose project was at an organization working to expand community services to non-native (English) speakers described the work thus: "We have this big community . . . it is such a good resource to mobilize . . . how can we use it to create equitable access . . . uncovering the strengths of Latinx community networks that help make our families healthier."

Acknowledging the significance of both identity and shared humanity, students highlighted the importance of fostering relationships in a diverse yet interconnected world. They also grappled with the tensions of working with, and in, communities where their identities differed from that of community members, learning to navigate these circumstances with honesty and humility. For instance, Sara had this to say about her community engagement project:

> If I wanted to do community work, there is a part of me that's like, don't you have to have the same identity as the people? But I also realized that you're not always going to walk in and be the same person as the people you're trying to support. And so, what do you do about that? When you share an identity, it does not necessarily mean you understand the person completely. That's a false narrative. I feel like a good community organizer knows that no matter what, even if you share very similar identities with the people that you are working with, it still is a lot of work to understand the community. But also, the amount of work and the amount of listening and the amount of time you must sit on your hands and resist the urge to act . . . extends the farther your experiences are than the people you're working with.

Recognizing that social change doesn't always require large-scale action, but can start with smaller, incremental steps, seemed to help students prepare for the long arc of civic work. Almost all of the students spoke about the notion of "thinking big and acting small," something they had discussed in class. Jay elaborated on how this helped him think about his own work in advocating for climate action:

> It's easy to talk about changing a whole system, but it's actually better to have a different conversation, to do something different, when you could for example, start a composting initiative, and build awareness about an environmental issue. . . . get kids involved in it. That's more useful and feasible.

Thus, the curricular community engagement program played an explicit role in both enabling students to have greater agency in the learning process and in creating contexts that facilitated civic behavior and shaped civic identity; it also gave them the tools and language to sustain their civic behavior and civic identity beyond program participation.

### Phase 4. Establishing Civic Identity and Finding One's Civic Voice

According to study participants, college education should go beyond preparing students for workforce participation, and should also foster personal growth, cultivate critical thinking, build democratic skills, and develop the willingness to engage with communities. Academic and extracurricular activities were an avenue by which students

built skills and knowledge for personal and professional growth, but they also seemed to play a part in shaping their sense of identity and purpose. There was significant overlap between choice of academic (both majors and minors) and extracurricular activities among participants. Students found synergistic ways to connect their work in the classroom to activities beyond it. They often leveraged academic skills toward advocating for issues that they cared about, indicating the exercise of (civic) agency. Education was viewed not only as essential for career preparation, but also as necessary to leverage for broader societal benefit. Jay's perspective on the purpose of college was illuminating:

> It isn't just about efficiency or isn't just to make as much money as possible. Going to a place like [this university] or to any college for that matter comes with the responsibility that you're not just going to go out and earn a lot of money, but you're also going to make a difference . . . to lift up communities, or address issues you care about.

Scholarships, financial aid, and other funds to make college more accessible facilitated greater civic participation among study participants. As Sam put it, the expectations of a college education and a career completely flipped once he knew he had a scholarship to support his education. He said,

> My expectations of college have absolutely changed because I came to the university without a scholarship. I was investing into my education so wanted a return on that investment (e.g., a higher paying job). Getting a scholarship flipped that script—now it was the university investing in me. This is a whole different ball game—I do things because I think they're intrinsically important, intellectually stimulating, or serve some public good.

Thus, students were finding powerful ways to fine-tune their civic voices and discovering a sense of agency by shaping public discourse through their civic work. It was also evident that as students were crafting their academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular experiences in ways that were synergistic with their interests and identities, they were also actively constructing these experiences around how they saw themselves and whom they saw themselves becoming—in other words, identities and lived experiences. The positions that these identities placed them in were instrumental in helping them craft their civic role and purpose.

The civic journeys that the students were on led to growth and development in their capacities as leaders and agents of change. Through critical reflexivity and by intellectually vesting themselves into a variety of causes, the students grew in maturity and efficacy of actions. Their notions of what it meant to be a leader and an agent of social change seemed to evolve from more traditional stereotypes toward a broader and more collective orientation. For example, Jay said that through his experiences he came to recognize and appreciate that the "hardest part of leadership is how you articulate your vision in a manner that encapsulates and connects to the vision of other people." Similarly, Sofia said,

> My work made me reevaluate leadership—what should it look like? And sometimes it's good to give power to people who are closest to the problem. Because they should have agency to provide solutions.

