

“THIS IS MY TEXAS A&M:” THE INTERPLAY OF INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL
“NARRATIVES OF DIFFERENCE” IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Although most colleges and universities claim to be committed to the values of diversity and inclusion, repeated race-related incidents across the nation highlight the ongoing need to engage issues of race on college campuses. However, it is important to explore these issues at the institutional *and* individual level. Narratives are an important way to engage this interplay because they serve as tools for both institutional and individual identity negotiation. In particular, I am focused on “narratives of difference,” which I define as those that explore experiences of difference and identity. As such, this study examines how institutional and individual “narratives of difference” interact within institutions of higher education to influence core organizational narratives and students’ relationship to the institution.

In order to engage this central problem, I employed three methodologies: (1) archival analysis, (2) photovoice, and (3) walking tour interviews. What I found is that Texas A&M has framed its core institutional narratives, which are grounded in its (military) history, traditions, and core values, to reinforce the notion of the “Aggie Family” as inherently inclusive. The result is the advancement of a model of *inclusion as assimilation*. As long as newcomers, regardless of their identities, are willing to assimilate into the existing culture, they will be welcomed here. Likewise, the university uses memorialized places and campus tours as *occasions for telling* this institutional story stock and to reinforce its macro culture.

At Texas A&M University, being part of the “Aggie Family” is a unifying force and students across all racial groups take pride in it. However, how exactly the “Aggie Family” is defined is more malleable than the university presents. While the institution has promoted the values of the “Aggie Family” as inherently inclusive, the experiences of diverse students challenge this. They resist full assimilation into this construction by joining identity-based

organizations and creating supportive communities with other students from similar backgrounds, highlighting means of improving inclusivity. These findings illuminate meaningful implications for higher education institutions, organizations in general, as well as the field of communication.

DEDICATION

To the many people who have entrusted me with their stories.

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PROLOGUE

“Are you a woman of color?”

It’s a question I’m asked a lot. And it’s one I’ve always had an answer for, but with little explanation.

“No, I’m not.”

I’m no longer surprised by the question and I’ve come to understand it better over the years. The picture I present is confusing. My appearance can sometimes be “ambiguous” I suppose, a quality I had never really noticed until I got older and started being asked, *“What are you?”* By friends. By new acquaintances. By research participants. Combine this ambiguity with my passion for issues of diversity and inclusion, and the question is reasonable.

So who am I?

Well, my father is a Portuguese immigrant. And my mother is White... I think. Her story is also a complicated one. So as far as I know, half of me is *not* White. But, almost all of me *feels* White. And even this basic description is complicated because technically Portuguese *is* White, according to “official classifications.” And as history reminds us, Portugal was one of the original colonizing nations. Despite that, at least in my community, there’s clearly a distinction made between “us” and “them,” especially in the way we hold tightly to our culture.

The important part here is that I’ve been afforded every privilege that comes with being White in the United States. My family had enough money to live comfortably. I had a good education, was involved in many extracurricular activities and could go (and was expected to go) to college. By 22, I had finished my undergraduate degree, a culinary degree and was on my way to becoming a food journalist.

And in that time, I never had to contemplate my identity. My life circumstance (thankfully) never forced me to have to confront it. But when I found my way back into graduate school, it slowly became clear that I could no longer have the same, unqualified answer to this question.

“No, I’m not.”

As I filled out my application, I was faced with deciding what type of research I would pursue and the topics I was passionate about. And truth be told, the only thing I really did know was that I was passionate about school.

Because school saved me.

Despite what seemed like a decent life on paper, my childhood was a difficult one. Even my own parents will tell you it’s surprising that I ended up where I am. I had no sense of “home,” moving in and out of twelve houses, some lasting only months at a time. I remember the small tears around the edges of my favorite Led Zeppelin poster getting bigger and bigger each time I had to take it off and put it on a new bedroom wall. My parents’ many relationships came and went.

Some of their partners were kind, some not. And one violent. There were taxing custody battles in court, restraining orders, and no control over where I would spend my time, who I would live with, and how much money I was worth in child support. By the time I reached high school, I had spiraled into a deep depression. And yet, in the midst of the fog, I knew leaving for college would be the way I could survive. Despite the unstable life I had been dealt, I did well in school because it was my ticket out.

But I knew this path of escape wasn't available to everyone. And it became my passion to explore why.

I reflect back on my own blended family. On my mom's side, I am one in a long line of college graduates. But on my dad's side, the number of college graduates stands at two: me and him. Why? Because I'm the only one with a White mother. And for my dad, he said, "I just happened to hang out with the White kids in high school and did what they did." Of course it's more complicated than this and I soon realized I didn't know as much as I thought I did about my own family. And how my lack of understanding of who I was could negatively impact my identity as a critical scholar.

"Some white people who take up multicultural and cultural plurality issues mean well but often they push to the fringes once more the very cultures and ethnic groups about whom they want to disseminate knowledge...The difference in appropriation and proliferation is that the first steals and harms; the second helps heal breaches of knowledge" (Weedon, 2004, p. 47).

Could I really engage with this project fully, leave graduate school and start a career tackling critical issues without knowing more about who I really was and where I came from? The answer was a resounding "no" and it became clear that before I could truly begin this dissertation about "narratives of difference," I had to have a much clearer understanding of my own story.

Why was it that more members of my Portuguese family hadn't gone to college? How was it that I ended up here when so many others in my family did not? In asking these questions, I realized that I had been making assumptions all along. *There wasn't enough money. The school system wasn't welcoming. Women were expected to stay in the home.*

Despite our strained relationship, I thought it best to go to my father to answer the questions I needed to ask. So I called him for the first time in a long time...

It's a cultural thing, he said.

Back in Portugal, the education system simply isn't the same. There, you learn a trade, you're taught a job. And when we immigrated, this mentality stayed the same. We were in a new country and we had to make money. Most of my siblings were old enough to start working right away and for the first two years, each one of their paychecks went back to our parents. And this "immigrant mentality" has stayed the same for many groups. We came here for the American Dream.

One of the only reasons I ended up going college was because I was on the hockey team. The Portuguese kids in school were segregated, and I didn't hang out with them.

My close peers were those who had college plans and had it not been my talent for hockey, I never would have made it into a decent college because my grades were nothing to envy.

I was also the youngest in the family and the only one who went through the entire American education system. I was never forced to go to college, although my parents were incredibly proud that I went. It's an option, but it's not an expectation. Most of us choose to get through high school and work. And for a lot of minority and immigrant groups, the mentality is that since college isn't seen as something for us, why even try?

Sometimes I wish my parents had pushed a little more. And that's why I had those expectations for you.

What was most surprising to me about his story was how the role of gender *didn't* play into this dynamic. In my family, the expectations don't change for men and women. Or at least that's what he told me. But as a woman, it's hard not to question this. I'll never forget a story my mother told me about how she watched my grandfather take a meal my grandmother had just prepared and pour it out on the lawn because it wasn't up to his standards. Or how one of the first questions I'm always asked when I visit home is, "Do you have a boyfriend?" because despite my impending Ph.D., it feels like something important in my life is still missing.

And I'll always remember my grandmother in the kitchen. Walking in and smelling the aroma of sweet bread and coffee (instant, of course), hearing the crackling of fried sardines being made, and even if you aren't hungry, you always end up with a plate of *biscoitos* next to you at the kitchen table. And the mental image I carry with me of most of the women in my family involves the kitchen. Something just *feels* different about what's expected of them.

But these women are also the strongest I know, some really hardy stock I'm endlessly proud to be related to. It's why I take such pride in my accomplishments, to be a woman in this family, but one who is following a different path. And it's why I've chosen Dr. Sousa as my scholarly moniker, despite the fact that I was given both my mother's and father's last names. Because even if the Sousa's don't fully understand it, they're proud of me.

It was also in this conversation with my dad that I witnessed the power of storytelling. Despite the fact that we don't talk often, being able to share his story sparked this passion and vigor in our conversation that we hadn't shared in many years. In a way, it was a moment that brought us closer together. Stories have that power. And it's stories that drive critical scholarship.

"It does mean that the primary responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences" (Hill Collins, 1997, p. 253).

There is this unique "in between" position that I find myself in, one that gives me a two-sided perspective of how education and culture collide. And it's in this ambiguous place I negotiate my role as a critical scholar who explores issues of inclusion within higher education.

"Are you a woman of color?"

“No, I’m not.”

My answer has not changed, but it is far more thoughtful...Because my experiences have been so different from the rest of my family and other marginalized groups, to claim that identity doesn't seem fair. My Whiteness has protected me. And I'm conscious of the fact that this Whiteness has the potential to distort my perspective, to make me capable of falling into the savior complex, and for me to inadvertently repeat the status quo. But I'm fiercely drawn to the experiences of my family and I find so much worth in playing any part in highlighting the voices of those who are different than I am. It's their stories that inspire me.

Stories give us a tool to reflect on who we are, so we have a greater understanding of how we impact other people. They are constantly shifting and help us make sense of our identities and place in the world. They are a lens to understand people. But they're also complicated and never complete. That's why stories are so powerful and why I think change lies within them.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In early 2014, three students at Ole Miss draped a noose and a Georgia flag with a confederate emblem around the neck of the campus's statue of James Meredith, the first black student to be admitted to the university (Harris, 2015). In 2015, both Virginia Tech and Kentucky University responded to incidents of graffiti calling for the extermination of Muslims (Taylor, 2017). That same year, American University addressed posters on campus that called for violence against Muslim and Jewish students (Taylor, 2017). And in March of 2015, University of Oklahoma students Levi Pettit and Parker Rice were caught on camera leading a racist chant among their fraternity brothers, making explicit references to lynching and the segregated nature of their fraternity, SAE (Kingkade, 2015). Although almost every college and university claims to be committed to the values of diversity and inclusion, these incidents highlight the ongoing need to engage issues of race on college campuses and examine individual responses of students, faculty, and staff, as well as official statements from these institutions.

How individuals and university officials respond to hate incidents on college campuses can impact organizational culture in many ways. At an institutional level, colleges can implement policies that address bias-motivated incidents in order to create a culture of tolerance (Cobia & Carney, 2002). Adversely, failing to properly respond can foster a hostile climate for minority students and increase their feelings of helplessness (Aguirre Jr. & Messineo, 1997). Although the goal of this study is not only to analyze specific hate incidents, they are important windows into exploring campus culture. Because most responses about inclusion efforts from academic institutions emerge in response to these moments, the analysis of racially-motivated

hate incidents are particularly valuable, as they focus attention on the connections between organizational intentions and the lived experiences of diverse student bodies.

Higher education research that explores issues of diversity and inclusion typically prioritizes organizational responses *or* the impacts of such incidents on different groups of people, often students. While communication scholars would anticipate that organizational responses shape collective student responses and vice versa, most studies tend to focus on one or the other. For example, when examining these types of issues from a crisis communication perspective, Liu and Pompper (2012) focus on the experiences of crisis communicators to show that organizational responses to incidents involving race or culture should be less grounded in managerial biases and more natural. On the other side, Rudick (2017) collected the narratives of students to explore how they resist “racialized domination” in the classroom and how their experiences show the need for increased recognition by instructors of discriminatory pedagogical practices and the introduction of counteractive techniques. I sought to focus more on how organizational and individual narratives *interact*. To explore this interplay, this study examines how institutional and individual “narratives of difference” interact within higher education institutions to influence core organizational narratives and students’ relationship to the institution.

Organizational members often create personalized narratives of what it means to be a part of an organization and its mission. As such, organizations are influential in the identity construction and self-worth of its members (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). However, organizational members typically negotiate multiple identities at once (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003), some of which can conflict with the identity and culture of the institution itself. Higher education institutions are especially interesting organizations to explore these questions of

identity negotiation for undergraduate students. Universities are key sites where individuals interact with people who are different from them (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), and in many cases, for the first time. In terms of identity formation, “late adolescence and early adulthood are the unique times when a sense of personal and social identity is formed” (Gurin et al., 2002, p. 334). Therefore, experiences and interactions at colleges and universities happen at a crucial moment of identity development.

Members’ narratives also impact the organization. Institutions are communicatively constructed (Dailey & Browning, 2014) and members’ stories help to shift or reify an organizational culture (Kramer & Berman, 2001). There is a reflexive relationship that exists between stories and organizational culture. A culture is constantly in flux because of the stories being told and this changing culture in turn fosters more storytelling. These stories have important impacts on individual sensemaking processes (Boje, 2006; Kramer & Berman, 2001), as well as the way organizations can better facilitate processes of socialization. For these reasons, this dissertation centers on the interplay between institutional and individual “narratives of difference,” a term I have coined to help better understand the ways in which difference is communicated and experienced through narratives. “Narratives of difference” are a means through which I explore organization-individual relationships as they relate to diversity and inclusion and the co-constitution of member and institutional identity. Additionally, narratives are a sensemaking tool for members to negotiate how their identity fits within the larger organizational culture and inversely, how organizations help to socialize its members into this culture.

Organization of Chapter

The remainder of this chapter is designed to provide a definitional foundation, and give an overview of my case study and the remainder of the dissertation. First, I define the important foundational terms I use, including *narratives*, *diversity*, *inclusion*, *identity* and *narratives of difference*, the latter being a term I have conceptualized to describe the connection between narratives and the values of diversity and inclusion, experienced or espoused. I then describe the site of my case study, Texas A&M University, a university with a particularly rich history regarding inclusion. Given this history, I begin to explore the relationship between institutional and individual “narratives of difference,” in order to introduce my dissertation study. I conclude by outlining the remaining chapters of my dissertation.

Narratives, Identity and Diversity

There are many different conceptions of what constitutes a “narrative” and as Boje (2006) argues, more traditional understandings can be “deadening” (p. 33). They focus too heavily on a particular structure and what should be considered a plot, which causes narrative scholars to ignore other potentially important forms of storytelling. I have established my own definition for the purposes of my research. I define narratives as the telling of a meaningful moment, a rupture in the normal course of events, situated in space and time, that has a stated or implied causality. A narrative also has an audience, although the audience can be the narrator. Although some form of temporal ordering of events is necessary, it does not have to be linear and chronological ordering.

Narratives are an important way in which individuals can negotiate and make meaning of their identities, and are an accepted site of identity construction (Schnurr, Van De Mieroop, &

Zayts, 2014). Identity work can even be limited by the absence of using narratives as tools to study it (Taylor, 2006). As Kraus (2006) explains:

[The self] must be understood as processed, socially embedded, and readable through the self-stories in which it discursively manifests itself. In order to understand this construction, we need to analyze the processes (the telling) as well as the relationships (between teller and listener) and the form and content of such self-stories. (p. 106)

Thus, identity development is an ongoing and changing story. Narratives related to identity can be impacted by institutional contexts, including the organization itself, who individuals interact with, membership in different social groups, and who they are telling their stories to (Schnurr et al., 2014). As Brown (2015) adds, “Identities, people’s subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are and desire to become, are implicated in, and thus key to understanding and explaining, almost everything that happens in and around organizations” (p. 2014).

Identity is an answer to the question “Who am I?” (Allen, 2011; Brown, 2015). For Allen (2011), it is also a response to “Who am I in relation to others?” because who we are is also based in the social groups we are part of, which is why she opts for the term *social identity*. Identities such as race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality are also social constructs (Omi & Winant, 2015; Feagin, 2013; Elias & Feagin, 2016; Hill Collins, 1997). That being said, identity is a reality with material and symbolic consequences (Crenshaw, 1991; Omi & Winant, 2015). Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) also note the pragmatic uses for categories of identity adding, “Identities mobilized in political struggles of disenfranchised groups are not fundamentally fixed and unchanging but, rather, are *strategically essentialist*” (p. 133). Therefore, researchers and activist groups often homogenize identity groups for pragmatic reasons and to draw important conclusions about how to challenge oppressive structures and constructed identities. It’s also

important to note that a single identity does not manifest on its own. Intersecting identity constructs interact simultaneously to create unique and complex experiences (Gillborn, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). And while I explore race in this dissertation in order to keep the study focused and give due diligence to the complexity of this particular identity construct, there are important impacts of others, including gender, that will certainly come into play and will not be ignored.

Identity also has an important role in higher education institutions and the focus on diversity, another key term to introduce, as well as inclusion. And to give a finite definition of these terms is difficult given their broad applications and ambiguity (Ahmed, 2012; Kvam, Considine, & Palmeri, 2018). Broadly, *diversity* is a term used to describe the presence of difference or different types of people that exist within an institution, while *inclusion* is the effort to increase diversity. As Meibar (2011) adds, “Inclusion is a choice we make, individually or collectively, and it sets the tone for any organization” (p. 14). But even these definitions are too simplified. These terms are performative, and “diversity” has been used to replace terminology such as “equal opportunities” and “anti-racism” because it is unthreatening and “digestible,” especially in higher education institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p. 54). By claiming diversity as a value, organizations give off the impression they are working to create a place that accepts all types of people. And these expressions, official or otherwise, of diversity are included in what I refer to as “narratives of difference.”

“Narratives of Difference”

The concept “narratives of difference” is one I developed for the purposes of my own research and this study. I did so because a term did not exist that properly encapsulated the way I wanted to explore the interplay of organizations, identity, and narrative. Broadly, “narratives of

difference” are those that explore experiences of difference and identity. Specifically, these narratives are a telling of meaningful experiences about an organization and/or individual in relation to its/his/her/them identity, diversity and inclusion. As a particular type of narrative, “narratives of difference,” whether written or spoken, have some form of temporality, connecting past, present, and future, whether explicit or implied. And importantly, they are also sensemaking tools. “Narratives of difference” are a particularly useful type of narrative that focuses on how institutions and individuals make sense of and respond to issues of difference and identity. The concept of “narratives of difference” can be used to explore many different identity constructs, including gender, ability, sexuality, and race.

Higher Education Institutions and “Narrative of Difference”

Within the context of diversity and inclusion, the history of higher education is a complicated one. Postsecondary institutions are established sites of discrimination (Wilder, 2013) and at a macro level, I argue that higher education institutions act as micro-societies. The structures and practices that exist within these institutions mirror larger structures of capitalism, oppression, and power (Allen, 2011). Allen (2011) notes how “the educational system replicates the class structure and corporate system of capitalist systems” (p. 105). And it’s because of this that we can’t ignore the inherently discriminatory nature of higher education in the U.S., given its establishment within the context of slavery. The first elite institutions were both funded by slavery and built by slaves (Wilder, 2013), weaving oppression and exclusion into the original fabric of academia.

Sadly, the effects of this history still impact marginalized groups, as “campus folklore and place names record the story of slavery in college towns” (Wilder, 2013, p. 145). Instead of

considering how this history can negatively impact the experiences of marginalized groups on college campuses, higher education institutions typically attempt to whitewash or diminish their tainted histories. As Wilder (2013) notes, after the abolishment of slavery, “the northern elite [were] cleansing the stain of human slavery from the story of its prosperity. Some of the best-educated people in the nation were revising history to romanticize and sanitize their relationship to bondage” (p. 280). Unfortunately, if these revised narratives are not challenged, the roots of current practices and traditions at universities can be lost.

The values of diversity and inclusion have become important for higher education institutions to address and there are particular ways in which they do so. First, university policies tend to address the symbolic manifestations of discrimination, as opposed to the material consequences. An example are official policies regarding discrimination. Although policies can be put in place as a symbolic gesture to promote inclusion, enforcing such policies and addressing the harmful material effects on individuals is often much more difficult (Ahmed, 2012; Hill Collins, 2000). The reason, as Crenshaw (1988) notes, is because “there is no self-evident interpretation” of anti-discrimination policies (p. 1344). Not only that, the values of an academic institution may not reflect those of all of their different stakeholders and without coherence of practice, material manifestations of discrimination are not properly addressed.

One of the most highly used symbolic tools implemented by universities are diversity statements. Although such statements espouse the values of a particular institution, they bring to the forefront the tension between reactive and proactive strategies that higher education institutions use to address diversity and difference. For example, and pulling from my case study, the following are the diversity statements used by Texas A&M University. These statements are crafted by the Office of Diversity and are not called “Diversity Statements,” which is potentially

beneficial as terms like “diversity” are seen as digestible, unthreatening, and may not have the impact needed (Ahmed, 2012). Instead, they are referred to as “Commitment Statements,” with one addressing Equal Employment Opportunity and the other a University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination (“Commitment Statements,” n.d.). They read as follows:

Equal Employment Opportunity

The Texas A&M University System shall provide equal opportunity for employment to all persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, or veteran status, and shall strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity through the System for faculty and staff employees. Additionally, we must ensure employees know University and System policies and procedures. Furthermore, we need to encourage and foster a workplace community where individuals are valued for their diverse backgrounds and differences.

