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Students Who Identify as Black and Their Perceptions of and Experiences with Public High School Student Council

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Students Who Identify as Black and Their Perceptions of and Experiences with Public High

School Student Council

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Dissertation Approval
In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, there has been a decline in the participation of Black students in high school student councils, causing concern that the Black student population is underrepresented in this traditional form of civic engagement. This hermeneutic phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of Black individuals who attended Massachusetts' public high schools and were faced with the opportunity to seek membership in student council. Three guiding questions focused on factors influencing a student's decision to seek membership in the organization and the alignment between the portrayed purposes of student council with the participants' actual experiences and perceptions. A modified snowball approach was used to collect data from 103 individuals, twenty-five of whom met the delimitations of the study and identified themselves as Black. Interviews were conducted with seven participants. A frequency analysis helped to illustrate themes from the survey data, and the interview data were coded both manually and using NVivo software. The analysis revealed themes that became the basis for six findings. The findings suggest that participants were more likely to join student council when they felt their involvement could impact their school communities. Participants did not feel their student councils provided an open forum for non-student council members to share their ideas; however, they could see potential benefits of student council if organized appropriately. Many prioritized other activities over joining student council. The purpose they most associated with student councils was their fundraising function, and participants credit their student council experiences for their strengthened communication skills. Recommendations from this study advise school leaders and student council advisors to examine demographic patterns of participation and find ways to include the voices of all students to achieve racially diverse participation and reclaim the fundamental purpose of student councils.

Key words: Black students, civic engagement, high school student council, motivation

DEDICATION

For Kory Turner

Without you, the idea for this research study may have never surfaced. You inspired me to investigate your observation of the lack of racial diversity in student council. It is my hope that this dissertation will inspire others as much as you inspired me and that change will take place.
Thank you.

For all of the Black students who feel they don't belong

This work does not end here. I hope people start to recognize the decline in Black student participation in student council and begin to make changes. I hope you and others are inspired to speak up in your schools and communities to demand change.
Your ideas matter. Your voice matters. You matter.

For Alycat

I hope the past five years have inspired you to continue following your dreams, no matter what they may be. We sacrificed a lot of quality time so that I could achieve this goal. You never complained and always supported me.
I love you.

For Moby

You would be so proud right now.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A long-standing fundamental purpose of public schooling in America is to prepare

students to become contributing members in our democratic society (Mann, 1867; Dewey, 1938;

Ravitch, 1983; Tyler, 1987; National Education Goals, 1994; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton,

2000). Likewise, it has been claimed that the public school itself can function as a type of

democratic society (Mathes, 1975; Tyler, 1987; Warren, 1988), and the conversation of public-

school education often includes the expectation that the school should embrace the diversity of

the community resources, administration, teaching staff, and student body to cultivate the

necessary democratic ideals. Educators often claim that extracurricular activities provide a way

to strengthen the ties that students develop to their school community while introducing students

to democratic practices.

One extracurricular activity offered in many schools is student government, often in the

form of a student council, an activity with which I became closely familiar while serving as a

high school student council advisor. Throughout that time, I developed a passion for witnessing

and helping to advance the emergence of student leaders. Part of this role involved

accompanying student council representatives to state conferences. My experiences at state

student council conferences have made me wonder about the motivations of students to join

student council. I have specifically wondered about Black students' participation because I have

noticed minimal Black student representation at these events. This wondering began six years

ago when, Kory Turner, the student President of the Southeastern Massachusetts Association of

Student Councils made a comment in his closing ceremony speech regarding his concern about

the lack of racial diversity in the audience. At that moment, he stopped his speech and asked the

audience members, student council representatives and advisors from schools in southeastern Massachusetts, to look around and notice the lack of Black student representation. He then issued a call to action for the students to work on recruiting a more diverse group of members into their respective councils. This was an eye-opening experience for me because I was an advisor at a school that enrolled more students of color than White students, and therefore it was typical to have several students of color on the student council. That call to action signified a defining moment for my research. I realized that I wanted to investigate the seemingly limited representation of Black students in Massachusetts' student councils. To begin that investigation, I started with a review of the existing literature pertaining to student councils and other extracurricular activities.

I discovered in the existing scholarship that people have researched and written about the discrepancy in interracial participation in extracurricular activities since the desegregation of schools. Clotfelter (2002) showed the racial discrepancies in extracurricular participation by examining yearbooks from 193 high schools during 1997-1998 and finding that "the average rate of memberships per student is higher for white students than nonwhite students" (p. 32). Weinberger (2014) found the proportion of Black seniors participating in student council decreased by 14% from 1974 to 2004. This decline in participation was happening at a time when the percentage of Black high school seniors was increasing by almost 5% (Ingels, Dalton, & LoGerfo, 2008). It is worrisome that the percentage of Black students participating in student council and other extracurricular activities is unequal to their representation in schools because it is a demonstrating factor that they are not being included in an activity so closely associated with one of the primary aims of public education. By not engaging Black students in all facets of public education, we are essentially leaving them out of experiences that may further their

development as contributing members of a democratic society while simultaneously depriving those students who do engage with student council the experience of governing alongside racially diverse peers. Learning about these discrepancies in the rates of participation by race throughout extracurricular activities and, especially, student council motivated me to inquire further about this issue.

Before continuing, I must acknowledge that there are complexities when discussing the social construct of race. Singleton (2015) discusses the importance of establishing common language. He admits that "because language is at the heart of culture, it is essential both that we establish common language around race, and at the same time remain open to understanding how our varied racial experiences shape our own vocabulary and comfort with the conversation in general as well as with specific word choice" (pp. 16-7). Briscoe, Arriaza, and Henze (2009) wrote that "language is the medium through which educational leaders make their intentions known to others" (p. 16). Using the example of transitioning the way people identify others based on their ethnoracial characteristics, such as African American, rather than from their skin color, Black, the authors explain how language, used with intent, can be a powerful social force. It is important to note that in making the choice to use the term Black throughout this study, I am not in any way ignoring or discounting the social forces that have been in place for years regarding the shift in the language used to identify individuals. I fully appreciate and acknowledge the shift away from labeling someone based on their skin color and want to recognize that, for the purposes of this study, using solely ethnoracial labels will not work. I am relying, therefore, on the label the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has designated for school districts to use.

Throughout this dissertation I refer to participants as Black. This is not a term that I have assigned to these individuals; rather, it is a term with which participants have self-identified. Participants in this study are individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 who self-identified as Black or African American. These are also the terms used in various other places where students and families are asked to self-identify their race (e.g., school enrollment and health forms). Individuals of all racial groups were invited to participate in this study; however, only those participants who self-identified as Black participated in the full survey as well as the interview phase of the data collection process.

When I discuss my research interests with colleagues and friends, it is common for them to press me with questions such as: "Why aren't you interested in hearing about White students' experiences?" or "Shouldn't you use the term students of color?" When people question why I am not interested in an inquiry that focuses on the perspectives of White student council members, I am obligated to explain to them that the scholarship presents a decline in Black student participation; therefore, I am more interested in learning about Black students' experiences and illuminating their voices and experiences. Having just finished reading Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (2018), I was especially alert to comments such as these when I was initially setting out on my research journey. DiAngelo (2018) unpacks the feelings people experience when the topic of racism arises. She also provides language that White people use when discussing matters of race that are offensive and unsettling in hopes of encouraging White people to see their whiteness. I was taken aback when one of my contemporaries responded to my explanation with, "Don't the students on student council represent the student body, so therefore, aren't they providing a voice for all students, including the Black ones?" Because White students have not experienced the systemic racism that Black students have faced, there is

no way that White students could—*nor should*—speak about matters concerning Black students. Therefore, there is reason to investigate the perceptions and motivations of Black students when joining, or deciding not to join, student council. Learning these perceptions and motivational factors may help schools discover and replicate conditions that are more inviting for Black students to join student council.

As a White woman investigating experiences about Black students, my research may become the subject of criticism. Therefore, I want to introduce early in this dissertation the steps I took to amplify, and not overtake, the voices of the Black individuals with whom I spoke.

To explain my choice in racial terminology, I include the fact that the available data on student council participation demonstrate a decline in the participation of Black high school seniors as referenced by Weinberger (2014), not in other racial identities.

I recognize that conversations about my choices will continue to arise, and I will take great care not to be dismissive of people's reactions because it is apparent that this topic, and my choice of language, are gateways to this type of discussion.

This dissertation outlines how I relied on the voices of Black individuals between the ages of 18-21 and various documents related to student council to learn about the phenomenon of being a Black student perceiving and experiencing the opportunity to join a high school student council. In the sections that follow, I discuss additional details of the problem explored, the purpose of the study, the related literature, and the methodology of the study.

Statement of the Problem

A core purpose of public education in America is to prepare students for a life where they become contributing members of a democratic society who are capable of working together to solve collective problems (Beck & Jennings, 1982; National Education Goals, 1994; Oakes et al.,

2000; Ravitch, 1983; Tyler, 1987). Student council is an arena in which students can come together on behalf of their school community to engage in this type of work. Despite the literature promoting the various benefits of participating in high school student council (Flutter, 2006; McFarland and Starmanns, 2009), there is limited research on the experiences students who identify as Black have on student councils and the extent to which their experiences are consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation.

Student councils can be venues for promoting civic values and experiences; therefore, Mathes (1975) asserted that student councils should be representative of all the students in the school. However, findings from Darling, Caldwell, and Smith (2005) indicate that Black students are under-represented in student councils. In Darling et al.'s study, it was discovered that out of the 178 African American students surveyed, only 1.1% of them participated in a leadership group and over half of them did not participate in any type of school-based extracurricular activity. Weinberger (2014) took a deeper look at the racial gap in high school leadership opportunities by comparing data from longitudinal studies and found that the number of Black students engaging in student council declined by 14% between 1974 and 2004.

Trying to gather information on the demographics of student councils throughout the state of Massachusetts, as well as surrounding states, yielded no results. These states have no data collection process which tracks the racial makeup of student councils. This lack of reporting system to monitor trends in the racial make-up of activities such as student council suggests that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is inattentive to how a national trend as indicated by Weinberger may forecast inequities within Massachusetts' schools.

Griebler and Nowak (2012) found benefits of participation in student council include improved self-esteem, development of democratic skills and citizenship, development of life skills, and improved learning and academic achievement. A separate study reported leadership and communication skill development as benefits (Keogh & Whyte, 2005). If the number of Black students involved in student council is declining, it means that even fewer Black students are gaining the various benefits of student council these writers have extolled in the literature. Because there are positive implications of participating in extracurricular activities such as student council, this waning involvement can be detrimental to not only Black students' future civic participation but also to their daily lives in high school.

While there is a small body of literature examining potential inhibitors for Black student participation in extracurricular and other after-school activities (Perkins, Border, Villaruel, Carlton-Hug, & Stone, 2006), there is a dearth of literature exploring motivational and inhibiting factors of engaging Black students in student council. To further learn about these conditions, this study inquired directly about the perspectives of Black individuals between the ages of 18-21 who had the opportunity to engage in their high school's student council.

Purpose of the Study

A great number of scholars have examined the contributing factors and inhibitors of student participation in extracurricular activities (Morimoto & Friedland, 2013; Perkins, et al., 2006; Weiss, Little & Bouffard, 2005); however, the extant research has not examined the contributing factors which lead to participation of Black youth in the specific extracurricular activity known as student council. The overarching purpose of this study was to gain insight into the phenomenon of being a Black student faced with the opportunity to join student council in high school. I looked at the relationship between the value Black students place on student

council membership and the claims made about the purposes and benefits of student council as presented in the literature that popularizes the benefits of student council participation as well as the claims presented by schools. Through these inquiries, I illuminate factors and conditions that contribute to Black high school students being inclined or not inclined to participate in student council.

In order to learn more about these areas, I used the following three research questions to guide my study:

1. What external factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

2. What intrapersonal factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

3. What do Black individuals report about their experiences with high school student council and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will help to ensure clarity of terms frequently used in this dissertation.

Black students: Black students is used when referring to research participants. These participants are individuals who self-identified as Black or African American on the initial survey tool.

Black Student Union: Black Student Union is a term used to describe an organization designed for Black students to come together to engage in conversation and activism regarding social, political, and cultural discourse.

Extracurricular activities: Extracurricular activities is the term used to refer to the optional clubs and organized activities offered by schools outside of the traditional school hours.

Motivation: Motivation is the term used to describe the reasons behind an individual's actions

Student council: Student council is used to refer to schools that have an organization classified as either student council or student government regardless of affiliation with state or nationwide organizations.

Student government: Student government is used to refer to an organization within a school that is comprised of an elected group of students who help oversee the happenings of the student body.

<div align="center">

Significance of the Study

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Through this study, I elicited information about the experiences of individuals who identify as Black and had the opportunity to participate in student council in a Massachusetts' public high school. This study can contribute a number of benefits to the educational field as well as society at large.

When I attempted to gather preliminary data on the demographics of student councils in my local community and nearby communities, I was unsuccessful. It was apparent that the school districts in my area and the surrounding states did not maintain this type of data. I decided to widen my inquiry and reach out to the National Student Council Association. The Assistant Director reported back to me that there is no reporting system in place for states to record the demographics of their student council members (personal communication, July 31, 2018). By bringing light to the declining number of Black student council members as referenced by Weinberger (2014) and capturing the voices of these students and their experiences, it should be evident to schools, districts, and state agencies and organizations such as the National Student

Council Association and Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education the reasons for monitoring participation in student councils by race.

In the current scholarship available on student councils, there has been minimal attention brought to the students' perspectives. One aim of this study is to increase attention regarding how Black students perceive and experience high school student councils. Current educational practitioners can use the information gleaned through this study to improve practices in their schools. The findings could inspire student council advisors to look at the purposes and benefits they portray about student council and examine their effectiveness in meeting them through their own student councils.

Furthermore, the study can be used as a resource to school districts by providing rich information to school personnel to reflect upon and consider the conditions in their schools that may invite or impede Black student participation in student council. It may also illuminate the lack of Black students in their student councils and drive school personnel to actively recruit more students who identify as Black into their student council organizations. Furthermore, districts may begin to recognize and address the inhibitors within their settings that prevent students from having an overall positive or beneficial experience in student council.

Information gleaned from this study can be used by the stakeholders in middle and high schools who are responsible for the recruitment of future student council members. This study has the potential to draw attention to the fact that Black students are underrepresented in student councils. Considering this information, student council advisors will better understand the importance of maintaining data on the demographics of students participating in student council and monitoring the conditions within the student councils they supervise.

Additionally, this study impacts students who identify as Black because it draws attention

to perspectives on student council offered in the voices of other students who identify as Black.

By inviting reflection on their perspectives about student council and their own experiences and

interactions within student council, it allowed these individuals to examine their reasons for

joining or not joining student council. This process helped former student council members

consider if they benefited from student council participation in how they initially anticipated.

Lastly, by shedding light on the variables that encourage, sustain, or discourage

participation in student council, current and future researchers can use these new perspectives to

develop follow-up studies.

Delimitations of the Study

To engage with a group of individuals who experienced a similar phenomenon, specific

delimitations were placed on this study. To increase the validity of my results, the participants of

the survey needed to agree that they fit the criteria I was looking for as well as confirm that they

had not previously filled out the survey.

Participants of the survey were between the ages of 18-21. Although data from all racial

demographics, high school types, and states were collected, only those who identified as Black

and reported that they attended a high school in Massachusetts were included in the analysis.

To participate in the interview protocol, the individual must have self-identified as Black

or African American and expressed interest in engaging in an interview.

Overview of the Literature Review

This dissertation includes a synthesis of the literature from the past eighty years regarding

the democratic purposes of public education and how extracurricular activities, and student

council in particular, serve schools' attempts to further achieve such purposes. Looking back to

the origin of public schools in the United States, one can observe that the fundamental purposes given often include the aim to foster a democratic society (Adams, 1765; Mann, 1867; Dewey, 1938; Ravitch, 1983; Tyler, 1987; National Education Goals, 1994; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Rose, 2009). Looking predominantly at Dewey (1938), Tyler (1987), National Education Goals (1994), Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton (2000), and Rose (2009), the purposes of public school become evident. These leaders, scholars, and advocates have described various characteristics that schools should focus on in order to achieve the core purpose of fostering a democratic society. From the positions and ideas expressed in the cited works, I recognized three themes that are especially relevant to the inquiry of this study:

1. Teach students how to use their current surroundings and past experiences in order to become contributing members of their communities.

2. Teach students to be accepting and respectful of others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests.

3. Ensure students understand that every person can learn and foster a sense of urgency in improving their intellectual capacity in order to be prepared to contribute to the life ahead of them.

Schools have implemented various curricula and extracurricular activities in an attempt to fulfill their obligation of meeting these ideals. For example, extracurricular activities are often designed in ways that allow students to work together with other individuals with similar interests to advance their leadership skills while contributing to their community and gaining a sense of belonging in a larger group (Eccles & Barber, 1999). One specific extracurricular found in many high schools is a student council. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I include an overview of student council which includes a look at the origins of student councils, the purposes and

benefits of the organization, a review of empirical studies and anecdotal examples of how

student councils operate, and insight into the participation rates of Black students.

A viewpoint that will be examined in the review of literature includes an overview of the

desegregation of public schools and how consequences arising from desegregation may have

negatively impacted the number of Black students motivated to join student council.

Following the section on the desegregation of schools, I offer theoretical perspectives that

help explain the limited racial integration within student councils. Because of the growing

distrust in government by ethnic minority youth (Flanagan, Cumsille, Sukhdeep, & Gallay, 2007;

Levinson, 2012(b)), Black students may not be inclined to join a group that mirrors or represents

a democratic structure which, in their personal experiences, has failed them or people in their

communities. Tajfel and Turner's (1985) Social Integration Theory further explains that if

schools are perpetuating a White image of student councils, Black students will not feel an

atmosphere that encourages them to be different than how they currently feel they are viewed.

Therefore, they will not try to join the social group. Homophily is another theory that will be

examined as a possible explanation to the decline in Black student participation in student

council. Homophily is "the tendency of people to associate with others similar to themselves"

(Currarini, Jackson, & Pin, 2009). If student councils are comprised of primarily White students

or are promoted and advertised by only White students or teachers, Black students may be less

likely to express an interest in joining. Furthermore, it was found that students with few

demographically similar peers felt more isolated and less connected to the school, which in turn

affected their academic performance (Benner & Wang, 2014).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is also discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation as it helps

scholars to look at the cultural perceptions of race and the implications of those perceptions on

minority groups. CRT is often used in education to examine the racial inequalities that students face. CRT reminds us that we live in a White-dominated society with marginalized and oppressed minority groups. Two of the leading theorists of CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), explain that "members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power." Other scholars have built on the ideas of Ladson-Billings and Tate. CRT demonstrates that if Black students have been exposed to the negative stereotypes that once existed, they may feel that they are not worthy of breaking those stereotypes. This idea includes joining groups in which they feel they do not belong.

<div align="center">Overview of the Research Methods</div>

Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the phenomenon of being a Black individual faced with the opportunity to join or seek membership in student council in high school. The data were collected and analyzed using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to unveil, analyze, and interpret information pertaining to the three Guiding Research Questions. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a hermeneutical approach to a phenomenological study allows researchers to speak to the individuals who experienced the phenomenon as well as examine various artifacts. In this study, the artifacts I looked at included school websites and student council handbooks. By employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I was able to gather an in-depth understanding of the students' experiences and how their thoughts regarding council relate to the ideals portrayed by their school as well as common understandings of the purposes and benefits of student council.

Laverty (2003) expressed that in a phenomenological study "participants are generally asked to describe in detail their experience of the topic being investigated" (p. 19), and Morse (1991) wrote about the importance of methodological triangulation and its importance in research studies to ensure a comprehensive approach to data collection. This study utilized two primary data collection methods: individual surveys and personal interviews. The surveys included both open-ended and closed questions, and the answers were used to inform the development of the qualitative interview protocols. This data collection process helped to enlist and select participants who continued to the interview phase of the study. Three interview protocols were developed: one for students who did participate in student council, one for students who did not participate in student council but desired to, and one for students who did not participate in student council and never had a desire to. Videoconferencing interviews using Zoom! were used for all participants due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study did not set out to provide a generalizable interpretation concerning the experiences of all Black high school students with student council. The findings of this study are only one description of the lived experiences of a group of Black high school students regarding their experiences with student council and does not "exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* [emphasis appeared in original text] description" (van Manen, 2016, p. 31).

Role of the Researcher

I have had an interest in working with student council members since 2013. At that time, I was a seventh-grade English teacher who had no experience ever actually working with student council. Nor was I on student council as a high school student. I did, however, have a co-teacher who was an advisor for the senior class. I loved listening to her talk about the activities the

students were planning and the changes they were advocating for in the school community. I

knew then that I wanted to be an advisor as well. The following year, I looped with the students I

had taught in the 2013-2014 school year and co-taught their English class once again. Working

with the same students in consecutive years inevitably helps a teacher form a strong bond with

her students. Halfway through that academic year I decided I would loop again and teach 9th

grade English the following year. I made this decision so I could apply to be a student council

advisor that year and have the opportunity to work with the students I had been teaching for so

long. I was thrilled to find out that I was accepted to be an advisor for the Class of 2019

beginning with the 2015-2016 academic school year when they would be in the ninth grade.

When applications went live, I started handing them out to all the students in my classes

and displayed them around the school. I also ensured that the application information was made

clear during the morning announcements. When it came time to select student council members,

my co-advisor and I decided to accept every ninth-grade student who applied. Working with that

group of students brought as much joy to my workweek as I thought it would. I looked forward

to every meeting. Adolescents have empowering ideas and strong opinions they want to share

with others but infrequently get a welcomed opportunity to do so. Student council was a perfect

arena for this type of enthusiasm.

My extensive background with student council made it critical for me to consider my

prior assumptions and biases prior to beginning this research study, especially because of my

experience working with a similar population to the students being studied. When discussing the

idea of bias, van Manen (2016) stated:

The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the

phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, the

problem is that our "common sense" preunderstandings, our suppositions, assumptions,

and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of

the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the

phenomenological question. (p. 46)

Van Manen reminded readers that "it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs,

biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories" (p. 47) in order to acknowledge them.

Bracketing, a term first coined by Husserl, the father of phenomenology, is the process of

putting aside the suppositions, assumptions, and predispositions that one might have entering

into a research study (van Manen, 2016; Vagle, 2018). Having been a student council advisor for

seven years, I am familiar with the topic being studied. In particular, I am a student council

advisor at a school comprised of many Black students. The student council I currently advise has

several Black students as members. Due to my proximity to Black student council members, I

have spent time discussing their experiences with them both one-on-one and in small group

settings.

Vagle (2018) explains two viewpoints on bracketing theories while conducting interviews

for a phenomenological study. Husserl maintained that all prior assumptions, beliefs, and

theories should be bracketed prior to embarking on a research study. He wanted to get at the

essence of the phenomenon without any outside influences. Heidegger, on the other hand,

professes that there is no possible way of bracketing out personal assumptions or theories while

collecting or analyzing data from participants. And, in fact, Heidegger encourages

phenomenologist researchers to draw on theory in their interpretations of the lived experiences of

participants. Heidegger uses the hermeneutical circle to explain how analysis of the data includes

many lenses, including additional theories, to break down the whole data set into parts. In turn, the researcher should use those parts to better understand the whole.

Setting and Participants

To study the phenomenon of being a Black high school student faced with the possibility of participating in student council in a Massachusetts' public high school, I needed to find participants who met predetermined criteria. Using a modified snowball sampling approach as well as social media postings, I relied on key informants to help me recruit individuals for phase one of the study. To do so, I sent a letter to potential informants (Appendix A) which included a sample letter they could send to potential participants (Appendix B). I also posted my recruitment flyer (Appendix C) on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. I collected a total of 103 surveys, twenty-five of which were from individuals who identified as Black. Of those twenty-five, there were seven individuals who expressed interest in an interview. Ultimately, seven interviews were conducted.

Data Collection Instruments

There were three data collection instruments used in this study. The first was a survey (Appendix D) which gathered data from former high school students of all races. The purpose of the survey was to collect demographic information and an overview of the motivation behind students either joining or not joining student council. The survey also investigated the experiences of individuals who did participate in student council.

There were two separate interview protocols utilized in this study. Interview Protocol A (Appendix E) was used with participants who indicated they were a member of student council at some point in high school. This interview protocol followed up in more detail about participants' motivations for joining student council as well as their experiences in student council and how

those experiences align with the purposes intended by schools. Interview Protocol B (Appendix F) was used with participants who did not participate in student council and indicated that they were never interested in joining their high school student council.

Survey. The survey was used to collect information from former student council members as well as individuals who were never members of student council. At one point in the survey, the participants were prompted to indicate their race. Participants who did not identify themselves as Black or African American were brought to a screen that thanked them for their participation. Participants who indicated they are Black or African American were directed to continue taking the rest of the survey. The last survey question for individuals who identified as Black or African American informed the participants that there is another phase of the research study consisting of an interview and asked participants if they were interested in participating.

The survey was piloted with eight individuals before beginning data collection. By piloting my data collection instrument with a small sample of individuals, I was able to get a sense of how long participants should expect to take when completing the survey. This was also one other way to eliminate bias during my research study and to have greater confidence in my design of the research instruments.

Interview protocol. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the participants to speak in detail regarding their own experiences and allowed for follow-up questions when necessary. A few interview questions were based on the answers to the individual's survey questions; therefore, not all participants were asked the same questions on each protocol. Before beginning my research, I piloted the interview questions with two individuals. This pilot provided me the opportunity to gather insight and feedback on the types of questions I was asking as well as if there may be any questions I overlooked in the development

of my instruments. This was also one other way to eliminate bias during my research study and to have greater confidence in my design of the research instruments.

Data Collection Procedures

For the initial survey, responses were collected from individuals between the ages 18-21 of all races who were members of student council in high school. The survey asked certain individuals if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Videoconference interviews took place for all participants due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Open-ended interview questions corresponded to all three Guiding Research Questions for individuals who participated in student council. The interview protocols were only used with those participants who identified as Black and agreed to an interview.

Data Management

All interviews were video recorded with participant permission. Recordings and transcripts were all stored on a password protected device. The transcripts were saved using Microsoft Office 365 which utilizes an online, cloud-based storage system. This storage system prevented loss of data in case of laptop failure because I would have been able to access the data from any internet-connected device. The Microsoft Office 365 username was password protected to prevent any accidental breach of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the closed questions on the surveys, I began with a frequency analysis. This strategy provided me with a quick understanding of the demographics of my participants as well as an overview of the past and current student council experiences. Throughout the analysis process, I kept in mind the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger designed the

hermeneutic circle to illustrate and explain the process of data analysis in a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Each interview was transcribed within one week of recording and was sent to the participant to approve and review for any errors. While reading through the written transcription, I recorded notes in the margins and highlighted specific phrases that struck me as salient. To stay true to the hermeneutic circle, I read through the corpus of the data with various lenses.

After completing a few rounds of manual coding, I utilized the NVivo coding software to apply my various coding systems and to assist in the organization of my data. I used it as one method of ensuring a detailed analysis and to help manage the multiple analytical lenses I used throughout the data analysis process. This software was able to help link participant responses to each other in order to ensure that I included the most thorough analysis of the data.

Chapter Three of this dissertation includes an expanded explanation of the research methods utilized in this study.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is a five-chapter dissertation. Below I outline each chapter and an overview of its contents.

- Chapter One included an introduction to the topic, a statement of the problem, the intended purposes of the study, the guiding questions to be examined, the definition of terms, the significance of the study, and the delimitations of the study.

- Chapter Two will consist of a review of the relevant literature including the purpose of public education, the nature of student council, the participation rates of students of color in student council, possible explanations for the lack of Black student representation, and an overview of the phenomenological research methodology used.

- Chapter Three will contain an explanation of the design of the study. This will encompass an explanation of the phenomenological approach to the data collection and analysis of the data. This chapter will explain how the study was designed and implemented. Explanations about the survey instrument and interview protocol will also be included. Additionally, descriptions of the participants, data collection methodology, and maintenance of confidentiality will be presented. Finally, this chapter will explore possible biases held by the researcher.