Collectively, students' perspectives portrayed adaptive leadership—a transformation in their understanding of themselves as leaders and civic agents.

### Phase 5. Envisioning the Future—Consolidating Civic Identity and Looking Ahead

As students looked back on their time in college and looked to their futures beyond college, they reflected on the evolution of their expectations of college—shifting from a singular focus on gaining marketable skills to intentionally building experiences and relationships. Leveraging their education to advance social causes appeared to be a central concern for many of them. Several believed that extant social structures and policies presented profound challenges for their generation, and continued to create untenable circumstances, particularly for marginalized communities. They believed these challenges could be addressed only by seeking community-centered and community-informed solutions. As Paz said, "Given what we just went through [referring to the pandemic], I could never fathom not doing something for [my] community, especially now, especially after the

pandemic." In short, they gave voice to a generation that is faced with existential crises and has little faith in current leaders or institutions to tackle them justly. As Sara put it, "You know climate change is here. . . . sometimes I'm like, wow, the world is ending, and no one seems to care."

In envisioning their ongoing civic journeys, although the specific trajectories varied, students seemed committed to doing work that would make a difference, regardless of its context, nature, or scope. They also imagined working on the issues that they cared about, for the near-term future, reflecting recognition of the long, slow arc of change. For instance, Jay imagined continuing his work advocating for climate action beyond his time in college:

> I would love to work on the global issue of climate justice . . . how can we build alliances between different communities all across the world, so that they can share knowledge with each other? And pursue strategies that aren't driven just by, like corporate interests, but rather like community-based action?

However, the struggles of choosing something that resonated with their civic selves, and balancing that with what they deemed to be a means to a sustainable livelihood, was also paramount for many. As Sofia, a student whose parents are migrant farmworkers, put it, "I want to do so much work for my community, but I can't help others if I am not helping myself. And that means financial stability." For some students, choice of direction seemed clear—either a job that would lead to a sustainable salary, or else work that felt meaningful, with the hope that it would bring a sustainable income. Others, however, were not satisfied with what they saw as mutually exclusive trajectories. These students viewed their futures with hope and optimism, yet also with uncertainty, and the weight of responsibility. As Michelle put it, "Much of the work of building community happens around tables. So, I'm hoping that I'm hosting dinner and having conversations around a table and hoping that soon I actually have a table."

Data also suggested that civic identity is shaped not solely by individual psychological factors but also through social and cultural influences, or figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Conceptualized as culturally constructed spaces where individuals voluntarily enter or are recruited, they are instrumental in shaping one's experiences and actions. Figured worlds serve as "landscapes of action," where individuals "learn to recognize each other as a particular sort of actor, sometimes with strong emotional attachments." Integral to "identity work," figured worlds elucidate how individuals construct their identities within various social contexts, influencing their actions and perceptions through assumed or assigned social roles within interconnected figured worlds (Urrieta, 2007, pp. 107–108). Figure 2 provides a depiction of elements and processes involved in the figured worlds of civic identity.