University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination

Texas A&M is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, Texas A&M encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality, diversity, pluralism and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit.

Here, diversity is defined in a way that recognizes many identity constructs (race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, or veteran status), and the statements rightfully acknowledge that there needs to be an organizational climate where “individuals are valued for their diverse backgrounds and differences” and “encourages a climate that values and nurtures

collegiality, diversity, pluralism, and the uniqueness of the individual.” However, although these statements are seemingly explicit in terms of what the university values, they also arguably foster ambiguity (Ahmed, 2012). These statements *only* appear on the “Office of Diversity” web page and not on Texas A&M University’s main web page or near the other official “Mission Statement.” And unfortunately, there are no clear guidelines of what happens when these commitments are not realized.

The most visible manifestations of anti-discrimination values typically come *after* an incident has occurred on a college campus. Diversity statements don’t function as effective long-term strategies that address *both* symbolic and material discrimination. As Ahmed (2012) explains, formal statements of commitment are typically used to simply abide by the law (and as discussed earlier, this has limited impact) and in many cases, “diversity and equality commitments are an ‘institutional habit’ and can be used, like statements, to not follow-through” (p. 124). Diversity statements are part of the organizational narrative that higher education institutions construct about their values regarding inclusion, but these verbal commitments may not be in line with the experiences of those marginalized bodies that are members of these institutions.

Case Study: Texas A&M University

Similar to the examples used to open this chapter, my own university, Texas A&M, has also experienced many events related to discrimination since the school officially integrated in 1963. As “episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong” (Hochschild, 1994, p. 4), these historical events serve as “magnified moments” that provide opportunities to reflect on the evolution of Texas A&M’s commitment to diversity and how it has impacted the

construction of its organizational narrative of what it means to be an Aggie. Although choosing Texas A&M University as the site of my case study was practical given my role as a doctoral student here, the history of the university, mixed with its strong adherence to Aggie traditions, makes it an even more interesting institution to study.

Texas A&M University was established in 1876 and remained a White, all-male, military campus until the early 1960's. Although the university was officially integrated in 1963, Hispanic men were admitted prior and graduated as early as 1891 ("Diversity timeline," 2013). The admittance of women followed very shortly thereafter. Currently, the university has just over 69,000 currently enrolled students, 53% male and 47% female. The university is predominately White, at almost 56%. 21% of students identify as Hispanic, 3.5% Black, 7.5% Asian, and almost 9% are international students ("Accountability," 2018).

Among what defines the "Aggie Spirit" is a commitment to a series of very well-known traditions. These include the Corps of Cadets, a reminder of the military history of the university and the largest student organization on campus ("Corps of Cadets," n.d.), the Aggie Ring, the "most recognizable symbol of the Aggie Network" since 1889, and Reveille, the official mascot of Texas A&M since 1931 ("Aggie culture", n.d.), to name a few. These traditions are meant to reinforce the Aggie Core Values: *excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service* ("Core values," n.d.). These traditions and core values remain embedded in the everyday lives of current organizational members.

Although the university prides itself on respect for others and a sense community, its history is not clean of issues of discrimination, as is true of many higher education institutions. Among the traditions at the university is placing a penny for luck on the statue of Lawrence Sullivan Ross ("Sul Ross" or "Sully"), a figure who was responsible for keeping the university

afloat in the late 1890s and is said to represent “the embodiment of Aggie Spirit and tradition” (“Pennies on Sully,” n.d). However, Sullivan Ross was also an official in the Confederate Army and rumored to be a member of the KKK; as a result, the presence of his statue has sparked several forms of protest over the years. The last time the controversy was addressed was in 2017, when the President of the university announced the statue would remain in Academic Plaza despite the removal of Confederate-based statues at several other universities. Another university tradition that has come under fire is Yell Leaders, A&M’s alternative to football cheerleaders. Despite the many years women have been at the university, A&M still has not had a female yell leader. In 2016, two young women attempted to run for yell leader but were not voted in (Bradshaw, 2016) and received a lot of public backlash for challenging the all-male tradition.

Despite these setbacks, Texas A&M maintains its commitment to diversity and inclusion. It’s official “commitment statements” address its drive to promote inclusion and provide equal employment opportunity. In 2010, the Office of Diversity implemented a new Diversity Plan, which seeks to enhance its commitment to inclusion (“Texas A&M’s diversity plan,” n.d.). The plan is based off the three pillars of *accountability*, *campus climate*, and *equity*. The specific efforts include developing strategies for tracking progress the institution is making in creating an environment that promotes equitable treatment of all people, regardless of their identities, and their success. This proactive strategy is one that highlights Texas A&M’s continued focus on these important values.

“Narratives of Difference” Connecting Institution and Individual

Although there are many avenues to explore diversity and inclusion within higher education institutions and the interplay between institutions and their members, narratives provide a particularly interesting opportunity. To begin, narratives are an important sensemaking

tool (Boje, 2008; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011; Weick, 1995). It is through the construction of stories that individuals make sense and meaning of their role within organizations, as well as their identity. Such identities can be stigmatized if they are positioned in a racially marginalized group, and narratives are also a way in which this stigma can be managed. It is through the process of narrative identity that individuals negotiate who they are in relation to others (Loyttyniemi, 2006; Rolling Jr. & Bey, 2016) and attempt to manage this difference.

The connection between these more individualized levels of narrative construction are related to institutional narratives through the process of socialization. It is important for organizations to stay attuned to these processes in order to effectively facilitate socialization. This is because organizations are also narratively constructed (Dailey & Browning, 2014). The impact of individualized and institutional stories is reciprocal; Organizational culture impacts the experiences of members and the stories they tell and the individual stories that people tell about their experience influences the collective culture and stories of the organization (Kramer & Berman, 2001). And it's the relationship between individual and institutional "narratives of difference" that is central to this dissertation.

Exploring the "Narratives of Difference" at Texas A&M

Within the context of this dissertation study, the focus is to explore how institutional and individual narratives are layered within Texas A&M, a memorialized and contested organization, and the ways in which this tension impacts the lived experiences of minority undergraduate students at the university. In order to engage this central problem, I employed three methodologies: (1) archival analysis, (2) photovoice, and (3) walking tour interviews.

In order to understand how the values of diversity and inclusion are incorporated into Texas A&M's institutional story stock and the impact of this on what it means to be an Aggie, I

collected and analyzed archival data. By focusing on Texas A&M as a case study, as opposed to higher education institutions more broadly, I was able to provide more depth and context of the particular impact of this unique environment (Smith and Keyton, 2001) on organizational and individual narrative construction. Analysis of archival data was informed by discourse analysis, which uses tracing questions to identify themes across “magnified moments” (Hochschild, 1994) in the history of diversity at Texas A&M.

As I moved into the exploration of individualized narratives of racially diverse undergraduate students, I utilized photovoice and walking tour interview methodologies. The first part of participants’ engagement involved taking three photographs with the broad prompt “This is my Texas A&M.” Visual images better reflect the multisensory experiences of individuals (Wilhoit, 2017) and are a complex site for storytelling that can elicit more meaningful reflections of experiences (Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007). After participants sent me their photos, the final method involved walking tour interviews, where students chose 3-5 meaningful places on Texas A&M’s campus to take me to. Along the way, I asked questions about memories and stories they attach to those places, the people they spend time with, and their use of the spaces. As opposed to traditional, stationary interviews, mobile interviewing methods allow for an exploration of the tension between place and people (Anderson, 2004), allow individuals to “show” instead of “tell” researchers about their experiences (Evans & Jones, 2011), and can help participants forget about the power difference between them and the researcher (Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs, & Hein, 2008; Hein, Evans, & Jones, 2008). The interview becomes a natural conversation.

When these individualized “narratives of difference” were put in tension with the organizational narratives revealed in the archival analysis, the following findings were the most

significant. In response to “magnified moments” over the course of its history of racial inclusion, Texas A&M University has responded in a way that frames its traditions and core values as *inherently inclusive*, and therefore, not in need of shifting to better prioritize diversity and inclusion. It reinforces this framing through current narrative-driven processes including memorialized places on campus, official campus tours for prospective students, an intensive Freshman orientation program called Fish Camp, and curtailing its own history. Taken together, the university promotes an *inclusion as assimilation* model. The general message is that as long as newcomers are willing to accept the history, traditions, and values of the university, anyone is welcome. That being said, individualized “narratives of difference” do have the potential to destabilize core institutional narratives by highlighting diversity of the Aggie experience and resisting assimilation into the “macro” culture of the university by extending what it means to be part of the “Aggie Family.”

Summary and Dissertation Overview

Higher education institutions are contested sites for issues of diversity and inclusion, and are accessible institutions to explore the connection between narrative construction, students’ sensemaking processes about their identity, and how organizations socialize its members. While many organizations can be used to study these topics as they relate to inclusion, the long histories of oppression that exist within higher education and the impact of diversity on the learning and democratic outcomes of students is why this dissertation focuses specifically on this type of organization, along with my own membership in academia. Texas A&M University, an institution who has addressed its own fair share of discrimination-based incidents, serves as the central case for this study and where I explore the relationship between institutional and individual “narratives of difference” and their impact on student experience.

This central topic is informed by several important bodies of literature, which I explore in Chapter II. Narratives are the site of identity construction, including for organizational members, whose experiences then inform the institutional narratives constructed by an organization about its values. Within the context of this study, narratives are used to explore how diversity and inclusion are valued within higher education and the ways in which “narratives of difference,” from both an institutional and individual level, are in tension with one another. Most studies explore these issues from either the side of the organization or the impact on student audiences. Instead, it is my hope to use previous research to highlight the interplay of these narratives and show how organizations need to be more attuned to (narrative) sensemaking processes in order to better socialize its members.

In order to explore these different narrative levels, I employed archival analysis, photovoice, and walking tour interviews as my methodologies, as I detail in Chapter III. Archival analysis allowed me to trace the ways in which Texas A&M has addressed issues of discrimination over its history and how this history plays into its current institutional “narratives of difference.” Then, to understand individual “narratives of difference” for undergraduate students, my participants were instructed to take three photographs of “their Texas A&M,” and then design a tour of their most memorable places to take me on as we did a walking interview.

Chapters IV, V, VI and VII share the findings and implications of these various methodologies and answer my central research questions. Chapter IV explores the ways in which Texas A&M University has (re)presented the values of diversity and inclusion in its core institutional narratives over time, while Chapter V delves into the everyday occasions for telling that the university and its students use to (re)work core institutional narratives. Chapter VI then moves into how undergraduate students at the university express forms of relation with core

institutional narratives and how individual “narratives of difference” can help destabilize them to better represent diverse student experiences. Finally, Chapter VII addresses the implications of this study for Texas A&M University, higher education institutions, organizations broadly, and the discipline of communication.

As I moved into this study, I was driven by these initial questions: What “narratives of difference” has Texas A&M constructed? How does this impact our understanding of what it means to be an Aggie (or member of this institution)? What “narratives of difference” have undergraduate students at Texas A&M constructed? What are the impacts of the similarities and differences between “narratives of difference” at the institutional and individual level? How can we use this information to create a more inclusive Texas A&M?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discrimination-based crises magnify the amount of attention placed on a university's commitment to diversity and inclusion, fostering an opportunity to assess and shift the ways these values are prioritized in core institutional narratives. These narratives are not only established and reinforced through official statements, but also in the way institutions use space, including memorialized places and campus tours. Also key to the equation is the impact of individual "narratives of difference" on the institution, and the ways in which organizational members make meaning of and experience identity. And when you look at the interplay between these institutional and individual narratives, there are important implications for how to better foster inclusivity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how institutional and individual "narratives of difference" interact within higher education institutions to influence core organizational narratives and students' relationship to the institution. More specifically, I'm interested in how Texas A&M University integrates the values of diversity and inclusion into its core institutional narratives, and how these narratives are in tension with those constructed by racially diverse undergraduate students. Again, "narratives of difference" are a type of narrative, spoken or written, that tell meaningful experiences about an organization and/or individual in relation to identity, diversity and inclusion. These narratives also serve as sensemaking tools for organizational members, which in this context are undergraduate students at Texas A&M. Organizations should stay attuned to these moments of sensemaking and how institutional narratives are in tension with their students' narratives, in order to facilitate effective socialization and create a more inclusive climate.

To establish a foundation for exploring this thread between institutional and individual narratives, this chapter outlines the important theoretical frameworks and bodies of literature that inform this work. First, I explore the literature on narratives broadly, further establishing the definitions I use for the purposes of this study. Then, I explore general narratives surrounding diversity and higher education institutions, and how universities should respond to race-related crises, through the lens of crisis communication. Next, I look at how these narratives work within specific institutions, in conjunction with a discussion of space and place, memorialization on college campuses, and campus tours. Finally, I move into literature regarding individual-level narratives constructed by students about their experiences as they relate to difference. My final step in the literature review begins to unpack the interplay between the institutional and individual “narratives of difference” at the heart of this dissertation.

Narrative v. Story

Narratives are an important avenue for understanding life experiences and how people make meaning of those experiences and connect them to the larger world around them. As Chase (2011) explains, “Narrative researchers highlight that we can learn about anything – history and society as well as lived experience – by maintaining a focus on narrated lives” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). There are multiple ways to approach narrative inquiry. Saldana (2011) considers narrative inquiry as having the “goal of transforming data...about participants into literary story formats – an approach colloquially labeled ‘creative nonfiction’” (pp. 11-12). Narratives have also been used to study conflict and can emerge in diaries, interviews, and fieldnotes to tell conflict in a story-like way (Jiang & Buzzanell, 2013). Chase (2011) provides an extended articulation of narrative inquiry that I think my work embodies:

Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them. Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. (p. 421)

However, there is much debate about what narratives actually are (Riessman, 2008). Scholars' definitions vary significantly:

"I define a narrative as a construction, in talk, of sequence or consequence. It may be established minimally: for example, sequence is implied by expressions like 'then' or 'next,' consequence by 'so.' Alternatively, a speaker may present an extended account of experiences which makes explicit reference to sequence...From a speaker describing her life" (Taylor, 2006, p. 95).

"Narratives are characterized by their complexity. Stories are about problems, dilemmas, contradictions and imbalances. They connect the past, the present and the future, and they link past experiences with what may be yet to come" (Monteagudo, 2011, p. 298).

"For our present purposes, narration can be conceived as the telling (in whatever medium, though especially language) of a series of temporal events so that a meaningful sequence is portrayed – the story of the plot of the narrative" (Kerby, 1991, p. 39).

“In our analysis we conceive of narratives as having four key features: They “(1) foreshadow a problem, (2) provide a sequential rendering of actions in the face of complications leading toward resolution, (3) achieve closure, [and] (4) invite or pronounce moral implications” (Browning & Morris, 2012, p. 32).

“A narrative must be more than one thing following another. Some form of meaningful connectedness among episodes is necessary for hearers/readers and analysts to recognize a stretch of talk or text as a bounded whole or gestalt with a beginning, middle, and end, that taken together has a point” (Mishler, 2006, p. 31).

I have taken these definitions and the similarities between them to help me develop my own conceptualization of “narrative,” which I define *as the telling of a meaningful moment, a rupture in the normal course of events, situated in space and time, that has a stated or implied causality. A narrative also has an audience, although the audience can be the narrator. Although some form of temporal ordering of events is necessary, it does not have to be linear and chronological ordering.* I feel this definition is particularly useful for my own work because it allows me to account for audience, time, and content, without being too constraining, as Boje (2006) argues is the problem with many traditional narrativists. Mishler (2006) agrees, noting that we need to move beyond the linear temporal-order causal model of narratives if we want to accurately reflect “how individuals learn, change, and develop” (p. 36). Narrative is a process, as well as a product and linear-temporal-ordering constrains the recognition of the former. It also allows for a more realistic exploration of identity through narrative and challenges “the tendency to treat identity development as a unitary process, as if each life could be defined by a single plot line” (Mishler, 2006, p. 41). Individuals rarely make sense of their lives in a nice, neat fashion and the ways that researchers explore this phenomenon should reflect this complexity.

There is also a debate as to whether there should be a distinction between narratives and stories. While some scholars choose not to make a distinction (Bruner, 2002; Riessman, 2008), others firmly differentiate between the two terms. Dailey and Browning (2014) even argue that a single term cannot be used to describe the complexity of narratives and prefer to use dualities to describe the “functions of narrative repetition,” including control/resistance, differentiation/integration, and stability/change (p. 25). Boje (2006) feels that “traditional narrative is just too deadening. Storying is active” (p. 33). In his view, traditional narrative inquiry is too constraining in terms of what it considered a plot and how this causes many scholars to ignore more “‘improper’ story-types” as legitimate for analysis (Boje, 2006, p. 44). Boje (2006) provides a helpful definition of *story*: “An exchange between two or more persons during which a past or anticipated experience was being referenced, recounted, interpreted, or challenged” (p. 33). However, I argue that perhaps conceptions of narrative are not as limiting as Boje contends and there is overlap between this definition of story and how other scholars define narrative. It is because of this that I personally do not make a distinction between the two concepts in my own research. Differentiating between the two terms would not elicit a different approach to my analysis or in how my results are understood by my chosen audiences.

Responses to Racism in Higher Education Institutions

With its vast number of people from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, the college campus inevitably becomes an arena for race-related conflicts. The U.S. has been plagued with dozens of crises that have made waves in the media and have caused us to question the integrity of higher education institutions. As college campuses become increasingly diverse, it is crucial that we address "issues of equity and inclusion within the academy" because the current state of our system still perpetuates systemic forms of racism (Muñoz, 2015, p.53).

Barnett and Williams (2015) add that if we truly want to improve the climates of college campuses, we need to be having more conversations about these issues and specifically, "it's time people of majority identities talk about diversity as much as people with less dominant identities are forced to" (p.22). However, instead of having these important conversations, our attention is being drawn to the many race-related crises that remind us how far we still have to go to create equity in education.

Fortunately, these crises can also create opportunities for growth. When colleges and universities respond effectively, it can make a statement that higher education institutions are moving in the right direction, which can potentially act as an important driving force for change. However, if brushed off and handled incorrectly, university responses to race-related crises can help perpetuate racism and harmful campus climates. Liu and Pompper (2012) also recognize that issues involving culture, ethnicity, and race are emotionally charged conflicts that are prone to negative media coverage, potential financial loss, distrust in stakeholders, and escalation of tensions between different racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, effective crisis management is critical in these situations (p. 128). And with so many stakeholders to account for, higher education institutions have to be particularly strategic about how they respond to such moments.

In terms of racism-related crises involving students, universities are put in an interesting position. Although they do not directly commit the acts of racism, a majority of the responsibility is still placed on them. Because of this, universities are required to respond and to *respond well*. However, this can sometimes be a lofty request because schools have to send a message that is appropriate for a multitude of audiences such as students, parents, faculty, staff, media, donors, and government entities, all of which have different expectations (Leeper & Leeper, 2006). Responses will help dictate their reputation, their ongoing relationship with the community and

can ultimately impact their bottom line. Leeper and Leeper (2006) contend that if colleges and universities stick with simply disseminating messages rather than creating a dialogue with important publics, "they may suddenly find themselves embroiled in conflict and confronted with a crisis" (p.129). Even if these racism-based incidents are not considered crises at the onset, they can quickly evolve into something that threatens the core narratives that exist for higher education institutions in regards to diversity and inclusion.

Institutional Narratives

It can be argued that the use of storytelling is central to the functioning of institutions. As Gubrium and Holstein (2009) note, "Meaning is constructed at the confluence of sites of narrative production [including organizations] and the work of situated storytellers, listeners, and readers" (p. 197). Narratives are also a means through which organizations can construct and maintain a particular culture, "defin[ing] power relationships and organizational ideology, advanc[ing] behavioral changes, and reinforce[ing] predictable behaviors (Kramer & Berman, 2001). Boje (2006) utilizes the term *storytelling organization* to define "a collective system[icity] in which the performance of stories is a key part of members' sensemaking and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory" (p. 34). This definition is appealing within this context because it highlights the relationship between institutional and individual narratives and organizational members' sensemaking.