- Chapter Four will present the data that was collected and coded from the surveys and interviews of the participants. The Guiding Research Questions from Chapter One will be used to organize the presentation of the data. Data will be presented using tables, narrative paragraphs and will also include excerpts from interviews that demonstrate themes emerged in the research and analysis of the data. This chapter will conclude with a delineation of research findings.

- Chapter Five will include a clearly articulated discussion of the findings as well as implications for future research within the field of student council and other possible areas of scholarship. Final reflections will also be included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Student councils have been present in public high schools across the United States for over one hundred years, often with varying structures and purposes. One widely accepted view of student councils is that they bring together students from throughout the school community to work toward achieving collective goals. As public school demographics become increasingly more diverse (Hussar & Bailey, 2013), the notion that schools should find opportunities to engage students with each other becomes even more prevalent. Analysts have found a decline in student council participation by Black students indicating that schools are leaving out part of their school community in this important association. Weinberger (2014) found that the number of African Americans participating in student council from 1972 to 2004 decreased by 14 percent, and a study by Darling, et al. (2005), found that over 56 percent of the African American high school students surveyed did not participate in any extracurricular activity. Little is known about the contributing factors leading to this apparent racial divide because the experiences of Black high school student council members in the United States are an infrequent subject in the scholarship on extracurricular participation is an area missing in the scholarship. This study explores the encounters and interactions of individuals ages 18-21 who identify as Black and their perceptions of and experiences with high school student council to address this void.

Several areas of scholarship orient this study. The first is the vast body of literature explaining the democratic purpose of public schools in the United States as well as how schools have attempted to fulfill that purpose through extracurricular activities. This foundation will help situate student council as an essential component of public schools and will further explain the

necessity of including all student demographics in student council. The chapter will continue by reviewing the literature that examines the nature of student councils through a brief look at the origin as well as selected empirical studies and anecdotal accounts of student councils. This chapter also encompasses a review of the literature exploring motivation and adolescents and an investigation into selected theoretical and historical perspectives that inform our understanding of Black student engagement in activities where the participants are predominantly White. The chapter concludes with a summary.

The Democratic Purposes of Public Schooling

Proponents of public schooling in the United States have maintained that a fundamental purpose of public education is to foster a democratic society (Adams, 1765; Mann, 1867; Dewey, 1938; Ravitch, 1983; Greene, 1985; Tyler, 1987; National Education Goals, 1994; Rose, 2009). Throughout the nation's history, this democratic purpose has been a recurring topic of conversation about public education. Neem (2015) traced the history of public education and stressed that "at their most basic level, public schools exist because the quality of our democracy depends on the quality of our citizens." Although the ideals of what qualifies a person as a good citizen have changed since Mann's founding of the common school (Campbell, 2008), and the array of students who are welcomed to attend school together has widened (Levinson, 2012a), the goal of preparing students to become contributing members of a democratic society has primarily remained a part of the discourse of schools.

Notwithstanding the fact that scholars discuss a primary function of public schools as a means to engage students in citizenship practices that will foster community engagement and prepare them to be contributing members of society, Joselowsky (2007) highlighted that "in the 500 pages of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, the notion that students can help

improve their schools does not appear once" (p. 266). Furthermore, there has been an increasing

value placed on schools to encourage and foster college and career readiness. David Coleman,

one of the leading proponents of crafting of the Common Core State Standards, proclaimed in an

interview that "college-and-career-readiness is the goal of K-12 education in this country" (Hess,

2012). There is not one place in his interview with Hess where Coleman mentioned the

importance of civic preparedness as a goal of public education. Coleman's emphasis was solely

on developing adolescents who are ready to satisfy the expectations of their next educational or

professional undertaking. In a similar interview, Coleman addressed including all students, from

all backgrounds, in his goal (Russo, 2012), which many scholars contend is a recent goal of

education (Neem, 2015). However, Coleman's emphasis was still primarily on preparing

students for their college and career experiences; nowhere did he mention preparing well-

rounded citizens who care for each other. Dickerson (1999) argued that these high academic

expectations could be detracting from the time schools have to dedicate to student council. In

addition to the complexity of the academic standards in high schools, Dickerson also believed

that more students are interested in engaging in sports after school, resulting in less interest in

school leadership opportunities through student council.

Some scholars, however, who are urging schools to reinvest in the civic education of their

students (Allen, 2016; Educating for American Democracy, 2021; Guardian of Democracy,

2011; Postman, 1996) and are providing resources and pathways to do so. The Civic Mission of

Schools report (Guardian of Democracy, 2011) listed six proven practices of civic education.

Within these proven practices are service learning, student-led voluntary associations, student

voice in schools, and simulations of adult civic roles. Furthermore, Danielle Allen spearheaded a

project titled *The Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy* that expanded the six proven

practices from the Civic Mission of Schools report to ten, one of which is school climate reform stating that school operations should include student voice and input. This is not a new concept. Tyler (1987) and Warren (1988) noted thirty years ago that the school itself could be viewed as a democratic society—not just with its teaching pedagogy and curriculum, but with its student body, resources, daily operations, and other scholars still see the value in families, students, and teachers working together to improve schools (Oakes, et al., 2000; Kirshner & Jefferson, 2015). Kirshner and Jefferson (2015) asserted that "effective youth–adult partnerships tend to embrace the idea that every participant brings particular skills and knowledge" and that both groups have information that can be valuable to the other, and ultimately the school (p. 17).

Many scholars and advocates have described a range of characteristics that schools should embody to achieve the core purpose of fostering a democratic society. A scan of selected sources in the vast body of literature concerning the democratic ideals of schooling revealed three prominent themes associated with this core purpose that are especially relevant to the inquiry of this study. These authors urge that public schools:

- teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences in order to help others (Dewey, 1938; Rose, 2009; Neem, 2015).

- teach students to accept and respect others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests (Ravitch, 1983; Tyler, 1987; Levinson, 2012a; Rose, 2009; Rush, 2001), and

- foster a sense of independence in order to improve one's intellectual capacity (Einstein, 1956; Ravitch, 1983; Rose, 2009; Neem, 2015).

The following subsections introduce the underlying ideas of each of the themes and how they relate to life in a democratic society.

Teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences in order to help others

Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, argued that education should encourage students to care about their neighbors and to give back to their communities (Neem, 2015). John Dewey (1938) and Mike Rose (2009) examined the importance of preparing individuals for their futures through experiences in their education and in their communities. Rose (2009) opens a chapter with an impactful quote: "A good education helps us make sense of the world and find our way in it" (p. 31). He further explained that students need to learn from experiences in order to be prepared to navigate different obstacles that come their way. These experiences are also preparing students to be able to help others who may encounter similar obstacles. Allen (2016) further perpetuates this notion of learning from one's own situation in order to contribute to their community in the future.

Through activities in school, students learn how to inquire, reason, justify, and advocate for change (Dewey, 1938; Rose, 2009). These skills will help each individual as they learn to navigate the world and will also help foster a sense of community spirit. Dewey (1938) exhorted readers about the meaning of the term *experience*. He illustrated how an experience would differ for each individual based on their environment and previous experiences. While students may be facing a similar experience together, it is the makeup of their past experiences that cause them to react and encounter situations in different ways than their peers. Students will be able to use their own experiences and the experiences of their peers to help each other and their community members when similar situations arise.

Teach students to accept and respect others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests

It is common for the national political discourse to portray public schools as helping young people learn to be accepting and respectful of all people, regardless of their talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, or interests because they will be expected to interact and cooperate with several individuals throughout their lives. Public education should therefore promote cooperation and acceptance among individuals despite their differences (Ravitch, 1983). Rush (2001) wrote that a citizen, "must be taught to love his [*sic*] fellow creatures in every part of the world, but he [*sic*] must cherish with more intense and peculiar affection, the citizens of the United States" (p. 112). Although Rush emphasizes accepting and celebrating the people within our country, he still remarks that people should accept all beings in order to be their best selves.

These ideas about discovering and embracing our own and others' interests and identities are also consistent with Dewey's (1916) view of a democratic society. In his seminal work, *Democracy and Education,* he asserted that "a progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. A democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures" (p. 145). Furthering Dewey's ideas of intellectual freedom, schools also need to create opportunities for students to better understand each other's diverse ideas and cultural traditions (Levinson, 2012a; Rose, 2009). They need to be able to respectfully question each other in order to understand different perspectives in a new way, and possibly question their ideals. Similar to schools needing a diverse offering of literature to act as "windows and mirrors" for students, schools must also provide opportunities and interactions for

students to encounter individuals who may differ from each other in order for them to

acknowledge and embrace these ideas.

Foster a sense of independence in order to improve one's intellectual capacity

One of the foundational goals of public education is promoting intellectual development

(Ravitch, 1983; Rose, 2009; Neem 2015) which is part of becoming a contributing member of

society. The National Education Goals (1994) stated that by the year 2000, all students would

"learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further

learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy." Wilson (1995) argued

that "we want our children to perform on implicit standards of excellence and learning set in

their minds, habits, and work, not on explicit standards for learning" (p. 223). In other words,

Wilson reminded readers that, ultimately, schools should be designed to cultivate students who

challenge what they believe they are capable of and always strive for more.

As Paulo Freire (2000) made clear in 1970, teachers need to evaluate how they engage

their students in their own learning to increase their intellectual capacity. Students will never

learn to think for themselves if systems continue to use the "banking method" of teaching, which

is, as Freire described it, when teachers view their students as empty vessels waiting to be

deposited with information. Freire stretches his metaphor to demonstrate how the banking

method is a model for the oppressive society in which society lives because it "attempts to

control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their

creative power" (pg. 77). Educators guided by this Freirean perspective would work to empower

our students to challenge their beliefs and the beliefs of others, and if teachers continue using the

banking method, students will not gain the independence they need to think, reason, and justify

for themselves. Scholarship with this emphasis exhorts schools to increase students' ability to

think for themselves and strive to learn more to increase the number of people in communities who are critical thinkers. This mission will foster a generation of students who want to know about local, state, and federal politics and will become informed and educated on matters of their community. It will also create a generation of students who are life-long learners and strive to achieve their highest potential in their personal and professional lives. These well-educated, independent thinkers can then come together for the common good of their communities. The following section will present literature that connects ways schools may be trying to meet the three aforementioned themes of the purposes of schools.

Extracurricular Activities as Avenues to Achieve the Democratic Purposes of

Schools

This section examines how student participation in extracurricular activities can engage them in the school community in a way that mirrors their expected adult participation in their communities.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Fredricks et al. (2002), it was found that "the beginning of high school was a major turning point in these adolescents' commitments to their extracurricular activities" (p. 76). Educators often claim that extracurricular activities provide a way to strengthen the ties that students develop with their school community and introduce students to democratic practices (Janoski et al., 1998; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Extracurricular activities are venues for students to engage in groups that specialize in areas in which the students demonstrate an interest. These activities are often designed to allow students to work together with others who have similar interests to advance their leadership skills while contributing to their community and gaining a sense of belonging in a larger group (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Darling et al. (2005) focused on high school students' participation in

extracurricular activities and found that they offer an array of benefits including building social networks, identifying community resources, and developing one's identity. Their findings coincide with a similar study that inquired about extracurricular participation at the higher education level. It was found that students who participate in extracurricular activities in college can gain a sense of accomplishment by improving their own lives, while also benefiting those around them (Harper & Quaye, 2007). It is important to note that both of these studies' findings indicate positive outcomes from participating in extracurricular activities regardless of the participants' ages.

In the following sub-sections, I use the three aforementioned themes synthesized from the literature as a lens to better understand the function of extracurricular activities in preparing students for life in a democratic society. Each theme will be referred to as an ideal that schools should strive to achieve as a part of their mission to prepare students for adulthood.

Teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences in order to help others

By meeting with students in smaller group settings, such as student council, advisors are provided with an opportunity to get to know their students and their experiences on a deeper level. It also provides a forum for students to get to know each other. Within this setting they can learn from each other's experiences and use that knowledge to help people in the future.

Participation in extracurricular activities helps mold students' experiences with their community and the world by providing them with real-life situations. Einstein (1993) contended that a person's most significant problem in life should be serving their community. Extracurricular activities that include a volunteering component allow students to contribute to their communities (Beck & Jennings, 1987; Eccles & Barber, 1999), and volunteering during

youth makes it highly likely that individuals will continue serving others into adulthood (Janoski et al., 1998) thus fulfilling part of their civic responsibilities (Guardian of Democracy, 2011). However, there seems to be a decreasing number of adults taking on leadership and volunteering opportunities as well as a decline in civic participation (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007), so it is important for schools to find ways to engage students in civic opportunities in high school in order to foster their sense of civic spirit.

Teach students to accept and respect others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests

Providing an array of activities for students to engage in aligns with Tyler's (1987) view that there is not a specific way of living or being. He maintained that people express themselves in a variety of ways. By offering a multitude of extracurricular activities, schools potentially allow students to develop their own interests and find their own identities which will benefit them later in life. There is no better time for individuals to learn acceptance and respect than when they learn about their true selves. Eccles and Barber (1999) found that high school extracurricular activities shape an individual's sense of identity, making them feel more connected to and valued by their school community. Through developing one's own identity, they are learning what talents, abilities, and interests they possess. Furthermore, students in youth activities are naturally exposed to more collaborative situations thus increasing their interpersonal development (Hansen et al., 2003) and interactions with others who have different identities and interests. Through these interactions, students can consider their own identities in relation to their peers. They can learn to accept and appreciate how people with different interests and cultural customs can come together for the common good.

By joining more highly participatory undertakings through extracurricular activities, students are presented with the social opportunities to meet and interact with a more significant number of people while learning to embrace one another for who they are.

Foster a sense of independence in order to improve one's intellectual capacity

Einstein (1956) wrote about the importance of creating independent thinkers. He found that individuals who are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, "will be better able to adapt himself to progress and changes" (p. 36). An essential benefit of participating in extracurricular activities aligns with Einstein's reasoning. Extracurricular activities can help to promote academic awareness and success (Guardian of Democracy, 2011; Joselowsky, 2007). Joselowsky looked at a variety of youth engagement strategies. She concluded that "the most authentic learning and engagement comes when they are treated respectfully by adults and given the appropriate mix of support and freedom to assume responsibility and make decisions" (Joselowsky, 2007, p. 271). Giving students the space to think and understand problems and issues on their own inevitably increases their intellectual capacity because it fosters their sense of independence and self-reliance.

Students who participate in extracurricular activities in high school derive long-term benefits that extend to young adulthood and beyond (Lay, 2007; Lindsay, 1984). These benefits include participating in more social activities (Hansen et al.; Lindsay, 1984) and remaining involved in political and community activities later in life (Lay, 2007). These activities which require independent and intellectual thinkers.

Nature of Student Council

In the previous sections, I explained the democratic purposes of public schools and how extracurricular activities can be used to achieve such goals. This section highlights student

council as one specific extracurricular activity designed to promote civic engagement in and out

of the school community. This section begins by explaining the origin of student council. Even

before being formally recognized as a student council organization, students formed self-

governing groups to contribute to their school communities. I then include an overview of how

the purposes of student councils have been presented in the literature and continue with an

overview of empirical studies and anecdotal reports of student councils. I then provide a look at

some promising practices of student councils. Finally, I provide information detailing the

participation rates of students of color in student council.

Origin

It can be argued that the origin of student council dates back to Greece in 386 B.C. when

Plato provided a group of young scholars an opportunity to have a say in the functioning of their

school operations (McKown, 1944). McKown related the first resemblance of a student council

in America to be at the William Penn Charter School in 1777, where a group of boys met

monthly to discuss the rules and potential offenders of those rules. The boys determining the

rules and consequences for those who broke such rules were elected by the other students at the

school. Since then, student councils have emerged all over the United States in varying grade

levels with different structures and purposes. In Massachusetts, organizations resembling student

councils began in 1825 in Boston and 1840 in Duxbury. Since then, student councils have been

more formally established organizations that are recognized as a component of public high

school institutions. In 1931, a national organization was formed to help support student councils

in the United States. Within its vision statement, the National Student Council Organization

identifies that it is part of its mission to be a resource to school-based student council

organizations (About National Student Council, 2009).

Purposes

Within the current literature available on student council, there is a range of ideas and

beliefs about the function of a high school student council. While common functions of student

councils include planning student activities (Guardian of Democracy, 2011) and fundraising

(Fitchet, 1958; Dickerson, 1999; Student Project Database, 2019), sources maintain that student

councils should also provide a forum in which all students can use their voices to express

opinions on school matters which impact them (Guardian of Democracy, 2011; Mathes, 1975).

One example of active civic engagement in schools is contributing meaningful ideas to improve

the school community through the student council.

Although the purposes of student council may not be expressed consistently, the stated

principles in the National Student Council Vision Statement (About National Student Council,

2009) are a primary resource for U.S. schools. For the concerns addressed by this study, three of

their seven statements are especially relevant because they align with the ideals of student

council that are repeatedly found in the extant literature.

Student councils should:

- Create positive change in the school and community.

- Preserve the knowledge of and practice in the democratic process.

- Encourage all students to participate (About National Student Council, 2009).

The National Student Council argues that student council should involve all members of the

school community to give students a voice to positively affect the school. These guiding

principles are recognized in the minds of many scholars who write about student council and the

reason that student council provides students with the opportunity to work with people unlike

themselves while learning about and practicing the democratic process (Mathes, 1975; Beck &

Jennings, 1987; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1990).

Alluding to the preamble of our nation's Constitution, the words presented in the

Guardian of Democracy's (2011) publication state the ultimate purpose of civic learning in

public schools:

> Without civic learning, we cannot hope to preserve the republic born over two centuries
>
> ago. With it, we can unleash generations of Americans who are prepared to address our
>
> greatest challenges and leave future generations with the true blessings of liberty to
>
> continue to create a more perfect union. (p. 15)

Tyler's (1987) criterion for a democratic society encompassed members being involved in their

community and the larger world. He contended that, as part of their civic duty, people should

dedicate time and energy to making their community a better place for all of its members. The

skills to be able to contribute to one's community should be developed at a young age (Guardian

of Democracy, 2011). The authors of Guardian of Democracy emphasized that "all American

children need to have the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to participate in,

preserve, and strengthen our republic" (p. 8).

One of the justifications for extracurricular activities and student councils in school is

that they prepare children to assume adult participative roles which engage them in the

community (Beck & Jennings, 1987). Because a core purpose of the student council is to provide

a forum for students' voices to support school change efforts (About National Student Council,

2009), the student council is a vehicle for schools and students to realize Tyler's vision.

In a speech delivered more than four decades ago to the National Association of

Secondary School Principals, high school principal George Mathes (1975) stated his position on

student councils serving as venues to fulfill the civic mission of schools, including preparing

students to be contributing members of society. He paralleled school experience to life

experience highlighting the similarities of voting in a school election and an election for a local,

state, or federal governmental office and comparing students contributing ideas to their school to

citizens contributing ideas to their community. Mathes argued that these ideas only differ in "fact

not in the act" thus accentuating the school's opportunity to prepare students to be contributing

members of our democratic society. This idea represents a bit of conventional wisdom about the

function of student councils that is held in the minds of several people including George Fitchet

(1958) who argued that fundraising in student councils is about more than just raising money. He

believed that by volunteering their time to help raise funds for school dances and other activities,

students were "learning to contribute to their community (the school) without expecting some

monetary reward" (p. 557) which is something that more schools should be aiming to achieve.

To determine if student councils are fulfilling their potential, as stated in the literature

and presumed by educators and the general population, researchers have conducted empirical

studies offering insight into what student councils accomplish in practice. The following

subsections examine some empirical studies and anecdotal accounts found in the literature and

connect them to the three aforementioned purposes.

Empirical Studies of Student Council Practices

Overall, the empirical studies reviewed suggest that there is not an equitable and

consistent enactment of student councils that adheres to an ideal vision of how these

organizations foster civic-mindedness. This section investigates three studies that examine

student councils in varying settings. Each study provides a brief glimpse into the design of

student councils. The section concludes with a look into the factors which impede each student

council's ability to achieve the particular purposes of student council that are the concern of this study.

McFarland and Starmann's (2009) study looked solely at the nature of student councils based on how they were organized according to their constitutions. The researchers investigated councils' (a) stated purpose, (b) governmental structures, and (c) quality of student representation and government. The researchers discovered that high school student councils vary considerably in their structure and quality. An observation highlighted by McFarland and Starmanns is that "impoverished schools" often do not have a student council, and if they do, adults, rather than students, often exert the most significant control over their functioning. A downfall of this setup is that "[the councils] may be regarded as irrelevant and adult controlled, thereby failing to adequately promote the skills and sense of political efficacy that underserved youth would need as adults to be civically active against the social inequities that affect them so directly" (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009, p. 12). Having a student council design that does not offer a meaningful voice to the students does not align with the principles of the National Student Council.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1990) contended that "student government is the most obvious forum for encouraging student voice on schoolwide and district issues" (p. 19). Nevertheless, their studies of student council practices found little evidence of student leaders involved in student council having such an impact. Student leaders involved in student council had little influence over school operations. These student leaders organized events and designed a schedule of assemblies for the year, but they did not help enact any meaningful change. Within the twenty-five districts Schmuck and Schmuck (1990) looked at, no school demonstrated

evidence that their student council was an integral contributor to any aspect of the school's daily operations, except for social events.

In an eighteen-month study focused on nine high schools in Australia, Craigie, et al., (1993) discovered that students did not think the school's role included instilling in students' knowledge about the political system, whereas teachers did feel it was a necessary aspect of schools. Despite their opposing beliefs on the role of the school, both groups acknowledged that their school did not emphasize learning about the political system. Both students and teachers agreed that their schools should not emphasize community involvement in the sense that students should not partake in community decision-making. The researchers, however, suggest that students should participate in school and community decision-making to have student councils that are more representative of the students' ideals. They recognize that schools have student councils in place to achieve this purpose but acknowledge the doubts about the effectiveness of student councils due to adult control and lack of student representation. Craigie et al. (1993) took a closer look at three of the nine schools in the study to investigate the effectiveness of their student councils. The findings of the first school examined "strongly suggest[ed] that students perceived it as a facilitative organization for teachers and an elite group of students, rather than a participatory body" (p. 11). The entire student body did not feel represented in the council, nor did they seem to acknowledge the effectiveness or purpose of a student council. The other two schools had similar remarks culminating in an overall idea that the purpose and structure of student councils are misunderstood because there is limited representation from the student body.

Looking across these few studies, two factors help explain why none of the student councils mentioned in the studies seem to fulfill the full potential of student council. These factors include the high level of adult control and the student body's perceptions about who

should participate in the student council. Table 1 displays the empirical studies mentioned in this

section and highlights the organizational factors contributing to the failure to achieve the three

purposes of student councils.

Table 1

Factors Impeding the Purposes of Student Council

	High levels of adult control over processes of student councils	**Limited or exclusive access to student council**
Purpose #1: Create positive change in the school and community	Student councils that can only promote social events have little impact on meaningful school operations which leads to ineffective, and sometimes inoperative, student councils (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1990) Students felt powerless in the decision making of the school, leading to a negative view of the student council organization (Craigie et al., 1993)	Excluding a large portion of students from student council creates a weak sense of community spirit (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009)
Purpose #2: Preserve the knowledge of and practice in the democratic process	When there is too much adult control over school decision making, the student council does not prepare students for adult civic responsibilities (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009)	
Purpose #3: Encourage all students to participate		Students viewed student council as a small, elite group of teachers and students, leading to a negative or misunderstood view of the student council organization (Craigie et al., 1993) Including only a small sample of the student population in student council fosters civic engagement in a reduced portion of the student body (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009)

Considered together, the studies by McFarland and Starmanns (2009), Schmuck and Schmuck (1990), and Craigie et al. (1993) indicate that the design of a student council plays a role in the ability of the student council to achieve its purposes. Part of this design includes the way the adults participate in and promote council activities. Because the adults involved in all three studies did not foster an environment where students could have a meaningful impact on school operations, their actions indicated that they did not wholly value student voices or engage students in civic thinking. Schools may claim students have a voice because they are given the opportunity to speak up in some areas, but if students are limited to only discussing and planning social events for their peers, the adults are not providing the students with experiences that will help them make a positive change for a large community of people. Furthermore, these adults, intentionally or unwittingly, fail to provide opportunities that promote students' growth as civic-minded individuals who will be able to stand up for issues that face them in their adult lives. Student councils that include too much adult influence are not fulfilling one of the ultimate democratic purposes of schooling which promotes students using their current surroundings and past experiences to help their communities.

Promising Practices

Although a small body of empirical studies show that student councils are not fulfilling their purposes, there is literature that offers promising practices that bring student councils closer to the ideals championed by the National Student Council and others. These studies point to two common factors that may be contributing to the success of the student councils: promoting student voice and providing time during the day for students to meet.

Promoting Student Voice

Speaking about the benefits of high school student councils, McFarland and Starmanns (2009) stated, "at the very least, they provide youth with firsthand experiences and impressions of democratic citizenship and representative government" (p. 29). Flutter (2006), in her research based in the United Kingdom, discovered that including students in decision-making processes in school develops life skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and citizenship. If students do not experience their voices having an impact in a school setting, they are likely to lose faith that they can have a voice or make a difference in their communities.

Several schools in Melbourne, Australia organize junior councils for their sixth-grade students. Unlike Craigie et al.'s (2007) Australian study on student councils, these Australian junior councils are structured in a way that allows the students to act as the leaders. Black (2005) reported that in one set of junior councils, students collectively decide on a community-based issue they would like to work toward solving. The students draft improvement plans and then share their plans with each other in a follow-up council meeting. Similarly, in another Melbourne district, a junior council has been formed which promotes students' voices. According to Cahill (2005), the students in this district collaborate with other junior councils to "brainstorm what is working and what changes they would like to make" (p. 15).

Providing Time During the Day for Student Involvement

Sandra Scribner (2007), a student council advisor from Albuquerque, New Mexico went to Japan through a Fulbright Scholarship to study student council structures. There, she noticed that Japanese schools provide time during the day for student councils to meet. Furthermore, they meet with administrative support and learn about the country's political system. Scribner observed that the student council led school community initiatives that were followed by the

entire student body. These initiatives, such as cleaning the lunchroom and maintaining the school's gardens, demonstrate civic responsibility being taken seriously at the school level. Students and staff are participating in activities that will make their school community a better place. These activities can transfer from a school to a larger community setting.

Summary

A significant difference between the reports when student councils are living up to their ideals and those which do not is the input from the adults. In both Australian reports of successful student councils where "[students] see that they have a voice" (Cahill, 2005), the adults have limited influence on what the council discusses. The adults put the structures in place for the students to work together to make decisions, but students manage the space and guide their own decision-making. Furthermore, the report from Scribner (2007) about the student council structure of Japan highlights that the students are initiating ideas for change. The only mention of adult participation in any of these studies is to describe how they meet with the students to teach them about the country's political system, an area lacking at one school in Craigie et al.'s study.

The accounts of Scribner (2007), Black (2005), and Cahill (2005) demonstrate the importance of McFarland and Starmann's (2009) insight on the importance of student council structure. Both the junior council structures from Melbourne, Australia and the student council studied in Japan placed a significant emphasis on student voice and involvement within the council, which contributed to their successes. Further, the structure in place in Scribner's study allowed for the entire student body to participate in the student council's initiatives. Because there are positive implications of participating in student council, it is essential to examine if all student groups are invited into the student council experience.

Participation Rates of Students of Color

Student councils can be venues for promoting civic values and experience; therefore, Mathes (1975) asserted that student councils should be representative of all students in the school. However, Darling et al. (2005) findings indicate that Black students are under-represented on student councils. Some studies have been designed to learn about factors that may inhibit students from joining extracurricular activities such as student council. Darling et al. highlight that parents' education levels directly influence the rate of student participation for all students by informing readers that "adolescents whose parents had less education were markedly less likely to participate [in extracurricular curricular activities] than their peers from more highly educated families" (Darling et al., 2005). Barriers to participation in structured youth programs specific to African American students include (a) their perceptions of student council, (b) peer opinions, and (c) lack of friends in the programs (Perkins et al., 2006).