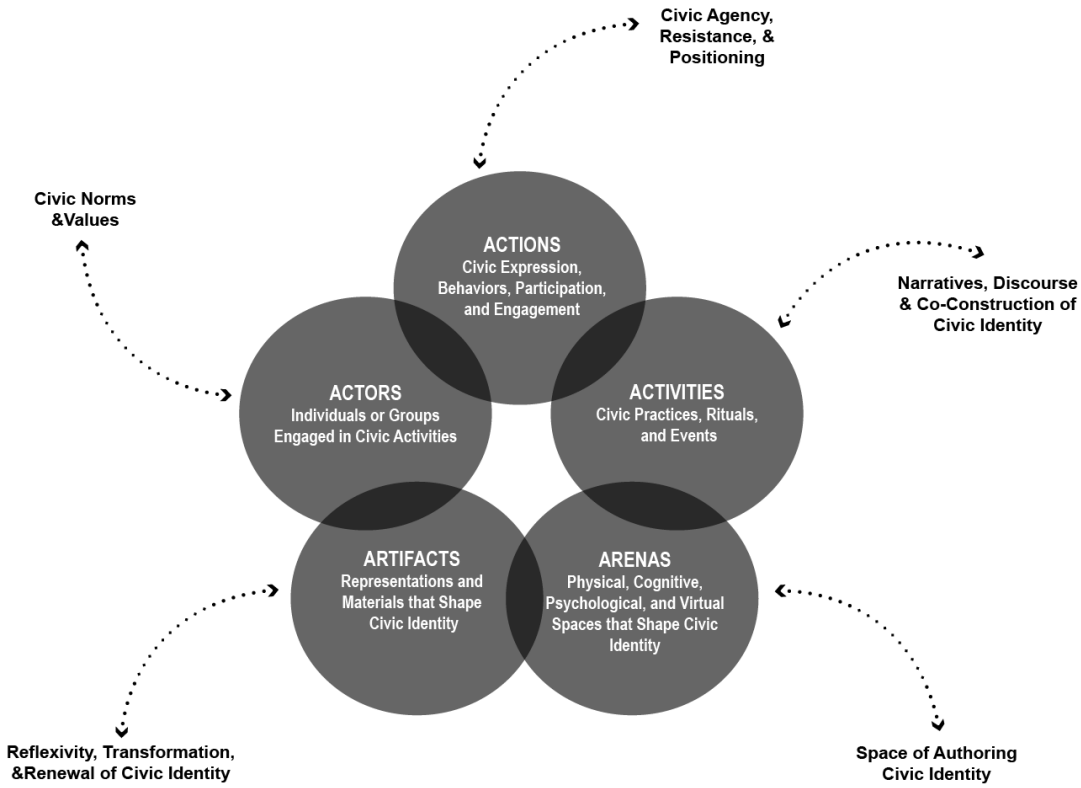
## Elements of Civic Worlds

Identity is shaped by figuring out one's sense of self as one moves through the various "worlds" one participates in and how one relates to and learns from other actors in these spaces. Since figured worlds are socially constructed and culturally replicated, interactions and engagement with others are critical. Individuals "figure" who they are and how they move through the "worlds" they are part of over time and across different contexts. Holland et al. (1998) described these ways of navigating spaces as "roles" that are created and recreated through actions and activities that people engage in (p. 98). Of note here is that individuals have agency in shaping these actions. Five critical elements comprise figured worlds—actors, actions, activities, arenas, and artifacts. These elements are described and contextualized to study findings below.

### *Actors: Individuals (or Groups) Engaged in Civic Activities and Interactions*

As Urrieta (2007) framed it, figured worlds are "peopled by characters," and study findings revealed several influential characters and actors who were important in the process of students' civic identity development (p. 109). Influential actors ranged from parents and grandparents to teachers and community members, as well as their peers. Serving as role models and exemplars of civic behavior, they were critical to how students saw themselves in civic contexts as well as the ways in which they developed civic values and norms. As Michelle, whose first experiences with volunteering were around providing meals to homeless people through the church she attended with her mother and her maternal grandparents,

**Figure 2. Figured Worlds of Civic Identity**




explained it, "It was a strong part of my family's ethic to give back."

### *Actions: Civic Expression, Behaviors, Participation, and Engagement*

The actions of these influential actors were crucial to how students learned civic norms and how these norms helped shape their own civic actions and civic sense of self. Themes of "doing like" influential actors or "doing for" important causes were salient throughout, and shaped how participants saw themselves. For example, Olivia described her interest in education stemming from her high school language arts teacher, an Asian American woman like her. Olivia described this teacher as going above and beyond to make a difference in her students' lives—staying for hours after school, supporting students' academic and extracurricular work with equal gusto, and creating a sense of community in her classroom. Olivia elaborated, "You know, one of the reasons why students succeed in school is because they have a sense of community. Like someone cares about them, or they have someone they can confide in or trust, you know like my own experience."

The students were enmeshed with both who they were, and who they were choosing to become. Particularly useful in interpreting and understanding study findings was that understanding of self, as shaped by navigating figured worlds over time and space (from adolescence to adulthood, for instance, or through curricular and other spaces) is dynamic and constantly shaped by actions of self and of the other. Thus, figured worlds are recreated by work, by work with others, and "across landscapes of action" (Urrieta, 2007, p. 109).