Organizational stories also evoke emotion and symbolism, as well as meaning-making processes, enriching fact with meaning (Smith & Keyton, 2001). In connecting institutional narratives to the discussion of space and maintaining tradition, it's also important to note that narratives are used *performatively* by organizations, and there are many occasions for

remembering, including temporally marked occasions, temporally irregular events, and solidifying existing traditions (Kramer & Berman, 2001; Linde, 2009).

Institution must also manage the individualized narratives of its members, as they play into the effectiveness of a collective culture. As Boje (1991) notes:

Bits and pieces of organization experience are recounted socially throughout the firm to formulate recognizable, cogent, defensible, and seemingly rational collective accounts that will serve as precedent for individual assumption, decision, and action. This is the institutional memory system of the organization. Although individuals are limited information processors, each person retains a part of the story/line, a bit of interpretation, story performance practices, and some facts that confirm a line of reasoning. (p. 106)

Although institutions construct their own narratives and attempt to create cohesion among the narratives of their members (Boje, 1991), it is often true that there exist individualized narratives in contention with the organizational culture (Kramer & Berman, 2001). Managing this tension is important for institutions that wish to effectively socialize its members. However, in order to do so, organizations need to have a more thorough understanding of the various ways it reinforces its core institutional narratives.

The Impact of Space and Place in Memorialized and Contested Institutions

Many of the traditions that are physically memorialized on college campuses are in the form of monuments and statues. This purposeful use of space helps connect the history of the university to the current experiences of a university's members. Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu (2016) identify *space* "to denote key characteristics of the environment or settings within which characters live and act: location, position, arrangement, distance, direction, orientation, and movement," while the notion of *place* highlights how space is used and its impact of human

action and experience (p. 7). We can also indicate space as having either a *strategic* or *emotional* purpose, depending on if it has been constructed for pragmatic purposes or to evoke emotion (Ryan et al., 2016). For example, a classroom is designed for the pragmatic purposes of facilitating learning, while a war memorial is constructed specifically to elicit certain emotions. On college campuses, students experience a unique sense of place that is influenced by the way a campus is designed and how its story is incorporated into the space. And it is certainly an emotional appeal that Texas A&M draws on in the physical ways it highlights its traditions and history.

Space also has a way of telling a story, although this is a new “focus of narratological interest” (Ryan et al., 2016, p. 129). Using space to tell a story is dictated by the positions of certain moments, the maintenance of historical buildings, the ways paths are designed to have people move through a space in a certain way, and even street and monument names. On college campuses, much of this purposefulness is exemplified in campus tours, a performative moment a university creates to tell a certain version of its story. As Kramer and Berman (2001) explain in detail:

Tour guides frequently tell these stories of academic heritage to visitors, prospective students, and students' parents who then repeat the stories to others. The stories represent the sanitized or official university culture; some are officially endorsed by appearing in University publications. By knowing these stories, students come to understand a unified culture of the university; by repeating these stories, students help recreate and maintain that dominant culture. (p. 301)

The narratives told by tour guides are more likely to have a linear temporality and causal order, and elicit the sensemaking processes of visitors (Burdelski, Kawashima, & Yamazaki, 2014).

Tours have the potential to deceive and exploit those who take them to varying degrees (Pezzullo, 2007). There is always a purposeful filtering of information and presentation. In the case of campus tours for prospective students, the goal is to influence individuals to come to the university. Therefore, tours are naturally designed to highlight what is best about the university. And while this approach can be useful for initially introducing people to the school, it can negatively impact the sensemaking processes of students when they become members and learn that the original institutional narrative was potentially misleading and may be in contention with their experiences and individual narratives.

Individual Narratives

As Bruner (2002) promptly points out, “‘Self-making’ is the product of ‘self-telling’” (p. 14). Telling stories is one of the most impactful ways individuals learn about themselves, construct their identities and understand how their “selves” are situated within the world (Bruner, 2002; Kirby, 1991; Linde, 2009; Schnurr, Van De Mieroop, & Zayts, 2014). As such, identity is socially constructed, in relationship and talk with others (Linde, 2009; Taylor, 2006; Weedon, 2004). Therefore, if identity were to have a concrete structure, “it would look like a story — an internalized and evolving tale with main characters, intersecting plots, key scenes, and an imagined ending, representing how the person reconstructs the personal past (chapters gone by) and anticipates the future (chapters yet to come)” (Nadeem, 2015). Narratives are so central to our everyday interactions that of course our “self” can be discovered and understood through language. As Kerby (1991) notes, “The self is generated and is given unity in and through its own narratives, in its own recounting and hence understanding of itself” (Kerby, 1991, p. 41). Narration is a sensemaking process, including making meaning of self.

Narratives are also an effective means of reflecting on the messiness of identity. Identity is fluid, complex and should be considered an ongoing construction (Kraus, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Weedon, 2004). Therefore, our life narratives should also be viewed in the same way, as not merely recollections of the past, but constructions and always-changing interpretations (Kerby, 1991; Taylor, 2006). And there is not just one unitary story, but a multiplicity for how we understand ourselves in this way. Bruner (2002) refers to these life narratives as our “self-making stories” and reminds us that they are impacted by culture and shift over time. Identity is also impacted by the social groups we are members of (Allen, 2011; Schnurr et al., 2014). As Langellier (2001) observes, “Narrative performance thus refers to a site of struggle over personal and social identity rather than to the acts of a self with a fixed, unified, stable, or final essence which serves as the origin of accomplishment or experience” (p. 151).

Identity and Intersectionality

As an organizational communication scholar whose research often centers on race and gender, the concept of identity is one that I have explored intimately. The same is true in this project on “narratives of difference.” Therefore, intersectionality is also a theoretical framework that needs to be addressed here because of its ability to extend our understanding of individual “narratives of difference” and narrative identity. *Intersectionality* “addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time, for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, disability, and so on” (Gillborn, 2015, p. 278). Although Crenshaw (1991) is often credited with the origins of intersectionality, Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) note that this is only the case for the term itself. The foundations for intersectional scholarship and activism were laid much earlier by Black women during the Civil Rights Movement, the protests of the 1960s and 70s, and with the work of the Combahee River

Collective and their coining of “interlocking systems of oppression.” Intersectionality is a concept that is contested and unclear because of a common failure to understand how interlocking oppressions can manifest themselves in certain contexts, the “etc. problem” (Gillborn, 2015), and the failure of mathematical metaphors to describe intersectionality without reducing it to “dividing or multiplying” identities (West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

Intersectionality isn't just a theory that highlights interlocking systems of oppression. It is also an analytical tool (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). It highlights the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly women of color, and links collective stories to broader societal structures. Women of color offer another unique standpoint for how oppression operates (Allen, 1998). Speaking of feminist standpoint theory, Allen (1998) notes that such an approach “does not essentialize the category ‘woman.’ Rather, it encourages us to solicit stories from many types of women” (p. 576). And as Hill Collins (1997) adds, “No standpoint is neutral.” To extend this, I'd argue that no narrative identity is neutral either. Therefore, it is the stories of diverse voices that I seek. In this project, when I discuss “narratives of difference,” I have focused on race. That being said, I recognize there are other identity constructs that may be at play and need to be considered to fully understand how such narratives function within higher education institutions. To understand the impact of institutional narratives, *all* types of individual narratives must be considered.

Narrative Sensemaking and Socialization

Narratives connect institutions and individuals in several ways. First, narratives are important sensemaking tools that organizational members use to make meaning of their role and experiences. Second, they can also be a means through which individuals attempt to deal with stigma, using narratives to separate themselves from majority experiences and make sense of

their unique positionality. Lastly, and in connecting sensemaking, it's important that organizations stay attuned to these processes if their goal is effective socialization because narratives can reveal a lot about how members function and thrive. But, before drawing out this connection a bit further, I will briefly dive into these separate bodies of literature.

Narratives, Sensemaking and Socialization

As Weick (1995) plainly explains, "The concept of sensemaking is well named because, literally, it means the making of sense" (p. 4). Sensemaking is the ongoing process of how individuals make sense of and create meaning of their worlds; it's retrospective, social, systemic, and grounded in identity construction (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). And because our worlds are messy, exploring the sensemaking processes of human beings can be a difficult task, as the process itself is complex and ambiguous. However, accuracy is not necessarily what we seek as researchers:

If accuracy is nice but not necessary in sensemaking, then what is necessary? The answer is something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story. (Weick, 1995, p. 61)

And it's this storytelling quality of sensemaking that is of particular interest to me and the purposes of this study.

Although scholars have long explored sensemaking, I will focus specifically on *narrative sensemaking*. As Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) explain, "Whether we are aware of it or not, we

make our lives and ourselves ‘sensible’ through embodied (bodily) interpretations in our ongoing everyday interactions,” that is, through the stories we tell (p. 64). A key to this definition is the notion of *embodiment*, for we make sense of our lives through emotion and “sensed bodily experience.” And it’s these experiences we translate into narratives, polyphonic and performative understandings (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2011) that we use to make meaning of our messy and complex lives as a way to shape our actions and identities. For as Boje (2008) notes, things only become experiences when they are told as stories.

Narrative sensemaking not only happens at the individual, but also organizational level and the term *storytelling organization* bridges these two levels. Boje (2008) defines a “storytelling organization” as “collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sensemaking and a means to allow them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (p. 1). In short, organizations are narratively constructed (Dailey & Browning, 2014) and it’s through storytelling processes that members make sense of what it means to be a part of that organization, contributing to their developing individual narrative, but also the organizational narrative and culture.

Sensemaking and socialization.

Organizations need to stay attuned to individualized narratives as sensemaking tools in order to effectively facilitate socialization. Organizations are narratively constructed, emerging via communication (Dailey & Browning, 2014). Stories are cultural artifacts that help to produce and maintain an organization’s culture and members of that organization in turn help to reify that culture (Kramer & Berman, 2001). As Linde (2009) adds:

Institutions and people within institutions do not mechanically record and reproduce the

past. Rather, they work the past, re-presenting it each time in new but related ways for a particular purpose, in a particular form that uses the past to create a particular desired present and future. (p. 14)

Storytelling creates organizational culture and the result is more stories (Kramer & Berman, 2001). Multiple narratives must be managed at once, shifting over time and sometimes in conflict with narratives that already exist (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). Therefore, organizations can't ignore the narrative sensemaking process, especially when there is a possibility that individuals' narratives contest the preferred organizational culture. As was discussed earlier, higher education institutions and particularly Texas A&M have an organizational cultural strongly grounded in tradition. And they rely on members of the institution to keep this alive.

It is this connection that Michael W. Kramer and Julie E. Berman have already explored within the context of higher education institutions. In their article about how undergraduate students use stories to make sense of their university's culture, the two scholars make a set of important arguments and findings that were very influential for this project. First, they provide a helpful definition of organizational culture: "Seen as the shared meanings or understandings that make up and affect the beliefs, values, and behaviors of an organization or unit" (Kramer & Berman, 2001, p. 298). There is also a keen connection of this definition to stories and how they "produce, maintain, and transform" organizational culture. Second, Kramer and Berman highlight that not all individual narratives are in line with what the institution has constructed for them. Some stories can even purposefully defy it, and can be a means of highlighting when something isn't representative of their experience. As they add, "Stories provide a framework for making sense of the unity, conflict, and change that are simultaneously part of organizational

culture” (Kramer & Berman, 2001, p. 297). And finally, they make the critical connection between stories, socialization and sensemaking.

The connection goes a little something like this (Kramer & Berman, 2001): Organizations use stories in order to socialize new members into their organization. Members use stories as sensemaking tools to make meaning of their experiences and the role they play in the organization; These member stories’ help reify or shift organizational stories, which in turn, impact the stories that are then used for socialization. As Boje (2008) adds, “In organizations, storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders” (p. 51). Organizations construct the own narratives, while having to manage the narratives of its members.

The Interplay of Institutional and Individual Narratives

The body of work that most summatively articulates the interplay of institutional and individual narratives that I use in this project is Charlotte Linde’s *Working the past: Narrative and institutional memory*. As Linde (2009) explains, institutions (re)work the past “for the purposes of the present and the projection of the future,” in order to construct a stable narrative identity. A stable identity is important because a clear sense of who the organization is allows for identification among its members. Institutions answer the question “Who are we?” through the cultivation and (re)working of core institutional narratives over time or what Linde refers to as *institutional story stocks*. These central stories are those that “everyone can be expected to know” and are crucial for the construction and maintenance of the institution’s identity, prescribing ways that institutional members should help (re)produce them (Linde, 2009, p. 222).

In order to create opportunities for these stories to be known, organizations grant

occasions for telling or *occasions for narrative remembering*. These occasions for telling can take multiple forms, including regular occasions (annual anniversaries), irregular/occasional occurrences (retirement parties), places, and artifacts (Linde, 2009). Occasions for telling institutional stock stories helps to affirm the stability of core institutional narratives. Finally, Linde (2009) also provides a helpful model for understanding the relationship between institutional and individual stories. She identifies several ways in which organizational members can express *forms of relation* with institutional stories, including direct citation, quotation or allusion to them, use of the same moral values in their own stories, critique of institutional stories, rejection of them, and identifying irony within them. Understanding the ways in which individuals relate to organizational narratives is a useful way to explore levels of identification. While Linde's work provides an important framework for my analysis, it is largely descriptive. I extend this work by applying it to the context of higher education institutions, "narratives of difference," and the *impact* of this narrative relationship between institution and individual.

Summary and Presentation of Research Questions

Narratives are an important tool to explore the ways in which higher education institutions and its members talk about and experience difference. For universities, racism-based crises are important opportunities to re/address how diversity and inclusion are represented in their core institutional narratives. By tracing organizational responses to these "magnified moments," as well as important occasions for telling used to memorialize history and tradition, we can begin to see how narratives are (re)worked. Using Linde (2009) as a framework, this assumption helped to formulate my first two research questions:

RQ1: How does Texas A&M's institutional story stock (re)present the values of diversity and inclusion over time?

RQ2: How do institutions and individuals use memorialized places as occasions for telling?

The literature also notes that organizational members play an important role in (re)affirming institutional narratives, including through the expression of relation to them. Within the context of higher education, undergraduate students are an important group of members to look at, which leads to my third research question:

RQ3: How do students express forms of relation between institutional story stock and their individual "narratives of difference?"

The findings from these three research questions have important implications for the ways in which higher education institutions can create a more inclusive climate by being better attuned to how they prioritize diversity and inclusion within their core institutional narratives and how these narratives are in tension with those that students themselves construct.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In a dissertation about narratives, I thought it would be fitting to begin with my own. Opening this project with an autoethnographic prologue was important for several reasons. First, as I previously suggested, it would seem incomplete for me to spend over a year and hundreds of pages doing research about narrative construction without including a narrative about how I am part of this work. And autoethnographies are just that, narratives (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). As both a process *and* product, autoethnography “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). While there are many types of autoethnography, I would classify my own as a *personal narrative*, which Ellis et al. (2011) define as “stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic research, and personal lives” (p. 279). Writing my prologue was the first, but also an ongoing step of the process of understanding myself within my research and my role as an academic.

Another important contribution of autoethnography to this project was its ability to allow me to analyze and reflect on the impact I have on others with my work. Although “auto” by definition means “self,” autoethnographies are about “self” *and* “other,” the relationships between those we write about (including ourselves) and our audience (Winkler, 2018; Sparkes, 2013). And with this, there are ethical considerations. Denzin (2006) notes, “Ethnography is a not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study” (p. 422). Therefore,

autoethnography is far more than just about the writer. And my experience with autoethnography led to a deeper understanding of myself and my connection to others.

The process of autoethnography also gives researchers the opportunity to highlight power and privilege, and be more unfiltered in what we hope to see in the world. As Adams (2017) explains:

Critical autoethnographies share a few key characteristics: They ascertain vital and often unforeseen connections between personal experiences and cultural experiences; identify manifestations of power and privilege in everyday practices; discern social injustices and inequities; and describe beliefs and practices that should – and should not – exist. (p. 79)

This time, the privilege exists within my own experience as a White scholar who has chosen to study identity. And when this power is combined with that which I have as a researcher, there are serious implications for the work I do. Therefore, this autoethnography allowed me to be more reflexive, to analyze my own position of privilege, and how I could be more conscious of it during the research process, as well as provide a perspective that could influence how other scholars who do this type of work approach their own studies.

There are several important questions that Moreira and Diversi (2011) pose to consider in this reflexive respect: “*Who can speak for whom? Under what power relations? What bodies continue to determine what constitutes legitimate scholarship? Which bodies continue to be excluded from the making of scholarship?*” (p. 230, *emphasis added*). Even the opportunity to be open and honest in an autoethnography requires a certain amount of privilege:

The call for reflexivity, vulnerability, and confession—all of which contribute to the

process of (self) forgiveness—may make some critical autoethnographers uncomfortable, especially if their autoethnographies describe experiences and offenses in/with educational contexts; *representing tarnished selves is risky and requires privilege*. (Adams, 2017, p. 85, *emphasis added*)

My hope in highlighting my own shortcomings and limitations as a researcher was to influence other critical scholars to be more thoughtful when choosing to study race and difference from a privileged position.

Researcher Positionality

The way I situate myself within my research and the study of identity and difference is also impacted by my researcher positionality, reflected in my work as a qualitative scholar, critical interpretivist, and feminist with a post-structural orientation. Qualitative research covers a wide variety of methodological approaches for studying everyday life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Saldana, 2011), not privileging any method and cutting across all research paradigms (Tracy & Geist-Martin, 2014). Within the context of organizational communication research, the goal is to “understand[d] communication processes in naturalistic organizational settings” (Doerfel & Gibbs, 2004, p. 225). Qualitative researchers are *bricoleurs* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Erlandson, 1993; Tracy & Geist-Martin, 2014), making sense of broad and varied sources of data. Within this project, archival research, photovoice and walking tour interview methodologies were pieced together to create a complex picture of how “narratives of difference” are layered within institutional space. Although qualitative studies are usually criticized for their lack of a universal set of criteria, Tracy (2010) outlines parameters for good qualitative research, including rich rigor, credibility, ethical and meaningful coherence, and

resonance, the ability of research to “meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience” (p. 844). This was specifically sought during this study through audio-recording and transcribing interviews verbatim, which were then made available for participant check, quoting students verbatim and not editing their photo captions, and keeping personal research journals to remain reflexive about the data collection and analysis process.

Much of my research also falls under the realm of a critical interpretivist approach. Interpretive approaches to research are based in the main assumption that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Putnam & Banghart, 2017). Meaning arises from social systems and relationships. Within organizational communication, this approach “emphasizes how actors transform social phenomenon into texts, narratives, and discourses that become central to organizational practice” (Putnam & Banghart, 2017, p. 2). The interpretive approach is also deemed *naturalistic* and has the following set of key assumptions: (1) *multiple, constructed realities*, (2) *constructionist*, (3) *no objective or single reality*, (4) *researcher as instrument*, (5) *no cause-and-effect*, and (6) *no generalizability* (Erlandson, 1993; Glesne, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Putnam & Banghart, 2017). The data collection and analysis process is emergent and the goal is to “create shared constructed realities that accurately represent a phenomenon” (p. 45). Data is the *construction*, analysis is the *reconstruction* of these realities.

I’m also a critical scholar, as my work seeks to critique organizations (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001), in an effort to address power imbalances and create emancipatory potential (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, 2011; Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). As Taylor and Trujillo (2001) note:

Critical theory is explicitly political, and it has as its ultimate goal the ‘emancipation’

of organizational members – the development of new lines of thought and practice that may enable undistorted dialogue and resolve unjust power asymmetries. (p. 168)

Kincheloe et al. (2011) also remind us that our work can also reproduce existing power imbalances and that we need to be more attuned of mainstream research practices.