In Darling et al.'s study (2005), it was discovered that out of the 178 African American students surveyed, only 1.1% of them participated in a leadership group and over half of them did not participate in any school-based extracurricular activity. Weinberger (2014) took a deeper look at the racial gaps in high school leadership opportunities by comparing data from longitudinal studies. In her analysis, she found a decline in Black students' participation in student government over the course of thirty years. Ranging from 40% of Black high school seniors participating in student government in 1972 to 30% in 1992, and concluding with a mere 26% in 2004, Weinberger illuminates a significant concern for schools.

Because there are positive implications of participating in extracurricular activities such as student council, this low representation can be detrimental to not only Black students' future civic participation and their daily lives in high school. In a recent study by Benner and Wang

(2014), it was found that students with few demographically similar peers felt more isolated and

less connected to the school, which in turn affected their academic performance. Benner and

Wang's findings serve as reason for schools to better understand what might be dissuading Black

students from seeking membership in student council. The Guardian of Democracy (2011)

asserted that activities should be designed to engage students. They also maintained that

decisions should have real effects and that students should be able to facilitate schoolwide

democratic deliberation to foster civic skills (Guardian of Democracy, 2011). This structure will

help promote the skills necessary for success in the larger community.

　　　　If there are claims about student council being a beneficial arena for students of diverse

backgrounds to unite in order to positively contribute to their school community and learn the

values of engaging in a democratic society, and there are glimpses of this engaged civic activity

in some educational settings, then it is reasonable to ask that students have equal access to this

opportunity and recognize the opportunity as having relevance to their lives. There is little

known about what is keeping Black students from participating in this arena, but there are some

historical and theoretical insights that illuminate these concerns. Before turning to theoretical and

historical analyses of what may be contributing to the lack of Black student participation in

student council, the chapter will first look at some of the influencing factors that motivate

adolescents.

Motivation

　　　　Francine Joselowsky (2007) took a broad look over four years to examine how schools

around the country are attempting to engage high school students. In her research, she found that

many schools struggle to engage kids in meaningful ways that connect them to the school and

community in a more considerable way. "Traditionally, engaged students were defined as

students who were in leadership positions in school government, involved in school clubs, or participating in other school activities" (Joselowsky, 2007, p. 261). She contended that in order to engage and connect the students to school effectively, educators must revisit their structures and systems that promote leadership engagement. As previously mentioned, one way that schools attempt to engage students in their school community is through extracurricular activities. Qualitative research conducted by Morimoto and Friedland (2013) with eighty-nine high-school-aged students found differing reasons for student participation in extracurricular activities. While some students participated because they wanted to serve their community and build their community connections, others joined activities that would strengthen their college applications and other post-high school endeavors. Because schools attempt to connect students to their school community through extracurricular activities, it is worth examining the factors that motivate high school students.

There are two main types of motivation—external (or extrinsic) and intrapersonal (or intrinsic)—both of which influence students' actions (Griffin, 2006; Husman & Lens, 1999; Hwang et. al., 2002). External motivation requires something outside of the person, be it another person, a reward, or an obligation, to provide a reason for doing something. Intrapersonal motivation comes from within a person; they are motivated to do something based on their own self-satisfaction, interests, or goals (Frank, 2010). A search for literature from the past thirty years on specific external and intrapersonal motivational factors for high school students reveals only a handful of studies. Therefore, the section that follows discusses the scholarship surrounding motivational factors for both high school and college students. The section begins with an overview of the external motivational factors that influence students and is followed by a section on the intrapersonal factors that motivate students.

External Motivational Factors

External motivation requires an outside force influencing the individual's behavior. External factors that influence a student's actions include the people around them including their peers, their teachers, and their family. In this section, I present an explanation from existing scholarship on how these three factors contribute to a student's decision-making.

Peer Relationships

Adolescents are motivated by the influence of their peers (Burns & Darling, 2002; Jensen 2009; Black, 2002) and their relationships with their peers can be an influencing factor in whether or not they participate in extracurricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2002; Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012). Students often behave and act in ways to fit in with social groups or get reactions from specific individuals. These motivations come from peer influence and peer pressure. Many people may consider peer influence as the same concept as peer pressure but Burns and Darling (2002) differentiated between the two terms. Peer influence is described as "changing one's behavior to meet the *perceived* expectations of others" (p. 4) whereas peer pressure is doing something because others are encouraging you to do it and may even be doing it themselves. The authors are suggesting that peer influence is when students act in a certain way, not because they see others doing it, but because they think others may appreciate that they do it. Adolescents have this constant self-conscious attitude influencing their daily choices, even when their peers are not around. Furthermore, because adolescents are still self-discovering what image they want to portray to others, they often join peer groups where they feel they will blend in in order to then discover and display their personal identity (Black 2002). Other students, who have already gone through the transition of finding themselves, join groups where they can assert their dominant traits or engage with like-minded students.

This idea of peer influence may be one reason why particular students join extracurricular activities, but the friends they meet while in the group can contribute to them retaining their participation. Ariani (2017) contended that "high quality social relationships are important for students' motivation and achievement" (p. 66). As adolescents develop, they self-discover who they are, whom they want to become, and whom they want to be around. These are all external factors that motivate students' choices and actions.

Teacher Relationships

Strong student-teacher relationships can be an external motivating factor for adolescents (Mendes, 2003; Jensen, 2009; Davis, 2003). In fact, Jensen (2009) contended that "the relationships that teachers build with students form the single strongest access to student goals, socialization, motivation, and academic performance" (p. 20). Students work harder, are more engaged, and strive to succeed more for a teacher or advisor they respect (Mendes, 2003, Jensen, 2013). Students who feel emotionally supported by their teachers are also more apt to value their academics (Davis, 2003), and therefore may be more willing to seek out extracurricular activities. Even if students do not initially find themselves proficient or interested in a particular activity, they may try out the activity if a respected teacher suggests it (Davis, 2003). A student's relationship with an extracurricular activity advisor can contribute factor to their desire to remain in the activity as well (Fredricks et al., 2002). Regardless of if a teacher is or is not the leader of the activity, just suggesting it to a student may encourage them to check it out. Teachers are an external source of motivation for students even when they are not intending to be.

Family Relationships

In Griffin's (2006) study with a sample of Black college students, almost all participants reported that an external source of motivation for them was their parents or family members.

Many participants' families instilled a desire to be academically successful during their younger years, a drive that carried them into young adulthood. Even if the parents were not helping their children set specific goals, they were always there to encourage the desires set by their children, which helped to motivate them to become more successful. Similarly, in their 2002 longitudinal study with nearly fifty adolescents, Fredericks et al. (2002) found that some students remained in their extracurricular activity to please their parents, not necessarily because it was enjoyable to them. Families may not realize the impact they have on their children, but they can be a strong external force influencing the path their children take throughout school.

Intrapersonal Motivational Factors

Intrapersonal motivation comes from a person's own desires, whether that means their willingness to learn more, achieve a goal, or enjoy their time spent on the activity.

Growth Mindset

Students who adopt a growth mindset have more motivation to do well (Dweck, 2007; Jensen, 2013). They want to learn from their mistakes and always strive to do better. These students want to learn in school and not just pass their tests to move on to the next grade (Dweck, 2007). Students in Fredricks et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study reported wanting to remain in their extracurricular activity in order to improve their skills, which can be recognized as an indication of a growth mindset. When things get complicated for people who possess a growth mindset, they keep going until they find a way to make them better. Growth mindsets enable "risk-taking, innovation, and creativity" (pp. 143-4). These are traits that contribute to students wanting to make changes in their schools and communities for the betterment of the people involved.

Goal Setting

Students working toward a goal are more likely to have a sense of self-efficacy motivating them to achieve that goal (Schunk, 1991). Self-efficacy is a student's ability to believe in him or herself. Students with high self-efficacy are proficient at setting their own goals, and "goals are critical to the motivation of self-regulated learners" (Griffin, 2006). In a study with Black college students, Griffin (2006) found that "almost half of the students in [the] sample described using their future career goals and aspirations to stay focused and that they used these goals to fuel their internal motivation. Furthermore, "Black students may be more apt to join student groups because they give them access to a group of like-minded individuals who will likely support their goals" (Miller, 2017). Almost half of the participants in Fredricks et al.'s (2002) study planned on continuing with their extracurricular activities after high school. Therefore, their internal desire to continue with their activities post-high school fueled their motivation to continue their participation. Whether a goal is short-term, like meeting new friends, or long-term, such as becoming a future university class president, goals create an internal drive for students to do more.

Enjoyment

One of the most common reasons college students reported for participating in extracurricular activities was to enjoy the activity (Fredricks et al., 2002). Students' reasons for wanting activities related to being good at them, having the opportunity to see their friends, and providing an emotional outlet from school or family pressures. Some students find more success in extracurricular activities than they do during their academic school day leading to a higher sense of enjoyment in the activity. Other students want to engage in something that keeps them busy during their free time (Fredricks et al., 2002). The contributing factors for finding joy in an

activity may vary, but overall, students are apt to engage in activities that fulfill their emotional

needs.

Values and Identity

Individuals make decisions based on their values (Crow et al., 1991; Güss, 2004), and a

person's values helps to form their identity (Hitlin 2003; Gronlund, 2011). Although high school

students may still be developing their sense of what is important to them and where their values

lie, participation in extracurricular activities may help contribute to their discovery. In Fredricks

et al.'s (2002) study, it was found that adolescents remained in specific activities because their

participation became a part of their identity. This is likely due to their values which were being

fulfilled as part of the activity. The students in Fredricks et al.'s study began to define whom

they were based on the activities with which they were a part. A student's internal identity

development may provide motivation for them to join or continue in a specific activity.

Theoretical and Historical Perspectives on Black Student Participation

In the previous sections, I reviewed how student council can be a venue for achieving a

core purpose of public education and highlighted how a specific demographic of students is

being left out of this experience. I also discussed external and internal factors that affect

adolescent motivation. In this section, I offer a brief look into selected theoretical and historical

explanations that may inform an understanding of the limited participation in student councils by

Black students. It is essential to look at theory because it provides a framework for how this

study fits into what is already known about Black student interactions in majority White groups.

These theories help to guide the data analysis because they influence the preliminary codes when

looking at the interview transcripts. The theories of homophily and social integration pertain

more to the individual while Critical Race Theory and the effects of school desegregation look

more at a systemic explanation. It is equally important to investigate historical explanations in order to provide readers a look into how the current decline of Black student participation in student council can be linked to the shift in educational settings and expectations of Black students and teachers. Ultimately, these insights help to explain what is going on in the complex dynamic of schools that contributes to the separation of Black students from activities such as student council in a majority White context.

Social Integration Theory

Blau's (1960) Theory of Social Integration provides a possible explanation for the disproportionally low participation by Black students in public high school student councils. This theory essentially states that a person will not seek membership in a group unless they see a reason for doing so. Until then, the person will have no interest in interacting with members not in their existing social group. If the time comes when an individual sets a goal to join a desired group, they must display the qualities that they feel the selected group is seeking in an individual. Blau's theory offers a possible explanation for the decline in the number of Black students in student council. Suppose a school's student council is comprised of a majority White population who behave in a certain way. In that case, a Black student may not find interest in joining their group because they might not see in themselves the characteristics that current student council members are exhibiting. Additionally, if an individual considers a group as having no relevance to their life, they will not have an interest in joining it. Flanagan et al. (2007) cited several scholars who discuss the reality that ethnic minority students are more cynical of the government than their White peers. Furthermore, Levinson (2012b) highlighted the impact of the efficacy gap after explaining that efficacy is "our belief that individuals can influence government (political efficacy) and especially that we ourselves can influence government (individual efficacy)" (p.

39). She explains that there is a "negative statistical correlation between trust and political involvement, especially among African Americans" (p. 39). This gap in political trust relates to Social Integration Theory because if students' experiences have left them with an untrusting view of government, they are less likely to seek membership in a group known as student government. This is especially true if students are aware that one of the purposes of student government is to replicate the form and function of the larger real-world government. Students are less likely to take part in something that does not relate to their lives or in something about which they have poor opinions or negative experiences.

As explained by Tajfel and Turner (1985), Social Integration Theory explains why people "tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories." In a mixed-methods study by Nasir et al. (2009), the researchers described two types of African American youth found in an urban high school: street-savvy African Americans and school-oriented African Americans. Students classified as street-savvy reported that they felt society pushes African American youth down a particular path and felt pressured to act, talk, and dress the way they did. The teachers and other school staff did very little to encourage academics for these students, thus their school experience supports their chosen identity. Social Integration Theory helps explain this context by proclaiming that if a school's teachers and staff members view a group of students in a certain way, they will treat them in a certain way, essentially limiting their opportunities for growth. If schools perpetuate a White image of student councils, Black students will not feel an atmosphere that encourages them to be different from how they currently think they are viewed.

Homophily

Homophily is "the tendency of people to associate with others similar to themselves" (Currarini et al., 2009). This tendency does not only concern student behaviors and personalities,

but also their race which can lead to self-segregation. Currarini et al. (2009), found that "Asians and Blacks are biased toward interacting with their own race" at rates higher than Whites. They emphasized a different value in their friendships with people of the same race, placing a greater value on those with individuals of their own race. However, "the extent to which the individual identifies with each category is clearly a matter of degree" (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 135). Even within racial categories, there can be different social groups.

Experiences reported by females in Meghan Holland's (2012) study in a majority white high school were consistent with the principle of homophily. In a school that is comprised of 92% White students, minority female students reported feeling as if people expected them to do poorly in their academics. They reported feeling uncomfortable and unwanted. The minority males in this study had opposite reactions. They reported in their interviews that they felt welcomed and comfortable at the school. Many of them who participated in sports thought they had a support system. The females in the study reported that they felt the African American males played into the stereotypes that the White males expected of them including listening to rap and wearing baggy clothing. In contrast, the males reported that they tried to downplay the negative stereotypes such as aggression, violence, and unintelligence by watching what they said and how they acted around their White peers.

The girls felt they were viewed as less approachable than the boys. They could never find a group they fit into and felt comfortable around. Their difficulties integrating into a new group could be attributed to the fact that they thought "they lacked the social characteristics necessary to gain social acceptance" (p. 114). Because the girls did not feel they related to the other groups, they did not attempt to participate. Similarly, White (as cited in Harper & Quaye, 2007) described the "pressures that are often placed on African American students by their same-race

peers to participate in Black student organizations" (p. 130) which leads to social group conflict. Black students may feel as though they are betraying their same-race peers by trying to seek membership in a group comprised mainly of White students (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Therefore, they do not seek membership in student councils when presented as majority White groups.

Critical Race Theory

The inception of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be traced back to the 1970s (Matsuda et al., 2018). CRT helps scholars look at the cultural perceptions of race and the implications of those perceptions on minority groups. A CRT lens can help people understand past and present conditions in order to build a better, more inclusive, future (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT was initially used in the field of law but can also be applied to the field of education. If Black students have been exposed to negative stereotypes, they may feel they are not worthy of breaking those stereotypes and therefore may be hesitant to join groups in which they think they do not belong. This feeling of inferiority is perpetuated by negative stereotypes and biases toward Black students and families held by teachers who treat African American students differently (Warikoo et al., 2016). An essential aspect of CRT includes amplifying people's voices, and more specifically, the voices of people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Bringing full attention to Black students' voices will help uncover internalized feelings that may bring light to racialized thinking in schools. CRT can be used to examine the stories of students to see what racial underpinnings may have influenced their experiences. A CRT lens helps to challenge the traditional "race-neutral" or "colorblind" theories in education (and other spheres) and seeks to end racial oppression (Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 2018). Schools may advertise that their student councils are open to all students, but what actions have schools taken to reach all students? Using a CRT lens will help to reveal those actions or inactions.

Ladson-Billings (2012) suggested that "until we begin to carefully examine the way race and racialized thinking influence our work, we will continue to perpetuate destructive thinking about the capabilities of learners based on race" (p. 115). In order to do this, schools must find ways to uncover the systemic root causes of racialized thinking. Looking at students' experiences with a CRT lens can do just that.

The Loss of Civic Training with Desegregation

Many people would agree that the desegregation of public schools was a positive change in America's educational history; it may be reasonable to think that the desegregation of American schools is a positive step in creating unity within our democratic society. When considered on a deeper level, however, it is possible that African Americans lost part of the democratic spirit as part of the desegregation of schools beginning in 1954. *Brown vs. Board of Education* was supposed to end forced segregation of schools (Allen, 2004), but during this time, the Black individuals had to make sacrifices. Although their schooling in segregated schools in the era preceding the Brown decision is widely referred to as inferior to the education of Whites, Siddle Walker (1996) highlighted that there were some positive traits to be found in the segregated Black schools. She illustrated how the Black community in the South had to work together to better the education of the youth and contribute to the larger community by preparing students for future civic participation. These students were being prepared for participation in a democratic society that did not yet value their presence.

The majority of Siddle Walker's (1996) book, *Their Highest Potential,* recounts personal anecdotes, artifacts, and meeting minutes from Caswell County Training School (CCTS), a segregated high school for Black girls and boys. Though the school may not have had the same level of materials and resources as its White counterparts, it still aimed to prepare its students for

life in a democratic society. Specifically, its philosophy was to "prepare the student to go back into the community and be an effective citizen" (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 108). One way of achieving this purpose was through the use of extracurricular activities. "In 1954, the school listed thirteen different clubs, including boys' and girls' basketball and track. These activities involved 66 percent of the student body, with no duplication" (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 102). In order to make the activities accessible to such a large population of students, CCTS held their activities during the school day rather than after school hours. When activities or games were after school hours, faculty members and parents helped transport the children who could not have otherwise participated. It was important to the community members that all students had the opportunity to participate in these activities as they were designed in a way that provided leadership opportunities for all students. These activities instilled skills and values that they felt would be necessary for the students to embody (Siddle Walker, 1996). Students involved in these activities often engaged in opportunities to entertain the community and demonstrate their skills in a public forum. Siddle Walker explained the "desirable outcomes" (p. 107) that the faculty wanted for their students. These outcomes included "the ability to speak standard English, to understand how to function in leadership roles, and to be educated in academics, vocations, and the use of leisure" (p. 238). These traits were all considered "important components of participation within a democracy" (p. 238).

Although a democratic society, as explained by Tyler (1987), should respect every individual, "the hard truth of democracy is that some citizens are always giving things up for others" (Allen, 2004, p. 29) which can be demonstrated through the desegregation of schools. The segregated Black schools were forced to lose their sense of autonomy and were never fully integrated into the segregated White schools. With desegregation, Black schools forfeited their

mission of developing in their students the ability to exercise their rights as leaders and citizens. Because this occurred during a time when Black individuals were not respected, schools lamented the experiences they provided for their Black students which provided them with opportunities to function as self-governing individuals.

In segregated Black schools, Siddle Walker (1996) found that schools engaged students in developing the necessary skills needed for civic engagement despite their lack of resources. So, why then are contemporary schools failing to integrate Black students into the activities that will give them the same opportunities? A contributing factor may be that, with the desegregation of schools, "[Black] citizens must imagine themselves part of a "whole" they cannot see" (Allen, 2004, p. 17). This school culture in which Black students cannot recognize themselves as part of that whole may have an impact on the participation rates of Black students in extracurricular activities. Allen's (2004) words help to explain this lack of integration when she claimed that "democratic citizens embody their political norms in their interactions with one another in public spaces" (p. 23). Therefore, racist Whites were not welcoming to Black students and historical accounts demonstrate that they were openly racist in public spaces. This overt racism causes Black students to feel less empowered and included in the White community. If students feel under-represented or unrecognized in school and in their surrounding community, it is hard for them to feel a sense of community spirit which they need in order to cultivate and participate in the ideals of a democratic society.

A tremendous amount of civic spirit has been lost with *Brown v. Board of Education*. Black educators lost the ability to pass along the narrative to all students that they are expected to be leaders (Siddle Walker, 1996 & 2003). In the schools described by Siddle Walker, Black students were being prepared with leadership skills and experience they would need when facing

a democratic society. With the desegregation of schools, came a loss of the preparation of Black

students with the skills deemed necessary for them to confront racism in the outside world

(Siddle Walker, 2003). In fact, some White educators now do the exact opposite by relaying

messages that further perpetuate the racial divide. Levinson (2012b) reported this issue from her

experiences with students. She illustrated how students from diverse backgrounds may

experience civic microaggressions at school from both school policies and teachers themselves.

She highlighted how small actions, such as prohibiting where students can eat lunch, do not

promote a sense of civic trust within the school community.

Additionally, there came a rapid decline in the number of Black educators (Siddle

Walker, 2003) further alienating Black students because it took away role models with whom

they could relate. Therefore, Black students' interest in participating in extracurricular activities

that would foster such skills may be linked to the decline of Black role models. The reduction of

Black educators and administrators was also the impetus for the drop in parent involvement in

the school community (Siddle Walker, 1996).

While the purpose of desegregation may have been to meet the requirements outlined in

our Constitution, many schools failed to achieve that. Allen (2004) reported, "since democratic

decision making necessarily brings about losses for some people, decision makers act

responsibly only when they also develop techniques for working through that loss and its

emotional surround" (p. 47). Educational decision-makers did not consider what the African

Americans would lose when integrating into White schools. A lack of solid policies was created

to maintain the sense of belonging students and families needed to feel part of the democratic

society. Instead, the Black students were alienated and were made to feel invisible. Levinson

(2012b) offered a similar analysis in her explanation of the civic empowerment gap. Levinson

claimed that those at the bottom of the civic empowerment gap, low-income families, and

students of color, are less likely to engage in activities that broaden their civic engagement

because they see themselves as part of a system that is failing them. She wrote:

> Schools inherently shape young people's civic experiences. Both students and adults
>
> learn "their place" and what's expected of them in the broader public sphere by observing
>
> and participating in the limited public space we call schools. Schools also give— or
>
> deny— students and teachers opportunities to practice a variety of civic skills and
>
> behaviors via classroom procedures and routines, curricula and pedagogies, interactions
>
> in the hallways and cafeteria, and cocurricular and extracurricular activities. This need
>
> not be intentional. Rather, *all* schools teach experiential lessons about civic identity,
>
> expectations, and opportunities—even when they have no intention of doing so. (p. 174)

Levinson's (2012b) words exhorted schools to be cognizant of the opportunities they provide to

all students. She was also urging school personnel to be aware of the hidden messages presented

throughout the school environment, conveyed by individuals, policies, and routine practices, that

function as implicit barriers to participation for some students or that diminish their sense of

belonging. If a teacher is observed only interacting with White students in the hall, intentionally

or not, it can relay a message to Black students that they are less valued than their White peers.

This internalization of inadequacy can cause students to "question their efficacy withdraw from

public civic engagement" (Levinson, 2012b, p. 40) both in and out of school opportunities. It is

due to this fact that educators and school policymakers listen to the advice of Brown and

Henderson (2017) when they wrote: "It is imperative that we take feasible steps to foster and

sustain racial integration across society and to deal with the politics of the deeply rooted harms

of segregation" (p. 249).

Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I explained the civic mission of schools and current strategies public schools use to engage students in meaningful ways. I categorized the criteria for a democratic society into three themes to frame the first two sections. This established criteria for a democratic society helped to detail the function of extracurricular activities in public school.

Analyzing selected empirical and anecdotal writings, I identified two possible factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of specific student council structures and some promising practices of student councils. The literature examined also illuminated that Black students are being left out of the student council experience which their White counterparts are experiencing. I found it essential to look at the current literature on motivation concerning adolescents to determine various contributing factors that influence the decisions made by high school students. The final section of this chapter offered a look at theoretical and historical analyses to explain the disproportionally low participation of Black students in contemporary public-school student councils. Throughout my investigation, I noticed that there is still much that needs to be explored and learned about regarding the motivations behind Black students' interests in becoming involved in student council and their experiences within their high school student councils. This study hopes to fill that void in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of the existing literature that relates to this research study. It illuminated the declining participation rates of Black students in student council and the apparent need for more research in this arena.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate how Black high school graduates experienced and perceived student council while they were students, whether they were ever a member. The following sections will explain the research design. Due to my unique connection with the topic being explored and my own racial identity as a white, female researcher, I found it imperative to begin with a description of the researcher.

Researcher Positionality

When the idea for this research study originated, I had been a student council advisor for two years. I was then, and still am now, enthusiastic about recruiting students to join student council and trying to help my district's student council to recognize and fulfill the core purposes of student council. I have always felt that the student council is meant to help students feel more connected with the school and each other while giving them an opportunity to have a say in their high school experience.

As a student council advisor in a district that enrolls over 50% African American students, it always seemed almost inevitable to have Black individuals on our student council. It was not until I attended an annual statewide student council conference that I realized the apparent lack of racial diversity in other districts' student councils. At the Spring 2017 Southeastern Massachusetts Association of Student Council (SEMASC) Conference, Kory

Turner, the SEMASC president who was a senior in high school at the time, made a comment in

his closing speech highlighting the need to recruit more student council members who looked

like him. It was at that moment that I turned to my student council co-advisor and ebulliently

declared, "I know what I want to research." Although Kory's comment may not have applied

directly to the students my co-advisor and I accompanied to the conference, it immediately

shined a light on the discrepancies within our region's student council membership. I have

carried the awakening I experienced at this moment with me throughout the entire process of this

research study.

I recognize that I am a white woman studying and writing about a perceived issue facing

Black individuals. I also understand the ineluctable fact that some might be dubious about

someone with my background adopting this research agenda. Therefore, I find it important to

remind readers that I approached this study to listen to the voices of recent high school graduates

who identify as Black to learn more about their experiences with and perceptions of high school

student council. I am positioned as a researcher reporting on the lived experiences of a group of

individuals who trusted me with the ability to analyze and interpret their perceptions of and

experiences with student council and share my findings with others.

Overview of the Research Design

Approach

This qualitative study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to seek answers

to three Guiding Research Questions. Creswell (2007) maintained that phenomenological studies

aim to understand how people live and explain their experiences. To find the essence of a

phenomenon, a researcher must study people who have similar lived experiences. Although their

direct involvement with student council may differ, all participants of this study perceived the

presence of student council in the high school they attended, were aware to some degree of how they and their peers regarded student council, and were faced the option of seeking membership in the organization. This section will (a) describe the questions that were used to guide the data collection and analysis, (b) explain the delimitations and limitations of the study, and (c) provide an overview of the setting and participants of the study.

As Creswell (2014) argued, qualitative research is appropriate, "for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). While there are many types of qualitative research, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this study was most suitable because it allowed me to speak to individuals who, as high school students, had experienced the phenomenon as well as examine various artifacts such as student council mission statements and websites. Creswell and Poth (2018) maintain that a phenomenology "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (pg. 75). Therefore, this study seeks to uncover the common essence of the meaning and relevance that the participants assign to student council and what factors contributed to their decision to join or not join student council in high school. I was able to gather in-depth details of the participants' experiences and how their thoughts regarding student council relate to the ideals portrayed by the literature and common understandings of the purposes and benefits of student council. Even though the experiences of all of the participants were different, after several rounds of coding, analyzing, and interpreting, I discovered elements from each that led to six findings relating to the common understanding of the group. Those findings will be explained and discussed in later chapters.

Guiding Research Questions

The study utilized the following three research questions:

1. What external factors influence Black student participation in high school student council? (e.g., peer, community, family, environment, media, school)

2. What intrapersonal factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

3. What do Black high school students report about their experiences with high school student council and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation?

Each guiding research question was first addressed through a survey that was sent out to multiple participants using a modified snowball approach and was further explored through semi-structured interviews with selected participants. A traditional snowball sampling approach is when a researcher gains access to their participants by gathering their contact information from other participants (Noy, 2008). This study's sampling approach can be considered a modified snowball approach because rather than asking informants to provide me with potential participants' information, many participants were recruited by individuals who passed along the study's survey link. I used this sampling technique because I felt that individuals may be more likely to fill out the survey when provided to them by someone they know and trust rather than being contacted by a stranger. I also felt that it was more appropriate for teachers to reach out to their former students rather than pass along their confidential contact information.