Holland et al. (1998) recognized and called out both conceptual and material ways in which identity is shaped and suggested that behavior is better viewed through the prism of "self in practice, not as self in essence" (p. 31). Students created and recreated their civic selves both conceptually and materially over time, through the choices they made and the actions they took. Through these actions, their perspectives evolved and matured into new(er) senses of self or to more consolidated ones. In other words, they ascribed new meaning to their actions over time. For instance, students described

how work had to have greater meaning and purpose than just a means to a livelihood, or they distinguished their own choices about areas of study and career pathways as distinct from others who made different choices. As Paz put it,

> I come from a community that has done so much for me. I have been given so much, so many opportunities . . . that I have a community that I am responsible to . . . so, I'll frame it this way: in many Native American cultures, when we do healing circles, or talking circles, when you introduce yourself, you say, who am I accountable to? And people respond with—my elders, my family, my community, native people as a whole. . . . And so, I think even being a part of certain cultures that prioritize community networks and prioritize taking care of one another . . . I think because of that, I can't really fathom a life outside of that, you know can't really fathom not doing that.

Thus, figured worlds of civic action seemed to provide them with the agency to influence their own choices and behavior. As Hatt (2007) put it, figured worlds often serve as "guidelines" or "social forces" influencing how people act and "practice" within social spaces (p. 149–150).

### *Activities: Civic Practices, Rituals, or Events*

Students spoke about several activities that were instrumental to learning civic behaviors and in fostering civic identity. Starting from volunteering and community service, evolving into more formal avenues of engagement such as curricular and extracurricular activities, reading, discussions, and dialogue about civic behaviors and community engagement, several practices and rituals related to civic engagement seemed to shape students' civic identity. Examples included developing practical means to advance change, such as the notion of "thinking big, and acting small," or practicing well-being—"taking care of one's personal ecology"—both of which were mentioned by almost all participants as powerful principles that were taught and reinforced through their curricular engagement program. In these instances, participants seemed to create new discourses, artifacts, or even new "liberatory worlds" (Urrieta, 2007, p. 111). The ability to independently envision, develop, and implement a community-based immersion experience through the program, leading to tangible and intangible outcomes, was impactful in both shaping and consolidating students' civic identities. In many ways, the program enabled students to find and fine-tune their civic voices. For instance, Raina summed up one of her big takeaways from the program—applying it to her everyday life, she said that civic engagement is often unrealistically defined in grandiose terms. She felt sometimes it can just be a matter of "being a good community member, getting to know your neighbors, helping with issues in your neighborhood, and not just solely focused on your own life."

### *Arenas: Physical, Cognitive, Psychological, or Virtual Spaces That Foster Civic Identity*

The arenas within which these actions took place were important. Be it in the context of community, the classroom, or formal and informal meeting spaces for the cohort, the actions, conversations, and messages that were exchanged and absorbed within these spaces were avenues by which students developed civic identity. For example, Danielle noted that program faculty were able to create "special" spaces so she and her cohort peers "could genuinely learn from one another." Or when Olivia (and several others) described consulting or other career paths as "a whole 'nother world," I got the impression that she was making a distinct choice of not wanting to be part of that world precisely because, as she saw it, "it is so harmful." In addition, the psychological contexts within which students made meaning of the experiences, the mindsets they were developing about civic work, also served as a mechanism in shaping civic identity. Lastly, virtual spaces such as blogs, podcasts, newsletters, and the group chat that the cohort had created for themselves were influential in enabling civic agency, and in enabling students to use their voice. These spaces socialized students and, in some instances, were a measure of accountability to engage in civic behaviors. As several students put it, "learning to value community" and "learning to be in community" were values they learned to appreciate both through facilitated conversations in class and in other spaces outside class.

### *Artifacts: Symbols, Representations, and Materials That Shape Civic Identity*

Holland et al. (1998) characterized artifacts

in figured worlds as mediating thoughts and feelings that enabled individuals to build the capacity to position themselves for themselves. Artifacts can therefore be interpreted through a prism of "a collectively remembered history" and can offer "possibilities for becoming" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 36). Artifacts are "psychological tools that are collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful." They serve as mechanisms facilitating everyday actions but also as symbols of individual or collective memory that propagate certain behaviors or actions. They shape "developmental histories" of activities past and present (pp. 60–62). Symbols, representations, or other similar abstractions played a part in encouraging civic behaviors and ultimately in shaping civic identity. For example, just as Paz talked about accountability to one's community being prioritized in Native American culture, Sam described learning from his community mentor that community work ought to "move at the speed of trust."