My critical research positionality can also be classified as having a feminist orientation. It too has a focus on challenging traditional research conventions, as is addressing the “androcentric” gender bias in research (Blair, Brown, & Baxter, 1994; Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). Feminist theory centers on the assumption that we must address power imbalances due to patriarchal forces (Buzzanell, 1994). Feminist research is also characterized by a recognition that the current societal system has material *and* symbolic consequences (Ashcraft, 2005), a concern for diversity and intersectionality, achieving social change, and being accountable and reflexive in one’s role as a researcher (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). Feminist organizational communication research is also complimentary of my focus on qualitative and interpretive work as well, with relevant methods including in-depth interviewing (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell, Long, Anderson, Kokini, & Batra, 2015; Trethewey, 1999), participant observation (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996), grounded theory (Forbes, 2002), and written narratives (Forbes, 2009). Much of feminist research also focuses on lived experiences. Savigny (2014) agrees, noting how experiential data is a feminist endeavor if it has the purpose of challenging current structures of domination. This is often through the highlighting of marginalized voices and experiences.

Although there are many “types” of feminism, much of my work could be considered radical-post-structuralist, which views gender as non-binary, fluid and performative. In terms of structural change, “liberation comes not from replacing bureaucracy with a new totalizing form, but rather, from constantly subverting it through alternative feminist discourses” (Ashcraft, 2014,

p. 139). Post-structuralist orientations to identity promote strategic essentialism, recognizing the pragmatic nature of defining certain groups, but with the hopes of breaking down restrictive identity categories. This feminist approach also recognizes that solutions to these problems are always incomplete, as society itself continually shifts. As Ashcraft (2014) adds, “Emancipatory forms can only be known provisionally, in relation to the demands of specific and ever-changing contexts” (p. 140).

Study Methodologies

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to explaining the three methodologies that helped me explore the central focus of this dissertation: How institutional and individual “narratives of difference” interact within higher education institutions. In order to accomplish this within the context of Texas A&M University, I began with a discourse tracing of archival data to establish how the university has (re)presented values of diversity and inclusion within its institutional story stock over time and through current processes. Then, through photovoice and semi-structured walking tour interviews, students’ individual “narratives of difference” illuminated the ways they express relation to these stock stories. It should also be noted that this study was classified by IRB as *exempt*, which is why I am revealing the site of study.

Discourse Tracing of Archival Data: Case Narrative

Understanding the historical context of Texas A&M University is central to understanding how the university has prioritized “narratives of difference” in its institutional story stock. By focusing on the case study of Texas A&M, I was able to do an in-depth analysis of the layering of narratives, but also the vast historical context that has led to the current organizational culture. As Smith and Keyton (2001) note,

The advantage of case studies over other methodologies that explore organizational narratives or stories is that the narrative in a case study is viewed in its development. In most analyses of organizational stories, a story is presented as a vignette or as a brief recollection or report of events... Thus, the depth of contextuality is this case study's salient feature and reveals the importance of searching for deeper meanings in the complex organizational environment from which and in which stories are told. (pp. 176-177)

This case study approach is also complimented by the influence of discourse tracing to guide my data collection and analysis process, a tool that is also in line with my critical-interpretive and post-structural research goals.

LeGreco & Tracy (2009) offer discourse tracing analysis in order “to analy[ze] the formation, interpretation, and appropriation of discursive practices across micro, meso, and macro levels” (p. 1516). The phases of discourse tracing include: (1) research design – defined by identifying rupture points, significant events [that] signal moments of discursive organization and reorganization,” and then reviewing relevant literature (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1524); (2) data management – gathering data, ordering data chronologically, and doing a close reading of the data; (3) analysis – developing structured questions to *trace* through the data and writing a case study; and (4) evaluation – developing theoretical and practical implications of the case study. I used discourse tracing to inform the collection and analysis of my archival data, which was collected around key moments in Texas A&M's history of racial inclusion, ordered chronologically and then analyzed thematically with the help of tracing questions. However, instead of using the term “rupture points,” I will describe these events as “magnified moments” (Hochschild, 1994). This is because “rupture points” imply an observed change in the normal

course of events (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009), something that wasn't necessarily observed in the events I chose, while "magnified moments" are simply "episodes of heightened importance" and increased attention (Hochschild, 1994), which is more fitting for my study.

The legacy of diversity at Texas A&M University is a complicated one, and in order to identify which "magnified moments" I wanted to analyze, I did extensive research to identify key civil rights moments that have been noted throughout the university's history. Two archival documents proved to be particularly helpful: A timeline released by the university for the Office of Diversity's 50th Anniversary and a chronology of African-Americans' experiences at Texas A&M in the library's historical archive. Although there were many notable moments that have been documented, those chosen had certain characteristics that helped facilitate the analysis process: (1) the events were addressed explicitly by the university (e.g. formal statements), (2) they received responses from several groups on campus (including students, faculty, and staff), (3) they received public attention, and (4) were covered by various news sources on and off campus. The "magnified moments" chosen for analysis were also influenced by my own experience of being on the campus at the time and stories that had been passed down to me as a graduate student.

Despite the many important turning points in Texas A&M's history regarding diversity and inclusion, I chose the following three "magnified moments:"

- *1963/1965*: It was in these years that Texas A&M University admitted minority students and women, respectively;
- *2008*: Controversy over an Anti-Obama Carnival hosted by the Texas A&M chapter of The Young Conservatives of Texas (YCT);

- *2016*: A speech made by Richard Spencer, a white nationalist, in December created tension for the university and its members.

Although it was not my intent, these chosen moments are what could be deemed as “negative” or “crisis” moments for the university (even the period of integration, which will be illuminated in my analysis). However, these moments garnered the most attention by a variety of audiences, and a significant amount of university and public responses, giving me more data to accurately assess the broad impact of these events. It is harder to identify more “proactive” actions taken by the university to address issues of inclusion, as they usually do not receive much public attention.

For each of these “magnified moments,” I collected official materials released by the university, stories from Texas A&M’s student newspaper, *The Battalion*, and outside news coverage of the events, from both local and national outlets. In total, 21 articles were collected from national and local news sources, along with 335 other pages of university documents and archival material, including a 50th Anniversary of Diversity Timeline released by the university and the Texas A&M Visitor Guide. I also received a plethora of helpful materials from library associate Bill Page, who has been working to collect materials around the history of diversity at Texas A&M. Included in these documents shared with me is a list of buildings, places, awards, and memorials named after or created by people of diverse backgrounds, a history of the university’s interactions with and perceptions of Native Americans, the history of Mexican workers and workers barracks’ on campus, the first African Americans to live on campus, a list of student protests, and the history of Japanese American students.

This data was then organized chronologically and after a close reading was completed, the following structured questions were traced through the data to begin the development of a case study:

- How are the values of diversity and inclusion put in tension with Texas A&M’s organizational values?
 - How do magnified moments/crises change, extend or reinforce this narrative?
- What does it mean to be an “Aggie?”
 - What does being an “Aggie” communicate about expected experiences at Texas A&M University?
 - How is this connected to the values of diversity and inclusion?

As part of the case narrative, I also observed campus tours for prospective students.

These tours are an important component of the narrative Texas A&M has constructed about what it means to be a member of this university and what historical stories and artifacts are worth highlighting. As Ryan et al. (2016) notes, “Irrespective of whether they are fictional or factual stories, narratives are selective in what they represent and what they leave out” (p. 170). Texas A&M is strategic in the narratives it has created about its values. Tours are hosted by the Aggieland Visitor Center and given three or four times a day by trained student guides. There was no hesitation on the part of Texas A&M or any of the tour guides when they found out why I would be joining them. I was explicit about my research agenda because I didn’t want tour guides to feel as if I wasn’t engaged while I was taking notes on my phone.

In total, I observed 3 campus tours, guided by 3 different student tour guides for approximately 4 hours total (approx. 1 hour and 20 minutes each). I attended two tours at the beginning of the semester, August 2018, and then again at the end of the semester, in December 2018. This was beneficial, as the university changed the route between the second and third tour I attended. On the last tour, I also had a *new* tour guide who was also being observed, so I witnessed a variety of tour guide experience and level of personalization. I took close

observation notes and digitally mapped the tours using ArcGIS. This additional methodological tool gave me the opportunity to explore the concepts of space, place, and materiality. These observations were combined with the traced, chronological data to create a case narrative. Finally, I also analyzed the 8-minute welcome video on display at the Visitor Center that can be watched before or after a tour.

After establishing the case narrative and seeking to understand the “narratives of difference” constructed by Texas A&M, the next steps were to analyze the narratives constructed by students at Texas A&M through the use of photovoice and walking tour interview methodologies, and the implications of comparing these institutional and individual narratives. Undergraduate students were selected because of the perceived level of inundation they receive on Texas A&M’s traditions and organizational culture. Because I was interested in exploring racial differences in the narratives of students, both racial majority *and* minority students were sought to participate in the study for comparative reasons. They were recruited using an email prompt through Texas A&M’s bulk mail system, as well as through more purposeful recruiting through identity-based student organizations on campus. The latter, more targeted recruitment was used to ensure diversity of participants. In total, 19 undergraduate students participated in both the photovoice and interview components of this study (See *Table 1*).

Table 1. Race and Gender Demographics of Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	# of Participants
White	Male	5
White	Female	4
Hispanic/Latino	Male	2
Hispanic/Latino	Female	4
Multi-Race (Hispanic + Asian)	Male	1
African American	Male	2
Asian	Male	1
	Men	11
	Women	8

* Participants self-identified and the labels above are those used by them

Photovoice

Interviews and survey research dominate organizational communication scholarship (Wilhoit, 2017) and this can be limiting when researchers want to capture the complexity of lived experiences. Therefore, along with conducting walking tour interviews with my participants, I also employed photovoice, the use of participant-generated photos. As Wilhoit (2017) explains, “To best understand participant experiences, research should be multisensory, not based only in talk” (p. 2). Photovoice has its theoretical underpinnings in Freire’s notion of education on critical consciousness, as well as feminist theory (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997). Its main goals are: “(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strength and concerns; (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers” (Wang & Burris, 1997). These goals align with my own critical consciousness and the emancipatory potential I seek through my research.

Undergraduate students were asked to take three photographs that captured “their Texas A&M,” using the following prompt:

For this first part of the study, I would like you to take three photographs that capture “your Texas A&M.” This can include places, people, and events that define your time as a student here and the impactful experiences you’ve had, good or bad. Then, write a short description of the photo and why what you’ve captured is meaningful to you. You can take these photographs on your phone, but if you don’t have access to one, I can provide you with a digital camera to use. Once you’ve taken your pictures and written your captions, you can send them to me at ansousa1161@tamu.edu. At this time, we can schedule an interview.

This call was meant to guide participants in capturing important places and experiences they have had at Texas A&M, while also giving them freedom to interpret what they were allowed to capture. While my participants could simply have *explained* the places or images that are most salient to them as members of Texas A&M, visual representations gave me the opportunity to see these moments from their perspective, and engage in conversations about those images, why certain components were included and why others were excluded. Constructing identities within organizations is also discursive in nature. The use of photovoice within this project provided the opportunity to see how organizing and identity formation impact the “narratives of difference” that are created at Texas A&M, as photo elicitation is connected to storytelling. As Singhal et al. (2007) explain, “The photograph’s narrative becomes a participatory site for wider storytelling, spurring community members to further reflect, discuss, and analyze the issues that confront them” (pp. 216-217).

Photovoice also created a foundation for conducting more engaging and complex interviews that allowed me to know more about participants and their experiences before interviews, what participants found particularly important, and how participants' engagement evolved during the research process. It also gave me the opportunity to communicate "with participants about taken-for-granted knowledge that participants might not otherwise see as important enough to discuss" (Wilhoit, 2017, p. 4). The methods we use to capture lived experiences should be as diverse, complicated, and complex as those individuals we seek to understand.

Photovoice (in combination with walking tour interviews) provides the opportunity to understand how people construct "narratives of difference" and how these narratives evolve. This photo elicitation technique also helps to democratize qualitative research, giving participants more control over the research process (Novak, 2010). When combined with interviewing techniques, "Images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Therefore, at the end of interviews, if the images captured by my participants were not discussed already, I found a space to sit with them and discuss their photos.

The analysis of images is not as straightforward as transcripts or observation notes. As Wagner, Ellingson, and Kunkel (2016) explicate, "Images are messy. Ask people to *visually document* their lives and a host of concerns emerge" (p. 336). And there are no standardized guidelines for analyzing photographs and trouble can arise when photo elicitation is not coherent with text-based data. Because this study was focused on narrative construction, my analysis of these photographs was thematic and focused on what and who was included in the photographs,

as opposed to an analysis of the artistic choices made by photographers. This is because my participants were asked to take pictures of important places and people that represent significant memories, not to create an aesthetically pleasing image which itself should represent said memories.

Walking Tour Interviews: Mobile Methodologies

The final method I employed was walking interviews, which are quite simply, “interviews conducted on the move” (Clark & Emmel, 2010, p. 1). As Wiederhold (2015) notes, “People tend to connect stories to material places in ways that make embodying those spaces a rich site for research” (p. 609). Therefore, moving with participants through their “lived environment” sparks additional details into their experiences and memories than if participants were simply “telling” a researcher about those places (Clark & Emmel, 2009). By bringing in other senses, researchers can get a better understanding of how people interact with places and spaces. This is what Anderson (2004) refers to as the “co-ingredience of people and place,” expressing the interconnected and dialectical tension of place and people. Mobile interviewing methods also allow researcher and participant to be “co-present, actively engaging with, creating, and interpreting the spaces they travel through together” (Wiederhold, 2015, p. 612).

There are a series of other benefits of mobile interviewing methods that should be noted: (1) participants are given more control over their involvement in the study and are less likely to feel like they have to give the “right” answer, (2) participants can “show” instead of “tell,” (3) being in the spaces where memories occurred can help participants better explain their experiences, (4) it allows for more natural conversation (Evans & Jones, 2011), and (5) it can

help break down the power imbalance between researcher and participant (Jones et al., 2008; Hein et al., 2008).

This methodology allows for an exploration of many concepts this dissertation encapsulated, including space, place, and identity. As opposed to more traditional, stationary interviewing methods, there is the ability to explore people's attitudes and knowledge about the place in which we are walking, as "walking has long been considered a more intimate way to engage with landscape that can offer privileged insights into both place and self" (Evans & Jones, 2011, p. 850). Walking tours give researchers the ability to explore experience and its connection to space and place (Anderson, 2004; Jones et al., 2008), as well as materiality (Hein et al., 2008). There is also the opportunity to better understand the connection between place and identity (Anderson, 2004; Evans & Jones, 2011; Hein et al., 2008). Anderson (2004) adds, "The fusion or meshing of place and identity thus illuminates the agency of the human self in relating time and space" (Anderson, 2004, p. 256).

Wiederhold (2015) also provides useful ways to think about this methodology and my role as the researcher. First, she argues that instead of eliminating considerations of the insider/outsider binary in qualitative research, "we [can] gain much needed specificity within these descriptions by considering more deeply the influence of mutual familiarity between researchers and participants when conducting fieldwork at home" (p. 602). I am an organizational member of Texas A&M and this is not something I can ignore as I am collecting and analyzing my data, as my own experiences will inevitably impact this study. On the same note, mobile methods such as walking interviews can help "make the familiar strange" (Wiederhold, 2015, p. 606). Instead of moving through Texas A&M in a way that is familiar to me, I can experience it in a new light through my participants. Lastly, this methodology can help

evoke “narrative residue,” which references that ways “people connect stories and memories from past experiences and dreams of certain futures to particular places” (Wiederhold, 2015, p. 609). As Wiederhold (2015) describes of her own study using mobile methods, “These locales retained narrative residue that we were able to explore as we traversed the landscape together, illuminating the ways in which ‘layers of memory are embedded into built space’” (p. 610).

That being said, walking interviews also pose additional challenges for researchers and their relationships with participants. Power relations between researcher and participant become more complex and challenging, depending on the space and whether or not you are interviewing socially marginalized individuals. It is also difficult for the researcher to balance “mapping” the data and conducting an interview, as well as dealing with technological issues (Jones et al., 2008). Because I am also a member of Texas A&M, I had to find a way to balance my own biases about the places we visited. As Wiederhold (2015) explains, “Researchers-at-home must constantly grapple with the ways their own local knowledge and presumptions color their questions, interpretations, and representations” (p. 606). However, the richness of these forms of data collection far outweigh these few challenges. As Hein et al. (2008) explain:

Mobile methods are not just of interest to academics, but also to a wide range of public organizations who are seeking to capture the ways in which people value the places around them in order to manage and plan those places in a more inclusive and sustainable way. (p. 1280)

The collection of such data can also bridge gaps between quantitative and qualitative research, highlighting the need for methods that are as fluid as human experience.

Because this method follows a photovoice component, walking interviews just make sense because they give participants and I the opportunity to actually go and discuss the places

and moments they captured in their photographs. As explained above, this will help explore not only the “narratives of difference” participants construct, but also how these narratives can shift through their interaction with me and certain spaces. In order to do this, participants who responded to my call were given the following instructional prompt:

Please choose 3-5 places on campus that are the most important to you. I'd like you to take me to these places. You will pick a starting point where we will meet and the route you'd like to walk between the places you've chosen. Along the way, I will ask you some questions about these places, your experiences, and memorable stories at Texas A&M. You are the tour guide. You do not have to choose the places included in your photos. This should take approximately one hour, and I will be audio-recording the interviews. You may ask any questions you have throughout the process.

Because I was interested in my participants experiences in places that were meaningful to them, I made the decision to allow those I was interviewing to choose the places we went, instead of pre-determining the route, one of the most important considerations with mobile interviewing methods (Clark & Emmel, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011; Wiederhold, 2015). For a similar reason, I constructed my questions in a broad way, hoping my participants' recollection of meaningful experiences and stories was as natural and uncoerced as possible. It was also important to keep the semi-structured interview guide (*Appendix A*) short and language strategic because I didn't want to prime my participants into discussions of race and difference if it was not natural. Interview questions included: (1) *Why did you choose to come to A&M?*; (2) *Why did we come here?*; (3) *What do you like about this space? What do you dislike?*; (4) *Who do you spend time with in this space?* These questions are also grounded in my concern for narratives, as they attempt to get at recollection, plot, and character development.

Walking interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I decided to use a thematic, iterative approach (Spradley, 1980; Tracy, 2013) to analyze my transcripts, allowing me to oscillate between what emerges naturally from the data and relevant literature and theory. The first step was to do a close reading of the transcripts, while identifying first-level codes inductively in individual transcripts, using narrative theory (socialization, sensemaking, etc.) as a theoretical foundation. First-level codes were systematically compared and then a series of pre-set codes were used to a second round of coding, allowing for comparison across interviews. However, other emergent codes were still identified if they were discovered during this round of coding. Coding memos were kept throughout the process. Not only did they include notes on important themes and thoughts on the transcripts themselves, but my own personal thoughts and biases that occurred during the process, in an attempt to maintain reflexivity during the entirety of data collection and analysis.

Narrative Analysis

Each of these methodologies and the subsequent analysis of data were guided by my focus on narrative. The goal of my study wasn't simply to identify narrative themes, but the reasons for why they emerged, how they emerged, how narratives are maintained, and how they change. Although there are several approaches to using narrative as a form of qualitative inquiry, my method most closely identifies with *storytelling as lived experience*. Chase (2011) notes that researchers who take this approach “study narrative *as lived experience*, as itself social action...narration is the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities, and realities” (p. 422). This form of narrative inquiry aligns with my social constructionist sensibilities and my belief in the power of storytelling to help members of organizations negotiate their identities and

make sense of their experiences. Viewing *storytelling as lived experience* also lends itself to in-depth interviewing and is interested in how narrators resist existing cultural discourses (Chase, 2011), important components utilized and being paid attention to within my own study.

Thematic analysis is often used when analyzing qualitative data, but narrative inquiry adds complexity to how researchers approach understanding lived experience (Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Smith & Keyton, 2001). Along with attempting to identify themes *across* interviews and the experiences of participants, narrative scholars also stay attuned to themes that exist *within* individual sets of data. Narrative inquiry is also made more complex by the incorporation of a variety of methodological approaches and types of data (Chase, 2011; Riesmann, 2008), something I accomplished through the analysis of archival data and the visual images produced by the photovoice aspect of my study. As Riesmann (2008) adds,

In narrative study...attention shifts to the details – how and why a particular event is storied, perhaps, or what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story *that way*, and effects of the reader or listener. Who elicits the story, for what purpose, how does the audience affect what is told, and what cannot be spoken. (p. 13)

I'd also add that it is important to be attuned to what is *not* said, purposeful silences and omissions made by narrators, as these can also be telling.