Delimitations and Limitations

Certain delimitations were designed for this study to find a group of participants who could provide their lived experiences about the same phenomenon. Each participant in this study

attended a high school in Massachusetts that offered student council membership to all students.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, although the originally intended age group of

participants encompassed high school aged students, the COVID-19 pandemic created conditions

that made it more feasible to use participants who were between the ages of 18 and 21 at the time

of the study.

At the outset of this study, participants had to have attended a high school that enrolled a

majority White student population. In August 2021, I submitted an amendment to Lesley's

Institutional Review Board to remove that delimitation because I did not feel that I was receiving

an adequate number of completed surveys. This amendment was approved on September 5,

2021.

There were a few factors in this study that may contribute to some limitations in my

findings. Firstly, it is important to remember that this was a limited study by design. It was never

intended to uncover findings that would lead to conclusions about student council across all

settings. Another limitation that may be present in this study is the fact that I disclosed my close

association with student council to all participants. It is possible that my proximity to this

organization may have caused participants to perceive me as wanting to hear positive aspects

about their experiences with student council. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on

school operations may have altered the experiences of participants' student council experiences.

This fact was mentioned in at least two of the participants' responses.

Setting and Participants

Because the impetus for my research topic was sparked at the Southeastern

Massachusetts Association of Student Council's Spring 2017 Conference, and my experiences as

a student council advisor have all been in Massachusetts' public schools, I decided to carry out

my research study in Massachusetts. Using a setting in which I was generally familiar with the

context allowed me to have a better understanding of some of the meetings and events that

participants mentioned during their interviews. Focusing my study on Massachusetts' student

councils meant that in this study all participants had to have attended a high school in

Massachusetts. Additionally, respondents had to be between 18-21 years old at the time of their

participation in the survey and have had a student council at their high school. Using this age

group allowed me direct access to potential participants rather than attempting to gain consent

from guardians of students who were currently in high school at the time of the study.

Participants who identified themselves as Black/African American engaged with more survey

questions than all other participants. This group of participants was also asked to indicate if they

would like to participate in a follow-up interview. The participants who expressed interest in an

interview were only selected if they also attended a public high school in Massachusetts. If a

participant attended a school not in Massachusetts, their survey responses were not included in

the data analysis.

By September 15, 2021, I had gathered 100 completed surveys. Three more surveys were

submitted between September 16, 2021 and October 25, 2021. If a respondent specified that they

identify as Black/African American, the survey asked them to indicate if they would be

interested in a follow-up interview. After removing the data from individuals who did not meet

the delimitations set for the study, there were 82 total surveys completed of which 25 individuals

indicated they were Black or African American. Seven of those individuals expressed interest in

the interview phase of the study. After reviewing the responses from the seven students, I

contacted each of them using the information they provided to find a mutually convenient time

for the interview. Although I would have preferred to hold in-person interviews, the effects of

the COVID-19 pandemic limited my feasibility, and all interviews were recorded through Zoom.

Research Methods

Data Collection

When developing the instruments for this study, I kept in mind the purpose of the study

as well as the three questions that helped to guide this study. To initially address the three

research questions, I began with a survey. Although the study was focused on Black students'

encounters and experiences with student council, I invited individuals of all races to participate

in this phase. Gathering basic information from all races allowed me to see if the foundational

experiences leading up to joining student council were similar. The survey asked selected

participants if they would like to engage in a follow-up interview. Interviews asked open-ended

questions which allowed me to elicit detailed responses from the participants because they

provide space for participants to include whatever details they feel are relevant in their

responses. Each question during the interview was intended to gather information aligned to at

least one of the three research questions. Some of these questions were following up on

individual responses from the participant's survey.

Survey

The first phase of data collection was a survey that was designed on the Qualtrics

platform. This program allowed an anonymous distribution link, and all data was housed on a

secure, password-protected website. The subsections that follow will detail how the survey was

developed, piloted, and distributed.

Survey Development. The survey (Appendix D) had several different tracks participants

could take depending on their answers to each question. Some respondents to the survey

indicated that they were never a member of their high school's student council. These individuals

were asked three open-ended questions about their experiences, interactions, and perceptions of

their high school's student council. Participants who indicated that they were members of their

student council in high school were asked four open-ended questions. However, the survey was

designed in a way that allowed one exception for an individual who indicated that they were a

member of student council but forfeited their membership within their first year. This individual

was asked an additional open-ended question about their decision to drop their student council

membership. All participants were also asked between five to seven closed-response questions.

For example, questions asked of all races included if they had a student council offered to them

in any grade prior to grade nine. All survey respondents were also asked if they had any friends

or family members who were a part of a student council. These questions were aimed at eliciting

information for questions #1 and #2 which revealed factors influencing their interest in student

council. Two of these seven questions had a follow-up question based on the participants'

answers to the original question. At one juncture in the survey, all participants were asked to

specify their race. Their response to this question determined if their survey ended or if they

were brought to the next section.

If the participants answered with any race other than Black/African American, the survey

automatically ended their session and thanked them for their participation. For participants who

identified themselves as Black/African American, there were two to three more questions, each

with 10 sub-items constructed with Likert scales. These questions were designed to obtain

information about their experiences with student council, aligning with guiding research question

#3. I chose to use a Likert scale with only four response options to eliminate neutral responses.

The first set of Likert scale responses asked participants to rate how often their student council

engaged in specific activities. This set of questions was intended to provide information about

the actual experiences of student council that the survey respondents encountered. These Likert

scales were also a place where I could differentiate between the reported experiences of

participants who were members of a student council and those who were not. The second set of

Likert scale questions asked participants to indicate the level of importance they felt their student

council attributed to each activity. This set of questions was only displayed to participants who

indicated they were a member of their high school's student council for at least one year. This

second set of Likert scales was crafted to get the perceived importance of each activity to

determine if the perceived importance of student council activities aligned with the ideals of

student council. This data was also used to compare the level of importance that the survey

participants placed on each item in the third set of Likert scale responses. The last set of Likert

scale questions asked participants to indicate the level of importance they assign to each activity.

The same ten activities were used for each question, and the activities were selected based on

their prevalence in the literature as core purposes of student council.

The final section of the survey for individuals who self-identified as Black/African

American asked them to indicate if they were interested in a follow-up interview. Participants

who expressed interest were asked to provide their name and contact information.

To reduce researcher bias in my data collection instruments, I piloted each protocol with

a small group of individuals after the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. The

pilot participants were recruited using a modified snowball approach. I provided the pilot survey

link to two informants who passed it along to a small group of their contacts. Overall, 16 people

engaged in my pilot survey. I asked each one of them to identify any questions that may appear

leading or abrasive. The survey was revised based on the feedback from the piloting process. The

pilot also brought to light that the timing of the survey was different depending on the

respondent's race. Participants who did not identify as Black or African American completed the

survey in roughly five minutes whereas the participants who did identify as Black or African

American took up to 25 minutes to complete. This is a result of the survey design. Participants

who identified themselves as Black or African American were presented with more questions

than all other participants because they are the demographic for which the study was designed. It

is important to note that the data collected from the pilot study is not included in the findings of

this research study.

Survey Distribution. Using the approach of a modified snowball sampling, I asked

informants (colleagues as well as current and former students) to pass along my recruitment flyer

(Appendix C) to individuals who they knew qualified for phase one of the study. This technique

varies from a traditional snowball sampling technique because I did not receive referrals and

reach out to potential participants myself.

I sent a letter to the student council advisors from around Massachusetts whose schools

belong to the Massachusetts Association of Student Councils on April 17, 2021. This letter

(Appendix A) introduced my research study and requested that they each pass along my

recruitment letter (Appendix B) and flyer (Appendix C) to their former students, whether or not

they were members of student council in high school. I recruited this initial group of informants

because I knew they had access to many students. I also hoped that receiving information about

the research study from a trusted former teacher would encourage more individuals to complete

the initial survey.

Because I am not personally connected with every student council advisor from across

Massachusetts, I also posted my recruitment flyer on social media platforms including Facebook,

Twitter, and LinkedIn on the same day. I have several educator connections from high schools

and higher education institutes on each of those social media platforms, and a few of them shared

my post for others to see. The flyer I posted on these platforms included both a QR Code and a

link that brought individuals to the survey (Appendix D) on the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics is a

secure survey site that privately stores all information collected.

I collected 54 survey responses in April, 10 of which were from individuals who

identified as Black. On May 16, 2021, I did not feel I had an adequate number of completed

surveys, so I sent my recruitment letter (Appendix B) to eight local colleges and universities in

Massachusetts. I collected 17 additional survey responses in May 2021, eight of which were

from individuals who identified as Black. In June 2021, I sent a follow-up email to all of the

student council advisors who had received my initial email in April. I also emailed all the

Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) directors in June 2021 requesting

their assistance in my recruitment efforts because I felt they might have strong connections with

students and former students who met the demographic I was looking for in this study. I

provided the METCO directors with my recruitment letter and requested that they forward the

letter to their current and former students who were between the ages of 18-21. Although June

was not a great time to seek support from school personnel because it is the end of the school

year and they do not have personal contact information for their former students, I wanted to

exhaust all avenues that could help with my recruitment efforts.

Interview

The second phase of data collection was an interview. Only participants of the survey

who indicated interest were contacted to arrange for an interview. The subsections that follow

will detail how the interview protocol was developed, piloted, and conducted.

Interview Protocol Development. The interview protocol was only used with individuals who identified as Black/African American and provided consent to be interviewed. The interview protocols (Appendices E & F) consisted of three different sets of questions to account for the different experiences of each of the participants: one for former members of student council, one for individuals who had an interest in joining the organization but never became members, and one for individuals who indicated they had no interest in becoming a student council member.

Each set of interview questions pondered the same types of questions. The protocol was designed to ask individuals who were former student council members a total of nineteen questions. Six of these questions were aimed at eliciting information on guiding research question #1. Six questions were intended to gather information on guiding research question #2, and seven questions were aligned with guiding research question #3. This protocol was utilized with four interview participants.

The questions designed for participants who never had any interest in joining their high school student council included nine questions for question #1, two questions for #2, and two questions for #3. This interview protocol was utilized with three participants.

The third interview protocol designed for individuals who had an interest in joining student council but never did was not used as there were no interview participants who fit that criterion.

The interview protocol was semi-structured in that it was organized in a way that allowed for organic conversation. Each set of interview questions included items that were designed based on the participants' survey responses, therefore, not all students were asked the same exact questions. For example, if a participant indicated that their school did not have a student council

in any grade prior to grade nine, they were not asked the two follow-up questions aimed at eliciting information on those experiences.

Before beginning the study, I piloted the interview protocol with one male and one female, both of whom were individuals who identified themselves as Black/African American on the pilot survey and expressed interest in a follow-up interview. The pilot participants were former students from the district where I serve as a student council advisor. These responses are not part of the aggregate data.

I followed the same procedures to interview pilot participants that I did with participants in the actual study. After each pilot interview, though, I asked the participants if there were any times when they felt uncomfortable answering a specific question or if they felt like I was trying to elicit a specific answer from them. Both participants reported feeling comfortable throughout our conversations and one participant indicated that she even forgot that my study was centered around race. The pilot study process also enabled me to determine if the interview questions were eliciting the kind of information that was relevant to the three Guiding Research Questions or if a question needed to be reworded, added, or eliminated. A few questions were reworded as a result of the pilot. Piloting the interview protocol also provided me with the opportunity to practice the flow of the interview. I learned how to help my participants feel more comfortable at the beginning of the interview by asking them informal questions. Additionally, I practiced asking follow-up questions as necessary and learned how to be engaged with my participant through a videoconference. The interview pilot helped me to be more confident in my ability to carry out a semi-structured interview protocol with participants.

Interview Protocol Process. By reviewing the survey data, I discovered that there were seven qualified participants for the interview from four different high schools. This is in line with

the choice of an appropriate sample size (5-25 participants) in a phenomenological study

(Creswell and Poth, 2018). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote, "Phenomenology

ranges from 3-10" participants (p. 186). Therefore, according to these researchers, seven

interviewees is an appropriate number of participants for this study.

Using the contact information provided by the participants in the survey, I contacted each

one to arrange their individual follow-up interview. Due to Covid-19 at the time of the data

collection, I conducted all seven interviews via Zoom. I informed participants that I was

recording the interviews and provided them with the option of turning their cameras off and only

using audio if they felt more comfortable. All participants kept their cameras on for the interview

and consented to the recording. I enabled the setting on the Zoom! platform that required

participants to click a button agreeing to the recording to ensure I had their permission. I also

enabled the setting for a transcript to be recorded so that I could use it to assist me in my

transcription of the interviews.

As I began each interview, I allowed time for an informal conversation to help

participants feel more comfortable with me prior to engaging in the interview questions. Because

I was aware in advance that all participants were attending college courses at the time of their

participation, we spoke about their college majors, their college decision process, and the impact

of the pandemic on their college experience. All interview candidates seemed at ease and willing

to open up to me about their experiences.

After each interview, I read the Zoom transcript while listening to the audio recording of

each interview several times to find and clear up mistranslations in the transcripts until I felt

comfortable that they were an accurate representation of each interview. I sent the corresponding

interview transcript to each participant within one week of their interview to give them the

opportunity to check for errors or provide clarification where they felt their ideas did not come through as intended. No participants reached out to me with any comments or concerns regarding their transcripts. The digital interview transcripts were all kept in files that were protected with a password only known to me. During my data analysis process, I printed each transcript to complete some manual coding of the data. These transcripts had no identifying names on them and were kept within my possession or stored securely at my home.

Data Analysis Processes

This study uses data from surveys and interviews. The survey data includes a frequency analysis. This section will describe how I utilized a multi-stage data-analysis process to arrive at my findings, each related to one or more of the three Guiding Research Questions. Within this section, I describe the qualitative data analysis process which includes manual and computational coding as well as how I interpreted major categories from the data.

Survey Data Analysis

To analyze the survey data, I first had to eliminate responses that did not meet the delimitations of the study. This included 21 survey respondents. Once invalid responses were removed, I was left with 82 completed surveys, 25 of which were from participants who identified as Black. Using the Qualtrics platform and features, I filtered the data to first look at only data from the participants who identified as Black. There were a few questions that prompted me to also filter for only individuals whom I did not interview. I used this method on questions that I did not want duplicate data for such as questions that asked about their reasons for joining student council which were covered in the participants' interviews. To analyze the questions that asked about the purposes of student council and the importance to the individual as well as their perceived importance of each purpose to their student council, I filtered the

responses to look only at individuals who were student council members for at least one year.

This filter provided me with a way to compare the data set to see if the students reported that

their student council experience met the intended purposes of the organization and their own

values of those intended purposes.

Interview Data Analysis

To begin my data analysis process, I printed out each interview transcript. I initially used

an open coding system which is "the initial close, line-by-line or word-by-word examination of

the data for the purpose of developing provisional concepts. Through the process of constant

comparison, these concepts are collapsed into categories" (Draucker et al., 2007, p. 1138). To

assist me in my initial close coding process, I utilized my three Guiding Research Questions. I

assigned each guiding research question a highlighter color, except for guiding research question

number three, which had three distinct colors to correspond to three of the purposes of student

council that I focused on in my review of the literature. Using a highlighter, I read each transcript

with one guiding research question in mind at a time and highlighted all the words, phrases, and

chunks of text that correlated to the guiding research question. Following this process of open

coding, I went back through the first transcript and assigned a category to each unit of

highlighted text. I then repeated this process for the remaining transcripts.

As Heidegger explained, the data analysis process is cyclical (Vagle, 2018); therefore, I

could not look at each transcript one time and move on to describing themes. I found it important

to do multiple cycles of coding. Heidegger referred to this approach in a hermeneutic

phenomenology as the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger professed that the researcher should bring

in a new existing theory or experience to look at the whole each time he or she looks at the data.

"This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and

interpretation" (Gadamer, 2014, p. 269). Essentially the researcher must analyze the whole to understand the parts but must also analyze the parts to understand the whole. A visual representation of the hermeneutic circle appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Hermeneutic circle for data analysis
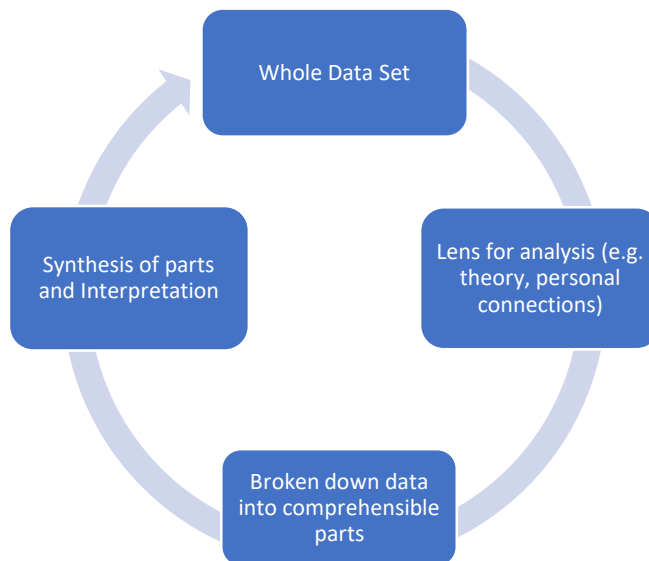
After conducting a manual coding process for the first round of codes, it was apparent that a coding software would be a more convenient process to cluster my codes together into categories. Using the NVivo software, I transferred the codes from my manual coding process. During this process, I created a few new codes, especially regarding data surrounding Guiding Research Question #3. This is because I found areas in some transcripts where I did not originally highlight or assign a code during my manual process, but then by going through the process again with the NVivo program, I was able to extrapolate even more pieces of text that warranted codes. Because the NVivo software shows the user in which files each code was found, it was possible to go back into a file to reread to ensure that I did not miss an opportunity

to code a piece of data. When I finished assigning codes to each transcript, it was time to read

my codes. At the outset of this process, I had eight top-level codes, twenty-one second-level

codes, and three third-level codes. Recognizing that I had to condense some codes to make more

sense of my data and be able to determine appropriate themes from the data, I started to look for

commonalities between codes to combine them into larger units.

After this, I began the axial coding process to find related codes by using "one open

coding category as the 'core phenomenon'" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I checked to see if any

codes should be moved up to top-level codes or if any pieces of data were coded incorrectly to

assist me in the process of condensing codes. If a code was not found in at least three of my

seven transcripts, I reviewed it to either combine it with another code or eliminate it as an option.

My third-level coding process, selective coding, began when I started reading the

excerpts under each code. I noticed some common language such as "I liked" or "I enjoyed" and

this reminded me that in the analysis conducted as part of my literature review the idea of

"enjoyment" emerged as one intrapersonal motivational factor for adolescents. After digging

deeper into my data and codes, I realized that "enjoyment" could and should be a code by itself.

Selective coding can be described as a way a researcher "develops propositions or hypotheses

that interrelate the categories or assembles a story line that describes the interrelationships

among categories" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). When looking at the data color-coded as

relevant to guiding research question one, I initially had three separate codes: one for peer

interactions, one for staff interactions, and one for community interactions. I was able to

combine those into one code labeled "Interactions with Others." The two codes "enjoyment" and

"interactions with others" were both outcomes of the selective coding process.

When it came time to complete the selective coding process for the items that I coded

under the third research question, I began with eleven codes. Because I knew that much of the

data were coded under multiple codes, I used the matrix view in NVivo to see where codes

overlapped. That strategy helped me see that there was some overlap between my codes. This

process also helped me broaden my codes. I had three codes individually named "help the

community," "bring the community together," and "volunteering and community service."

During my selective coding process, I combined these codes and renamed them "Create Positive

Change in the Community." During this process, I was thinking critically about what the

literature said and how it related to my codes because I wanted to be sure to include all the

salient purposes of student council in my coding process. I also had to carefully read, and re-

read, each piece of text that was coded to find significant nuances between what participants

were explaining.

I noticed that some of the participants mentioned areas of student council in which they

felt their school was lacking and others mentioned areas of success. To properly analyze how the

participants of this study reported how the purposes of student council aligned with their

experiences, I decided to add a code to each of the areas that I coded for the third guiding

research question. I went back through each transcript on NVivo and displayed the codes that

aligned with the third research question and then added a second code for each of those areas

which indicated that the individual was reporting that their experience with their school's student

council did or did not meet the purpose they were speaking about. I followed this process

because some participants reported their student council met the intended purpose and other

participants reported that their student council was not successfully meeting the intended

purpose. I wanted to be able to clarify with an additional code which purposes were being met

and which were not without removing the initial code identifying the purpose. I chose to double code these pieces of text so I could easily filter by "meeting," not meeting," or the purpose itself.

Following that process, I decided to display the data as Miles and Huberman (1994) advise to help me better understand what was going on with the data and determine if I needed further analysis. I created a table in a separate document with each of the purposes listed on the left column (Appendix G). I then used two column headers of meeting and not meeting. Under each column heading I pasted the text from each interview transcript that aligned with the purpose stated in the left column. This gave me a clear visual of which purposes of student council participants credited their student councils in meeting and which they mentioned their student councils did not meet. This table made it possible for me to clearly see which ideals of student council sparked a lot of discussion and made it so that I could clearly see the areas in the matrix that remained blank. For example, under the column header "Not Meeting" in the row labeled "Planning Student Activities" there were no responses. However, there were seven responses in that row under the column header "Meeting."

Addressing Researcher Bias and Ensuring Trustworthiness

Because of my close association with student council members and structures, I had prior experiences and assumptions entering the research study. Researchers have different viewpoints on the topic of bracketing assumptions. I chose to approach this research study as Heidegger would advise. Heidegger maintained that researchers cannot set aside personal assumptions or theories while collecting or analyzing data from participants and encouraged researchers to acknowledge their interpretations of the lived experiences of participants while making connections to theory (Vagle, 2018). Heidegger uses the hermeneutical circle to explain how a researcher uses many lenses to pull apart and analyze the aggregate data. When collecting and

analyzing data for this research study, I kept my biases at the forefront of my mind but was careful to take steps to recognize, monitor, and reduce the impact of my bias. This step helps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data because I accounted for these biases when developing my findings.

Another consideration I had to remember during the data collection and analysis process to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings is related to the chosen methodology. Because I employed a phenomenological study, I was aiming to discover the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. I had to keep in mind that I was not learning about the way a specific school or district structured their student council, but rather, I was learning about the way each participant perceived the ways in which their school's student council was structured. When two participants who had been students in the same district answered the same question in a different way, I had to be cautious not to assume one of them was right or one of them was wrong. I ensured that I remembered their answers reflected their own, individual experiences.

Finally, I had to pay careful attention to the fact that I am a White, female researcher of a different generation speaking with Black individuals about their experiences in a group that is reported to be majority White. This fact was a constant consideration of my doctoral committee and mine throughout the development, implementation, and analysis of this research study. The study was designed to address a problem as demonstrated in reports on the participation rates of Black students in student council. There has been a decline in Black student participation in student council (Weinberger, 2014), and there is a need for further study to help educators understand and address this concern. Although this study does not aim to provide a reason, it does intend to provide insight into factors that have kept some Black students from participating in their high school's student council as well as factors that have motivated some Black students

to participate in the organization. I understood that it was a fundamental responsibility to rely

completely on their own accounts of their experiences to assert common connections and themes

through my analysis process. I did not report on what I felt was motivating or inhibiting students

from joining student council; I reported on what they told me was motivating or inhibiting them

while connecting their stories and lived experiences to the existing literature.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the qualitative research method used in the study. It opened with a

brief introduction followed by a researcher's positionality statement. In this section, I explained

how a personal experience and my worldview on the importance of fostering and celebrating

diversity helped me arrive at the purpose for this study. I then explained the premise of the

research design and why a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used. Following that

section, I described the research methods used in this study. Within this section, I outlined the

data collection and analysis processes. I explained how there were different paths participants

could take on the survey based on their answers to specific questions. This chapter concludes

with a synopsis of how I aimed to reduce researcher bias throughout the research study. The next

chapter will present the analysis and findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This hermeneutic phenomenological study investigated Black high school students' experiences with student council at Massachusetts' public high schools. The study included two phases of data collection: surveys and interviews. The goal of this study was to answer three Guiding Research Questions:

1. What external factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

2. What intrapersonal factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

3. What do Black high school students report about their perceptions and experiences with high school student council and in what ways are their reports consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation?

Chapter Three explained how the data were collected to address each of the three Guiding Research Questions. This chapter will explain the findings that emerged from the analysis of data by presenting the major thematic categories found that pertain to each guiding research question. Thematic categories will be presented for the survey data and the interview data separately. (Refer to Appendix H for a list of all thematic categories.) Following those sections is an explanation of how the data analysis led to each of the six research findings from this study. A summary concludes the chapter.

For this study, participants were initially recruited using a modified snowball sampling approach. To do this, I contacted several informants to help me spread the word to recruit qualified participants. Eighty-two individuals who attended a public high school in

Massachusetts completed the survey. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 21; twenty-five

of whom were individuals who identified themselves as Black. Seven individuals qualified for

and participated in follow-up interviews.

Table 2 displays the demographic breakdown of all survey participants. Overall, there

were 53 respondents who identified as White, one respondent who identified as Hispanic, three

respondents who identified as Asian, and 25 respondents who identified as Black.

Table 2

Demographics of the Survey Respondents (n=82)

	Male		Female		Non-Binary		Did Not Answer	
	Member	Non-Member	Member	Non-Member	Member	Non-Member	Member	Non-Member
White	7	4	30	10	1	0	0	1
Hispanic	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Black	3	4	9	9	0	0	0	0

As a reminder, only those survey respondents who identified as Black were invited to

partake in the interview phase of the study. Table 3 displays the reported length of student

council participation of the 25 survey respondents who identified as Black. It also delineates the

length of student council experience of the seven interview participants. Thirteen of the Black

survey respondents were never members of student council in high school, three of whom

participated in the interview. One survey respondent was a member for less than one year and

two survey respondents were members for only one year. There were two survey respondents

who reported being a student council member for two years, and one of them participated in the

interview phase of this study. Two respondents were student council members for three years,

and one of them participated in the interview. Five respondents were members of student council

for four years; two of them participated in an interview.

Table 3

Length of High School Student Council Experience of the Participants Who Identified as Black
(n=25)

	Never a member	Member for less than one year	Member for one year	Member for two years	Member for three years	Member for four years
Survey Respondents	13	1	2	2	2	5
Interview Participants	3	0	0	1	1	2

Guiding Research Question #1: What external factors influence Black student participation in high school student council?

The following sections will present the data that correspond to this question from both the

surveys and the interviews. The findings from this study were derived only from analysis of the

twenty-five respondents who identified as Black, which includes the seven individuals who

participated in follow up interviews. Any data presented from other racial demographics is only

used for points of comparison or contrast.

Survey Data

This section will present the survey data collected that corresponds to the first guiding

research question. There were five closed-response questions on the survey (Appendix D) that

intended to gather data relating to Guiding Research Question #1. They include the following:

1. *Was student council offered at your school in any grade prior to grade nine?*

2. *Were you a member of your student council in any grade prior to grade nine?*

3. *Do you have any family members or anyone close to your family who has been a member of student council in any grade level?*

4. *Did you have friends who were members of student council?*

5. *Did anyone in your life ever encourage you to join student council?*

Table 4 displays the frequency of responses for each closed-response questions relating to external motivation. Data from all subgroups are included. The frequency of responses from participants who answered that they were unsure of the condition was combined into the same column as participants who skipped a question. A substantial portion of Black participants (80%) had friends in student council and 32% of them reported having a family member in student council. Yet only 40% of them ever had someone directly encourage them to join student council. Table 4 also reveals that 64% of participants were not exposed to a student council organization before entering grade nine, and 52% of those participants indicated that this was because membership in the organization was not offered before grade nine.

The analysis showed that race is a determining factor of awareness of the existence of student council prior to entering high school; Black participants in this study reported having considerably less awareness of student council prior to entering high school than the White participants. There was a 30-point difference in the percentage of Black participants who reported having someone directly encourage them to join student council, and a 32-point difference in the percentage of Black participants who reported having a student council in any grade prior to ninth.