## The Process of Identity Formation

If the elements described above served as vehicles for identity development, the catalysts that gave these vehicles momentum were several process-related factors. They catalyzed the evolution and consolidation of civic identity throughout the developmental stages described previously. These processes are highlighted below.

### *Engagement, Participation, and Relationships: Developing Norms and Values Through Civic Work*

Social and cultural norms determine how individuals navigate figured worlds. Paraphrasing Urrieta (2007), identity is not just made up of labels that individuals assign themselves or that are assigned to them; it is "very much about how people come to understand themselves, how they come to 'figure' who they are through the 'worlds that they participate in'" (p. 107). Individuals' identities are shaped by how they absorb and apply civic norms in their day-to-day decision making and ways of being. Students in this study created metaphorical worlds to make meaning of their community engagement experiences, replicating norms or embracing values exemplified by influential individuals. These experiences often held deep symbolism and were associated with admired or aspirational figures. Michelle described her aspirations and the influence that her grandparents had on her thus: Her grandfather was a pediatrician who often saw patients on government-supported health insurance even though it was not financially lucrative, and her grandmother was a family therapist who worked with "troubled children." For them, work and personal lives were intertwined. Similarly, she said that she could never imagine work being a "nine to five" endeavor. As she envisioned her future life unfolding, she said, "I see myself working evenings because that's when this kind of work happens. That's when relationships are built, that's when town halls are held. . . . That's when so much of life is. . . ." Notions of "responsibility to community" and "caring for each other" stood out in shaping civic identity from adolescence, during college, and beyond. These notions were part of the figured worlds that students moved through and shaped how they saw themselves, who they saw themselves becoming, and what was deeply enmeshed with their sense of self.

### *Space of Authoring—Artifacts and Discursive Elements*

Students seemed to negotiate their civic identities by seeking alignment with their own evolving values, beliefs, and the roles they envisioned for themselves. Channeling Bakhtin, Holland et al. (1998) described "space of authoring" as an important element within figured worlds in shaping identity. Engagement and participation with artifacts or discursive practices could lead to "embodiment of [this] identity" (Mayes et al., 2016, p. 613). Findings suggest that although students may have had a predisposition for civic engagement prior to participation in the curricular community engagement program, the artifacts (from program application to course readings and course deliverables) were all primed to create spaces and avenues for students to author their own civic destinies. Additionally, although the ways in which students engaged with these artifacts and discursive elements—including classroom discussions and dialogue, engagement with peers and community partners—were unique and personalized to their own civic journeys, all of these factors did facilitate authoring of civic identity. As Mayes et al. showed in their study about citizenship positions enacted and embraced by elementary school children, the figured worlds of civic identity overlapped or diverged depending on the

positions that the students themselves chose to take. For students like Sofia and Paz, giving back to their communities was integral to their civic identities, whereas for others, like Jay, Sara, or Sam, the cause they were passionate about, be it climate advocacy, gentrification, or gerrymandering, was the catalyzing element.

In understanding students' civic life trajectories, the metaphor of "lamination" (Holland & Leander, 2008, p. 131) was useful. Related to identity, this process works by one's sense of self being built and thickened with layers of memories, experiences, and artifacts. Although each layer may be distinctive, it also bonds together with new layers. This flow between worlds creates overlapping and synergistic layers of identity (Brown, 2017). Regardless of the ways in which their worlds aligned or diverged, it appeared that program participation offered students tools by which to construct, define, and perform their civic selves (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007), which then became enmeshed with their other identities and histories of self. As Sofia eloquently framed it, "The work I am doing now, the work I'm going to continue to do isn't just for myself, it's for every other person from my community who didn't have the chance to make it."