Narratives are an intriguing and complex approach to qualitative inquiry, but this type of research must be engaged with care. Smith and Keyton (2001) call the uncovering of narratives “rewarding and seductive” and warn us that “it is easy to read too much into a story and to manufacture connections that are not relevant for participants” (p. 177). Therefore, it's important that researchers who study narrative remain reflexive and maintain a rigorous and ethical approach to analyzing the data they collect. Our research is only valuable if we represent the

lived experiences of our participants in a way that accurately addresses the complexity of their stories and the connections between them.

CHAPTER IV
(RE)PRESENTATIONS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN INSTITUTIONAL STORY
STOCK

An organization constructs many institutional narratives over the course of its history, a complex combination of stories that passes on this history in specific ways and highlights an institution's values to its many stakeholders. Some of these narratives are part of what Linde (2009) refers to as central "story stocks," a collection of frequently (re)told stories that everyone within an organization should know. These particular narratives allow institutions to construct and maintain a stable identity, highlighting "who the [organization] is, what qualities the [organization] and its members are expected to exhibit, [and] how the changes in the present are necessary to preserve the fundamental nature of the [organization] (Linde, 2009, p.122). Within the context of higher education, the push to increase student diversity and cultivate more inclusive learning environments has put pressure on these institutions to (re)visit their core institutional narratives and consider how this will challenge their past.

At Texas A&M University, a strong commitment to its (military) history still heavily influences present-day traditions, what it means to be an "Aggie," and how diversity and inclusion have been integrated into their institutional stock stories. Because Texas A&M's traditions and core values originated when the school was an all-White, all-male military institution, it would be reasonable to expect that the presence of women and racial minorities could potentially threaten the stability of this history and the institution's coherent narrative identity. Destabilization is also possible during "magnified moments," which in the context of this study are race-related events that have heightened the importance of diversity and inclusion

and required the university to revisit its institutional narratives to account for these values in the ways they respond.

Analyzing the evolution of Texas A&M's core narratives over time can provide important insights for how the university's institutional identity has been (re)worked to account for increasing diversity and pressure to become more inclusive. Therefore, this chapter explores the core institutional narratives at Texas A&M, how they have evolved over time, and how they shape what it means to be a part of the "Aggie Family." Specifically, I seek to answer the following research question: *How does Texas A&M's institutional story stock (re)present values of diversity and inclusion over time?*

The historically-driven story stock that constitutes Texas A&M's narrative identity has remained stable over time and resisted meaningful integration of diversity and inclusion, despite repeated race-related crises that have magnified the university's commitment to these values. By using the metaphor of the "Aggie Family," Texas A&M has been able to continually reinforce its core values, which remain grounded in the university's (military) history and traditions. Over time, the university's core institutional narratives have communicated that "who" can be part of the "Aggie Family" has become more inclusive, but the "how" has not. Anyone can be part of this family, only as long as they adhere to the core values and traditions set forth.

In order to illustrate this argument, I will make the following analytical steps within this chapter. First, I give a short case narrative of Texas A&M and then explain how its traditions play into the institutional narrative every member is expected to know. Next, I trace through important "magnified moments" in the history of Texas A&M that center on issues of diversity and inclusion. In these moments, I show how Texas A&M's answer to the question "Who are

we?” is presented and (re)worked when faced with crises that force it to (re)consider the role of “narratives of difference” within its institutional story stock.

Case Narrative: Texas A&M University

Texas A&M University was established in 1876 and is lauded as the state’s first public higher education institution. In its early years, when it was known as The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, the school was an all-White and male military institution. In the beginning, membership in the Corps of Cadets, a military-style leadership program (“Corps of Cadets,” n.d.), was mandatory. It wasn’t until the early 1960s that the university was officially integrated, allowing women and minorities to enroll, under the leadership of university President James Earl Rudder, who also made membership in the Corps of Cadets optional.

While minorities and women were officially integrated and being a member of the Corps of Cadets was no longer required, Texas A&M’s most honored traditions and values were established under this history and have changed little since. Although this list is not exhaustive, the most prominent of these traditions include the Aggie Ring, Reveille, Silver Taps, Muster, and Sullivan Ross (“Aggie traditions,” n.d.). These are also the traditions that were highlighted most by my undergraduate student participants. Although some of these traditions were introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation, their history is more thoroughly traced in this chapter as a means of highlighting their role in reinforcing the practices and values that should be known by every member of the “Aggie Family.”

The metaphor of the “Aggie Family” is an interesting point of analysis in and of itself. And in actuality, it’s two metaphors in one. Metaphors are important because they are a “way of taking what we know and applying it to a less well-understood area” and the metaphor of “family” is commonly used to evoke emotional responses and highlight the closeness of

relationships between certain people (Moss, Moss, Rubenstein, & Black, 2003, p. 290). Families are societally constructed as groups of individuals that share close bonds and provide support for one another. So although being an “Aggie” at Texas A&M has its own metaphorical implications, including following certain traditions and historical canons, the university’s choice to also attach “Aggie” to the metaphor of “family” suggests a belonging to a particular type of family that holds certain values - those consistent with the “Aggie Spirit.” The history and the traditions of the university are what bind this “family” together, remind us that we need to support one another, and makes them central to the important stories we pass down, as families naturally would over time. And when new members of the “Aggie Family” are welcomed into the university, they may not know the specifics of what it means to be an “Aggie” right away, but they can grasp onto what it means to be part of a “family” almost immediately.

Traditions of the Aggie Family

Described as the “most recognizable symbol of the Aggie network,” the Aggie Ring is a symbol of academic achievement and the pride of being part of the “Aggie Family.” The tradition dates back to 1889, and the historical and military symbolism that appears on the ring is quite prominent and has remained mostly unchanged since 1933. Included is a shield with thirteen stripes meant to represent “the protection of the good reputation of the alma mater,” the original thirteen states, and Aggies’ commitment to patriotism. Also engraved is a ribbon that represents the traits necessary for one to serve, a cannon, a saber, and a rifle, as well as a pair of crossed flags used to represent an allegiance to both nation and state (“The Aggie Ring,” n.d.).

The Aggie Ring is earned by undergraduate students after they complete 90-hours of undergraduate work, and marks a coming end to their story as current Aggies and their induction into the Association of Former Students, which stands strong at over 430,000 alumni. When you

are still a student, you wear your ring so that your graduation date faces you, a reminder of what you still need to accomplish as a member of Texas A&M. When you graduate, the ring is turned so the year faces outward, symbolizing your achievement and everlasting membership in the “Aggie Family” (“The Aggie Ring,” n.d.). It’s a symbolic achievement every Aggie is expected to work towards and there is an immense amount of pride that comes with that. As one of my own study participants, Tess, explained, “When you get your Aggie ring, I think that [is] just really one of the coolest things, ever, because I know how hard ... I know, firsthand, how hard everybody works to get that ring on their finger.”

Reveille, also known as the First Lady of Aggieland, is a full-blood Rough Collie and has been the official mascot of Texas A&M since 1931. She is also the highest-ranking member of the Corps of Cadets. Her handler, Mascot Corporal, is a sophomore member of the Corps and when a living Reveille dies, she is given a full military funeral (“Reveille,” n.d.). Students hope that “Miss Rev” is in one of their classes because the tradition states that if she barks in class, the teacher should end class because she’s bored. Reveille not only has an important presence on campus, but also visits Aggies around the country, solidifying her status as an enduring symbol of the “Aggie Family.”

Two of the more somber traditions that are highly revered at Texas A&M are Silver Taps and Muster. Silver Taps is held the first Tuesday of each month and is a remembrance ceremony for those current Aggies who have died in the last month (“Silver Taps,” n.d.). Muster is an extension of this ceremony and is held once a year to remember those Aggies, past and present, who have died within the last year. Muster can be traced back to “San Jacinto Day,” a holiday celebrated in Texas to commemorate the defeat of the Mexican Army in a battle of the same name. The present day ceremony includes a “role call for the absent” and following the

ceremony on campus, “a rifle volley is fired and then a special arrangement of ‘Taps’ is played” (“Muster,” n.d.). Jillian, one of my participants, attended Muster during her Freshman year because her own grandfather was being remembered. As she explained of the experience, “Having my family all with me and having us honor my grandpa just felt so inclusive and it's something I always ... like when I think of A&M that's what I think of. That's what I want to talk about.” For Jillian and many other Aggies, Silver Taps and Muster are ceremonies that are meant to remind us of the long-lasting nature of the “Aggie Spirit” and represents the inclusivity of the family that Texas A&M has attempted to construct.

Lastly, there is the statue of Sullivan Ross, a tradition I have left until last to describe because of its controversial story. Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross was the President of Texas A&M from 1891-1898, and is often credited with saving the university by donating money, improving infrastructure, and increasing student enrollment at a time the university was at risk of being shut down. His statue can be found in Academic Plaza at Texas A&M, the most central place on campus. In honor of his contributions to the university, students will place a penny at his feet for good luck. The money is collected and donated to a local charity (“Pennies on Sully,” n.d.). Before his tenure at Texas A&M, Sullivan Ross was a Confederate General in the Civil War, leaving many to believe that honoring his statue has racist implications and some have even called for its removal. There are also rumors circulating that Sul Ross was a member of the KKK.

Numerous of my participants mentioned the statue, and most did so in a positive way. However, in August of 2018, the statue was vandalized and “Sully and A&M are racist #BLM” and “Fuck A&M” were written on the memorial (Miller, 2018). In November 2018, university administrators decided that the statue of Sul Ross would no longer be a stop on Elephant Walk, a

yearly tradition to honor seniors by collectively revisiting important locations on campus during a ritualized walk (Mahler, 2018). However, the university administration has repeatedly made it clear that the statue will remain in Academic Plaza despite protests.

These traditions remain the most revered and practiced by members of the “Aggie Family” at Texas A&M University. Each is grounded in the (military) history of the institution and they have changed very little since they were first established, all prior to the period of integration. As one participant, Jace, explained, “Things change. That's the only constant in life, but all of the traditions as far as I've seen it stay pretty much constant, and that's because the older people really care and want to make sure that they pass on the importance to the younger and the young people also seem to care.” These traditions commemorate a time at Texas A&M where the campus was only open to White men, and calls into question how the values of diversity can truly be integrated into an organization that privileges such traditions, including the monument of a Confederate soldier.

A university's mission.

This strong connection to Texas A&M's (military) history is also quite evident in the university's current mission statement, one of the first places someone will look to get a sense of what is important to an institution. For Texas A&M, its mission statement serves as another reminder about what it means to be part of the “Aggie Family:”

Texas A&M University is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication, and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields. Its mission of providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate programs is inseparable from its mission of developing new understandings through research and creativity. *It prepares students to assume roles in leadership, responsibility and service to society. Texas A&M*

assumes as its historic trust the maintenance of freedom of inquiry and an intellectual environment nurturing the human mind and spirit. It welcomes and seeks to serve persons of all racial, ethnic and geographic groups as it addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse population and a global economy. In the 21st century, Texas A&M University seeks to assume a place of preeminence among public universities while respecting its history and traditions. (“Texas A&M Mission Statement,” n.d., emphasis added)

Unsurprisingly, this statement serves as another means through which the university has solidified a stable institutional narrative grounded in its military and traditions-driven history. There are several important components of this mission statement that I want to highlight. First, the university’s military history is emphasized strongly, particularly in the last part of the statement, creating an interesting recency effect in the choice to close with noting the goal of respecting A&M’s “history and traditions.” The statement also attempts to balance a focus on the old with the new, tradition and change. In noting that the university “welcomes and seeks to serve persons of all racial, ethnic and geographic groups, as it addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse population and a global economy,” there is recognition of the need for change in regards to diversity, but in a way that does not undermine the historical nature of the university, which is what closes the statement.

Along with this mission statement, Texas A&M emphasizes adherence to six core values, which I explore in-depth throughout this dissertation: *excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service*. At the surface, it’s hard to argue that these values are constraining, but their positioning within the (military) history of Texas A&M makes them a bit more controversial. Militarization can be defined as the way institutions (societal or cultural) adopt militaristic values as its own, and higher education institutions are included (Taber, 2015).

Kronsell (2005) adds that these discourses are “difficult to critique, in part, because normativity makes certain practices appear ‘natural,’ beyond discussion” (p. 282). The core values of Texas A&M listed above are strongly in line with military principles and actually share four of the same values with the U.S. Army, *integrity, loyalty, respect* and *selfless service* (“The Army Values,” n.d.). As Taber (2015) argues, such discourses are gendered and can have negative effects on the way we view the goals of education. As she continues:

Militarism and masculinity are separate but intersecting discourses. Although there are many different versions of masculinity which are ‘ranged across apparently diverse contexts, of which the military is one’ (Higate, 2003, p. 39), hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2012) and military masculinities (Higate, 2003) are nonetheless connected through the ways in which they construct men as strong protector breadwinners and women as vulnerable protected dependents, regardless of the realities of everyday life (Enloe, 2007; Young, 2003). (p. 233)

Like its traditions, Texas A&M’s core values and mission statement cannot be separated from the all-male, military history of the university. Texas A&M has also used these core values to make a case for why the university’s institutional story stock is already inclusive and welcoming of difference. This argument emerged as I traced through important “magnified moments” in Texas A&M’s history of racial inclusion because there are few occasions that press an organization to reconcile its commitment to diversity and inclusion then when something goes wrong.

Do “Magnified Moments” Rework Core Institutional Narratives?

Inclusivity has an interesting history at Texas A&M. In 2013, when the Texas A&M’s Office of Diversity celebrated its 50th anniversary, it released a timeline to “look back on the

history and the remarkable contributions of A&M's increasingly diverse campus community" ("Diversity Timeline," n.d.). And there have been some noteworthy moments in terms of progress, including the establishment of Texas A&M Prairie View in 1878, the formation of the Black Awareness Committee in 1973, and creation of Multicultural Services in 1987. And of course, there was the period of integration, which set in motion a formal commitment to diversity and inclusion at Texas A&M University. However, there have also been quite a few very negative incidents that have garnered quite a bit of attention. All of these moments, whether positive or negative, can become "magnified moments," a term used by Hochschild (1994) to indicate a moment of heightened importance and attention. Significant race-related events or crises increase the amount of attention that is on a university and often forces them to address how "narratives of difference" fit into its core institutional narratives. Responses to these crises can impact the reputation of a university (Leeper & Leeper, 2006) and if ineffective responses are repeated, it not only threatens progress towards inclusivity, but can also impact a university's bottom line.

These particular moments can also be considered what Linde (2009) refers to as *occasions for telling* or *occasions for narrative remembering*, which "are the occasions [that] allow for the telling and retelling of the stock of stories which have a life within the institution and which constitute its acts of remembering" (p. 44). However, what is slightly different about the moments I'm analyzing and those that Linde outlines in her work are that the moments in focus here are *unexpected*. Linde (2009)'s taxonomy focuses on occasions that are anticipated or purposefully constructed (regular occasions like anniversaries, irregular/occasional occurrences like retirement parties, places, and artifacts). However, I argue that unexpected crises and events, like the "magnified moments" I analyze as part of this study, are also very important occasions

for (re)telling the stock of stories that form the foundation of an organization's values. At Texas A&M, race-related crises are occasions for telling where they must take stock of their core institutional narratives and assess where the values of diversity and inclusion fit in.

When we look at significant moments in the history of racial inclusion at Texas A&M, it becomes clear the university's desire to maintain a stable narrative identity is quite strong. Responses from the university to negative incidents highlight the university's core values as justification for their inherently inclusive positionality. Being part of the "Aggie Family" means we stand for *excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, and selfless service...* and therefore, *inclusivity*. Outside media coverage of these events and other discrimination-based crises also tend to separate negative events from the university itself, highlighting the responsibility of the offender, but not necessarily noting any responsibility on the part of Texas A&M. The combination of these two themes works to characterize these crises as distinct events, as opposed to part of a larger, systemic pattern. This allows the university to disassociate itself and its culture from the responsibility of fostering an environment where discrimination continues to occur. Because of this, the organization does not have to shift its grand narratives.

Of particular importance is the way in which these responses also help to define *inclusivity as assimilation* at Texas A&M University. Being part of the "Aggie Family" means adhering to the university's values and traditions, which are deemed by the organization as already inclusive and accepting of difference. Therefore, as long as individuals accept our existing institutional stock stories and don't disrupt who we are and how we've always been, they will be able to assimilate into the inclusive culture Texas A&M has already created. In sum, anyone is welcome as long as they are willing to be a part of the "Aggie Family" in the right ways.

In order to illustrate these arguments, I will move through three “magnified moments” in Texas A&M’s history of racial inclusion, highlighting the university’s responses to these crises and the ways in which the organization talks about difference. Although the events themselves differ in significant ways, Texas A&M has implemented similar narrative strategies and responses over time. These strategies include *disassociation* and *corrective action*, events used to restore an organization to its prior reputational condition (Coombs, 2007). The first moment, the years of integration at Texas A&M (1963-1965), was chosen because it marked the “official beginning of inclusivity” at the university and is told on prospective student tours as the years women and students of color were admitted. The second and third moments were chosen because of the high level of publicity they received on and off campus, increasing the pressure of the university to respond and potentially (re)work its core institutional narratives. After discussing the details of the specific “magnified moments,” I will move into an analysis of how Texas A&M has used its institutional stock stories grounded in its history and traditions to characterize the organization as inherently inclusive and as a result, how this promotes the one-way assimilation of its diverse members.

Magnified Moment 1: Integration (1963-1965)

We begin in 1963, the years of integration at Texas A&M University. Until this point, the university had remained an all-male, all-White campus for 92 years. The official decision to allow women and minorities to enroll at the school was initiated by James Earl Rudder, a former President and Chancellor of Texas A&M. Because he is credited with this progressive step, his portrait is the first stop on the official prospective student tour where this story is told. Although the College Station campus finally allowed the enrollment of African Americans, the Texas

A&M system had opened its Prairie View campus in 1897 to serve this population. Despite integration of the College Station main campus in the early 1960s, Texas A&M Prairie View is still a prominent HBCU (historically black serving college or university) and the College Station campus is still predominantly White.

When Texas A&M first announced plans for integration, reactions were far from positive. The university recognized the potential tension that would arise in response to allowing women and racial minorities to attend and reported on it several times in the school newspaper, *The Battalion*. In an article on October 16th, 1963, which reported on the responses to the Board of Directors' decision to admit females to the university, the paper recognized that there was opposition to the decision and that the road to "co-education" would be a difficult one. As they reported:

We are convinced that there is struggle ahead for A&M because of the co-ed decision. It is unfortunate that the institution of A&M cannot remove itself from the struggle. It cannot. *A&M must sit here helplessly* and be ripped and torn by the struggle... We only plead with all persons of the struggling forces to *tear gently and save the pieces*. There are some of us who will be attempting to keep them together, and, just maybe, someday *we can build another united A&M*. We will have a good start – *the indestructible Aggie Spirit*. (Editor, October 16, 1963, emphasis added)

There are important aspects of this internal response to co-education that should be unpacked. First is the separation made between the institution itself and the individuals within it. Texas A&M is depicted as "sitting helplessly," neither responsible nor in control of the conflict. Instead, the responsibility of ripping apart the institution is in the hands of those "persons" involved in the debate over co-education. Next comes a plea to "tear gently and save the pieces."

To want to save these pieces means that there is something good to be preserved, in this case, “the indestructible Aggie Spirit.” It is this spirit that will create what already was, “a united A&M.” But this time, when the university is reunited with the *same* pieces, it will somehow be inclusive of both men and women. Therefore, the foundation for the institution will not be changed, but will welcome diversity anyway. In 1963, the “Aggie Spirit” was already being situated as a defining characteristic of the university that would eventually allow for the successful integration of women and minorities. It was setup as the force that would bring all Aggies together.