Table 4

All Participants' Responses to Closed-Response Survey Questions Regarding Possible External Motivations for Joining Student Council

	Was student council offered at your school in any grade prior to grade nine?			Were you a member of your student council in any grade prior to Grade 9?			Do you have any family members or anyone close to your family who had been members of student council at any level?			Did you have friends who were members of student council?			Did anyone in your life ever encourage you to join student council in high school?		
	YES	NO	Not Sure or Didn't Answer	YES	NO	Not Sure or Didn't Answer	YES	NO	Not Sure or Didn't Answer	YES	NO	Not Sure or Didn't Answer	YES	NO	Not Sure or Didn't Answer
White	36 (68%)	11 (21%)	6 (11%)	20 (38%)	16 (30%)	0 (0%)	23 (43%)	19 (36%)	11 (21%)	43 (81%)	10 (19%)	0 (0%)	37 (70%)	10 (19%)	6 (11%)
Asian	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Hispanic	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)
Black	9 (36%)	13 (52%)	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	4 (16%)	0 (0%)	8 (32%)	12 (48%)	5 (20%)	20 (80%)	5 (20%)	0 (0%)	10 (40%)	13 (52%)	2 (8%)

Participants were asked open-ended questions on the survey designed to elicit information related to Guiding Research Question #1. These questions included:

1. Describe your reasons for joining your high school's student council.

2. Describe what the process of joining the student council at your high school looked like.

The twelve participants who indicated they were student council members in high school were asked the first question above regarding their motivation for joining student council. Some of their responses related to external factors which provide information corresponding to the first guiding research question in this study. These responses were grouped into three thematic categories:

- Amplify Student Voice in the School Community: Three of the twelve respondents (25%) said they joined the student council because they wanted to increase the student voice and advocacy in their school. For example, one participant said: "I wanted to be involved and help the student population get their voice heard." Their external motivation is derived from the students in their school and making a difference for them and their school experiences rather than their own.

- Meet and Interact with New People: Three of the twelve respondents (25%) said they joined the student council because they were interested in attending events, meeting new people, and making new friends. One wrote: "I joined because I thought it would be a fun way to meet other students." Another participant indicated, "I thought it would be a good way to meet a lot of new friends and good people in general."

- Provide Community Service: One participant (8%) was interested in joining the student council because they wanted to be a contributing member of society. This person wrote: "I really wanted to find a way to give back to my community."

All participants were asked the second question listed above which prompted them to describe what the process of joining student council looked like at their high school. This question was asked in order to determine the prior exposure participants had to the process before deciding to join student council and to discover if there were any contrasts between students who were members of student council and students who were not. Table 5 displays how I categorized the answers to this question provided by the 25 survey respondents who identified as Black. A few of the respondents provided answers that fit into more than one category.

Table 5 shows that 15 out of the 25 respondents (60%) reported that their school held elections for students who were interested in becoming members of student council. Three more of the respondents, participants who were not student council members, wrote that they were unsure of the process, but they all think that their schools held elections. If we consider the perspective of those three participants in the overall group, then 18of the 25 participants (72%) perceive that their school uses a traditional election process for selecting student council members. Table 5 also shows that participants who were members of high school student council had more varied responses about the ways in which they could become eligible for joining student council than those participants who were never members of a high school student council. The respondents who were non-members tended to answer in terms of either attained status with their peers through an election or attained status with the faculty through the means of academic achievement.

Table 5

Reported Perceptions of How to Become Eligible for Student Council Membership (n=25)

	Member	Non-Member
Elections (nominations, speeches, voting)	5	10
Write an essay	1	0
Plan a mock event	2	0
Attend three consecutive meetings	1	0
Sign up with the advisors	2	0
Complete an application	2	0
Complete an application and have good grades	0	1
Earn honor roll and be a well-respected individual	0	1
Unfamiliar with the process	0	3

The 12 participants who were never student council members were asked to explain their reasons for not joining student council. One of these participants suggested that they did not have enough information about what the student council was. Seven others (58%) reported that they did not have enough time, many due to sports and/or other extracurricular activities. Some of their responses included: "I didn't have the time to be fully committed," "I was a part of other extracurriculars, and I had classes that needed my attention," and "I had other extracurriculars to focus on." These responses indicate that the participants who were never student council members cited competing demands on their time as the reason they did not seek to join student council.

Interview Data

Although data from the corpus of each transcript were analyzed with each guiding research question in mind, there were three open-ended questions in each interview protocol that

directly intended to elicit information relating to the first research question: What external

factors influence Black student participation in high school student council? These questions

included:

- *Your survey indicated that you were a member of a student council prior to grade 9. Can you please tell me about what got you interested in the student council?*

- *Could you please explain what you consider to be the most important reasons for joining student council?*

- *Your survey response indicates that you had been a member of your high school student council for X number of years. Could you please explain what you consider to be the most important reasons for remaining a member of the student council?*

Two major themes emerged from the interview data relating to the external factors

influencing involvement or non-involvement in high school student council. All the interview

participants who were not members of the student council had experiences that led to the first

major theme—student time constraints due to competing responsibilities and demands.

Participant F illustrated this factor by reporting, "With work and schoolwork and everything like

that, for me to add something else to that category, I didn't think I'd have the time for it." The

second theme regarding external factors influencing student involvement in student council is

student council being perceived as having insufficient or insignificant importance in the school.

Participant A felt like there was minimal presence of their high school's student council leading

them to believe that the goal of their student council did not align with their understanding of

what a student council should do. This is reflected in their description of what might have

changed their decision to join student council:

Probably just having more of a presence, I mean like the presence was pretty minimal, so

it like it didn't really make a difference to me if they were there or not, and I think that

that's not the goal of the student council. It should be to have that presence and to truly

make the community a better community.

The combined analysis of survey and interview data revealed five major themes from the data

regarding external factors that influenced students' involvement, or non-involvement, in student

council. These themes are: (a) to amplify student voice in the school community, (b) to meet and

interact with new people, (c) to engage in community service, (d) competing activities leading to

time constraints, and (e) an insignificant presence in the school community.

Guiding Research Question #2: What intrapersonal factors influence Black student

participation in high school student council?

In this section, the survey data pertaining to the second research questions will be

presented first, followed by an overview of the interview data. The analysis in this section is

based only on responses from the 25 participants who identified themselves as Black.

Survey Data

The survey contained a closed-response question to gauge the participants' interest in

joining their high school student council. This question was asked only to participants who

responded that they were never a member of their high school student council. Among the 25

individuals who identified as Black, thirteen (52%) were never a member of their high school's

student council and, of those 13, three individuals (23%) indicated they had interest in joining

their high school student council.

Participants who were members of student council in high school were asked to describe

their reasons for joining their high school's student council. The responses from the 12

individuals who identified as Black and were a part of their high school student council had similar responses that can be categorized according to two themes:

- Identity and Enjoyment as a Leader: Ten of the 12 respondents (83%) indicated they joined student council to be involved as a leader in their grade. Their reasons included statements such as: "I wanted to get involved and make decisions for my class," and "I wanted to be a part of leading my class and presenting new ideas." These participants provided intrapersonal reasons for their leadership involvement. Their reasons for exercising leadership skills were for their own desires, ideas, and motivation.

- Instrumental to College Acceptance: Five of the 12 respondents (42%) said they joined the student council because they expected that it would help them achieve a goal they had for their future – being admitted into college. One participant wrote: "I wanted to have something to do with leadership on my college application." Another simply wrote, "college resume," and a third respondent wrote, "It would look good on college applications."

Participants who were never a part of student council were asked to explain why they were not a member of their high school's student council. One theme present in the analysis of their responses to this question is a difference between the perceived expectations and lived experiences of student council. Four participants indicated that the student council did not align with their understanding of how a student council should operate. One mentioned, "I viewed our school's student council as superficial. It seemed that individuals did it to put it on a resume rather than passion for serving the school." Another wrote, "The student council at my school was not a very motivated team and didn't have a very strong community." A third respondent explained, "My student council had no say in changes that needed to be made around the

school." These participants felt they attended schools that did not meet the expectations of what

they felt was appropriate from the student council organization. It is possible that they attended

schools that did not provide adequate communication or disseminate enough information about

the happenings of their student council leading them to believe that their student council was less

useful than they had anticipated.

Another theme concerned the lack of interest in student council. Three participants

directly wrote that they did not have any interest in joining their high school's student council.

There was also one participant who wrote, "I didn't feel like I was qualified to take on

one of the roles. It also intimidated me." This individual was apprehensive about joining the

student council because they felt they were underqualified. Although this sentiment was only

expressed by one survey respondent, their view supports a theme of a feeling of isolation or

exclusion from student council or the school community that will be discussed in the next

section.

Interview Data

The interview protocol contained questions that elicited information on the intrapersonal

factors for joining or not joining student council. Individuals who were members of their high

school student council were asked:

1. *What do you know about yourself that made you realize that participating in student*
   council could be a good thing for you to do?

2. *Could you please explain what you consider to be the most important reasons for joining*
   student council?

3. *When you were considering becoming a member of the student council, were there any*

   moments when you felt like you couldn't or shouldn't join student council? Please tell me

   about them.

The three questions above were asked to directly elicit information relating to the second

research question, but the entirety of each transcript was analyzed when determining the major

themes in the data. There was one major category found in the qualitative data of which 100% of

participants who were student council members in high school provided comments—leadership.

Participants felt they could use these leadership skills to contribute to the happenings of their

student council and, ultimately, their school. Each of them provided intrapersonal reasons for

their leadership involvement aligning with the theme of identity and enjoyment as a leader found

in the survey data relating to guiding research question two. Selected anecdotes can be found

below:

> I think the most important reason for me to be on student council was really to be, I
>
> guess, not even the voice of reason but a voice of critique or I guess rebellion because I
>
> didn't want it to always be just everyone agrees (Participant D).

> I like being a leader. I don't know if that's weird but, like, I thought I kind of liked being a
>
> leader. I kind of liked making important decisions and being involved in making
>
> important decisions, so I guess that's why I stayed in student council (Participant E).

> I like being a leader, and I like deciding things and running things, so I always knew that
>
> like I wanted to have a part in planning my prom and graduation, the school dances, and
>
> raising money for my class (Participant G).

Two other themes that emerged from the interviews were a feeling of isolation or exclusion from student council or the school community and wanting to make a difference and be involved in the school community. Sixty-seven percent of interview participants who were not members of their high school student council indicated that they felt there was an exclusionary culture in their student council or in the larger school community that left them uninterested in joining student council. Participant B recalled:

> I don't know of a Black person or a Latinx person who ever ran for anything like that. Like I…I… can't think of anyone who ran for anything like a position of power or to have that kind of position…. I think like we didn't even get to that step yet because the community doesn't really encourage that diversity.

There were 80% of interview participants who were student council members in their high schools who reported a desire to make a difference in their school communities. Participant D reported:

> The reason I wanted to remain on council was to improve things that needed to be improved in terms of the relationship between the student body and our council as well as other school improvements that needed to be done because student council is not only about creating events and generating income for the prom, but it was also about addressing issues in the school community and of course in our class.

Another participant echoed a similar reason for joining their high school student council:

> I heard like a lot of things that kids in my grade were complaining about and I was like, okay maybe if I can get in there, maybe I can do something cool, something that everybody would like because there were a lot of things that our grade didn't like (Participant C).

All the interview participants who were student council members spoke about their interest in

knowing the details of what was happening with their grade. Participant G mentioned:

> I liked knowing what was going on and I liked planning events for my class and like even
>
> though it'd be stressful at times, I like actually not… not… just showing up to school, but
>
> like having a hand in the role and everything that was going on in my grade was actually
>
> what kept me around.

The analysis of the lived experiences of the participants in this study offer six themes for

intrapersonal factors that influence involvement with high school student council: (a) identity

and enjoyment as a leader, (b) instrumental to college acceptances, (c) difference between the

perceived expectations and the lived experiences, (d) lack of interest in the organization, (e)

making a difference in the school community, and (f) a feeling of isolation or exclusion from

student council or the school community.

Guiding Research Question #3: What do Black high school students report about their experiences with high school student council and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation?

A previous chapter in this study includes a review of existing literature on student

council. The chapter included an overview of the purposes derived from these sources. These

purposes include:

- preserving the knowledge of and practice in the democratic process. (Mathes, 1975; Beck & Jennings, 1987; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1990),

- providing a forum in which all students can use their voices to express opinions on school matters which impact them (Mathes, 1975; About National Student Council, 2009; Guardian of Democracy, 2011),

- preparing children to assume adult participative roles which engage them in the

  community (Beck & Jennings, 1987),

- bringing together students from diverse backgrounds to have joint responsibility for their

  common experiences (About National Student Council, 2009),

- encouraging participation in student council from the entire student body (About National

  Student Council, 2009),

- creating a positive change in the school and community (About National Student

  Council, 2009),

- planning student activities (Guardian of Democracy, 2011), and

- fundraising (Student Project Database, 2019).

The following sections will present the survey and interview data that correspond to research

question three or in some way address the purposes listed above.

Survey Data

As mentioned in the data analysis from the preceding section, there was a lack of clarity

among their understanding of the perceived expectation and the reality of the participants'

experiences with their student councils. This was a recurring theme in the data analysis relating

to Guiding Research Question #3. Four participants provided anecdotes of how they felt their

student councils were not operating as they expected or desired and subsequently did not seek

membership in the organization.

The survey asked participants who identified as Black to answer a series of questions

using Likert scale responses. These scales were arranged in three matrices, each presenting ten

items for participants to respond. The questions in each matrix were derived from the purposes of

student council indicated in and selected from literature related to student councils. Previously,

these questions were presented as goal statements. For the purposes of gathering information

regarding the students' lived experiences in relation to these purposes, they are referred to as

activities and phrased as questions. One matrix asked participants to rate how often their student

council performed each activity. Participants were provided with four-point scales rather than

five-point scales to avoid any neutral responses.

The first Likert scale matrix asked participants to identify how often they felt their

student council performed a specific type of activity. The 10 items that were rated and the

number of participants who answered each question is listed in Table 6. The student council

activity that participants indicated most often as a frequent occurrence was fundraising for school

functions with 40% of participants, which is less than a majority. Because there were no other

activities that showed 50% or more of participants indicating their student council performed the

activity very often, I combined "most-of-the-time" responses and "very often" responses to get a

better sense of how common these activities were according to the participants. This process

demonstrated that 64% of participants felt that fundraising for school functions was the activity

on which their student councils focused their time. Another activity that participants reported

their student councils spent much of their time on was fundraising for charitable purchases.

Accordingly, the participants in this study most associate student council with fundraising for

school functions and charitable purposes. There were no other activities that 51% or more of

participants reported their councils spent most of their time on. Therefore, the most prominent

theme found as a result of the analysis of this section of the survey is that the student councils in

this study are meeting the purpose of fundraising.

Table 6

Likert Scale Responses Regarding How Often the Participants Felt Their Student Councils Performed Each Activity

Question	1: Rarely	2: Some of the Time	3: Most of the Time	4: Very Often
How often did your student council plan activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?	4 (16%)	12 (48%)	3 (12%)	6 (24%)
			36%	
How often did your student council plan activities for the student body to participate in after school hours?	2 (8%)	12 (48%)	6 (24%)	5 (20%)
			44%	
How often did your student council plan activities for your local community?	11 (44%)	8 (32%)	5 (20%)	1 (4%)
			24%	
How often did your student council volunteer in the local community?	9 (38%)	9 (38%)	4 (16%)	2 (8%)
			24%	
How often did your student council fundraise for school functions?	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	6 (24%)	10 (40%)
			64%	
How often did your student council fundraise for charitable purposes?	7 (28%)	5 (20%)	9 (36%)	4 (16%)
			52%	
How often did your student council provide a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	5 (20%)	2 (8%)
			28%	
How often did your student council advocate for improvements in the school community?	9 (36%)	7 (28%)	7 (28%)	2 (8%)
			36%	

How often did you student council encourage interest in and respect for the talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests of students throughout the school?	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	9 (36%)	3 (12%)
			48%	
How often did your student council encourage the student body to commit to their education?	7 (28%)	7 (28%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)
			44%	

The second Likert scale matrix presented the same student council purpose but asked

participants to indicate how important each activity was to them personally. Table 7 displays the

data reported by participants about the importance they assigned to each activity. These data

illustrate the importance participants gave to the purpose of encouraging interest in and respect

for the talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests of students throughout the

school. Table 7 shows that 71% of participants found it highly important to celebrate diversity.

The majority of participants also found four other areas of student council highly important:

- providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues (67%)

- fundraising for school functions (66%)

- increasing students' commitment in their own education (59%)

- advocating for improvements in the school community (54%)

A thematic statement that explains the data collected from the second set of Likert scales is that

the participants of this study find many of the foundational ideals of student council highly

important.

Table 7

Likert Scale Responses Regarding Each Activity's Importance Level to the Participants

Question	1: Of Little Importance	2: Somewhat Important	3: Of Moderate Importance	4: Highly Important
How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?	3 (12%)	4 (17%)	6 (25%)	11 (46%)
How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in after school hours?	3 (12%)	5 (21%)	7 (29%)	9 (38%)
How important was planning activities for your local community?	0 (0%)	10 (44%)	7 (30%)	6 (26%)
How important was volunteering in the local community?	0 (0%)	7 (29%)	7 (29%)	10 42%)
How important was fundraising for school functions?	2 (10%)	4 (19%)	1 (5%)	14 (66%)
How important was fundraising for charitable purposes?	2 (9%)	3 (12%)	8 (33%)	11 (46%)
How important was providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	5 (21%)	16 (67%)
How important was advocating for improvements in the school community?	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	9 (38%)	13 (54%)

How important is it to encourage interest in and respect for the talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests of students throughout the school?	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	5 (21%)	17 (71%)
How important is increasing student commitment in their own education?	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	7 (29%)	14 (59%)

The third Likert scale matrix asked participants who were student council members in high school to rate each activity based on how important they felt the activity was to their student council, rather than to themselves. Table 8 is a display of the responses from these participants. It demonstrates that participants recalled fundraising for school functions and planning activities for students to participate in after school hours as the two activities most important to their student councils. The activities that the participants deemed highly important to themselves were not reported as highly important to their student councils. Below is a reminder of the percentage of participants who felt the four aforementioned activities were highly important to themselves from Table 7:

- providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues (67%)

- fundraising for school functions (66%)

- increasing students' commitment in their own education (59%)

- advocating for improvements in the school community (54%)

Table 8 shows the percentage of participants who felt their student council regarded these activities as highly important:

- providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues (27%)

- fundraising for school functions (55%)

- increasing students' commitment in their own education (18%)

- advocating for improvements in the school community (18%)

This data supports the earlier-mentioned theme of there being a difference between the perceived

expectations and the lived experiences of student council.

Table 8

Likert Scale Responses Regarding the Participants' Perceptions of the Importance of Each Activity to Their Student Councils

Question	1: Of Little Importance	2: Somewhat Important	3: Of Moderate Importance	4: Highly Important
How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?	*1 (9%)*	*2 (18%)*	*6 (55%)*	*2 (18%)*
How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in after school hours?	*1 (9%)*	*2 (18%)*	*2 (18%)*	*6 (55%)*
How important was planning activities for your local community?	*4 (36%)*	*4 (36%)*	*1 (9%)*	*2 (18%)*
How important was volunteering in the local community?	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*2 (18%)*
How important was fundraising for school functions?	*1 (9%)*	*1 (9%)*	*3 (27%)*	*6 (55%)*
How important was fundraising for charitable purposes?	*3 (27%)*	*2 (18%)*	*4 (36%)*	*2 (18%)*
How important was providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?	*3 (27%)*	*4 (36%)*	*1 (9%)*	*3 (27%)*
How important was advocating for improvements in the school community?	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*2 (18%)*

How important is it to encourage interest in and respect for the talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests of students throughout the school?	*2 (18%)*	*2 (18%)*	*4 (36%)*	*3 (27%)*
How important is increasing student commitment in their own education?	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*3 (27%)*	*2 (18%)*

To better visualize the comparison of data from Tables 6-8, I compiled the data into one table. Table 9 presents the average level of importance of each activity to the participants, the average level of perceived importance to the student councils, and the average frequency of each activity by the student council as reported by the participants. It also displays the difference in their personal ideas about the importance and the importance they perceived their student council had for each type of activity. Finally, the difference between the average level of importance to the participants and the average perceived frequency of each activity is provided.

Table 9 illustrates that there are some disconnects between what is important to students and what they feel is important to their schools' student councils. The largest discrepancy is concerning the importance given to providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues. The difference between how important that activity was to the participants versus how important they felt it was to their student councils shows a one-point discrepancy. Even more prominent is the over 1.5-point difference between the importance placed on providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues and how often the participants felt their student council actually did that. Table 9 demonstrates that in their overall lived experiences, participants of this study reported that student council often fell short of their expectations. The participants held value in activities that their councils did not engage in frequently. Further, according to these participants, their high school student councils appear to

function with only minimal attention to some of the foundational purposes of student council

dating back to the origin of student council. Student councils did not appear to put a high amount

of value in helping their community or providing a forum for students to use their voice, both are

activities that are essential to developing future contributing members in our democratic society.

Table 9

Average Level of Importance and Frequency of Each Activity

Activity	Average Level of Importance of Activity to All Participants	Average Level of Perceived Importance of Activity to the Student Council by Participants Who Were Student Council Members	Difference Between Avg Level of Importance for All Participants and Perceived Avg of Importance to the Student Council by Participants Who Were Student Council Members	Average Perceived Frequency of Activity by Student Council to All Participants	Difference Between Avg Level of Importance of Activity to All Participants and Avg Perceived Frequency of Activity by Student Council to All Participants
Planning activities for the student body to participate in during the school day	3.04	2.82	-.22	2.44	-.60
Planning activities for the student body to participate in after school hours	2.92	3.18	+.26	2.56	-.36
Planning activities for your local community	2.83	1.73	-1.1	1.84	-.99

Volunteering in the local community	3.13	2.36	-.77	1.96	-1.17
Fundraising for school functions	3.23	2.73	-0.5	2.92	-.31
Fundraising for charitable purposes	3.17	2.45	-.72	2.40	-.77
Providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues	3.54	2.36	-1.18	1.96	-1.58
Advocating for improvements in the school community	3.42	2.36	-1.06	2.08	-1.34
Encouraging the interest in and respect for the talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests of students throughout the school	3.58	2.73	-0.85	2.36	-1.22
Increasing student commitment in their own education	3.46	2.36	-1.1	2.32	-1.14

Interview Data

Interview participants were asked to elaborate on their responses to survey items deemed

relevant to research question three. Other interview questions also elicited information relevant

to the third research question. I took the responses that aligned to each of the aforementioned

eight selected purposes of student council as outlined in Chapter 2 and placed them in a table.

The first purpose of student council, preserving the knowledge of and practice in the democratic

process, has been split into the three ideals of how schools should foster a democratic society.

The three ideals were synthesized from the literature and are explained in more detail in Chapter

Two. The three ideals maintain that schools should:

- teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences to help

  others (Dewey, 1938; Rose, 2009; Neem, 2015).

- teach students to accept and respect others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge,

  abilities, and interests (Ravitch, 1983; Tyler, 1987; Levinson, 2012a; Rose, 2009; Rush,

  2001), and

- foster a sense of independence to improve one's intellectual capacity (Einstein, 1956;

  Ravitch, 1983; Rose, 2009; Neem, 2015).

Another purpose of student council, preparing children to assume adult participative roles which

engage them in the community, has been added to the same row as teach students how to think

critically about their community and past experiences to help others to eliminate redundancy as

those are similar concepts.

I created a display of exemplifying statements from each of the interviews corresponding

to the selected purposes of student council. It displays one exemplifying quote that shows a

participant's perception of how their student council is meeting the purpose and one quote of a

participant indicating how their student council is not meeting the purpose. The blank cells

indicate that no participants mentioned anything that related to that particular purpose. The

complete table of responses can be found in Appendix G.

There were only three purposes that most of participants credited their student council with meeting. These three purposes include: (a) planning student activities, (b) fundraising for school activities, and (c) fundraising for charitable purposes. There were two purposes for which interviewees only had illustrations of how they are not being met in their student councils: (a) bringing students together from diverse backgrounds to have joint responsibility for their common experience and (b) creating a positive change in the school and community. In the experience of the participants, therefore, these two purposes were not obvious endeavors for their student councils. These data can be summarized into one thematic statement: the student councils in this study are not meeting all of the foundational purposes of student council.

Delineation of Research Findings

This study was guided by three research questions. The previous section presented an analysis of the data relevant to each of the questions which led to thematic statements. This section will explain the six findings that were derived from those thematic statements and how the findings connect to one or more of the Guiding Research Questions.

Finding #1: Participants indicate that they are more likely to join student council when they feel they can have a voice to make a difference in their school community.

The first finding in this research study relates to the second guiding research question because it was what the participants knew about themselves that influenced their decision to seek membership. According to the participants of this study, they joined student council because they perceived it as an avenue to make a difference in their school community.

The analysis of survey data revealed a common theme for seeking membership was to have a leadership opportunity or identity. When responding to the open-response question which inquired about reasons for membership, 83% of respondents included leadership in their answer.

The answers in response to the prompt, *Describe your reasons for joining your high school's student council,* included: "to present new ideas," "to make decisions for my class," "I wanted a good prom," and "to have a say in what happens at my school." All of these participants wanted to gain membership into their high school student council in order to use their voice to express and advance their own goals, thus relating to guiding research question two. Additional responses that relate to this finding include:

- "I joined my high school's student council, in order to improve the sometimes strained relationship between the student body and the students in government,"

- "to help the student population get their voice heard,"

- "so we can create fun activities to generate more school spirit," and

- "help make events and give what my fellow classmates wanted to experience in high-school together."

The aforementioned examples indicate that participants were motivated to join their school's student councils in order to fulfill a goal of making a difference in their school community. Each one of those participants saw an opportunity to lead and make an impact in their school community.

The interview participants acknowledged a similar theme of using leadership skills to make a difference in their school communities. Participant E shared:

I like being a leader. I don't know if that's weird but, like, I thought I kind of liked being a leader. I kind of liked making important decisions and being involved in making important decisions, so I guess that's why I stayed in student council.

This comment from Participant E displays an intrapersonal motivation for joining student council. They enjoyed their leadership identity and wanted to continue to experience what being

a leader entailed. They wanted their voice to be heard in the planning of activities and events that

took place in their school, therefore, their motivation came from within. Ultimately, however,

they viewed the student council as an arena in which they could make decisions that would

impact their school community.

Two of the survey respondents, when asked why they did not join their high school

student council, spoke about the impact student council would have on the school community, or

rather, lack thereof. Consequently, they did not join student council because they didn't feel their

school would offer them such an opportunity to make a difference. Their comments included:

"My student council had no say in changes that needed to be made around the school." and "I

viewed our school's student council as superficial. It seemed that individuals did it to put it on a

resume rather than passion for serving the school."

It was evident that the seven interview participants were all passionate individuals who

had clear interests in serving their school communities. This statement applies to the participants

who were members of student council in high school as well as those who were not. Each of the

seven individuals acknowledged their leadership interests. Participant G explained:

> I like being a leader and I like deciding things and running things, so I always knew that
>
> like I wanted to have a part in planning my prom and graduation, the school dances, and
>
> raising money for my class.

 This individual demonstrated intrapersonal motivation for deciding to join student council. They

were aware of their leadership abilities and wanted to use them to help contribute to their class's

events. However, they also indicate that their motivation came externally as well when they

mention a desire to raise money for their class. In both instances, their primary goal was making

an impact in the activities their class was going to orchestrate that year.

Participant C expressed their motivation for wanting to help their school community. They said:

> I was like, okay maybe if I can get in there, maybe I can do something cool, something
>
> that everybody would like because there were a lot of things that our grade didn't like. So,
>
> I don't know, I guess trying to be a part of the change.

Participant D's illustration of reasons for joining student council echo similar feelings relating to making a difference in the school community. Participant D reflected:

> The reason I wanted to remain on council was to improve things that needed to be
>
> improved in terms of the relationship between the student body and our council as well as
>
> other things school improvements that needs to be done because student council is not
>
> only about creating events and generating income for the prom, but it was also about
>
> addressing issues in the school community and of course in our class.