### *Narratives, Discourses, and Coconstruction*

According to Holland et al. (1998), identity becomes consolidated through discourse and collective meaning making, or coconstruction of worlds that individuals share. With increasing involvement in civic work, students seemed to develop shared meaning and shared rituals of civic work. Notions of "being in community" or "working with community members" or "thinking big and acting small" were all examples of cognitive hooks that students used to chart their civic journeys. In these situations, students' increasing investment in civic worlds and civic work often manifested as "spoken discourse and embodied practice" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 251). Students were retelling and replicating many of the lessons learned through the curricular community engagement experience into their everyday parlance and into day-to-day practice. For instance, in discussing the evolution of their ongoing civic journeys beyond college, there was a recurring motif of a vision of continued engagement with community. Although it was hard for participants to predict the specific contours that this engagement would take, they could not envision a future devoid of public service or civic work. As Holland et al. (1998) framed it, identity is what "people tell others [about] who they are, but even more important, what they tell themselves and then try to act as they are who they say they are. . . ." (p. 3).

### *Agency, Resistance, and Positioning—The Metanarratives of Civic Identity*

How students "positioned" themselves with regard to their civic selves was determined not only by factors such as background and personal history, but also by how individual aspirations and ideals influenced thoughts, behaviors, and ways of interpreting the world. Although the program curriculum was influential in positioning students as civic leaders and in preparing them for public service, students seemed to improvise and exercise their own civic agency (Hatt, 2007). They developed a sense of civic self by resisting dominant narratives. One such narrative thread that emerged was that of seeking work that gave them a sense of purpose, and in positioning themselves as distinct from peers whom they could not find identity alignment with. Phrases like "I'd be miserable as a consultant," or the need to "be around people who care," or not wanting to be like "the finance bros" came up in describing one's aspirations. Furthermore, negotiations around positionality, and space of authoring, are powerful avenues for producing identities. Positionality refers to roles that are assigned to individuals or that they create for themselves within figured worlds, whether that of a "finance bro" or that of "people who care." Similarly, and with regard to narratives, individuals encounter narratives that can be either oppressive or liberating and where prestige and rank are determined based on one's identity alignment. In the context of this case study, terms like "caring," "community," "fulfillment," "purpose," and "public good" all seemed to impact how one saw oneself and one's identity as serving a larger civic purpose rather than a more narrow, individualistic one.

### *Reflexivity, Transformation, and Renewal of Civic Identity*

Identity is a dynamic process influenced by evolving interactions and experiences within figured worlds. Given the ongoing and long-term practice of civic work, figured worlds become spaces of possibility where individuals have agency in determining the "roles" that they play. Thus, when students were making choices about their

community engagement activities, their outcome was both additive of new identities and affirmative of previously existing ones. As Paz explained, their passion for community work took root early in their life and has been an ongoing aspect of their sense of civic responsibility. They explained,

> When I moved from public school to a private school, I was the only one from my neighborhood, and perhaps one of a few from a low-income, Latine community. Community service was a way for me to stay connected to my roots—it ignited a fire in me. Given where I come from, and where I am now, I owe it to my community to give back. It is really important to me.

As opportunities for repeated participation and choices to engage arose, accompanied by an "emotional charge," so did the accumulation and internalization of civic identity as a form of self-authoring (Holland & Leander, 2008, p. 137). As one of the participants, Leonard, put it, it was easy to "follow old patterns."

## Discussion

Quoting Horace Mann, who said, "a different world cannot be built by indifferent people," the "Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education" (Ehrlich, 1999) emphasized the unique role of universities in shaping graduates' democratic knowledge and values. Looking back a quarter century since then, higher education institutions have embraced the call by implementing various initiatives to cultivate civic skills and values among students. Despite the recognized benefits of such programs, little is known about their impact on shaping students' civic identity. This study sought to understand how college students' civic identities are shaped as a result of their participation in a curricular community engagement program. Leveraging theoretical borderlands as a framework, and drawing upon self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1982, 1994) and the theory of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998), this study examined students' civic journeys to shed light on their development as civic agents in democratic societies. By blending together two theories of identity development, the study offers a heretofore unexplored perspective in civic engagement scholarship to understand the ways in which civic identity may be fostered in the context of college. Combining a constructivist–developmental model with figured worlds, it explicates the ways in which curricular community engagement experiences may help shape college students' civic identities. Findings of the study have implications for shaping pedagogy, praxis, and institutional policy.