The university also used The Battalion to highlight its progress and the climate at Texas A&M in the months following integration. In September of 1963, the newspaper took stock of the enrollment of women and minorities. Although the university had seen a dip in numbers from the previous enrollment season, it remained optimistic the numbers would continue to increase. As The Battalion reported:

H. L. Heaton, registrar, said that he feels the gap will be closed before registration ends on Saturday. “We had a real busy day today,” Heaton said Monday. “I’m always optimistic about these things. *I certainly hope we pass last year’s enrollment*” ... While the over-all total is lower than last year’s figured, *the graduate school can boast a near 30 per cent increase over last year’s total of 840 students.* (Editor, 1963, September 7, emphasis added)

Here, the university’s registrar is quoted as being “hopeful” that enrollment of women and minorities would continually increase and that progress was something to “boast” about. The university openly intended for racial and gender diversity to increase at the university and welcomed opportunities to share these successes in the school newspaper.

In another article from November 1963, as a means to further illustrate Texas A&M's progress, the university highlights the story of an exemplar African American student who was able to successfully integrate into the university. Arthur Dunn was the first potential African American graduate and there are several interesting decisions the newspaper makes about what it shares of Dunn's story. They highlight his army service, along with a qualifying quotation from Dunn about the benefits of being part of the military. As reported, "Arthur left school at the end of football season and joined the army. He was 17. 'THE ARMY was good for me. I matured and became a better man'" (Harris, 1963). This characteristic of Dunn is important because it highlights the *right* type of "Aggie," one who knows the value of the military and will likely respect military-based traditions as a student at Texas A&M. He is also noted as having been a promising football player and wanting to give back to his community once graduated, a nod to the university's core value of *selfless service*.

The article also speaks directly to the *lack of conflict* Dunn experienced during integration at the university:

ARTHUR GETS ALONG all right – in fact, he has *nothing but praise for A&M. The administration and faculty have been very helpful to Arthur* and he has never had any trouble with the student body. He has made many friends. Arthur is probably one of the *best known personalities on campus – or off.* (Harris, 1963)

He is explicitly noted as having "nothing but praise" for the university, directly citing the administrations helpful efforts. Not only that, his personality is revered. As a football player, member of the military, and person dedicated to selfless service, he was an "ideal" fit. The fundamental values of the university did not change, and neither did Arthur Dunn. Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn is that Texas A&M already had a culture that welcomed the successful

integration of those who were willing to embrace what is expected from a member of the “Aggie Family.”

In the “magnified moment” of integration, it was also *who* (re)worked the core institutional narrative that was important. James Earl Rudder, university President at the time and the person credited with the decision to officially integrate, was an esteemed member of the armed forces. Per his biography on the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets’ official web page, Rudder was a Commanding Officer in the Army during the D-Day landings and then went on to command the 190th Infantry Regiment in the Battle of the Bulge. His service has been recognized with the Distinguished Service Cross, Legion of Merit, Silver Star, Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, French Legion of Honor with Croix de Guerre and Palm, and Order of Leopold (Belgium) with Croix de Guerre and Palm (“Major General James Earl Rudder 1992,” n.d.). At the end of the same page, it includes the following about his decision to make the Corps. of Cadets optional and allowing women and minorities to attend the university:

[These decisions were] hugely unpopular to the former students (it has been said only *a president with Rudder’s heroic military record* could pull off such drastic changes), [but] there is no doubt these changes *freed Texas A&M to become one of the largest universities in the U.S.* (“Major General James Earl Rudder 1992,” n.d., emphasis added).

Had it not been for the fact that the person in charge of making potentially destabilizing changes to core institutional narratives was also a decorated veteran, it’s possible the change would not have been made at this time. However, what this particular recognition also includes is the *positive* impact of these decisions for Texas A&M. Rudder’s decisions are credited with “freeing” the metaphorical chains that the all-White, military traditions could have on the

university's expansion. Inclusion of women and minorities is depicted as beneficial to the institution itself. The irony, however, is in the fact that he was able to do so because his own personal history was so intimately in line with the existing values of the university.

The period of integration marked an "official" beginning to the university's heightened attention to (re)working the values of diversity and inclusion into Texas A&M's core institutional narratives. And the core narratives of what it means to be a part of the "Aggie Family" did shift when women and minorities were allowed to enroll... but only slightly. The "who" can be an Aggie shifted from White and male, to persons of any race or gender. However, successful integration was equated to *assimilation*. Anyone is welcome to be an "Aggie," as long as they are able to adhere to the already existing values of what that means.

Magnified Moment 2: Anti-Obama Carnival (2008)

We now fast forward to a racially-charged incident that marks the second "magnified moment" analyzed during this study. In 2008, the Texas A&M chapter of the Young Conservatives of Texas (YCT) hosted their second "Anti-Obama Carnival," where they displayed a poster of presidential candidate Barack Obama and allowed passersby to throw eggs at his face. The act was supposed to symbolize "throwing away nest eggs" because of Obama's policies (Linebaugh, 2008). The second activity at the carnival was a "socialist-on-a-stick" ring toss, which allowed students to toss rings at Halloween masks of Obama and Hillary Clinton (Ruland, 2008). The carnival came after a controversial flyer was released by the Young Conservatives of Texas a month prior that "feature[d] a photo of President Obama dressed in baggy jeans, an oversized flannel shirt, and sneakers with the phrases, 'Think he NEEDS a time out?' and 'Join TAC!'" written on them (Washeck, 2013). Critiques of the flyer included that the boy-like depiction was dehumanizing and has been used historically to diminish the status of

African Americans, and his hip-hop style clothing made him appear “as a ‘street kid who must be shown his place’” (Washeck, 2013). As a response, the university ended the PSA service used to disseminate the flyer after receiving a handful of complaints. However, it did not stop the Anti-Obama Carnival from being held only a month later.

Unlike coverage of integration at Texas A&M University, this event in the university’s history and the one that follows were also covered by external sources, particularly local media. Because of this, my analysis of the way in which “narratives of difference” are subsumed into the institution’s story stock moves beyond the perspective of internal stakeholders to further illustrate Texas A&M’s ability to resist the destabilizing narrative potential of race-related crises. That being said, I naturally begin my analysis of this key moment with the university’s official response to the incident, which was reported across local news coverage of the Anti-Obama Carnival:

A university campus is a *marketplace of ideas*. While we found today's activity offensive and *not representative of Texas A&M's core values*, we certainly respect the free speech of students on our campus. We are of the opinion that there are more appropriate and constructive ways to engage in a dialogue in advance of the upcoming elections.

(Sigman, 2008)

At first read, the university’s response seems quite straightforward here. The official statement utilized *dissociation*, a technique commonly used by organizations to separate themselves from negative incidents. By stating that the actions of the Young Conservatives of Texas are “not representative of Texas A&M’s core values,” the university is making the claim that this is not what an Aggie would do. Aggies respect *excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect* and

selfless service (“Core values,” n.d.), and a *true* Aggie would engage in more “appropriate and constructive” dialogue or as I also understood, “respectful” dialogue.

The reference to free speech is also unsurprising at face value, given that Texas A&M University is a public institution and as such, has to respond within certain legal constraints. However, the specific wording of this official university response is more complex, especially its reference to the “marketplace of ideas.” The foundation for the connection between the metaphor of the “marketplace of ideas” and free speech within constitutional law was made in the dissenting opinion of Justice Holmes in *Abrams v. United States*. In his dissent, he stated:

[W]hen men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—*that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market*, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution. (Blocher, 2008, p. 824, emphasis added)

In his analysis of Holme’s opinion, Blocher (2008) notes that the Justice’s conception of free speech is “worthy of constitutional protection precisely because—like the free flow of goods and services—it creates a competitive environment in which good ideas flourish and bad ideas fail... (pp. 824-825). In sum, the best truth will emerge *as a result* of allowing for the free flow of ideas.

By employing the same metaphor in its organizational response, Texas A&M is prioritizing the protection of free speech, even when it displays “bad ideas,” over the potential negative ramifications of an event that was seen as racist. A similar response came from Student Body President John Claybrook, who was quoted in Texas Monthly:

“There are over 850 organizations on A&M’s campus, and they are all going to have different opinions. That does not mean that it is representative of the student body as a whole.” Claybrook said we should celebrate various viewpoints, calling places of higher education a “marketplace of ideas... Issues like this help students solidify their views” (Washeck, 2013).

Therefore, a shift in the core institutional narratives of Texas A&M is not required despite this racist incident because inclusion here is conceptualized by the university as fostering “diversity of thought,” not racial diversity. That being said, the university simultaneously presents the argument that by allowing students the right to free speech, we can trust “the marketplace of ideas” will promote inclusivity of all kinds because “the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas” (Blocher, 2008, p. 824). The university thus situates itself as already having constructed an inclusive environment, one that fosters *both* free speech *and* inclusivity.

Not only does the university relieve itself of responsibility for the Anti-Obama Carnival through the use of dissociation and prioritizing free speech, external media coverage also reinforces this separation. Quoting the university's official response is one of the very few explicit mentions by local media about the larger university. The focus remains on the members of Texas A&M’s Young Conservatives of Texas or as they were later known, Texas Aggie Conservatives. There is even recognition that this act is part of a larger pattern for the *group*. For example, an article in Texas Monthly reported that the organization “seems to have a history of ticking people off by being intolerant” (Washeck, 2013). However, the analysis stops here and does not move into assessing the potential impact of a climate fostered by Texas A&M University, a conservative institution itself. Instead, the article closes with a quote by an undergraduate making the argument that it’s this conservative nature at the university that leads

people to make unwarranted claims of racism, and that TAC's actions were *not* overtly racist. As Ben Castille is quoted, "Since A&M is so conservative, people want to go to racism... If you look hard enough, you'll find that. Do I think [TAC] take the party lines too far? Yes" (Washeck, 2013).

The Anti-Obama Carnival was an important opportunity for Texas A&M University to assess its core institutional narratives and the ways in which racial diversity and fostering inclusivity are situated within this story stock. Its response was a logical extension to the foundation set forth by the way these values were conceived during integration. The racist display put on by the Young Conservatives of Texas was separated from the values of the university in their dissociative claim that "this is not who we are." And while their prioritization of free speech could be depicted as choosing not to put racial inclusivity on the same pedestal, the official university response connects the protections of free speech as the process through which the best values (read, inclusivity) would emerge. The overall message is the same forty-five years later - The "Aggie Family" fosters inclusivity and always has.

Magnifying Moment 3: Richard Spencer Speech (2016)

The final "magnified moment" that was chosen for this study was a speech made by Richard Spencer at Texas A&M, on December 6, 2016. A former student at Texas A&M invited Spencer, a white nationalist, to speak at the Memorial Student Center, an event that drew much protest (Blau, Ganim, & Welch, 2016). While a speech by a white nationalist would naturally stir up controversy, even at a historically conservative university, another event earlier the same year had already put Texas A&M under a microscope. In February of 2016, students from a predominantly Black high school in Dallas were accosted by students who aimed racial slurs at

them while on a campus tour of Texas A&M (Dart, 2016). The closeness of these events put additional pressure on the university, which publicly responded in a variety of ways. Separate from the university's official response, a protest was organized in response to Spencer's speech by several identity-based groups on campus, including TAMU Anti-Racism.

For students, one of the first responses received was a campus-wide email from Aggie student leaders, after the Battalion had broken the story late the night before. And in this initial response, we see a *sharp* deviation in the typical roundabout way diversity and inclusion are discussed within the context of race-related crises at Texas A&M. As the statement read:

While Richard Spencer's freedom of speech and expression are protected, so too is the right for students to respond. Our response as student leaders is this: hatred and bigotry have no place at Texas A&M. Whether or not you have personally witnessed these actions, be assured that these sentiments exist and that they are happening on our campus. We look to students and administrators to create meaningful change through civil discourse and elevating student voices, holding one another accountable to demonstrate progress. It is important to address these events centered on hate, moreover we encourage students to engage in programs and constructive dialogues.

While the undersigned student leaders do not represent every student experience, every student leader carries with them an expectation of developing an inclusive environment at Texas A&M. We stand in solidarity with Aggies who have faced harassment, discrimination, and oppression, with a commitment to creating positive change on campus through actions rather than through statements. (Aggie Student Leaders, email correspondence, November 23, 2016, emphasis added)

To begin, this response from student leaders at Texas A&M does foreground the protection of Spencer's right to free speech and expression. However, in a shift from the official university response made in reaction to the Anti-Obama Carnival, it is *not* argued that the institution's protection of this Constitutional right fosters inclusivity. Instead, free speech is put in contention with inclusivity in noting that while "freedom of speech and expression are protected, so too is the right for students to respond." This is coupled with what I found most surprising, explicit mentions to "hatred and bigotry" existing on Texas A&M's campus. Combined, the recognition of discrimination and the need for change leads to a "call to action." And the prescribed response suggested by Aggie student leaders – actions, not statements. The "call to action" is particularly significant because the "action" engaged in by many of the student leaders who signed this letter became somewhat antithetical with this initial statement, as I explain in detail below.

It's also important to note that the Aggie student leaders' response also recognized that they were not in the most official "position of telling" (Linde, 2009). They explain, "the undersigned student leaders do not represent every student experience," recognizing that other students may have differing points of view and that there are other more "official" statements to be made. In the context of Richard Spencer's speech, what ended up representing the institution as a whole were the responses made by President Michael Young and the event Aggies United.

After Spencer's speech was announced, there was an outpouring of condemnation regarding the event, on and off campus. Despite the bad publicity, the university's official response reiterated the importance of protecting free speech within public institutions as the reason they would not cancel the event. However, President Michael Young also publicly denounced the viewpoints of Richard Spencer and his supporters, stating "I find the views of the organizer - and the speaker he is apparently sponsoring - abhorrent and profoundly antithetical to

everything I believe...In my judgment, those views simply have no place in civilized dialogue and conversation" (Kuhlmann, 2016). However, Texas A&M's most significant response came in the form of a counter-event called "Aggies United."

The event was designed "to promote a sense of solidarity" and included important guests, including singer Ben Rector, members of Texas A&M's football team, and Holocaust survivor Max Glaubien (Rodriguez & McCown, 2016). However, the sense of solidarity promoted at the event was solidly rooted in Texas A&M's core values, reverting back to the stable institutional narrative of *inherent inclusivity*. As Young said at the event, "Our differences really do unite us... That's what makes us great. That is our values. Respect is bred into everything we do here" (Walker, 2016). Similarly, The Battalion quoted sophomore Katelyn McCarthy who "said the driving force behind Aggies United was the Aggie core values... 'I think with the core values that this university holds it's very important to embody these values and show these values and stand up for them.'" Because Aggies United was an event designed to promote solidarity and celebrate difference, by defining it as a symbolic means of "standing up for" Aggie values, it equates these values with inclusivity. Again, this situates inclusivity as inherent within who Aggies have always been and consistent with what they've always stood for.

Another intriguing theme that emerged within some local news sources was how reports highlighted a separation made between those Aggies who participated in the Aggies United event and Aggies who protested outside. For example, in quoting a senior from Texas A&M who participated in Aggies United, Walker (2016) reported:

"I think out there, what it is fear by one party and hate by another," she said,

referring to the thousands protesting the presence of white supremacist Richard Spencer at the Memorial Student Center. “I think sadly the speech that's being given tonight has led to fear and hate, and when those clash, nothing good ever comes from that.”

This communicates that there is a “correct” way to be inclusive at Texas A&M and the way the university addressed Spencer through Aggies United promoted love and unity, like a true “Aggie Family,” as opposed to the divisiveness being reinforced by other types of protestors. Although both groups were Aggies and both groups were upholding the university’s core values by responding directly to acts of hatred, protesting is situated as coming from “fear” and thus, an inadequate performance of Aggie values.

Aggies United is an organizational response that can be classified as both a form of *dissociation*, which was used in response to the Anti-Obama Carnival, and *corrective action*, events used to restore an organization to its prior reputational condition (Coombs, 2007). The university relieved itself of direct responsibility for Spencer’s speech, citing the First Amendment and free speech as to why they could not cancel the talk. Then, they hosted an event to remind the public what the university stands for, and has always stood for – Texas A&M’s core values. These core values represent “who we are,” and the viewpoints of Richard Spencer do not align.

The Aggie Family is and has Always Been Inclusive

The period of integration marked an important moment when Texas A&M University had to begin negotiating how the values of diversity and inclusion were worked into their institutional story stock, its core narratives about the identity of the institution. Institutional responses to the inclusion of women and racial minorities set up a model of *integration as*

assimilation. When the university stated that “the indestructible Aggie Spirit” would serve as the foundation for ushering in the inclusion of women and minorities, it was saying “This is who we are,” a university whose current values are already designed to facilitate this transition successfully. There was no modification about what the “Aggie Spirit” was. It was already suited for a diverse “Aggie Family.”

Responses to the Anti-Obama Carnival were approached within the same framework. Texas A&M framed its core values and traditions as inherently inclusive and thus, separated itself from racist incidents through *dissociation* and the claim that “hate is not an Aggie value.” Although Aggie student leaders did respond to racism in a more explicit way in their response to Richard Spencer’s speech, the form of *corrective action* they participated in, Aggies United, weakened the impact of the initial statement because the “call to action” suggested was grounded in the same historical foundation that has been used since integration. The organizational responses may become more multifaceted, but the goal remains the same – reinforce who we are and who we’ve always been.

To compliment this, media coverage of racism-based crises reinforce this *inherently inclusive* framing by reporting on events in a way that separates the university from the offender/event, as opposed to exploring the potentiality of an institutional culture that could foster such discriminatory actions. This combination relieves the university of responsibility and therefore, doesn’t require Texas A&M to reconsider its values and how its institutional narrative could possibly be limiting inclusivity. Now that I’ve explored how Texas A&M’s institutional story stock has (re)presented values of diversity and inclusion over time, the next chapter will explore the everyday *occasions for telling*, specifically memorialized places, Texas A&M uses to further stabilize this institutional narrative.

CHAPTER V
MEMORIALIZED PLACES AS OCCASIONS FOR TELLING INSTITUTIONAL AND
INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES

Higher education institutions spend a lot of time (re)working their institutional story stock in order to create stable narratives about their identity. Linde (2009) tells us that this is expected because having a coherent identity allows for member identification. As I explored in the previous chapter, Texas A&M has managed to create stable and enduring institutional narratives about its history and traditions over time, despite race-related “magnified moments” that call into question how “narratives of difference” have been (re)worked into this core story stock. Tracing this through the history of racial inclusion at Texas A&M revealed that the university has conceptualized what it means to be part of the “Aggie Family” in a specific way, through a model of *inclusion as assimilation*. In essence, the university depicts the “Aggie Family” as inherently inclusive because of its history and core values and therefore, anyone can be integrated successfully as long as they assimilate into the existing culture.

One of the ways that institutions continually (re)work their story stock is by granting *occasions for telling* or *occasions for narrative remembering*, opportunities that allow for the (re)telling of stories which are core to the institution. As Linde (2009) explains:

The narrative of a given institution may be collected by a company archivist, or by a historian or folklorist, but if this collection consists only of a rarely consulted archive or unread volume, the narratives have no life of their own, and there is no way to tell whether or not they are actually part of the institution’s memory. (p. 44)

If these *occasions for telling* are not cultivated properly, organizational members cannot participate in the necessary process of (re)visiting and (re)telling core institutional narratives. Institutions need to stay attuned to these occasions, when and why these stories are (re)told, because they are critical to giving them continued “life.”

Occasions for telling include regularly timed occasions, such as anniversaries or annual meetings, and irregular/occasional occurrences like a funerals, as well as places and artifacts (Linde, 2009). Because Texas A&M University’s narrative identity is grounded so deeply in its history and traditions, it often uses memorialized places and artifacts to grant *occasions for telling*. These occasions help the institution reinforce its core story stock and provides opportunities for students to continue (re)telling important institutional narratives. Thus, I argue it is important to understand how students use memorialized places and artifacts as occasions for telling and how they are in tension with the ways Texas A&M uses these occasions, which is what I explore in this chapter. More specifically, I seek to answer the following research question: *How do institutions and individuals use memorialized places as occasions for telling?*

In order to answer this research question, I put the ways memorialized places are utilized as occasions for telling during official campus tours in tension with the ways they were used by my participants on their walking tour interviews. By observing campus tours, it became clear that memorialized places are used in this context by Texas A&M to help (re)affirm its institutional story stock. The tours were meticulously crafted around a very particular and consistent telling of the school’s history and traditions. During participants’ individualized tours, which also served as *occasions for telling*, they often took me to many of the same memorialized places that are included as stops on the official campus tour. Students also used places around campus as

occasions for telling that were not cultivated specifically for narrative remembering by the university (Linde, 2009).