These participants realized that the student body wanted changes to be made and they felt they possessed the skills necessary to advocate for those changes. Their reasons for joining student council were to help the greater good, not for self-fulfillment or simply to have a say.

Analyzing participants' reasons for not joining student council demonstrates further evidence that Black students join student council when they feel they can have a voice and be a part of making a difference in their school community.

Two of the survey respondents, who were not student council members in high school provided their reasons for not joining the student council. One of the survey participants who had interest in joining student council but did not join wrote: "Students should only join [student council] if they're able to bring something to the table." This participant believed that students should only seek membership in the student council organization if they have a skillset that could

contribute to the group. They did not feel that they could make a difference given their current

skillset and therefore, did not join the student council. Another survey respondent who did not

join student council in high school wrote: "I didn't feel like I was qualified to take on one of the

roles. It also intimidated me." These two responses indicate that these individuals feel that only a

certain type of person can join student council. They do not view the student council as a place

that can develop a person into a better citizen or a stronger leader. They feel that you must be a

person who has a skillset ready to contribute to making the school a better place.

Participant A was a member of student council in middle school but chose not to join

their high school student council because they did not think they would actually be able to make

a difference. They recounted their feelings during our interview as:

> ...Theoretically, it was like "Oh, this is really cool. I'll get to like make decisions and do
>
> this and that, but I realized in middle school that like at [my school] that's not really what
>
> it was. It was sort of just like a…. it just seemed very superficial and so I kind of moved
>
> away from it.

Participant A was a founding member of their high school's Black Student Union and reported

making changes in the school through that arena instead. Their response indicates an

intrapersonal motivation for initially joining their middle school student council. They were

interested in having their voice included in the decision making of their grade and school

community. Their ultimate decision to not join student council in high school due to the

"superficial" nature of the group, paired with their passion for the Black Student Union, suggests

that Participant A did not feel their student council could provide them with the forum they were

seeking to make a change.

The essence of Finding #1 is that the participants who joined student council reported joining to use their already established leadership skills to contribute to their school. Some of the participants wanted to use their voice to suggest new ideas while others wanted to help uplift the voices of their classmates.

Finding #2: Participants indicate that their high schools' student councils are not meeting their intended purpose of providing a forum in which all students can use their voices to express opinions on school matters.

An enduring purpose of student council organizations is to provide a forum in which all students can use their voices to express opinions on school matters which impact them (Mathes, 1975; About National Student Council, 2009; Guardian of Democracy, 2011). The results of this study indicate that, according to participants, their high school student councils did not meet this intended purpose. This finding can be substantiated from data from both the survey and the interview.

Survey participants who identified as Black were asked: *How often did your student council provide a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?* Only two respondents (8%) indicated that this happened very often in their school, and only five respondents (20%) reported that this happened most of the time in their school. Most survey participants (72%) indicated that their school rarely or only some of the time provided a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues. When asked how important it was to students that their schools provide a place for students to contribute opinions on school issues, 67% of them said it was highly important. However, only 27% of participants reported it being highly important to their school's student council. According to this analysis, the participants

indicated in various ways that they did not perceive their high schools' student councils as fulfilling the goals of student council that they embraced as important.

An analysis of the interview data further supports this finding. First, the interview participants reported that their schools' student councils did not involve all students and student council was viewed as a small group of students who made decisions on behalf of the student body. Participant D, who was a student council, illustrates this issue:

> It was always like "well we don't care what the student body thinks because we're the ones making the events that make the money." But I think that really hurt us in the end because when a student who's part of a larger friend group made an idea and we didn't take that into account, if we made a different idea, just know that we would lose that whole friend group. They wouldn't participate in that event. And we really need to take into account like, I guess, cliques because this is high school, so there are cliques. And I guess we didn't take into account hearing the opinions of certain cliques so that's why turnout wasn't as great in certain events as others.

Participant D, who was a member of their high school student council, can see the flaw in not bringing together the whole student body when making decisions.

Participant A was not a member of their high school's student council and also reflected on the fact that their student council did not include the rest of the student body. They said, "I mean like the presence was pretty minimal, so it like it didn't really make a difference to me if they were there or not, and I think that that's not the goal of the student council." Participant A also explained the lack of interest in students expressing their opinions on school matters: "I think individuals weren't sort of conditioned to think about the community at large, rather to think about themselves and their own gain and getting to where they need to be."

Similar to Participant A, another participant felt their high school's student council did not attempt to involve the student council in their discussions or decisions. Because of this, the students did not view the student council as a place to suggest changes or address issues in the school community. Participant B reflects: "Like it didn't even cross our minds to go to student council when we were having issues because like they had never made themselves present as that resource." Participant G, who was a member of student council in their high school contends that students should have a place to express their opinions or bring about issues but acknowledges that student council was not that place in their high school: "I feel like if people have like, you know, like certain issues in school they should be able to have a place to express that but student council just wasn't that." The experiences of Participants B and G do not align with one of the enduring understandings of student council which is to elevate student voice.

The essential idea of Finding #2 is that the Black participants in this study did not feel as though their student councils provided a space for the student body to bring issues or opinions. This is perpetuated by the fact that many participants, including those who were student council members, felt that the student council did not involve the entire student body in their decision-making on the events or activities that would involve everybody. Students who were not student council members could not bring up their own matters of concern, nor could they have a say in the matters that student council discussed among themselves.

Finding #3: Participants can see the potential benefits of high school student council if organized appropriately, even if they were not student council members themselves.

Finding #3 relates to the third guiding research question: *What do Black high school students report about their experiences with high school student council and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation?*

Based on an analysis of the data, even participants who were not members of student council can see positive outcomes from membership in high school student council when it is organized in a way that allows for student participation.

Ninety-two percent of participants in this study indicated that they could see value in joining student council under certain circumstances. This figure includes information from participants who were high school student council members and those who were not. When asked if they would recommend participation in high school student council, 72% of survey participants said yes and 28% of survey participants gave answers dependent on other factors. There were some participants (8%) who did not answer this question.

When interview participants were asked if they see student council as being necessary for high schools, they all mentioned some positive potential aspect of having student council in high school. Some of these participants did not experience the benefits of student council personally at their own schools, but they speak about ways in which the student council organization has the potential for impact on students' lives.

Participant A, who was a member of student council in middle school but not in high school, shared their opinion: "I think a student council when done right is super beneficial or at least theoretically and from what I've heard, I think that it, it could be beneficial." Even though Participant A was not a member of student council in high school and shared that they felt their high school student council was "superficial," they still believe that student councils have a place in high schools when "done right."

Participant B was also not a member of their high school student council and shared that "there was no really like awareness of who they were" and still found some benefit of the

purpose behind student council. When asked if they felt it was necessary to have a student

council in high school, Participant B responded:

> That's a hard question, I think that, like I said, we had so many impassioned individuals
>
> who were doing more than the student council, so I think it's, it's proven that it's not
>
> necessary…. I think that they could be very helpful, but I think it doesn't actually have to
>
> look like student council either. It could look like, like putting a consultation board or
>
> like something like that up where it's more like people you can go to have a conversation,
>
> and then they can make things happen rather than kids just like sitting together, the eight
>
> of them being like what should we do for the 300-person class. Like I think it will be
>
> more effective to have a go to resource that our students can then kind of be like the
>
> secretaries for the whole... the whole grade rather than it being like they have power over
>
> the rest of the grade.

Participant B clearly sees the need for the student body to have a place to bring concerns, they

just did not feel like the student council represented that mission at their school. Therefore, like

Participant A, Participant B can see the value of a student council when organized appropriately.

Participants C and F wholeheartedly believe student councils are necessary in high

schools to give the students a voice in their high school experiences. Participant C mentioned:

> I feel like the students should get a say in what they want their high school experience to
>
> look like. And I think them having a hands-on experience and being involved will have
>
> like a better outcome with what they want to achieve rather than just faculty taking care
>
> of everything.

Participant F echoed similar sentiments: "I think student council is really important because it

actually brings out what the students like. If you want, if you want a great high school experience

then student council be it." Even though Participant F was not a member of their high school

student council, they can still see the value that the group brought to their high school

experience. Participant D, who was a student council member in high school, has mixed feelings

about the necessity of student councils:

> I'm neutral. I agree and disagree. In certain high schools, like bigger high schools, I think
>
> student councils are necessary in kind of keeping, well I guess they are, I feel like they
>
> are necessary no matter the size of the school. But if their impact is not that pivotal, if it's
>
> not significant there is no need for it. Certain student councils are just there as a, I guess,
>
> a symbol that we have some student governing body but there is no actual effect on or
>
> impact on the grade. And, in those cases, I feel as though the student council is not
>
> necessary. But if student councils are advocating to make change, that doesn't always
>
> take the form of making money for a certain goal, then I feel as though their impact and
>
> their existence is really necessary.

They understand that sometimes student councils don't fulfill their true purposes. In those cases,

Participant D does not feel it is necessary for the high school to have a student council.

Therefore, much like Participants A and B, Participant C advocates for student councils to have a

voice in changing aspects of the school community.

Finding #3 contends that the participants of this study feel that student councils are

necessary for high schools, only when they are given the chance to advocate for and have a say

in the experiences of the students in the high school. If a student council is present in the school

to simply raise money for their prom, or to stand as a symbol that there is a governing body, then

the participants do not see the value in them having a part in the school.

Finding #4: According to the participants, the purpose they most associate with their high schools' student councils was its fundraising function.

The fourth finding of this study relates to guiding research question number three, which inquired about the ways in which students' experiences are consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student council participation. The data from this study reveal that participants perceived the student councils at their schools as meeting an intended purpose of student council: fundraising (Student Project Data Base, 2019).

During the analysis, I separated the participants' remarks or references to fundraising into two categories: (a) fundraising for school activities and (b) fundraising for charitable purposes to consider the two purposes for fundraising as distinct sets of data. According to the participants, both fundraising purposes are being met by their student councils. However, not all participants reported that their schools' student councils fundraised for both school functions and for charitable purposes. Most participants (64%) indicated that their student councils fundraised for school functions most of the time or very often. Fewer participants, yet still a majority (52%) responded that their student councils fundraised for charitable purposes most of the time or very often.

There were 43% of interview participants who provided examples of how their schools' student councils raised money for charitable purposes. Further, 100% of interview participants indicated that their student councils fundraised for school functions. Notwithstanding, there was a smaller sample of examples of what the goals of the fundraising were for when it came to school functions versus charitable contributions. It became clear during the interviews that a large component to fundraising for school functions was to fund their high school

proms. Participant D directly mentioned that their student council prioritized fundraising for

prom. They illustrated this fact when they recalled:

> We wanted the best, most luxurious prom ever which is why we took so much more time
>
> on focusing on things that would make us money rather than focusing on things that
>
> wouldn't make us money like volunteering events. If it wasn't making money, we weren't
>
> really interested in it.

This participant later reiterated, "the main goal was to generate the most amount of income as

possible, so we could put into saving for prom."

> Similarly, Participant G, who was the treasurer of their high school student council. stated

one of the reasons for maintaining a student council is to fundraise for prom:

> I feel like if you don't have a student council, like who's going to plan your prom and like
>
> raise the money for it? I don't know. I think that's a huge aspect of it, and I think it is
>
> necessary for high school students.

> In response to the interview prompt "*Many people say that student councils are*

necessary for high schools, do you agree or disagree with that?" Participant F, who was not a

student council member in high school, described the importance of student council as: "You get

to host events and you get to do things and make money like fundraising towards the grade's

prom or whatever, so I think student council is really important." Another non-member reported:

"The only thing I know of that kind of like student council involvement was for prom or like our

semi dance or things like that." They further mentioned about their student council that, "they

collected student fees to plan prom. But that's like their only public interaction."

> Conversely to the small array of school activities for which to fundraise, there was a more

diverse report of charitable contributions. One participant described a variety of charities their

student council fundraised for including Christmas in the City which is an organization that

provides gifts for homeless families around the holidays. Other reported fundraisers for charity

included: clothing and food drives, personal care item collections for women in shelters, raising

money for Habitat for Humanity, and fundraisers for leukemia and lymphoma.

Although it became obvious that the only in-school event their student councils were

raising funds for was prom, from the participants' perspectives, their high school student

councils are fulfilling the purposes of fundraising for student activities. With a more diverse set

of examples, it was also clear that their councils are meeting the purpose of fundraising for

charitable purposes. This aligns with the level of importance that the participants placed on

fundraising. Many of the participants (71%) said that they found fundraising for school activities

highly or very important; and, even more of the participants (79%) reported that fundraising for

charitable purposes was highly or very important.

Finding #5: Participants of this study who were student council members in high school

credit their student council experiences for their strengthened communication skills.

The fifth finding of this research study relates to guiding research question three: What

do Black high school students report about their experiences with high school student council

and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and common portrayals of student

council participation? Analysis of the data suggest that Black high school students credit their

student council experiences with transferable skills they have used beyond high school including

communication skills and developing new friendships. This aligns well with one of the purposes

of student council: preparing children to assume adult participative roles which engage them in

the community.

A question on the survey asked participants about their views on encouraging high school students to join student council. Within the responses to this question, one participant touched upon how student council impacted them: "Student council teaches you A LOT [emphasis in original] about student leadership, collaboration, interacting with your superiors (school administration) and orchestrating initiatives/projects from start to finish. It prepared me a lot for college." This participant acknowledges that their ability to communicate with someone in a higher position of authority was developed and strengthened through their experiences in student council. These communication skills will be transferable to their engagement in the community as an adult.

The interview participants who were members of student council in high school were asked: *Are there any ways in which your involvement in student council helped you after high school or helped develop you into the kind of person you are now?*

Participant C credited the student council with deepening their communication skills as well. By becoming more involved in school, and the student council, they became more vocal about their ideas. These experiences have also led them to seek out leadership positions since graduating high school. Participant C shared their ideas on how their membership in student council helped them to develop into the person they are now: "Maybe in the aspect of being more vocal about my ideas. I'm trying to be more hands-on in school because I mean, I'm about to go back to school so I've been looking into different leadership positions like that."

Participant D and Participant E acknowledge not only gaining stronger communication skills as a result of their membership in student council but also the friendships they were able to gain in the organization, which is a byproduct of strong communication skills.

Participant D's reflection is a powerful example of the outcomes they got from their

student council participation:

It really did affect my life. I know I spent multiple weekends at school, volunteering for

events and they were really fun. That's not to say it took away from my personal life

because council did become my school life and personal life because of the friendships I

was able to form. Also being able to network as well during those events really helped. I

would also say that its impact really helped me in interviews and professional settings.

Having that experience of student government really shaped my manners and how I carry

myself in professional settings. I've always been told that I just beam with this, I guess,

aura of professionalism and maturity, so I will say I really credit student council for

allowing me to be able to become this person who is just a naturally maturing

professional when necessary.

Participant D demonstrates the transferability of skills from student council to life outside of

high school. They are taking the communication skills they learned from networking during

events and applying them to interviews and other settings.

Similar to Participant C's response, Participant E also credited the student council with

developing the communication skills necessary to create a stronger bond with the teachers and

administrators in the school when they recounted:

It gave me something to do after school. It also allowed me to make new friends and also

get closer to the faculty because we would have to talk to them a lot and also have a good

relationship with my principal.

Participant E further explained that this type of ability to communicate with the administration is

not typical for a high school student. They described: "When you're a high school student, there's

like you (motions down low with one hand) and then there's the principal (motions higher with

other hand). And then there's like nothing in between." Practicing and feeling comfortable

communicating with an adult such as the principal at a younger age will benefit Participant E,

and others, in their adult lives.

Finding #5 demonstrates that members maintained that being on student council

contributed to their eventual ability to talk to others in professional settings. This is a skill that

allows them to make friendships, network, and conduct themselves in interviews. Ultimately, the

participants credited their student councils for preparing them to be able to confidently

participate in community settings as adults.

Finding #6: When given the choice, many participants prioritized other activities over

student council.

The sixth finding from this research study relates to guiding research question one which

inquired about external factors that influence Black student membership in high school student

council. The final finding tells us that Black students in this study often placed more value on or

found more relevance in other activities and responsibilities in their life than they do on student

council.

Not having enough time was a common theme that emerged in participants' responses

when speaking about their reasons for not joining student council in high school. An open-

response question prompted participants to explain why they were not a member of their high

school student council. Some of the responses can be found below:

- "I had other extracurriculars that interfered with joining the student council."

- "I was already a student- athlete."

- "I ran track, played Volleyball, did Mock Trial, and centered most of my attention on addressing the social injustices that the school perpetuated, such as founding the BSU."

- "I had other school activities and priorities to focus on."

- "I didn't have the time to be fully committed."

- "I was a part of other extracurriculars, and I had classes that needed my attention."

- "I had other extracurriculars to focus on."

Analysis of the responses indicates that the participants had other, seemingly more preferred, activities in which to invest their time. There were 12 participants who answered this question and seven of them (58%) indicated having other activities that took precedence over joining student council. The value these students placed on their other commitments was higher than the value they placed on joining student council.

The interview participants echoed sentiments that further demonstrated their priority was within other activities. Participant B stated this fact directly in their interview when they said: "I think, with like everything else that I had going on and what my other passions were, it just wasn't as much of a priority." Participant B was a member of track, volleyball, and the Black Student Union.

Participant A reported: "I played sports in high school and... I was the president of the Black Student Union so that was a big, like one of my strongest communities [in high school]." Participant A found more value in being a part of the Black Student Union community than being a part of the student council. One of the reasons for this is that they didn't feel the student council could provide them with the sense of "family" they were seeking.

Both Participants A and B mentioned joining the Black Student Union as a way of being a part of a community that could make a difference in the lives of others. They found a sense of purpose and belonging in this group that they felt the student council couldn't offer them.

Further analysis of Participant E's interview transcript further supports Finding #1. When describing the open-door policy for student council as described in Finding #1, Participant E described, "like obviously people have sports, but we didn't want to be like 'Oh, if you do a sport like you can't come because you have to choose between student council.' So, people sometimes would come early and then leave." While this may be an effective way to expand membership to more high school students, it demonstrates that some students prioritize their other activities, such as sports, over student council by deciding to skip the student council meeting to attend the other activity. There was also one participant on the survey who indicated they dropped their student council membership altogether and reported having "too many sports and other activities."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented an analysis of the survey and interview data that corresponded to each Guiding Research Question. I then explain the six findings derived from that analysis. Chapter Five will discuss the findings and examine how they relate to existing literature. Within Chapter Five, I will also discuss the implications for practice and scholarship, future studies that could build on these findings, and recommendations for educators and the future of student councils in high schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINAL

REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This final chapter contains four sections. It opens with an overview of the research study

and a summary of each of the preceding four chapters. The second section reviews the research

findings within the context of the existing literature and discusses the implications this study has

for practitioners involved with student council, including educators, student council advisors, and

student council administrators. As a reminder, the data discussed in the findings, and

consequently in this chapter, is data gathered from Black individuals only. Following the

discussion of findings, is a section with recommendations for schools and student council

leaders. There is then a section discussing possible future research ideas relating to this study.

The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on how this study has impacted me as an

educational advocate, leader, and student council advisor.

Study Summary

The premise for this study evolved from an observation I made at a 2017 student council

conference in Massachusetts. Toward the end of his speech, the state's student council president

acknowledged himself as a Black man and asked everyone in attendance to look around the gym

and notice the number of people who looked "like him." When I looked around the gym, I

quickly understood his salient point; there was a noticeable lack of racial diversity among the

students in the crowd. It was then that I decided to focus my study on students' attitudes toward

student council. Because of the apparent racial divide in student councils, I designed my study to

illuminate the voices of Black students. To do this, I developed three research questions that

would guide this phenomenological study and help me to learn about the current lived

experiences of Black students within high school student councils. The questions were:

1. What external factors influence Black student participation in high school student

    council?

2. What intrapersonal factors influence Black student participation in high school student

    council?

3. What do Black high school students report about their experiences with high school

    student council and in what ways are their experiences consistent with ideals and

    common portrayals of student council participation?

Within this study, I employed two methods of data collection: a survey and in-depth interviews.

A total of twenty-five surveys meeting the delimitations were submitted and seven interviews

were conducted.

Chapter One of this dissertation outlined an overview of the entire study. Within this

chapter, I included an introduction that provided more details about my motive for studying

Black student participation in student council. I also provided a statement of the problem, a look

into the literature reviewed leading up to the study, and an overview of the research methodology

including the data collection and analysis procedures.

A review of existing scholarship is provided in Chapter Two of this dissertation. This

chapter looked at the relevant existing literature on topics relating to the study. These areas of

literature include: (a) the democratic purposes of public schooling, (b) extracurricular activities

as avenues to achieving the democratic purposes of schools, (c) the nature of student council, (d)

areas of motivation, and (f) selected theoretical and historical perspectives explaining Black

student participation. The literature examined in Chapter 2 helps to situate the purpose of the

study by illustrating that a core purpose of education in America is connected to the ideals rooted

in the foundation of student council. The literature demonstrates a decline in student council

participation by Black students and alludes to possible reasons for this decline.

Chapter Three provided an explanation of the research methods used in this study. It

explained the premise behind the use of a phenomenological methodology and detailed the data

collection and analysis processes.

Chapter Four is where the findings from this study are revealed. I first presented an

analysis of the data pertaining to the three Guiding Research Questions from both the surveys

and the interviews. I described the themes that emerged from the data and then described how

the analysis of data led to each of the research findings. This analysis resulted in six research

findings relating to the three research questions that guided this study. The research findings are:

1. Participants indicate that they are more likely to join student council when they feel they

    can have a voice to make a difference in their school community.

2. Participants indicate that their high schools' student councils are not meeting their

    intended purpose of providing a forum in which all students can use their voices to

    express opinions on school matters.

3. Participants can see the potential benefits of high school student council if organized

    appropriately, even if they were not student council members themselves.

4. According to the participants, the purpose they most associate with their high schools'

    student councils was its fundraising function.

5. Participants of this study who were student council members in high school credit their

    student council experiences for their strengthened communication skills.

6. When given a choice, many participants prioritized other activities over student council.

Discussion of Research Findings

This section will include a discussion of the six research findings. Explanations of how each finding is situated within current scholarship and its implications for practitioners are included.

A Disconnect Between Expectation and Experience

Finding #1 indicates that the Black high school students from this study were more likely to join student council when they felt they could use their voices to help their school community. This finding is connected to research questions one and two which examined the intrapersonal and external motivational factors for seeking membership in student council. The participants' personal views of student council were a motivating factor for their decision to seek membership in student council. They viewed student council as an arena to use their voice to make a difference in their school. Ultimately, the participants in this study hoped they would be able to positively impact their school community through student council.

Finding #2, however, revealed that the participants of this study tended to regard student councils in their schools as not meeting the fundamental purpose of promoting students' voices. This apparent disconnect aligns with the third guiding research question. Although most participants expected that they would be able to make a difference in their schools by becoming members of their schools' student council, their actual exposure to or encounters with the organization did not live up to their expectations.

Implications for Scholarship

Dating back to 386 B.C., Plato organized a group of scholars to exercise their voice in the ongoings of the school operations (McKown, 1944). While this was not directly stated to be a student council organization, it resembles the premise of what more recent scholars have deemed

to be an essential function of student councils: providing a forum in which all students can use their voices to express opinions on school matters (Guardian of Democracy, 2011; Mathes, 1975). In this study, 67% of participants felt that providing a forum for students to use their voices is highly important. Further, 57% of participants felt it is essential to advocate for improvements in their school communities. Coupled with data analyzed from the interviews, it was found that these beliefs fueled the participants' motivation for seeking membership in their high school student councils. Scholars have maintained that individuals make decisions based on their values (Crow et al., 1991; Güss, 2004). The desire to have a voice and make a difference in their school community were two of the values motivating the participants when they were deciding whether to seek out membership in student council.

Scholarship from McFarland and Starmanns (2009) and Craigie et al. (1993) mirror the themes in Finding #2 in which the participants I interviewed reported that, unfortunately, the opportunity to share their voice was rarely afforded to them. Over half (72%) of the participants indicated that their student council rarely or only some of the time provided a forum for them to express their concerns on school issues. Accounts from interview participants further supported the survey responses. They described their student councils as uninterested in the student body's ideas and not as a place to bring concerns or ideas. The adults involved in the student council were inattentive to the students' voices. When student council is facilitated in a way that lacks student voice from all students, the school's sense of community spirit may be weakened (McFarland & Starmanns, 2009) and students may start to have negative views of the student council organization (Craigie et al., 1993). The results of this study support literature from Craigie et al. and McFarland and Starmanns. Participant A wanted to have a voice and make a difference in their school community but noted that they did not get out of student council in

middle school what they were hoping for and therefore did not seek out membership in high

school. Instead, Participant A engaged in the Black Student Union at their school and remained a

member until graduation. The concept and fulfillment of the Black Student Union aligned more

with the identity and values of Participant A than the student council did. They described the

Black Student Union experience at their high school as:

> You're an underrepresented minority and you're going through a struggle with a ...with
>
> like a small group of other underrepresented minorities and there's sort of like a common
>
> experience that brings everyone together in that way. And the community was a little bit
>
> smaller and we…we sort of used our time and our efforts to try to improve the Black
>
> experience at [our] high school.

Participant B also mentioned joining the Black Student Union at their high school because they

felt they could make a difference for a group of students and did not feel that the student council

would offer that same type of impact. They explained their overall high school experience as "a

very dehumanizing experience" and continued to say, "I think that a lot of people, including

myself, didn't even realize like 'Oh, we can do something to change the experience.' So, when I

was approached about [joining] the Black Student Union, it was like a life-changing point itself."

It has been found that "Black students may be more apt to join student groups because

those spaces give them access to a group of like-minded individuals who will likely support their

goals" (Miller, 2017). This assertion supports the theory of homophily which is "the tendency of

people to associate with others similar to themselves" (Currarini et al., 2009). Likewise,

Fredricks et al. (2002) found that adolescents remained in specific activities because they became

a part of their identity which supports Kadushin's (2011) thoughts regarding homophily and

structural location. He explained how individuals, groups, and organizations who spend a lot of

time together end up with similar interests. Participants A and B support the relevance of the

theory of homophily to this phenomenon because their decision to not seek out membership in

high school student council was based on their desire to make a difference and work with like-

minded individuals. They felt that they would not be able to have a voice on their student

councils and observed that their student councils did not have the type of impact they would have

liked to have had. They both expressed wanting to associate themselves with people who would

listen to their voices and help them make a difference in their school communities. These are the

two factors that Kadushin (2011) claimed support the theory of homophily. He wrote how a

person is likely to want to engage with others who have common interests and values. They are

also more likely to associate themselves with a group that will provide them the resources,

encouragement, and space needed to work on the actions they deem important. Kadushin (2011)

illustrates homophily using the analogy of "the chicken-and-egg situation" (p. 19). In other

words, in some cases, it is unclear if all the members of a group had the same interests prior to

associating with each other or if, by associating with each other, they developed common

interests.

     There is scholarship asserting that adolescents are motivated by the influence of their

peers (Burns & Darling, 2002; Jensen 2009; Black, 2002) and teens' relationships with their

peers can be an influencing factor in whether they participate in extracurricular activities

(Fredricks et al., 2002; Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012). Accounts from Participants A and

B were consistent with these research findings on extracurricular participation because they both

engaged in the Black Student Union due to their relationships with the other students who were

involved. Participant B, especially, did not feel a connection with the students in student council

nor did they have a positive perception of the impact of their high school student council.

Participant B did not feel their voice would be heard through student council but, from the influence of other peers, joined the Black Student Union instead.

The Black Student Union is a critical organization in high schools, especially those that are comprised of a predominantly White population, because it can help a Black student feel a sense of belonging and community that they may not otherwise feel. As Siddle Walker (2003) explained, the desegregation of schools brought with it a loss of the preparation of Black students with the skills deemed necessary for them to face racism in the outside world. The Black Student Union, as demonstrated by Participants A and B, can be a place where Black students can come together to work through and discuss those common experiences. Nevertheless, schools should not portray a community where Black students should feel that the only beneficial organization for them to join is the Black Student Union. Student council organizations should be promoted in a way to support all students and should be an organization that can partner with the Black Student Union, if welcomed, to amplify the voices of all students and help educate the community in ways that will inhibit the microaggressions and overt racism that Black students are facing.