Patterns about students' civic journeys and civic identities revealed by this study suggest that precollege experiences were influential in shaping students' civic sense of self. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that students' early experiences influence their college decisions, including where and whether they attend, as well as academic and extracurricular choices (Campbell, 2006; Johnson, 2014). In addition, demographic factors were also instrumental in shaping participants' civic outlook, especially among students from minoritized communities, who expressed a sense of responsibility toward uplifting their communities. In transitioning to college, students expressed engaging in self-discovery, finding purpose, overcoming challenges, and building resilience, all of which were critical to shaping their civic identities. Curricular community engagement enabled the development of civic purpose through classroom discussions, relationships with peers, and connections with faculty and community partners.

Study findings also suggest that the process of authoring one's civic identity occurs through developmental tasks such as values exploration, affirmation, or divergence (Pizzolato, 2005), making meaning of one's experiences, determining the course of one's life, and taking steps along that path. Similar to previous studies (Baxter Magolda et al., 2010; Pizzolato, 2003), this study revealed that students from minority groups seemed to move toward authoring civic identity with greater urgency. These experiences of marginalization or "provocative moments" (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 628) propelled them toward greater clarity about their civic identity. Baxter Magolda (1999) has long advocated that universities play an important role in promoting self-authorship. Leveraging constructivist–developmental approaches, universities can empower students to become active participants in the learning process (Thomas et al., 2021), interpret their experiences, and cocreate knowledge,

particularly through high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008) such as community-engaged learning. According to Baxter Magolda (2009), faculty play a crucial role, fostering self-discovery, reflection, and growth, and enabling students to have greater agency in the learning process. The findings of this study further reinforce the critical role of faculty in supporting students in the evolution of their civic identities. Student-driven factors such as examining one's beliefs and engaging with diverse others (Barber & King, 2014; King et al., 2009) complement faculty-driven factors. Experiential learning, highlighted as an important avenue for self-authorship (Breunig, 2005; Gregory, 2006), fosters qualities like self-efficacy, critical thinking, and leadership (Flood et al., 2009; Heinrich et al., 2015; McGowan, 2016). Study findings support these earlier conclusions and further suggest that these aspects of experiential learning are vital to the development and evolution of civic identity.

Applying figured worlds to adult education and lifelong learning, Erstad and Sefton-Green (2013) suggested that learner identities are shaped at and along learning moments and are often expressed as epiphanies. Many such learning moments were sprinkled throughout students' civic trajectories, and one resounding epiphany laced throughout several narratives was the importance of "being with community" that seems to have been catalyzed by a reading in the program. A noteworthy point with regard to the effect of the program in shaping students' civic identity is that of "affinity spaces," where students are part of a community and learn from others (Gee, 2004, p. 68). The notion of "space" has primacy here where identity work occurs. The program seemed to offer just such an affinity space, helping create both physical and virtual spaces where students learned from and with each other, with faculty playing powerful facilitatory roles. Thus, individual civic identity shapes behaviors, actions, and interactions, contributing to collective civic worlds. Civic work then becomes part of cultural practice that is "used to give meaning to others and to [oneself]" (Hatt, 2007, p. 158).

Findings highlighted the complex interplay of personal experiences, social influences, and self-perceptions in shaping civic identity. Holland and Leander (2008) elegantly described how the various elements of one's life—social, cultural, and personal—become intertwined over time like strands in a rope, so that "an object with characteristics distinctive from those of the original ingredients results. A rope differs in form and behavior from the fibers that compose it" (p. 134). Similarly, as students engaged in different and more complex civic work, their civic identities continued to evolve and mature, assuming more distinct forms than previous iterations. Identities incarnate over time through repeated positioning and through engaging with frequently used artifacts and discourses that align with this positioning. Hence, students' civic work seems to be not only in alignment across the various aspects of their lives as college students but also synergistic with how they imagined their life stories evolving. Thus, figured worlds are always "in process," always "undergoing transformation in practice" (Holland, 2010, p. 273), and identity is "about becoming, rather than being" (Brown, 2017, p. 94). The following section discusses the limitations of this study, implications of this work, and future directions.

## Study Limitations, Implications, and Future Research

### Limitations

This qualitative case study of participants in one curricular community engagement program was conducted at a highly selective school in the U.S. Southeast. It provides a glimpse into the experiences of some students who were part of this program, and the ways in which their experiences in and beyond this program may have shaped the evolution and consolidation of their civic identities. However, given the nature, scope, and context of the study, there are several limitations for the transferability of findings.