Understanding the use of memorialized places as occasions for telling is important. From an institutional perspective, if the goal is to maintain a stable narrative identity, it's valuable to know how organizational members are using these occasions for telling and if they are giving the right stories "life." And for those who want to create more inclusive institutional stock stories, understanding this relationship can reveal points of disconnect and the malleability of certain occasions for telling.

Official Campus Tours as Institutional Occasions for Telling

As part of the archival analysis process, I thought it would be a valuable experience to follow around the official Texas A&M tours for prospective students because this is one of the first opportunities for the university to share its core institutional narratives with potential students and what it means to be a part of the "Aggie Family." These tours are organized around memorialized places that connect past, present, and future, using these occasions to (re)tell the history of the university and ask prospective students to imagine passing on the same stories. This part of the analysis is based in three core pieces of data, observation notes from following three campus tours, at different times with different tour guides, observation notes from watching the welcome video in the Visitor Center where prospective students and their families wait, as well as the official "Visitor Guide," a 76-page booklet given to tour attendees about what it means to be a part of the Aggie family.

What I found was an experience that was both engaging, but also highly constructed. These campus tours are performative, and there is a purposeful filtering of information. Tour

guides showed a genuine enthusiasm for their roles. Each fact or story was told with an energetic and loud (quite loud, in fact) tone, they smiled from beginning to end, and struck up conversations with visitors as we moved between stops. But when I left these tours, they still felt too scripted, even when I thought about those more “personal touches” thrown in by experienced tour guides. They used traditions and heritage to present a “sanitized” and unified university culture that they hope is (re)told (Kramer and Berman, 2001). Tours guides at Texas A&M have perfected this strategy. The experience is an undeniable introduction into what the “Aggie Family” values most – its history and traditions.

To give this part of the analysis more depth, I’m going to describe my analytical observations in a way that takes you on the tour itself, the way I experienced it and watched it being experienced, from beginning to end. As Beyes and Steyaert (2011) propose, a technique like this can allow the reader to go through an organizational space in “slow motion,” connecting materiality, affect, and performance. They continue:

Being attentive to spacing directs the organizational scholar towards embodied affects and encounters generated in the here-and-now and assembled from the manifold (im)materialities. It emphasizes the multiple registers of sensation and intensity often lost in the representational techniques of the social sciences...It provokes openness towards everyday creativity, experimentation and the potentials of transformative spacings. (p. 53)

My participation in these tours was also a performance, a current student attempting to understand what these tours would be like to new students with little understanding of what it meant to be a part of the “Aggie Family.”

A Tour of Texas A&M University

Rudder Tower stands at eleven stories high, a muted concrete building that was aptly named. It's not ornate, a simple square tower with a column of windows down the middle of each side. The heavy glass doors at the back open into the Visitor Center, a crisply designed space with tan marble floors, deep wood paneling and lots of maroon accents, the official color of Texas A&M. A tour guide and a desk attendant stand behind a tall curved counter to the right, ready to promptly and politely ask if there is a reservation on file, sliding over a nametag. Before the tour begins, a welcome video is playing in a glass-encased room to the back of the space. This is where visitors receive their first lesson in what it means to be a part of the Aggie Family.

There are some very prominent themes that emerge in this video, including an emphasis on Texas A&M's military history, legacy students, the "Aggie Family," *and* diversity. To begin, the Corps of Cadets plays a strong role in the video, reminding us of the history of Texas A&M and the university's core values, particularly *selfless service* and *leadership*. At the center of many of these messages is Corps Leader Daizia McGhee, a Black woman who shared her story of coming from a single parent, poor household. The Corps, she explains, taught her leadership and how to better communicate with others. Another storyline follows a military widow, who enrolled at the university after her husband's death in an attempt to rebuild, which she did successfully because of the Aggie community. Along with this militaristic theme, the notion of traditions is also at the forefront. Many of the students featured in the video are legacies, individuals who have had members of their family attend Texas A&M before them. There is an emphasis of passing down and maintaining the traditions of the university, just as the ones before us did. The stories of first-generation Aggies are also shared, including a Latino male, who has taken the lessons he's learned at Texas A&M and become a leader in his own underprivileged

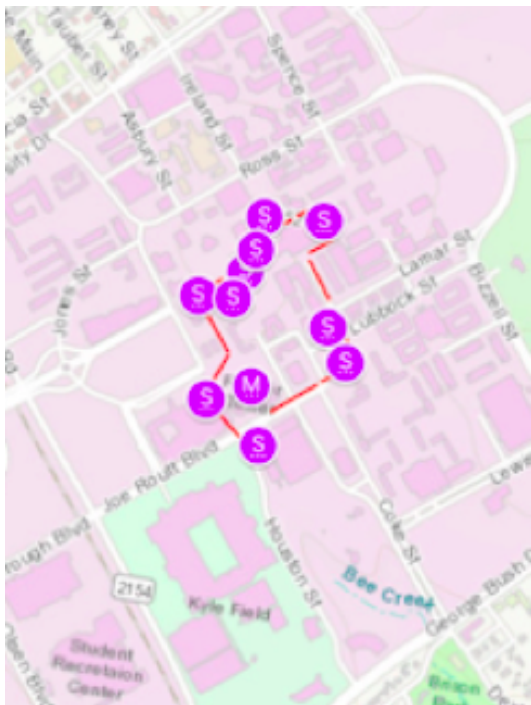
community. But what do all of these different individuals have in common? They are intimately part of the “Aggie Family,” where “We are the Aggies and the Aggies are we.” The message is that once you step on campus, you are part of the “Aggie family” and each member of this community is here to support you. This narrative runs through each and every story shared within the video and it serves to show prospective Aggies that they too will become part of this family.

The incorporation of diversity as a value is not as explicit, but *strategically* present. Most apparent is the purposeful use of “diverse faces” in the staged aspects of the video. It’s clear that a lot of thought was put into the stories that were told and the pictures that were used. For example, posed aspects of the video had far more racial diversity than candid snapshots taken around campus. And while it’s important for the university to make a conscious effort in recognizing the diversity that does exist on campus, it’s not an entirely accurate representation of what students would experience if they were to become a member of Texas A&M University.

A similar observation can be made of the Visitor Guide you are given when you go on a tour. Many of the photographs in this 76-page booklet are also strategically diverse, showcasing a level of racial diversity that is not necessarily representative of the demographics of the predominantly White university (63%). The terms *diversity* and *inclusion* appear 16 times throughout the booklet. There is also a page titled “Diversity and Inclusion” that surprisingly comes before the section on “History and Traditions,” which to a reader communicates a certain priority of the topic.

As you wait for your tour guide to gather visitors and let out the first “Howdy!” (the traditional greeting at Texas A&M), the lobby of the Visitor Center becomes full of bright-eyed prospective students and their families (although you can tell some of these unenthusiastic youth

were simply dragged here by their parents). And once the tour begins, the organizational narrative of what it means to be an Aggie continues.



Tour (#1 & #2)



(Tour #3)

Figure 1. Campus Tour Screenshots

The first stop of the tour is also in Rudder Tower, at the portrait of James Earl Rudder, a past President of Texas A&M University. Here, the tour guide emphasizes Rudder’s role in making Texas A&M University the grand institution we know it as today, in no small part due to his decision to allow the enrollment of women and students of color. This is the only place an explicit message about diversity is incorporated into the tour. From there, we move to “The Quad,” a central spot in the middle of the Corps of Cadets’ quarters on campus. Here, the tour guide will typically get into a description of the military history of the campus and the Corps, which was described by one tour guide as the “keepers of the traditions.” Several other traditions

are talked about here, including the Aggie Ring (described on the tour as a symbol that means you stand by the core values) and the university's mascot, Reveille. In the last tour, it was also noted that Reveille, a collie, has her first female handler this year, a passing note to gender diversity.

Now, the next stop depends on the tour. The first two tours I observed at the beginning of the semester went to the Heldenfels Hall, while the tour I followed at the end of the semester led us to the Engineering Activities Buildings (EAB). Despite the location, what was shared in this portion of the tour remained the same; tour guides covered scholarships, financial aid, and travel abroad opportunities, a chance to experience "new cultures and people," something noted by two of the three tour guides. Evans Library was the next stop on the tour, with an expected explanation of the library and academic resources on campus. From there, we either moved to the Harrison Education Center Classrooms (HECC) to learn about the different colleges at the university (the first two tours), or had this information shared with us while we were still at Evans Library (on the last tour). Then, the tour spots again became the same. There was a stop inside the Academic Building to talk about Texas's replica of the Liberty Bell, the only state replica not to be housed in the Capitol Building. From there, the tour moves to Academic Plaza, where prospective students and their families are given more detail about other Aggie traditions, including Silver Taps, Muster, the Century Tree, and the statue of Sullivan Ross, a controversial figure on our campus. The second to last official stop of the tour is the Memorial Student Center (MSC), described as a living memorial to those Aggies who have fought for our country, "past, present, and future," circling us back to the military values of the university. And finally, the tour ends outside of Kyle Field and Koldus, where tour guides lead the group in an Aggie Yell, one of

the many group chants that Aggies join in on during sporting events. Appropriately, the tour ends on yet another Aggie tradition.

It comes as no surprise that the two most prominent aspects of the university that were highlighted on the tour were Aggie traditions and the school's (military) history. The general message was that being part of the "Aggie Family" means respecting the history and traditions it was built on, and being willing to carry on these values as the next generation of Aggies. And if I were a prospective student, I would want to take up the task of (re)telling these important stories. Despite what I know as a student and critical scholar who has been critiquing the university for years, the stories were still compelling and it wasn't hard for me to imagine being part of this version of the "Aggie Family."

Memorialized places, stories, and "narratives of difference."

Describing the general observations I made of the tours in the way I experienced them was purposeful for drawing out my overall argument about the role of occasions for telling that the tours are constructed around. However, I also thought it would be useful to more explicitly connect the stories of these memorialized places and (a lack of) "narratives of difference." Therefore, Table 2 provides a synthesis of each tour stop, the content of the stories told at each place, and examples of "narratives of difference" that were noted. In sum, mentions of diversity and difference were almost nonexistent. The only explicit "narrative of difference" referenced was the short story about integration at the university, which was framed as an accomplishment of James Earl Rudder. There was also the welcome video shown in Rudder Tower, which did not make explicit mentions of diversity, but still strategically incorporated a "diversity of faces" in the students chosen to be of focus in the video and the "candid" shots of campus life.

Table 1. Content of Tour Stops and Connections to “Narratives of Difference”

Tour Stop	Story Content	Example of “Narratives of Difference”
<p>Welcome Video (Rudder Tower)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasizes military history, traditions Aggie legacy students, and the core values Focus on the Aggie Family: “We are the Aggies and the Aggies are we.” Prospective students can be intimately part of this family; Each member of the family is here to support you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difference is not discussed explicitly, it is shown using “diverse faces” Students of color are strategically chosen to share their stories Candid snapshots of campus are very racially diverse
<p>Portrait of James Earl Rudder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opens with Texas A&M’s beginnings: Year university was established and it’s all-male, military history James Earl Rudder given credit for establishing the Texas A&M we know today (including the school’s current name) Rudder also made membership in the Corps of Cadets optional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> James Earl Rudder allowed women and minorities to attend This is the only <i>explicit</i> story connected to “narratives of difference” across all tours
<p>The Quad</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed information about the Corps of Cadets, the “keepers of tradition.” Other traditions talked about here: the Aggie Ring (described as a symbol that you stand by the university’s core values), the Reveille (the university’s mascot) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>
<p>Heldenfels Hall/ Engineering Activities Building</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covered scholarships, financial aid, and travel abroad opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two of three tour guides noted that travel abroad is a way for students to experience new cultures and different types of people

Table 1. Content of Tour Stops and Connections to “Narratives of Difference”

<p>Evans Library/ Harrison Education Center Classrooms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected explanation of the library and academic resources on campus, as well as the different colleges at the university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>
<p>Academic Building/ Liberty Bell</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed organizations on campus students can join • Talked about Texas’s replica of the Liberty Bell, the only state replica not to be housed in the Capitol Building; the reason for this is the governor wanted to recognize Texas A&M’s military contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>
<p>Academic Plaza</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed information about more of Texas A&M’s traditions, including Silver Taps, Muster, the Century Tree, and the statue of Sul Ross 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>
<p>Memorial Student Center (MSC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described as a living memorial to those Aggies who have fought for our country “past, present and future” • Circled us back to the military values of the university as the tour is coming to a close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>
<p>Kyle Field/ Koldus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour guides lead the group in an Aggie Yell, one of the chants that Aggies join in on during sporting events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No explicit connections made to “narratives of difference”</i>

Revising the history of memorialized places.

Texas A&M has succeeded in constructing and (re)working a stable story stock grounded in its history and traditions. However, my analysis also revealed a potentially destabilizing force to the university's core institutional narratives – its own history. When further interrogated, the core institutional narratives constructed by Texas A&M, including stories about memorialized places referenced on campus tours, include revisions of the university's own history and even downplays parts of its historical narrative that could potentially minimize controversy for the organization when it comes to issues of diversity and inclusion. Some stories simply are not granted occasions for telling and I argue that the reason for this is to reduce ambiguity and avoid revisions to stable institutional narratives that have been reinforced for so long. There were several memorialized places used as occasions for telling on official campus tours that have been reworked, including traditions linked to the Century Tree, and the stories of James Earl Rudder and Lawrence Sullivan Ross (“Sul Ross”).

Revelations about changes made to stories about memorialized places first emerged during interviews with two of my participants who also happened to be university tour guides, something I did not know when we started our interviews. They noted that there is a script to follow in terms of where to stop and what needs to be said, but they are allowed a bit of freedom to add their own touches, including personal stories about their time at the university. However, when visitors don't take well to certain aspects of the tour, the stories shift. The story of the Century Tree is an example. Kevin and I had the following conversation about this when I found out he was a tour guide at Texas A&M:

Alex: So do you find that it's hard to balance not expressing too much of your personal experiences when you give the tour? Do you feel restrained in any way when you're

doing your official tours? Do you ever feel restrained 'cause you do care so much about these places?

Kevin: A little bit. There are some specific things that we're actually not allowed to tell visitors anymore...That we were allowed to when I first joined the organization. And they encourage you to put your own sort of narrative, your own personally spin, on the tour stops. But yeah, I do kind of sometimes feel a little restricted. Just 'cause one person tells a funny story, and one of the visitors takes it wrong and complains, and all this stuff, and you can't tell the stories anymore.

Alex: Ah.

Kevin: Like the Century Tree is one of those...It used to be that when seniors would propose to their girlfriends under the Century Tree, the freshmen would hide in the bushes around the tree. And if they said “yes,” they'd come out and cheer and all that. But if they said “no,” they'd actually come out and pick her up and carry her to the fish pond...and throw her in. Because no one says “no” to a senior. But we can't tell that anymore, for obvious reasons.

I observed that tour guides still talk about the Century Tree when we pass it in Academic Plaza, but don't tell this part of the story. It's actually a part of the tradition I didn't know existed. Revisions like these emphasize the careful construction of memorialized places on tours as occasions for telling. The goal is to further solidify stable institutional stock stories in a way that avoids critique.

If we circle back to the first “magnified moment,” the years of integration at the school, another memorialized place on the tour, James Earl Rudder's portrait, comes under scrutiny. On this first stop, prospective students and their families are told that James Earl Rudder

enthusiastically ushered in the enrollment of women and minorities during integration in the early 1960s. However, students of color were already on campus and seeking degrees before this time. There are records that indicate Hispanic students were enrolled and graduated from the university in the 1890s. Jose Angel Ortis, the earliest known Hispanic graduate of Texas A&M University, was in the Class of 1891. Japanese students were also enrolling as early as 1922, including student Taro Kishi, born in Japan in 1903 (Page, 2018). Therefore, citing 1963 as the point in which minorities were allowed to enroll for the first time is technically incorrect. The more correct telling is that it is the point in which women and *African Americans* were allowed to enroll, but this is not what's said. It seems the purpose of this revision is to increase the impact Rudder has had on the university, as well as to highlight the school's racial diversity, an important value in higher education. What is also interesting about this is that Rudder's progressive reputation is actually a bit more complex. As Page (2018) notes:

Towards the end of his life, Rudder began to uncharacteristically overreact when small traces of 1960s counterculture began to appear at the A&M campus. Two short-lived, mimeographed dissident student publications, *Evolution and Paranoia*, appeared at A&M in 1968-1969. Both publications ridiculed the Cadet Corps and A&M militarism and took the administration to task for its less than convincing commitment to racial and gender equality.

Rudder was also accused of giving minimal notice to the state's press about the integration of women at Texas A&M and as a result, kept women in the dark about coeducation at the school. The administration also refused to provide housing for women at the time.

The years after integration are not nearly as smooth as they are made out to be. Effigies were lynched on multiple occasions on campus as a sign of protest, including about the decision

to “co-ed” the university (Page, 2018). There are also other events that documents note where the university had to address differential treatment of students around these years. For example, in May 1969, Texas A&M requested that students stop “dousing their Mexican-American classmates with water on San Jacinto Day, the day of Aggie Muster” (Page, 2018). James Earl Rudder and the Texas A&M community may not have embraced integration quite as smoothly as is currently depicted.

It’s also possible that a reason minorities are not highlighted in the history of the university prior to integration is because further examination into this history would reveal that minorities were not treated well on this campus, threatening the inclusivity that is supposed to be inherently grounded in what it means to be an Aggie. Although people of color are typically worked into the institutional narrative during integration, African Americans and Mexicans played an essential role on campus long before they became students. They had worked in Sbisa hall since 1900, and there were laborer and servants quarters on campus as early as 1918 (Page, 2015). Unfortunately, many of these workers did not have job security and lost their jobs during summer breaks, especially African American servants who lived on campus with White professors and staff. They even lost their jobs when they demanded higher wages for their work. As the Galveston Daily News reported in 1905, “The mess hall of the Agricultural and Mechanical College is now supplied with student waiters, which is quite an innovation. The change from the Mexican and Negro waiters formerly used came about as the result of an unreasonable demand for higher wages” (p. 5). Despite the presence of Mexican and African American workers on campus, they were viewed far from equal and when there was discontent, the fault fell on individuals of color and they were replaced.

James Earl Rudder is not the only memorialized figure on the campus tour whose history needs more complex explication. Lawrence Sullivan Ross, whose statue sits in the center of Academic Plaza, also has a fair share of narratives that surround his name. As I noted earlier, there is a widespread rumor on campus that “Sul Ross” was a racist and member of the Ku Klux Klan. However, the evidence does not necessarily support the rumor. That being said, it doesn’t disprove the rumor either. To begin, there is no evidence to confirm Ross owned slaves, although members of his family were documented as having them. However, he did have paid African American servants that later worked cotton and cattle on his land. Although he did serve in the Confederate Army, there are records that point to his wanting to leave the war and he emphasized on several occasions that many Confederate did not support slavery and that wasn’t their drive to participate in the war. For example, in an 1892 speech at a Confederate reunion, Ross stated:

On behalf of thousands of old Confederates I want to record the fact today, that while slavery was undoubtedly an element which served to keep the public mind of the country like an angry sea that was continually casting up mire and dirt, it did not represent the principles for which the great majority of Confederates contended. As evidence of this fact I simply illustrate a general truth by saying that not 100 of the 1200 men composing the regiment in which I enlisted at the commencement of the struggle ever owned or expected to own a slave. (Galveston Daily News, 26 October 1892, p. 6)

And in his application for a Presidential pardon post-war, he wrote, “He would further say that he regards the slavery question finally settled, and would view any attempt to reestablish slavery in the South as injudicious & impolitic” (Confederate Application for Presidential Pardons, 1865-1867, National Archives and Records Services).