If students have an impression that the people in the student council are there to use their voice and make a difference, and they know about themselves that they want to exercise their voice, then they are more likely to seek out membership in the organization. However, if students notice that their school's student council does not actually get to make any real impact, then those students who desire to make a difference will not seek out membership and will try to find a group that aligns greater with their values.

Implications for Practitioners

Among its many purposes, the student council aims to bring together students from diverse backgrounds to have joint responsibility for their common experiences (About National Student Council, 2009). This purpose is a need for society at large. For our democratic society to thrive, it requires people to work together to explore disagreements and common goals. It is logical, therefore, to emphasize skills such as advocating for change during young adulthood. Whether stated explicitly or not, student council is an arena in which students of all backgrounds can come together with their school community to engage in this type of work by uplifting and attending to each other's voices.

Findings #1 and #2 demonstrate that even though students were motivated to join student council to exercise their voice, they were not finding the opportunity to do so in a way that would help make a difference in their school. Therefore, according to participants of this study, the student councils they experienced were not meeting one of the prominent goals of the organization. With the increasing emphasis on college and career readiness as prominently promoted in the Common Core State Standards, high schools, arguably, are left with some uncertainty about where and when to find ways to increase the civic engagement of current and future generations by developing their ability to speak up, make a change, and assume leadership roles. Since its origin, student council has had the purpose of being a forum for these purposes; but, school leaders and student council advisors need to ensure that they are reflecting on their school's purpose for having a student council and discovering ways to make student council more relevant to their students.

It has been noted that educational policies place a large emphasis on college and career readiness (Allen, 2016; Hess, 2012; Joselowsky, 2007) and leave much to be desired when

determining how to prepare students to be civically engaged in their communities. Scholars have

noticed the struggle that schools face to engage students in meaningful and relevant ways that

will strengthen their civic understanding, and they are urging school leaders to find ways to

incorporate civic education into students' daily encounters at school (Educating for American

Democracy, 2021; Guardian of Democracy, 2011; Postman, 1996). When discussing what

exactly schools should be preparing students for, Allen (2016) offers the term "participatory

readiness" meaning that students will be prepared to effectively participate in all areas of life,

including civic and political life as well as in their careers, their communities, and in love. She

reminds readers that all students should be engaged in ways that prepare them for future political

participation. While the student council may not be able to directly address all aspects of a

student's future aspirations, it certainly can address the civic and political readiness aspects.

The *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy* (EAD), a framework for advancing

civics and history learning, spearheaded by Danielle Allen, "sets out goals for a 21st–century

history and civic education, in support of civic strength" (Educating for American Democracy,

2011, p. 2). It sets actionable and measurable goals for improving the civic knowledge and skills

of our youth and provides guidance on how to renew the civic education in our K-12 educational

system. The EAD Roadmap maintains that the time allotted in the classroom for civic teaching is

not adequate and students need civic experiences and opportunities outside of the classroom. One

example offered by the EAD Roadmap is through the use of simulations of passing laws and

regulations, something which could be done through a student council organization by student

policy making. These simulations should include all students, and not just those directly involved

with the student council organization.

Furthermore, school leaders may want to consider taking an inventory of what their student councils are currently addressing and accomplishing during their time together and could work with student council advisors and their students to align their operations with the civic mission of their school and of the EAD Roadmap. Part of this work needs to include the voices of all students enrolled in the school because as the EAD Roadmap reminds readers: "our form of government necessarily invests in all young people the chance to become civic and political leaders" (Educating for American Democracy, 2011, p. 4). This is a critical step in bringing vitality back to the student council organization and diminishing the superficial nature participants of this study perceived. Levinson (2012b) explained that students of color are less likely to engage in typical school-based activities intended to broaden their civic engagement because they see themselves as part of a system that is failing them. Levinson's claim supports the experiences of Participants A and B and until their schools change the conditions around student council, it is unlikely that Black students will see the organization as relevant to their lives. By including the voices of not only the student council members, but also those who are not directly involved, all students will feel welcomed, valued, and experience the effects of using their voice to make a change. This feeling, what Allen (2016) refers to as "verbal empowerment," will be carried with the students after leaving high school and will have an impact on the way they view and contribute to their communities.

Potential Benefits of High School Student Council

Finding #3 demonstrates that although not all the Black students in this study were student council members in thriving student councils, they can still see value in student council being an effective organization in a high school if it is structured in a way that allows for meaningful student input.

Implications for Scholarship

Finding #3 explains that participants of this study, both members and non-members of student council, believe that there is a benefit to having student councils in high school. However, the participants do not feel it is necessary if organized in a way that does not allow for any student voice or meaningful change. The issues the participants in this study acknowledged are similar to the issues found over thirty years ago in a sampling of empirical studies discussed in Chapter 2. Schmuck & Schmuck (1990) found that some student councils only focused on social events which led to ineffective councils that were incapable of meeting the ideals of student council. A focus on fundraising for social events was prominent in accounts from the participants in this study and helped contribute to Finding #4. It is clear, though, that some student councils referred to in this study elevated the importance of fundraising to be one of their main priorities and disregarded the other prominent ideals of student councils. Though participants were able to recognize the importance of fundraising, they were disheartened at the lack of other opportunities their student councils were providing them. They did not let their own experiences diminish their entire view of the student council organization in general. Many participants were able to describe ways in which a student council could be a meaningful organization for a high school. One participant encouraged an open forum where all students can come together to discuss concerns and ideas. Another participant mentioned having a consultation board where anyone from the grade can post their ideas and questions and then a meeting with the grade to discuss them.

Implications for Practitioners

All participants in this study acknowledged that if a student council organization can structure and facilitate themselves in a positive way that prioritizes student input from all

students, meaningful change, and community outreach, then the organization would be beneficial

for high school students. Not all participants were asked to elaborate on this topic; however,

some participants offered their thoughts. One participant mentioned that they felt they and the

other students who were part of marginalized groups at their high school, specifically Black,

Native American, and Latinx students, did not feel like they were encouraged by the community

to participate in groups such as student council. This participant mentioned that celebrating and

welcoming that type of diversity into student organizations would be one of the first steps in

creating a student council organization that would be beneficial in a high school setting, but that

they would first have to feel welcomed in the school community as a whole. When speaking

about their personal experience, this participant said, "I had a pretty bad experience with my high

school and like the student body in general, so I think I wasn't very passionate about working for

like the student council." This participant further mentioned, "a bunch of black kids would get

sent to the library if their teacher didn't feel like dealing with them. They would just tell them

that they have like a C or B if they would just like leave the class alone." These actions likely

contributed to an unwelcoming culture in the school and perpetuated a feeling of not belonging

in the school. However, this participant still reported seeing a necessity and potential for a

student council organization to be established in high school if organized in a way that does not

"give power over the rest of the grade."

Other participants mentioned that an issue they felt their student councils faced was the

minimal input they had on school operations, going so far as to say that nobody even thought of

student council as a place to bring concerns. As seen in the studies by McFarland & Starmann's

(2009), Schmuck & Schmuck (1990), and Craigie et al. (1993), the structure and design of the

student council contribute heavily to the perceived success of the organization. Schmuck &

Schmuck (1990) examined 25 districts and found that the students had little impact on any of the school's operations. Craigie et al. (1993) found that student body did not feel well represented by the student council and did not view it as a space for all students to participate. Similarly, McFarland and Starmanns (2009) explained that when students view the student council as adult controlled, the organization is likely to be regarded as irrelevant by the student body. Though many of the students in this study reported experiences similar to the findings of these studies, their view is that student council organizations would be more worthwhile if designed in a way that combats the issues found in the student councils discussed in McFarland & Starmann's (2009), Schmuck & Schmuck (1990), and Craigie et al. (1993).

The lived experiences and recommendations from the participants in this study are related to the promising practices of student councils as stated in Chapter 2. The accounts reported in Chapter Two showed glimpses of how successful student councils promoted student voice and provided input in school operations as described in the accounts of Flutter (2006) and Black (2005). The student council described in Scribner's (2007) study based in Japan worked together to determine what they wanted to accomplish and then came together with the rest of the school community to fulfill their goals. School practitioners should keep these models in mind when working with their school's student council. Giving the students the opportunity to amplify their voices is a critical function of having a student council that lives up to the foundational ideals of the organization.

A positive interpretation of Finding #3 is that the participants in this study maintain positive views of the student council organization, even if they felt excluded from the group as high school students. Student council advisors and leaders should listen to the thoughts of their student community, both members and non-members of student council, to hear their ideas on

what a successful student council could look like. Because the students are the ones experiencing

discontentment with their student councils, they would be a sagacious starting point for

practitioners to gather insight. Listening to the thoughts and ideas of students who are student

council members as well as those who are not student council members can help school leaders

and student council advisors discover trends of satisfaction (areas of student council that should

remain unchanged) as well as trends of dissatisfaction (areas of student council they could

consider improving). It is reasonable to assume that many of those same students will be able to

offer ideas for improvement, making it a prime opportunity for school leaders and student

council advisors to partner with their student body. Since the students in this study have not lost

hope in the student council as an organization, this bottom-up approach to learning more about

the desires of the students regarding possible structures and processes may help to reinvigorate

the notions and outcomes of student councils within high schools today and revive the spirit of

student council for all student demographics. Based on the input from the small sample in this

study, this approach has the potential to help schools return to the core ideas of student council,

including civic participation and self-governance. This bottom-up approach may also contribute

to minimizing the exclusionary nature perceived by students.

Promising Practices of Student Councils in This Study: Fundraising and Communication

Skills

Among its many purposes, one of the reasons for having a student council organization at

a high school is its fundraising function. Finding #4 aligns with this purpose and connects with

this study's third guiding research question. Also aligning with the third research question is

Finding #5 which states: Participants of this study who were student council members in high

school credit their student council experiences for their strengthened communication skills.

Fundraising and communication skills are both transferrable skills from student council to the outside world.

Implications for Scholarship

Throughout the literature, there are a variety of functions and purposes related to the student council organization. One function of high school student councils that is infrequently given much attention is fundraising (Fitchet, 1958; Dickerson, 1999; Student Project Database, 2019). Fitchet (1958) believed that students learned a lot through fundraising. He maintained that earning money for school dances and other activities helped students develop transferrable skills that they could use after their time in student council to be contributing members in their communities. Fitchet's scholarship aside, there has not been much written about the fundraising function of student councils.

The students in this study also fundraised for charity which is one way that student councils can attempt to engage students in civic-minding thinking. Studies show that youth who engage in volunteering opportunities are more likely to continue to serve others into adulthood (Janoski et al., 1998). By fundraising for charitable purposes, the participants in this study are learning how to put others ahead of themselves and to contribute to their community which ultimately helps to fulfill one of the purposes of schools in a democratic society: to teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences in order to help others (Dewey, 1938; Rose, 2009; Neem, 2015).

Another promising outcome of the student councils in this study is the contribution of improved communication skills. It has been reported that including students in school decision-making processes develops communication skills (Flutter, 2006). Though the participants of this study did not report that they felt included in school decision-making, many of them did report

having an increased sense of confidence when communicating with others. Participant E

specifically credited their student council experiences for helping them be able to communicate

with advisors and peers at their college.

Implications for Practitioners

As noted by the participants in this study, the most prominent school activity that their

student councils raised funds for was their high school prom. In fact, Participant B sometimes

felt that prom was the only reason their school had a student council. They mentioned:

> I have no idea what they did in terms of actually helping the student body or like I don't
>
> know planning activities, making changes, or things like that. Like even our pep rallies
>
> were planned by like the faculty rather than student council, so I have no idea like really
>
> what they were doing, other than preparing for prom.

Participant C reflected on the purpose of their student council also being to fundraise for prom:

> We wanted the best, most luxurious prom ever which is why we took so much more time
>
> on focusing on things that would make us money rather than focusing on things that
>
> wouldn't make us money like volunteering events. If it wasn't making money, we weren't
>
> really interested in it.

Although fundraising is a function of student council as stated in the literature and corroborated

by the participants in this study, student council advisors need to be cognizant of the fact that it

should not be the only function of their high school student councils. Student councils were not

conceived and designed to fund proms; they were designed to support student voice and civic

engagement. Only one interview participant in this study did not credit their student council for

funding their prom. When asked about that, they explained that their school's student council

does not fundraise for prom and credited that to the fact that they attended a predominantly

White school in a suburb. This participant mentioned that students pay "class dues" each year

which help to subsidize the cost of prom.

To Join or Not to Join

Finding #6 revealed that Black students in this study prioritized other activities, such as

sports and the Black Student Union, over student council. This finding directly relates to the first

guiding research question which inquired about the external motivational factors influencing

Black students' decisions on whether or not to seek membership in student council.

Implications for Scholarship

Researchers have discovered a variety of motivators for adolescents. These include

enjoyment, fulfillment of a goal, adult or peer influence, and self-awareness of their identity

and/or values. A study by Wiesman (2012) indicated that 44% of high school students felt their

highest level of motivation came from their own goals. While several participants indicated that

they joined student council because they thought it would help them fulfill a goal of getting into

college, many others reported not joining student council because of other commitments. Some

specific commitments that interfered with membership in the student council included sports,

schoolwork, mock trial, and the Black Student Union. Participants were not directly asked if they

had previous exposure to these activities prior to high school which may have contributed to

their interest and loyalty in high school. Ralph McNeal Jr. (1998) asserted that "students are

more likely to participate in an extracurricular activity in high school if they have been in a

similar activity in middle school" (pp. 184-5). Table 3 shows that 53% of Black participants in

this study reported that they did not have a student council in any grade prior to grade nine, and

12% of Black participants were unsure if their schools offered student council memberships prior

to grade nine. This means 36% of Black participants reported student council exposure before

grade nine. It is possible that more Black students might prioritize student council in high school

if they have more exposure to the organization prior to grade 9 because they may have a stronger

connection and interest in it.

Implications for Practitioners

Wiesman (2012) reported that "students are intrinsically motivated when they have a

natural curiosity and interest in a topic" (p. 105). By providing students with the opportunity to

form a connection with student council prior to grade nine, schools would be able to help foster

more of a curiosity and interest in the organization thus encouraging more students to seek out

membership in student council in high school.

A possible barrier for students who have an interest in student council is the time

commitment. This study found that when faced with the opportunity to seek out membership in

student council, many students are prioritizing other extracurricular activities and sports over

student council. Student council meetings are typically held after school hours, making it

difficult for all students to attend. Even if interested in attending, sporting events and other

extracurricular activities may get in the way. The findings from this study are consistent with

scholarship from Dickerson (1999), a student council advisor for over twenty years, who

believed that there were two possible factors detracting student interest in student council: high

academic expectations and high interest in sports. Some students may not feel they have the time

to engage in the student council because they must dedicate time to fulfilling their academic

endeavors. Others, including a group of participants from this study, presume that academic

merit is a condition of membership and therefore lose interest in the organization because they

do not see in themselves the type of academic excellence they feel their school's student council

members need to possess. In Meghan Holland's (2012) study regarding a school that is 92%

White students, the minority female students reported they found it difficult to find a group they

felt comfortable around. The minority males in Holland's study, on the other hand, felt they had

a support system within the sports they played which was a common activity taking precedence

over student council from the participants in this study as well. Though these accounts are

consistent with the ideas of Social Integration Theory and homophily, school leaders need to

consider whether the perceptions and practices of their student councils contribute to the type of

angst in students as felt by the females in Holland's study. All students, whether directly

involved or not, should feel welcomed and supported to join the organization because it is a

representation of the school and student body.

      If the student council is not radiating a welcoming and non-exclusive environment, it is

safe to assume that the school's culture in and of itself also does not foster a welcoming and

inclusive nature. School leaders and student council advisors should be concerned with the ways

in which their students view their student council organization and their students' reasons for

deciding whether to seek membership in the organization.

<div align="center">

Recommendations

</div>

      Below are key recommendations for school leaders and student council advisors who

want to revive the spirit of civic engagement in their high school student councils.

Recommendation #1: State and school leaders as well as student council advisors need to

critically examine the patterns of demographic makeup of student councils and how and to

whom student council is being promoted.

    The first recommendation includes two important features for all stakeholders involved with

    student council to consider. The first part urges stakeholders to examine who is involved in

student council. The second part encourages stakeholders to examine how and to whom they

are promoting student council within school districts.

Part One: Critically Examine the Patterns of Demographic Makeup of Student Councils

This first recommendation as a result of this study is not only for student council advisors,

but it is for school leaders, state student council leaders, and the Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education. When I was initially looking for information on the racial makeup of

student councils in Massachusetts, I found no results. There is nobody paying attention to the

students who are joining our schools' student councils. Nobody is tracking the demographic

makeup of student councils and trying to ensure that we combat the decline of Black students

joining student councils from 1972-2004 (Weinberger, 2014).

Keeping in mind the ideas of Ladson-Billings (1998) and the concepts of Critical Race

Theory, schools should be able to create a better future for their students by keeping in mind the

conditions of the past. If there is no reporting system for the demographic information regarding

student council members from year to year, how can schools be sure they are not leaving out a

group of students or if students in a specific demographic are losing interest in student council

over time? A reporting system would also benefit the state because the Massachusetts

Association of Student Councils or the student council sub-committee from the Massachusetts

School Administrators' Association could actively reach out to schools who appear to have a

subgroup of students losing interest in student council. They could work together to partner

schools with other to brainstorm new ways to revitalize their councils and regain interest by all

students.

Because the desegregation of schools brought so many negative experiences and emotions to

Black students in the past, fewer Black students sought out opportunities such as student council.

Laws and court decisions mandating that Blacks and Whites be given equal opportunity have not been followed with policies that ensure equal opportunities are being taken advantage of by both populations. If there were to be a policy in place for districts to report the demographic information of the students enrolled in their student council, they would also be more mindful of who they are reaching out to for the opportunity. Schools could also use this data to compare it to the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity tracked by the state to see if the percentages of students participating in the student council are similar to the percentages of students in each subgroup.

It is essential for student council advisors and school administers to notice the racial makeup of their student councils and bear in mind that, according to the theory of homophily, it is possible that Black students may not seek out membership if the student council is portrayed or perceived as a majority White group (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Kadushin, 2011). Recall, for example, this reflection of Participant B:

> I don't know of a Black person or a Latinx person who ever ran for anything like that. Like I…I… can't think of anyone who ran for anything like a position of power or to have that kind of position…. I think like we didn't even get to that step yet because the community doesn't really encourage that diversity.

Part Two: Critically Examine How and To Whom Student Council is Being Promoted

In the experiences and observations of Participant B mentioned above, students in their school did not seek out leadership positions due to the perceived lack of encouragement from the community. This perception may come from the existing makeup of the student council organization, the conversations the students overhear in the halls, or personal experiences of not being encouraged themselves. As exhorted by Levinson (2012b): "Schools also give— or

deny— students and teachers opportunities to practice a variety of civic skills and behaviors via

classroom procedures and routines, curricula and pedagogies, interactions in the hallways and

cafeteria, and cocurricular and extracurricular activities" (p. 174). Therefore, all school personnel

need to be cognizant of who they are—and arguably more important, are *not*—encouraging to

seek out leadership opportunities such as student council.

While some participants of this study indicated their academic obligations and other

extracurricular activities as reasons for not seeking membership in their high school's student

council, others noted a sense of exclusion. Two theories, as discussed above, that are plausible

explanations for these exclusionary feelings are homophily and Social Integration Theory. If

students do not see people who look and act like themselves in the organization or see anything

about themselves that they could contribute to the organization, they are less likely to seek out

membership. This study introduces the question about whether student council is perceived as

being a domain primarily made up of students who have personal and family lives that privilege

them with the time and social status needed to participate in the group. One way to combat this

feeling of inferiority is for teachers to be mindful to whom and how they are promoting the

student council opportunity. The adults in school buildings should also strive to ensure that

student council is not viewed as an elite group of students but rather a welcoming environment

where all students' voices are heard. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 2, relationships with teachers

are a known motivational factor for adolescents. Students are more likely to seek membership in

an organization that they may not have an initial interest in if a respected teacher reaches out to

them about it. It has also been mentioned that peer influence and homophily are contribute to

adolescents' decision making. If student council is only being promoted by White students and

teachers in a district, it is likely that a higher percentage of White students will seek membership.

State and school leaders need to remind student council advisors that student council advertisements and promotional materials need to include a diverse group of students and teachers.

Recommendation #2: Make the goals of the student council transparent to all school community members.

It was apparent through this study that the goals of specific student councils are not widely known by their school communities, and, in some cases, by the student council members themselves. I was able to find written goals for only three of the schools' student councils that are represented in this study. All three of them had a common purpose of promoting students' voices. Moreover, one of the participants in this study, who was a student council member, mentioned that she did not even realize there were goals for her school's student council. This was mentioned in her interview after I read her school's student council goals to her. Student council advisors should take an inventory of the goals of their student council and how they are working to achieve those goals. It is equally important to share these goals with the student council members so they know what they should be working toward. For an even greater impact, schools should involve the voices of the students when generating the goals of student council. If they will be the group of individuals working to achieve the goals, it only makes sense that they play a part in brainstorming and developing the goals.

Furthermore, student councils should make their goals transparent to the rest of the school community because student council should not be a secret society of a small group of students; it should be a group of students who want to work with their peers to make their educational experience and community the best it can be. Even though a student may not be an official member of their school's student council, it does not mean that their voice should not be heard. If

the student council's goals are clear to the entire school community, then other students may be able to offer ideas on how to work toward the goals, even if they are not student council members themselves. It is also possible that one of the goals of the organization may be of particular interest to a student who is not a member of student council. By hearing about the goals of the organization, the student may become more inclined to join. Miller (2017) argues that "Black students may be more apt to join student groups because they give them access to a group of like-minded individuals who will likely support their goals."

Recommendation #3: Student council advisors need to be trained to allow, embrace, and encourage student voices about matters concerning more than student activities.

It was common for me to hear students talk about raising money for dances through their student council. In fact, prior to a thorough analysis of the data, I became concerned that raising money for school dances was the only function of the student councils in this study. A participant quote that continues to replay in my mind is "If it wasn't making money, we weren't really interested in it" (Participant D). Because of this, it is essential that student council advisors work toward rebranding their student councils from a group of students planning prom to a group of students engaged in civic-minded thinking.

Student council advisors must ensure they are incorporating ways to empower students to use their voices to speak about school issues. Flutter (2006) revealed that including students in decision-making processes in school develops life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, communication, and citizenship which are vital to life in a democratic society. Listening to the viewpoints of a variety of individuals provides the student council members the benefit of having to listen to an consider the opinions of a diverse group of other people. Together, the students will need to find mutually beneficial solutions to the problems they are facing as a collective

school community rather than the adults controlling all the decisions. The experience of listening

to the viewpoints of others is something that the students will need to continue grappling with as

they enter their adult civic lives.

      If students do not experience their voices impactful on school decisions, they are likely to

lose faith that they can have a voice or make a difference in their communities as well.

Fortunately, the individuals involved in this study demonstrate that they have not lost faith yet.

They can still see the potential that student council has to offer in a high school setting, and some

even indicated their desire to work on rejuvenating and rebranding the concept of student

council. It's possible that their ideas might not take traction immediately, but the opportunity of

success is worth the journey. Postman's (1996) illustration of America expresses the sentiments

from both Finding #3 and Recommendation #3. He writes:

> The story says that experimenting and arguing is what Americans do. It does not matter if
>
> you are unhappy about the way things are. Everybody is unhappy about the way things
>
> are. We experiment to make things better, and we argue about what experiences are
>
> worthwhile and whether or not those we try are any good. And when we experiment, we
>
> make mistakes, and reveal our ignorance, and our timidity, and our naivete. But we go on
>
> because we have faith in the future—that we can make better experiments and better
>
> arguments. This, it seems to me, is a fine and noble story, and I should not be surprised if
>
> students are touched by it and find in it a reason for learning (p. 142).

Though the participants in this study were not overtly impressed with their student council

experiences, they were equipped to offer experiments for improvement, if they were only given

the chance to do so. The leaders of our schools and student council organizations need not be

afraid of what might happen if they bring the students into the decision making about upholding

the fundamental purposes and ideals of student council; they should be wary of what might

happen if they do not. The students in this study expressed discontentment with the very

organization that is supposed to provide them autonomy.

If schools want students to have a positive view of civic involvement, a view where they

desire to embrace each other and participate in their communities, there need to be teachers and

student council advisors who view schools and extracurricular activities as essential places for

developing that stance. There needs to be teachers who take the ideas of students into mind and

encourage them to share their thoughts. Teachers must be trained to understand the benefits of

fostering and promoting student voice and be willing to work together with the entire school

community to engage each other and their students in civic-minded thinking. Acknowledging

Postman's sentiments, if schools do embrace the voices and "experiments" of the students, it

might help reengage otherwise uninterested students in their schooling experience.

The adults involved in the student council should also model the engagement they are

seeking from students. Part of this behavior includes making it possible for students to see that

they can collaborate and problem-solve to make a difference in their school and community.

These improvements should not be solely about social events but should also include authentic

ways to encourage students to engage in civic thinking and community improvement. For a

White student with privilege, planning a dance might be exactly what they are interested in

getting out of their student council experience, but for a Black student struggling to have their

voice heard daily within their community and school, planning a dance might not appear at the

top of their priority list. Students in this study mentioned wanting to speak up about the racism

and microaggressions they faced in their schools but knew that student council was not an arena

for that type of discussion. Whether that is due to the ignorance of the student council advisors,

or overt racism, it needs to shift. As Siddle Walker (2003) explained, there has been a loss of preparation of Black students for facing a world where racism is so prevalent. By further alienating Black students from student council and making it a place where their voices are not welcomed or acknowledged, schools are furthering the racial divide in their schools. If student council advisors had more training on how to support Black students and the issues they face when they attempt to be civically engaged, our student councils could become a space for growth within schools. Students of all races could work together to improve the experiences of all of their peers rather than student council being viewed as a space for an elite group of students who plan events for their grade.

Recommendation #4: Schools should dedicate time during the school day for all students to engage with student council to provide a voice for all students while also eliminating competing demands and feelings of exclusion.

Though not stated directly by any participant in this study, it is possible that transportation could be a reason why a student could not attend a student council meeting after school. McNeal (1998) found that high school students with a higher socioeconomic status were 1.4 times more likely to join student council and service groups in high school than students with a low socioeconomic status. Further, Scribner (2007) found student councils meeting the foundational purposes of the organization when they provided time during the day for their students to meet. Participants in this study reported competing demands on their time as a factor that prevented them from joining student council. Therefore, school leaders may want to ponder how their student council organization, in general, is situated within their schools and consider it becoming a forum that is untethered from the school's other after-school extracurricular activities. They could work with their student council advisors and teacher-leaders on finding

ways to incorporate the student council into the daily operations and curricula of the school to ensure equity and equal opportunity for all because if student council is not representative of all voices, it fails to replicate the type of democratic experiences we want students to promote and encounter after high school.

I recognize that it might not be feasible for schools to adjust their daily schedule to allow student council meetings to take place during the day. However, findings from this study suggest that, in some instances, existing systems and structures associated with student councils may be contributing to inequity and exclusivity for students. If schools truly want their student councils to be a place for students to bring concerns and suggestions on improving their school communities, then student council advisors should find ways to involve the student body in the happenings of student council during the school day so that everyone who wants to attend can attend, regardless of socioeconomic status, academic merit, or competing time constraints. Furthermore, by creating structures that embed activities for student council participation within the existing curricula of the school, schools would be on track to renewing civic education as carefully laid out in Danielle Allen's *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*. Much like George Mathes (1975) paralleled student council elections to general elections stating that he sees only a "differing in fact not the act," schools could model open forums after town hall meetings with their elected student representatives leading the meetings. These "town hall meetings" should take place during the school day to give everyone an equal opportunity to attend. It should be expected of the individuals who are official student council members to be civically engaged, but it would not be right for all other students to be left out of those opportunities. By taking time during the school day to voice their views or vote on community outreach efforts and ways to improve the school community, schools are ensuring civic

engagement opportunities for all their students, even if not official student council members themselves.