The participants of this study were 13 students who were part of a selective curricular engagement program. Findings were distilled from participant interviews and document analysis of course material shared by faculty (course syllabi and reading material) and content produced by the students. They offer a snapshot of the experiences of these particular students, based on personal reflections (both retrospective and prospective) at this point in time. Additionally, this study site (both program and university) has a long and well-recognized commitment to community engagement. Given that institutional

culture has an impact on student outcomes, including students' civic experiences (Berger & Milem, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Dey et al., 2009; Young et al., 2007), the distinctiveness of this locus is a consideration for transferability of study findings.

That said, this study makes an important contribution to the literature. It extends current research and offers new evidence in support of the benefits of curricular community engagement experiences. More importantly, it marries two prominent theories on identity development to examine the impact of curricular community engagement in shaping civic identity among college students. Using the work of Abes (2009) as a model, this study "create[d] a theoretical borderland" between constructivist–developmental frameworks and figured worlds in interrogating the development of civic identity. Although the respective theories individually provide a rich understanding of the process and influences involved in identity development, combining them yields a far more tapestried understanding of the evolution of civic identity. This borderland where students make choices and decisions about college based on aspects that are integral to their identities, and the ways in which these identities are "fused, performed, and . . . [are continually] becoming" is an important contribution of this study (Abes, 2009, p. 148). It is an integrative approach where social, political, and cultural factors are just as influential as cognitive processes. As a result, this study has important implications for student development theory and for curricular praxis.

### Implications

This study has three key implications for pedagogy. First, students valued the combination of experiential learning and conversations with peers. Corroborating other literature (Domangue & Carson, 2008), they also found opportunities for reflection to be beneficial, suggesting that curricula should prioritize such experiences to foster civic self-authorship. Second, students benefited from crafting and executing independent community engagement experiences, facilitating greater commitment to civic work. Therefore, experiential curricula should provide students autonomy in designing projects. Third, this study underscores the benefits of cohort-based models in creating learning communities (Roholt et al., 2009; Weerts & Cabrera, 2015) that enhance civic skills and foster civic identity. Students learned (with and) from each other to shape collective civic worlds through their interactions with each other. Due to their "high touch" nature, such programs require more planning and resources, but pay dividends by creating learning communities that foster civic skills and shape civic identity.

Participants expressed immense satisfaction about the community engagement program, emphasizing its value in preparing them for ethical community engagement. Given the selectivity of such programs, investing more resources and democratizing access will pave the way to expanding civic skills among college students. After all, democracies depend on citizens engaging with their communities. Extant literature emphasizes the benefits of service-learning on individual outcomes like graduation, retention, and long-term civic involvement. Going beyond these metrics, this study amplifies communal aspects, including the sense of belonging fostered by the program. Given deep schisms (Balz & Morse, 2023) in our society, and inequities in access to civic learning and opportunities for engagement among youth (Kiesa et al., 2022; Zaff et al., 2003), there is need to replicate such success stories to build community and connections among college students.

### Future Research

Given limited research on the impact of community-engaged pedagogies in shaping civic identity, there is need for further study across types of institutions, and with larger samples. Such research could lead to a more pluralistic understanding of how community engagement shapes civic identity. In addition, our understanding of how civic identity evolves over time can be further deepened through longitudinal studies following students from adolescence into adulthood.

## Conclusion

This study makes a significant contribution by extending current research and providing new evidence about the benefits of curricular community engagement. It combines two prominent theoretical streams on identity development, creating a "borderland" between constructivist–developmental frameworks and figured worlds to understand the evolution of civic identity among college students. Paraphrasing Abes (2009), experimentation with such borderlands allows for a paradigmatic shift in understanding student development

and the civic purpose of a college education. This borderland where students make choices and decisions about college based on factors that are integral to their identities, and the ways in which these identities are "fused, performed, and . . . [are continually] becoming" (Abes, 2009, p. 148), is an essential contribution of this study. It is an integrative approach where social, political, and cultural factors are just as influential as interpersonal ones. As such, it has important implications for student development theory and for curricular praxis. Above all, it amplifies students' stories in making the case for how civic identity is shaped in the context of college. These stories corroborate the significance of curricular community engagement and bring us closer to fulfilling one of the loftiest missions of higher education—enabling students to author their civic identities.

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