Until school leaders and student council advisors begin to value the voice of every student in all facets of the school, and therefore design their councils in a way that promotes meaningful student voice in authentic ways, we will not see this purpose of student council being achieved in schools. It is imperative that schools find equitable ways for more students to engage with the organization.

Suggestions for Future Research

The recommendations listed above are the basis for ideas about future research studies concerning student council. There is currently no data collection system in Massachusetts tracking the demographic information of who is joining student council. A possible research study could include learning more about current student council members' demographics and their motivations for joining student council. Continuing the conversation about the lack of a data collection system may lead to a change in procedures and a more extensive awareness of the demographic trends of students participating in student council.

This study included a few voices of student council members who were unaware of the goals of their student council. Another study could explore the awareness student council members and non-members have about the goals of their student council. Such a study could investigate the presence of specific goals and how various student councils strive to meet their intended goals.

I made a recommendation regarding the training of student council advisors. A possible future research study could be an examination of the ways that student councils promote student voice. This examination could also inquire about the students' perspectives on how successful

they feel their student councils are at promoting students' voices. It would also be worthwhile to collect data related to the values and beliefs held by student council advisors and school leaders regarding the student council organization. This study would be able to offer recommendations that schools could use in their training with student council advisors and leaders.

Many survey respondents indicated their reason for not joining their high school student council was due to competing demands on their time. A future study could inquire about the ways in which schools promote interactions within the school day to allow all student voices to be heard by the organization.

Four interview participants in this study offered ideas of how their schools could better structure their student councils. A future research study on student councils could use a participatory action research approach to invoke more students' voices on what student councils should look like. This approach to research focuses on making a change by partnering with the participants rather than the participants merely partaking in a research study (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). Some questions that come to mind for this type of inquiry include: For what purposes are students joining student council? What do they hope to accomplish during their time as a student council member? How should meetings be structured? When and how often should meetings occur? What type of adult presence should be included in student council? Asking students for their opinions on what an effective student council would look like may help schools to examine their own student councils and find ways to improve them to benefit the students in a more well-rounded way that helps to embody the democratic spirit.

Ultimately, the findings from this study, along with recent scholarship regarding student council, demonstrate that participants from this study have positive ideas of student council as a construct, even if they did not reap the benefits of it themselves. One question this research

implores, though, is how much input do students feel they have in the operations of their student

council? The name itself implies that the students run the council, but the findings of this study

would indicate otherwise.

Final Reflections

A revelation this study brought to light for me is that school leaders should not assume

that student council is the only avenue for civic participation in schools. Participants A and B

prove that there are other, and in their cases more impactful, ways to engage in the school and

the local community. These two participants were among the top examples of individuals serving

as contributing members of their communities. They both joined the Black Student Union at their

high school and cited ways in which they used their voices and gave back to their school and

local communities through that organization.

Student council, however, should be a place where members of the entire student body

can come together to work toward mutual solutions to problems in their community. This study

should serve as urgency for school leaders, student council advisors, and educational advocates

to refocus their purpose for having student councils in high school and find ways to revive the

democratic spirit that the National Student Council Organization extols on its website.

Although it was disheartening to hear that there are moments and feelings of angst about

joining student council, it brings me comfort to know that the participants of this study still

recognize potential benefits for student councils in schools. I hope that this study will inspire

others to consider the demographic makeup of their schools and student councils and examine

how they portray and fulfill their school's personal purposes for having a student council.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation for Potential Informants

Dear Student Council Advisors:

My name is Amanda Goddard, and I am public high school teacher in Massachusetts and a doctoral candidate at Lesley University in the Educational Studies field. I have been a student council advisor for five years and have attended several state student council conferences. My experience as a student council advisor has influenced my decisions about the research I will conduct for my doctoral dissertation. I am interested in studying the experiences of Black high school students in relation to student council. I anticipate that my findings will be informative for the educational community in general, but especially student council advisors, teachers, and administrators in secondary schools. My proposed study has been approved by my Doctoral Committee and Lesley University's Institutional Review Board has approved that my study design protects human subject participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent school closures which have led to changes in student council operations, my research will be focused on individuals between the ages of 18-21 and their experiences with high school student council.

I am writing today to invite you to help recruit participants for my study. Even though there is a focus on understanding the perspectives of Black students, this study in its early stages requires data collection from student council members of all races. Should you choose to help recruit members for my study, I have drafted a letter that I invite you to send to former high school students which introduces me and my research interests as well as provides information on how to participate in my study. I am looking for both former members of student council as well as students who never participated in student council.

Aside from your agreement to forward my introduction and invitation to participate to former students, there is no further involvement needed from you at this time.

Your district, school, and participants' names will not be used in any report of this research that is made available to the public. Furthermore, there will be no use of any other information by which your district, school, or participants could be identified.

I can be available to meet with you via phone or in person to discuss the proposed research and answer any questions you might have. Please be in touch with me if you wish to learn more.

I am grateful that you have taken the time to read this email.

Thank you,
Amanda Goddard
Doctoral Candidate
Lesley University
agoddar5@lesley.edu

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation for Potential Participants

Dear former student:

I am writing to inform you that Amanda Goddard, a doctoral candidate at Lesley University, wishes to invite former high school students to participate in a research study she is conducting for her doctoral dissertation. Miss Goddard has served as a student council advisor in a public high school for five years. As a result, Miss Goddard is conducting research that studies the experiences of Black high school students and their experiences with student council. Even though there is a focus on understanding the perspectives of Black students, this study still requires data collection from individuals of all races. You did not have to be a student council member in high school to participate in this study.

As part of this research, Miss Goddard invites you to take her survey which inquires about your encounters and experiences with student council while you attended high school. This survey should take between 10-15 minutes to complete. There are no direct benefits or drawbacks to taking this survey. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you can stop taking the survey at any point in the process. Miss Goddard encourages you to share this information and the survey link with other former high school students who are between the ages of 18-21.

All responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your district or school name. Furthermore, there will be no use of any other information by which your district, school, or you could be identified in any written publication.

As part of this research study, you will be contributing valuable perspectives that will help inform educators about student council participation.

If you would like more information about Miss Goddard's research interests or the methodology being used in this study prior to participating, please contact her at agoddar5@lesley.edu.

If you wish to proceed with taking the survey, please click this link.

Sincerely,

Student Council Advisor Info

Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

Appendix D

Survey

Dear student:

The purpose of this survey is to learn more about the experience of high school students in regard to student council. Data from the survey will be used for scholarly research aimed at fulfilling a Ph.D. requirement at Lesley University in Educational Leadership. This survey should take between 15-20 minutes for you to complete. There are no direct benefits or drawbacks to taking this survey. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you can stop taking the survey at any point in the process.

This survey may ask you if you would like to participate in a follow up interview. Should you choose to participate in a follow up interview, you will be asked to provide your contact information.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. You can contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent page to keep for your records.

Any questions regarding this survey can be directed to me via email at agoddar5@lesley.edu and/or my faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Naso, at pnaso@lesley.edu.

Clicking the "yes" button below indicates that you consent to participate and acknowledge that the data from this survey will be used in my research on student councils.

a. Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this survey will be used for scholarly research on student councils. I confirm that I am between the age of 18-21 and have not previously taken this survey. I hereby agree to participate in this survey.

b. No, I would not like to participate in this survey.

1. What was the name of your high school?

2. Where was your high school located?

      City/Town:

      State:

3. Please select the number of years you were enrolled in your high school's student council:
a.) never a member
b.) less than 1(joined and left)
c.) 1
d.) 2
e.) 3
f.) 4+

4. Did you ever have any interest in joining your high school's student council? This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE NEVER** a member of their high school student council.

a.) yes

b.) no

5. Please explain why you were not a part of your high school's student council. This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE NEVER** a member of their high school student council.
Open Response

6. Describe your reason(s) for joining your high school's student council. This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE** a member of their high school student council.
Open Response

7. Did you ever drop your student council membership? This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE** a member of their high school student council.
a.) yes
b.) no

8. Describe your reason(s) for leaving student council. This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **LEFT STUDENT COUNCIL.**
Open Response

9. Describe what the process of becoming a member of student council at your high school looked like. This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE** a member of their high school student council.
Open Response

10. Even though you were not a member of your high school student council, can you describe what the process of becoming a student council member looked like at your school? This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE NEVER** a member of their high school student council.
Open Response

11. Have you engaged in any form of student governance or student council after high school?
a.) yes
b.) no

12. Was student council membership offered in any schools you attended prior to Grade 9?
a.) Yes
b.) No
c.) Not Sure

13. Were you a member of your student council in any grade prior to Grade 9? This question was only presented to participants who answered that there was a student council in a previous grade.
a.) Yes
b.) No

14. Do you have any family members or anyone close to your family who had been members of student council at any level (elementary, middle, high school, post-secondary)?
a.) Yes
b.) No
c.) Not Sure

15. Did you have friends who were members of your high school student council? This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE NEVER** a member of their high school student council.
a.) Yes
b.) No

16. Did you have friends who were members of your high school student council before you joined? This question was only presented to participants who answered that they **WERE** a member of their high school student council.
a.) Yes
b.) No

17. Would you recommend participation in student council to high school students? What reasons would you give others in regard to *becoming* involved or <u>*not*</u> becoming involved in student council?
Open Response

18. With which gender do you identify?
a.) Male
b.) Female
c.) Non-Binary
d.) Prefer not to answer

19.) Would you like a summary of the findings from this dissertation to be emailed to you?
If a participant selected "yes," they were prompted to enter their email address.
a.) Yes
b.) No

20. Please specify with which race you identify:
a.) American Indian or Alaska Native
b.) Asian
c.) Black or African American
d.) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
e.) White
f.) Other

If participants answered a, b, d, e, or f to question #20, the survey presented a message thanking them for participating. If participants answered c, they were directed to take the rest of the survey.

QUESTIONS 21-23: The following questions will ask you about the purpose and function of your high school's student council. Please answer these questions based on your familiarity or experience with your high school's student council. *These questions were only displayed for participants who indicated they are Black or African American.*

21. Your rating for each item below indicates HOW OFTEN your student council performed each activity. Please rate each activity on a 1-4 scale according to how OFTEN the activity is performed by your school's student council. (1=Seldom; 4=Very Often; NS=Not Sure)

   a. How often did your student council plan activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?
   b. How often did your student council plan activities for the student body to participate in not during school hours?
   c. How often did your student council plan activities for your community?
   d. How often did your student council volunteer in the community?
   e. How often did your student council fundraise for school functions?

f. How often did your student council fundraise for charitable purposes?
g. How often did your student council provide a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?
h. How often did your student council advocate for improvements in the school community?
i. How often did your student council learn about the importance of acceptance and respect of others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests?
j. How often did your student council encourage the student body to commit to their education?

22. Your rating below indicates the importance of the activity <u>to YOUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL</u>. Please rate each activity on a 1-4 scale according to HOW IMPORTANT the activity was TO YOUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL. Your rating <u>DOES NOT</u> indicate your *personal* opinion on the importance of the activity. (1=Of Little Importance; 4=Highly Important) This question was only presented to participants who answered that they WERE a member of their student council for at least one year.

a. How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?
b. How important was planning activities for the student body to participate in not during school hours?
c. How important was planning activities for your community?
d. How important was volunteering in the community?
e. How important was fundraising for school functions?
f. How important was fundraising for charitable purposes?
g. How important was providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?
h. How important was advocating for improvements in the school community?
i. How important was encouraging accepting and respect of others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests?
j. How important was increasing student commitment in their own education?

23. Your rating below indicates the importance of the activity <u>TO YOU</u>. Please rate each activity on a 1-4 scale according to HOW IMPORTANT the activity is TO YOU. Your rating indicates your *personal opinion* on the importance of the activity. (1=Of Little Importance; 4=Highly Important)

a. How important is planning activities for the student body to participate in during the school day?
b. How important is planning activities for the student body to participate in not during school hours?
c. How important is planning activities for your community?
d. How important is volunteering in the community?
e. How important is fundraising for school functions?
f. How important is fundraising for charitable purposes?

g. How important is providing a forum for students to contribute opinions on school issues?
h. How important is advocating for improvements in the school community?
i. How important is encouraging accept and respect of others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests?
j. How important is increasing student commitment in their own education?

24. Do you wish to be considered for the interview phase of the study? Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and can be conducted in person or through videoconferencing. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. All information from the interview will be confidential and data presented in any published material will remain anonymous. If you select yes, you are providing permission for the researcher to contact you using the information you provide.

a. Yes, I am willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Please contact me using the information below:
       Your Name: _____
       Preferred method of contact (please enter your complete email address or phone number): _____

b. No, I am not willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Appendix E

Interview Protocol A: Former Members of Student Council

Dear participant:

You have expressed interest in participating in phase two of the data collection process for my research study aimed at gathering information about the experiences of high school student council members.

This interview should last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. There are no direct benefits or drawbacks to participating in the interview. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any point in the process or ask me questions at any time.

The interviews will be recorded, and field notes will be taken throughout the session. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

A transcript of the interview will be sent to you within two weeks after the interview. When this study is completed, and it has met with approval that I have successfully defended my dissertation, all that will remain is the recordings of the dissertation. I will destroy the audio files and transcripts of our interview from today.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent page to keep for your records.

Any questions regarding this interview can be directed to me via email at agoddar5@lesley.edu and/or my faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Naso, at pnaso@lesley.edu.

Signing below indicates that you consent to participate and acknowledge that the data from this interview will be used in my research on student councils.

___Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this interview will be used for scholarly research on student councils. I hereby agree to take part in the interview phase of this study.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name   Signature   Date

Thank you for taking the time to share with me more information about your experiences in student council. This interview will last between 45-60 minutes.

Today I will be asking you to tell me about your own experiences with and impressions of student council. There will be times throughout the interview when I reference your answers from the survey. I may also reference documents regarding student council from your high school.

I will record this interview in order to create a transcript of our conversation for further analysis. I will also type notes during the interview to capture my impressions and understanding of our conversation. I have a list of questions that I intend to ask you, but I want to make sure that you are aware that you may refuse to answer any question. You may also request to stop our interview at any time or ask any questions. This interview is entirely voluntary, and the interview will serve as one source of data for my dissertation. All of the information that you provide through this interview will remain anonymous in my dissertation. I will also keep all notes and recordings from this interview on a password protected electronic device. I will send you a transcript of our conversation within two weeks. This will provide you an opportunity to clarify or elaborate on about any part of the interview that occurs today. When this study is completed, and it has met with approval that I have successfully defended my dissertation, all that will remain is the recordings of the dissertation. I will destroy the audio files and transcripts of our interview from today.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Do you have any questions about what I just described?

If everything I have described is agreeable, can I have you read and sign this consent form and we can proceed with the interview? Great! Thank You.

1. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you were a member of a student council prior to Grade 9. Can you please tell me about what got you interested in student council? **(GRQ #1)**

2. [If applicable]: Can you please tell me about your student council experiences prior to entering high school? **(GRQ #1)**

3. What did the process for becoming a member of the high school student council look like at your school? **(GRQ #1)**

4. Tell me how you became interested in student council. **(GRQ #1)**

    [probing question]: Could you please explain what you consider to be the most important reasons for *joining* student council? **(GRQ #1)**

5. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you have family members or someone close to your family who had been involved in student council, can you tell me more about their involvement? **(GRQ #1)**

6. Your survey response indicates that you had been a member of your high school student council for X number of years. Could you please explain what you consider to be the most important reasons for *remaining a member* student council? **(GRQ #1)**

7. What do you know about yourself that made you realize that participating in student council could be a good thing for you to do? **(GRQ #2)**

8. When you were considering becoming a member of the student council, were there any moments when you felt like you couldn't or shouldn't join student council? Please tell me about them. **(GRQ #2)**

9. Throughout the X years that you had been a member of your student council, had there been any moments when you felt as if you didn't belong in the student council group? Please tell me about them. **(GRQ #2)**

   [probing question]: Did you experience any disappointments, disagreements, or difficulties within your time on student council?

10. Tell me about the types of activities your student council engages in. **(GRQ #3)**

11. Many people say that student councils are necessary for high schools. Do you agree or disagree with that? Why?? *(GRQ #2)*

12. In what ways did being a member of your high school student council affect your life? **(GRQ #3)**

13. Were there any differences in what you wanted to do on student council and what your school found important for their student council to engage in? **(GRQ #3)**

14. On your survey, you indicated that your school found **X** highly important. You also mentioned that your council spent a lot of time on **X**. Can you provide some examples of how they did this? **(GRQ #3)**

15. On your survey, you indicated that your school did not find **X** important, but you find it highly important. Can you speak more about your reasons for finding **X** important? **(GRQ #3)**

16. Common portrayals of student councils in Massachusetts indicate that they aim to XYZ. Can you comment on your experiences with these purposes? In what ways is your student council meeting these purposes? **(GRQ #3)**

[Probing question if necessary] Your school's student council handbook/constitution states that part of its mission/purpose is to **X.** Based on your experience, do you feel the student council is meeting its declared purpose?

17. Tell me about the most memorable moment of your high school student council experience. **(GRQ #2)**

18. In what ways did your involvement in student council help you after high school? **(GRQ #3)**

   [probing question]: How did your membership help you develop into the kind of person you are now? **(GRQ #2)**

   [probing question]: How did your membership help you become a better citizen? **(GRQ #3)**

19. When considering all aspects of your student council, what do you miss the most about your high school student council experience? **(GRQ #2)**

This concludes the interview portion of my research study. Do you have any information to add that I didn't ask or that you wish to elaborate on at this time?

I will transcribe our interview within two weeks and send you a copy of the transcript. At that time, if you have anything you wish to clarify or add, you can contact me. If I have any follow up questions, I will let you know.

Thank you!

Appendix F

Interview Protocol B: Non-Members of Student Council

Dear participant:

You have expressed interest in participating in phase two of the data collection process for my research study aimed at gathering information about the experiences of high school student council members.

This interview should last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. There are no direct benefits or drawbacks to participating in the interview. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any point in the process or ask me questions at any time.

The interviews will be recorded, and field notes will be taken throughout the session. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

A transcript of the interview will be sent to you within two weeks after the interview. When this study is completed, and it has met with approval that I have successfully defended my dissertation, all that will remain is the recordings of the dissertation. I will destroy the audio files and transcripts of our interview from today.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent page to keep for your records.

Any questions regarding this interview can be directed to me via email at agoddar5@lesley.edu and/or my faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Naso, at pnaso@lesley.edu.

Signing below indicates that you consent to participate and acknowledge that the data from this interview will be used in my research on student councils.

___Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this interview will be used for scholarly research on student councils. I hereby agree to take part in the interview phase of this study.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name   Signature   Date

Thank you for taking the time to share with me more information about your experiences with student council. This interview will last between 30-45 minutes.

Today I will be asking you to tell me about your own experiences with and impressions of student council. There will be times throughout the interview when I reference your answers from the survey. I may also reference documents regarding student council from your high school.

I will record this interview in order to create a transcript of our conversation for further analysis. I will also type notes during the interview to capture my impressions and understanding of our conversation. I have a list of questions that I intend to ask you, but I want to make sure that you are aware that you may refuse to answer any question. You may also request to stop our interview at any time or ask any questions. This interview is entirely voluntary, and the interview will serve as one source of data for my dissertation. All of the information that you provide through this interview will remain anonymous in my dissertation. I will also keep all notes and recordings from this interview on a password protected electronic device. I will send you a transcript of our conversation within two weeks. This will provide you an opportunity to clarify or elaborate on about any part of the interview that occurs today. When this study is completed, and it has met with approval that I have successfully defended my dissertation, all that will remain is the recordings of the dissertation. I will destroy the audio files and transcripts of our interview from today.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Do you have any questions about what I just described?

If everything I have described is agreeable, can I have you read and sign this consent form and we can proceed with the interview? Great! Thank You.

QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO <u>NEVER</u> WANTED TO JOIN STUDENT COUNCIL

1. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you were a member of student council prior to Grade 9. Can you please tell me about what got you interested in student council? (***GRQ #1)***

2. [If applicable]: Can you please tell me about your student council experiences prior to Grade 9? (***GRQ #1)***

3. Are you familiar with the process for becoming a member of the student council at your high school? What did that look like? (***GRQ #1)***

4. What made you realize that participating in student council might not be for you? **(**GRQ *#1 & GRQ #2)*

5. Did anyone in your life encourage you to join or discourage you from joining student council? (***GRQ #1)***

6. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you have family members or someone close to your family who had been involved in student council, can you tell me more about their involvement? (***GRQ #1)***

7. Are there any times when you look back on your high school experience and regret not joining student council? (***GRQ #1)***

8. On your survey, you indicated that your student council performed **X** often. Can you provide some examples of how they conducted this activity? **(*GRQ #3)***

9. On your survey, you indicated that your student council did not perform **X** often, but you find it highly important. Can you speak more about your reasons for finding **X** important? **(*GRQ #1)***

10. Can you tell me about any other types of activities your high school student council engaged in. **(*GRQ #3)***

11. Is there anything your high school's student council could have done differently that might have increased your interest in wanting to join? **(*GRQ #1)***

12. Many people say that student councils are necessary for high schools. Do you agree or disagree with that? Why? **(*GRQ #2)***

QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO <u>WANTED</u> TO JOIN STUDENT COUNCIL

1. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you were a member of student council prior to Grade 9. Can you please tell me about what got you interested in student council? (***GRQ #1)***

2. [If applicable]: Can you please tell me about your student council experiences prior to Grade 9? (***GRQ #1)***

3. Are you familiar with the process for becoming a member of the student council at your high school? What did that look like? (***GRQ #1)***

4. Tell me how you became interested in student council in high school. (***GRQ #1)***

5. For how many years did you try to become a member in student council? (***GRQ #2)***

6. When you were considering becoming a member of the student council, were there any moments when you felt like you couldn't or shouldn't join? Please tell me about them. (***GRQ #2)***

7. Did anyone in your life encourage you to join or discourage you from joining student council? (***GRQ #1)***

8. [If applicable]: Your survey indicated that you have family members or someone close to your family who had been involved in student council, can you tell me more about their involvement? (***GRQ #1)***

9. On your survey, you indicated that your school performed **X** very often. Can you provide some examples of how they conducted this activity? (***GRQ #3)***

10. On your survey, you indicated that your school did not perform **X** often, but you find it highly important. Can you speak more about your reasons for finding **X** important? (***GRQ #3)***

11. Can you tell me about any other types of activities your high school student council engaged in. (***GRQ #3)***

12. Many people say that student councils are necessary for high schools. Do you agree or disagree with that? Why?? (***GRQ #2)***

This concludes the interview portion of my research study. Do you have any information to add that I didn't ask or that you wish to elaborate on at this time?

I will transcribe our interview within two weeks and send you a copy of the transcript. At that time, if you have anything you wish to clarify or add, you can contact me. If I have any follow up questions, I will let you know.

Thank you!

Appendix G

Responses Regarding the Purposes of Student Council

Activity	Meeting	Not Meeting
Teach students how to think critically about their community and past experiences in order to help others / Preparing children to assume adult participative roles which engage them in the community	I'm definitely a better citizen because of student council. I was definitely more active in my community. (Participant G)	I think individuals weren't sort of conditioned to think about the community at large, rather to… to… think about themselves and their own gain and getting to where they need to be. (Participant A)
Teach students to accept and respect others' talents, cultural traditions, knowledge, abilities, and interests	We also did like a culture fest as well. So, like it would be one night in January. People from different cultures would bring like food from that specific culture and people around the town could like come in and get to learn about different cultures and countries, and also the food that originated from there, so that was really fun. (Participant E)	There was never like a like a diversity talk or that wasn't a thing. It was like different clubs had that. Like I know we had like clubs for Black students. We had clubs for Asian students. And you might have conversations about those in class. But it was never like a student council thing that we did. (Participant G)
Foster a sense of independence in order to improve one's intellectual capacity	We also would do like some of the prizes we would do as well would be "oh if you made honor roll, you can get this" or "if you get an A in this class, we will convince the principal to do this." So, we definitely try to link like incentive with doing well in school so to encourage the student body to be like "hey, do well in school." (Participant E)	I guess in our school community your education is your responsibility and no one else's. Your failures are your own, your successes are your own, and if you have failures, it's because you're not working too hard or you're lazy. (Participant D)

Providing a forum in which all students can use their voices to express opinions on school matters which impact them

We even tried having community meetings. That was a new thing that we introduced like having the grade come in and talk because we felt like oh council may have been bias because they were kind of those like a big friend group in there, and we didn't want just that one friend group to dictate like everything that was going on, so we included the rest of the grade into the conversation on maybe three or four occasions. (Participant C)

Like it didn't even cross our minds to go to student council when we were having these issues because like they had never made themselves present as that resource (Participant B)

Bringing together students from diverse backgrounds to have joint responsibility for their common experiences

I mean like the presence was pretty minimal so it like it didn't really make a difference to me if they were there or not, and I think that that's not the goal of the student council. It should be to have that presence and to truly like make the community a better community. Foster a sense of, you know, family amongst the students and things like that. That wasn't really done through the student council. (Participant A)

Encouraging participation from the entire student body	Everyone was pretty accepting and again, like I said, it was an open door policy so even like as a freshman like when I walked in like I didn't feel isolated or like I felt like I should drop the club because like I'm a freshman or sophomore or senior like it was really inviting and open to be honest, so I didn't feel like I needed to leave (Participant E)	It was always like well we don't care what the student body thinks because we're the ones making the events that make the money. But I think that really hurt us in the end because when a student who's part of a larger friend group made an idea and we didn't take that into account, if we made a different idea just know that we would lose that whole friend group. They wouldn't participate in that event. And we really need to take into account like, I guess, cliques because this is high school, so there are cliques. And I guess we didn't take into account hearing the opinions of certain cliques so that's why turnout wasn't as great in certain events as others. (Participant D)
Creating a positive change in the school and community		I have no idea what they did in terms of actually helping the student body or like I don't know planning activities, making changes, or things like that. Like even our pep rallies were planned by like the faculty rather than student council, so I have no idea like really what they were doing, other than preparing for prom. (Participant B)
Planning student activities	We were planning on events such as haunted houses, dances, fundraisers, canning events, prom. (Participant D)	

Fundraising for school activities	We did a lot of fundraising events like Krispy Kreme or other events where we would sell candy those sorts of things and we were always like actively generating new events, even after, even while we were in the process of finalizing an event. (Participant D)	
Fundraising for charitable purposes	Habitat for humanity. They would raise money for that. They would raise money for different like awareness months like things that would pertain to awareness months and things of that nature yeah. (Participant A)	We took so much more time on focusing on things that would make us money rather than focusing on things that wouldn't make us money like volunteering events if it wasn't making money, we weren't really interested in it. (Participant D)

Appendix H

List of Thematic Categories that Led to Research Findings

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #1: Survey Data
1. Amplify Student Voice in the School Community
2. Meet and Interact with New People
3. Engage in Community Service

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #1: Interview Data
1. Student Time Constraints Due to Competing Responsibilities and Demands
2. Involvement in Student Council Being Perceived as Having Insufficient or Insignificant Impact

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #2: Survey Data
1. Identity and Enjoyment as a Leader
2. Instrumental to College Acceptance
3. Difference Between the Perceived Expectations and the Lived Experiences of Student Council
4. Lack of Interest in Student Council

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #2: Interview Data
1. Identity and Enjoyment as a Leader
2. A Feeling of Isolation or Exclusion from Student Council or the School Community
3. Wanting to Make a Difference and Be Involved in the School Community

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #3: Survey Data
1. Difference Between the Perceived Expectations and the Lived Experiences of Student Council
2. Student Councils in This Study Are Meeting the Purpose of Fundraising
3. The Participants of This Study Find Many of the Foundational Ideals of Student Council Highly Important

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTION #3: Interview Data
1. The Student Councils in This Study are Not Meeting all of the Foundational Purposes of Student Council