After his time in the war, when he served as a delegate to the Texas Constitutional Convention, it appears that he voted against a poll tax that would limit voting rights for African Americans, and promoted full suffrage (Page, 2018). As both a sheriff and Governor, Ross led the warrants, arrests, and convictions of murderers of African Americans, and openly opposed mob violence. And finally, no evidence exists that Ross was a part of the KKK during Reconstruction. The Klan did not officially exist in Texas during the time he was Governor and President of Texas A&M University. His KKK robe is *not* in Cushing Library, one aspect of the rumor on campus. The robes that are kept there belong to other identified individuals and are of the wrong time period to belong to Sul Ross. I've seen these robes and verified this information myself.

So, if the archival data points to a more favorable image of Sul Ross, why not highlight this and explicitly address the rumors about his past? Because it means that the institutional narrative is in need of revision and for an organization whose institutional story stock is so deeply grounded in the telling of a history that already exists, modifying it reveals its potential instability. Whether history makes things clearer, more positive or more negative, the “Aggie Family” has been constructed to remain stable.

Texas A&M University has been able to (re)work a stable institutional narrative identity over its long history, one that emphasizes its traditions and core values. It continues to do so through official campus tours, utilizing memorialized places as *occasions for telling*. Artifacts and memorials around campus serve as another opportunity for students to be reminded what it means to be part of the “Aggie Family” and their role in passing along its values. And as I discovered during students own individualized tours, they too use memorialized places as

occasions for telling, in ways that both align and differ from how Texas A&M utilizes them for narrative remembering.

Places for Individual Narrative Remembering at Texas A&M

Undergraduate students at Texas A&M also use memorialized places as occasions for telling. During their walking tour interviews, my participants often took me to the same places that are included on official campus tours, including the Memorial Student Center (MSC), Academic Plaza, and Kyle Field. And they too used these places as occasions for connecting their personal stories and experiences to the university's history and traditions. When students do this, they take an active role in (re)working the institutional story stock as the university intended. However, they also utilized other occasions for telling, those that were not specifically designed by the institution for narrative remembering (Linde, 2009). In particular, they utilized ordinary places as opportunities to recollect positive memories about Fish Camp, an orientation program that many participants highlighted as an important means of learning Aggie traditions.

Occasions Designed for Narrative Remembering

One of the most photographed buildings by participants, across all groups, was the Memorial Student Center, which is itself a living memorial for those who have lost their lives fighting for our country. For example, Jillian captured this photograph, accompanied with the caption: "MSC was a home base for me, and *the core value of Respect is visible. This value means a lot to me, and shows a level of diversity at A&M*" (emphasis added).



(Captured by Jillian)

Reginald also chose to include a picture of the MSC (below) in the photovoice portion of the study and wrote the following explanation: “The MSC is important to me because of *the culture A&M has of friendliness*. I came to TAMU alone, but through fish camp I was able to make some lasting friendships. The MSC is significant because it is the center of campus, and I can run into a lot of my friends there, or meet even more people.”



(Captured by Reginald)

Jillian, who identified as a White women, makes an interesting connection between the symbolic nature of the MSC, her own personal connection to the place, *and* diversity. In highlighting “respect” as her favorite Aggie core value, the MSC as central “base” for this value, and the way in which “respect” facilitates diversity, this place becomes an occasion for telling that successfully reinforces the organization’s conception of Aggie values as inherently inclusive. Reginald, an African American man, also draws this connection as he cites the MSC as the centralized location he can experience “the culture A&M has of friendliness.”

Academic Plaza, which is central to many traditions, was also highly captured by my interviewees, including the statue of Sullivan Ross and the Century Tree. Kevin was one of these

participants and wrote this extended caption along with his photograph to explain why Academic Plaza is so important to him:

“As a member of *a student body that finds its’ identity in tradition*, I find that Academic Plaza accurately represents my Texas A&M experience. The Academic Building in its’ own right is the most symbolic building on campus, because while it may not be the oldest original building, it is one of the most iconic and certainly the most historic. The Plaza itself is at most times peaceful and *presents a friendly atmosphere*. In my personal opinion, visiting Academic Plaza—whether it be in transit between classes, to put a penny on Sully, or to honor a student who has passed away—is one of the most “aggie” things that one can do, as *it allows you to follow in the footsteps of generations before you*” (emphasis added).



(Academic Plaza and Sullivan Ross, captured by Kevin)

Interestingly, Kevin, a White man, uses the same adjective to describe the atmosphere of Academic Plaza as Reginald used to describe the MSC – *friendly*. Both places evoke a sense of friendless, which certainly makes them particularly appealing for narrative remembering, even beyond their explicit connection to the history and traditions of the university. Kevin’s use of the idiom “*to follow in the footsteps* of generations before you” also works to reinforce the closeness and endurance of the “Aggie Family” through the familial-like passing of these traditions over the years. Reginald also highlighted a similar closeness in his image of the Century Tree and attributed the site to symbolizing the importance of lasting relationships.



(Century Tree, captured by Reginald)

Other notable places that were included in photovoice images were the Quad (home of the Corps of Cadets), Kyle Field, and a tunnel with the words “There’s a spirit can ne’er be told...” written

across it. Paul, a non-traditional student, captured many of Texas A&M's traditions within his photograph of Kyle Field.



(Kyle Field, captured by Paul)

As he explained of the photograph:

[This photo] is of *some corp* with both the MSC and Kyle Field in the background. As an older non-traditional student, I can say I have been rooting for the Aggies longer than most students have been alive. This picture represents *the mainstays of A&M* that I have known for over thirty years. I bowled at the MSC. I worked concession at Kyle Field almost thirty years ago, way before Johnny Manziel showed up. *The corp are the living embodiment of Texas A&M.* This is my A&M, where I grew up and have watched the changes.

As Paul explained, the MSC and Kyle Field are the “mainstays of A&M” and the Corps of Cadets, the “embodiment of Texas A&M.” As places designed by the university specifically for the narrative remembering of Texas A&M’s (military) history and traditions, this is not surprising. However, these places are also sites of personal remembering for Paul, as he connects experiences he had to both the MSC and Kyle Field long before becoming a student.

All of these places are symbolic narrative reminders of Texas A&M’s traditions and as my participants explained, it’s not specific physical features of these sites that make them memorable. It’s their representation of the university’s history and core values, our military, and being part of the “Aggie Family” that make them important. Therefore, it’s clear that Texas A&M has been successful in purposefully constructing memorialized places as occasions for telling and reinforcing the university’s core institutional narratives.

Interviews with participants also revealed that the physicality of these structures is important, particularly their centrality on campus that make them constant reminders of what it means to be an Aggie. Academic plaza, which houses the statue of Sul Ross and the Century Tree, is at the center of campus and is passed by students, including most of my participants, on a regular basis. As Spencer noted of the space, “I don’t know... It’s just kind of central to the entire campus and no matter where I’m going I always walk past it.” And Paul offered a similar sentiment, adding, “I feel like this is kind of a central hub of A&M.” Likewise, the Memorial Student Center (MSC) is also in the heart of campus, housing many student organizations, food courts, and meeting spaces. And with Kyle Field across the street, it’s hard not to be reminded of the history of the university as you pass through them.

All but one of my participants captured a tradition in some way, whether in a photograph or during their walking tour interviews. Table 3 shows the overlap between the places students

highlighted in their photographs and/or on their individual tours and those on the official campus tour.

Table 3. Overlap Between Individual and Official Tour Stops

Participant Name	# Places	# Places That Overlap with Campus Tour	Percentage of Overlap
Robert	4	4	100%
Kevin	4	4	100%
Jace	4	3	75%
Spenser	4	3	75%
Paul	6	4	67%
Reginald	3	2	60%
Magnolia	3	2	60%
Ramon	3	2	60%
Angela	3	2	60%
Camila	6	3	50%
Henry	5	2	40%
Jillian	5	2	40%
Becca	6	2	33%
Sam	3	1	33%
Tess	3	1	33%
Thomas	4	1	25%
Smith	4	1	25%
Michelle	4	1	25%
Valeria	3	0	0%

While some undergraduate students captured the traditions as a whole, like the examples shown earlier in this chapter, others captured them more indirectly. Instead, they took a picture of

themselves with a group of friends *participating* in the traditions or a picture of their family at Aggie Ring Day or a football game. Either way, the traditions remained a prominent part of their story as an Aggie and these experiences could be easily captured because there are memorialized places for narrative remembering all over campus.

This chart also introduces some important points that will be explored more deeply in the next chapter. The first five participants in this chart, those that had the most overlap between their individual tours and the official tours, are either White men (4) or an Aggie legacy (1). Naturally, they show higher levels of identification with the university's history and tradition. Women and minority students also have a decent amount of overlap, up to 67%, but their identification with the institution is a bit more complicated and they do not describe or use memorialized spaces in the same way.

Gone FISHing

The memorialized places explored thus far were all occasions for telling that Texas A&M University has constructed for the *purpose* of (re)telling its institutional story stock. Many students designed their own tours around these places and connected their personal experiences to the traditions and values of the university, highlighting the narrative power of these places. However, during tours, less obvious spaces also became occasions for telling that sparked key memories for these Aggies. One of the most cited memories was Fish Camp, a freshman orientation program that many participants highlighted as a particularly positive memory and an important way of learning how to become part of the "Aggie Family." Fish Camp is also important and the central example used in this section because it too served as its own occasion for telling, but in a unique way.

There is no official occasion for telling granted for Fish Camp by the university; Nonetheless, participants granted places as occasions for telling these experiences anyway. And these places were typically more mundane, including the particular staircase at the Administration Building Fish Camp groups took their official photos or a specific table in the Memorial Student Center food court. For example, when I was with Spenser in the MSC, we talked about his experience in Fish Camp and he pointed out a particular table where his group always meets:

Actually we're going to the MSC right now which is where ... that's kind of like our little hang out spot. We'll always see ... if one of us is in the MSC, it's like come to the MSC. I'm eating lunch so all of a sudden seven or eight people will just rush to the MSC just because we don't have anything to do so I get to spend it with our fellow Aggies, you know?...*Oh yeah see, we have our DG group right there. Yeah, they're all here and you can always find someone from our Fish Camp here.* (Emphasis added)

Reginald also recollected the same memories as we visited the food court in the MSC. As he shared, “My Fish Camp group took all of us here and my Fish Camp parents are really good parents and they took us here, ate with us and then walked us to each of our classes so we would know where to go on the first day of school. So this has a lot of really good memories.”

Although these students brought me to the Memorial Student Center, the stories they told were not about the military history of the university, which is what this memorial was designed to represent.

Fish Camp itself also serves as an occasion for telling, although not in a way characterized by Linde (2009). I argue that it is an important occasion for telling institutional stock stories that is *untethered from the physical space* of Texas A&M’s campus. Although there

is no physical place that represents Fish Camp, the program has been so impactful for enough students that it has become an important occasion for telling. It's also an occasion for telling that was identified by my participants as a key way that new students are "inundated" with the university's history and traditions, which should make it of particular interest to the university.

Fish Camp is a four-day extensive orientation program for freshman led by current Aggies, with the goal of helping to make their first year a success ("What is Fish Camp?," 2018).

As Robert explained:

[Fish Camp] is really encouraged to go to and people that can't afford it is given scholarships because it's really important to be *inundated in the traditions* to feel like you have a home here to be successful, and then get involved. And so, administration and the University puts a lot of resources into Fish Camp and things like that...so that people *can feel like they are at home*. (emphasis added)

Fish Camp "inundates" new students into the history and tradition of the university, "induct[ing] them into institutional membership and, as part of this, [teaching them] to shape their stories to harmonize with the events and values of the main institutional narratives" (Linde, 2009, p. 4). This reflects the *inclusion as assimilation* model constructed by the university in response to race-related incidents because it asks new Aggies to mold their personal experiences with the institutional narratives that already exist.

Robert's quote also ties Fish Camp to the metaphor of the "Aggie Family" and making sure students "feel like they are at home." What is also intriguing is that on the program's website, there is a tally of how many camps, counselors, and freshman that have been involved in the Fish Camp program. And the last tally, which doesn't change, reads "1 Aggie Family," an

official recognition that there is a common culture and institutional narrative that should encapsulate all members of Texas A&M, especially students.



Figure 2. Fish Camp Statistics

Fish Camp also became an important occasion for telling personal experiences beyond Texas A&M's history and traditions. Several of my participants cited the experience as where they found their core social groups and the people they are still closest with on campus. As Spenser explained:

One of the best camps I've ever been to and that was two or three days. I met my best friends there. We're still doing continuity events. I actually just got my Clemson game ticket from one of my counselors from Fish Camp. We're all still friends, we're all still talking and hanging out.

Two of my participants, Jace and Henry, even went on to become Fish Camp counselors after having such a positive experience with the organization. And it then became their turn to instill the important traditions of Texas A&M on their own group of freshman. Henry and I talked about this in detail:

Henry: ... How much your counselors put in work to try and keep you involved and make sure you feel welcome and then those translate over to those other traditions because that's probably the first thing you end up doing once you get here. Someone

drags you to one of those and you kind of learn to appreciate it, and then you realize what's all behind it, how many years of stuff has gone into this.

Alex: So you said part of the Fish Camp, sort of socializing, is sort of bringing you into those traditions?

Henry: Yeah. That's kind of what I did with my kids this year. I just dragged them to everything like Midnight Yell, the first Silver Taps, second Midnight Yell, a couple meetings.

Alex: So you now, as a Fish Camp Counselor, are sort of now following the same pattern and bringing them into the traditions as well?

Henry: Yeah, making sure they realize how much of this is ... Like how most everyone goes to these things.

There is a universally appealing quality to the program that crosses racial differences and has impacted the majority of my participants, as well as a majority of undergraduate students at Texas A&M from what they told me. So what is it about Fish Camp that has been so impactful and transformed it into an important occasion for telling? My data points to the family-like atmosphere created by Fish Camp counselors, the mentor-mentee relationship set up by the program, and the use of Discussion Groups (or as participants called them, “DGs”) that carry on throughout students’ first year at the university.

The dedication of counselors to make people feel included and part of their “family” was a common explanation of why Fish Camp was regarded as such a positive experience for many of my participants. As I noted in the previous chapter, the metaphor of “family” is something everyone understands, even if the finite aspects of what it means to be an Aggie has yet to be learned. Before students even begin classes for the first time at Texas A&M, they are given the

foundation for what it means to be a part of the “Aggie Family.” As Jace explained of his own Fish Camp experience:

From the very first time everyone moved in, [my counselors] planned a movie night at our *DG mom's* house to go hang out, eat pizza and just have a good time. To be able to have that experience, when so many of my friends from high school [at other universities] were incredibly alone because they didn't have that support system that Fish Camp offers at Texas A&M...So to be able to have that as a freshman and not feel alone at all and to feel like I was essentially the king of the world...That felt amazing.

The notion of family support is strong, even down to calling your Fish Camp counselors “mom” and “dad.” And this initial sense of support is carried on throughout the entirety of student’s first year. DGs continue to meet on a regular basis, turning Fish Camp into a repeated occasion for telling where important stories are (re)told. They were meaningful enough for some of my participants to make sure to point out the table they meet their DG during their walking tour interviews. Counselors become important mentors for freshman and their groups little families of their own, an ongoing resource for students to always feel welcome.

Staying Attuned to Memorialized Places as Occasions for Telling

Memorialized places, whether or not they are designed specifically for narrative remembering, are important for the (re)telling of institutional stock stories. This chapter highlighted the effectiveness through which Texas A&M University has used memorialized places to grant occasions for telling core narratives about its history, traditions, and values. Official campus tours, organized around these places, link together storytelling episodes into a consistent and coherent narrative identity about who we are, how we are, and who we have

always been. Many students also use these memorialized places to connect their personal experiences to the university's history and traditions, as an institution would hope of its organizational members.

However, students at Texas A&M also used memorialized places designated for the (re)telling of institutional stock stories to share their unrelated personal stories. They even granted occasions for telling meaningful experiences to mundane pieces of furniture. It's important for institutions to stay attuned to these other occasions for telling because they may elicit stories in conflict with core institutional narratives. While the most meaningful occasions for telling identified by my participants also helped to reinforce the university's stable narrative identity, the following chapter reveals that this might not always be the case. Next, I complete the analysis of my data by exploring how diverse students express *forms of relation* with the institutional story stock and how "narratives of difference" change the way spaces are utilized and can destabilize exclusive institutional narratives.

CHAPTER VI

DESTABILIZING INSTITUTIONAL STORY STOCK WITH INDIVIDUAL “NARRATIVES OF DIFFERENCE”

Narratives are not only used by institutions to construct and maintain an identity. Telling stories is also a means by which individuals negotiate their own identities in relationship to the organizations they are members of. Within organizations like other communities, “one must know not only which stories to take as models but **how** the model is to be used” (Linde, 2009, p. 172). Linde (2009) offers the following forms of relation between individual and core institutional stories: *citation* and *quotation*, explicit mentions or references to a key text, *parallel evaluation*, using the same moral values as the institution, *critique*, criticism of text or values, *irony*, new texts being ironic to prior texts and *rejection*, an explicit rejection of texts or values. The ways individuals express forms of relation to institutional stories reveals their level of identification with an organization.

Although Texas A&M has managed to maintain core institutional narratives grounded in its history and traditions, members of the diverse student body do not have the same levels of identification with these narratives. And it’s in the ways they express forms of relation with institutional narratives that can illuminate these differences. In particular, I sought to explore how individual “narratives of difference” of diverse undergraduate students related to the institutional story stock. Therefore, this chapter is driven by the following research question: *How do students express forms of relation between the institutional story stock and their individual “narratives of difference?”*

My photovoice and walking interview data illuminated several important themes. In general, participants utilized three forms of relation: citation and quotation, parallel evaluation, and critique. However, the combination of forms of relation differed. For White male students, whom one of my other participants labeled the “Good ole’ boys,” there was a combination of citation and quotation, as well as parallel evaluation that was used to highlight their high levels of identification with Texas A&M University. Another group who used these forms of relation were Aggie Legacies, undergraduate students who have had family members attend the university before them. However, what became most surprising during the analysis of my data was the way in which racially underrepresented groups also overwhelmingly used citation, quotation and parallel evaluation, but also with critique. The first two demonstrate an alignment between individual and institution and the last emphasizes distance. Despite being able to critique the university, sometimes quite harshly, almost all of my participants still explicitly expressed pride in being part of the “Aggie Family.” This tension of autonomy from and connection with the university has interesting implications for efforts to improve practices of inclusion.

A Place for Certain Kinds of Aggies

My participants shared several interpretations of what it means to be an Aggie. Some define it as adhering to the core values and traditions, others equate it to being a part of a family, and many of my participants said something along the lines of “You just don’t know what it is like until you are part of it.” And in many ways, I think they are right. As Jillian described, being part of the “Aggie Family” means you can find your own individuality in a space where you feel welcomed by a larger community. That being said, it was also clear that although the “Aggie

Family” is multi-faceted, two types of students in particular demonstrated the most identification with Texas A&M’s institutional story stock – the “Good Ole’ Boys” and Aggie legacies.

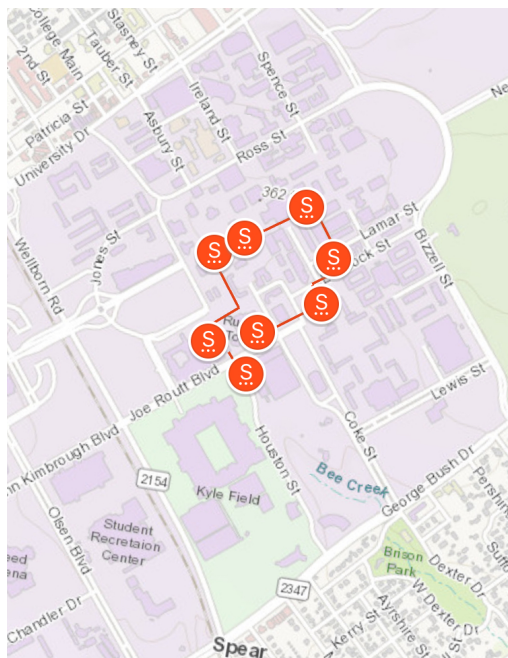
The “Good Ole’ Boys”

When asked to define the overall culture at Texas A&M, Sam, a bi-racial, male student called it the “Good ole’ boy conservative” culture. He described it as a culture that values Southern traditions, is politically conservative, and Christian. That is not to say there isn’t more complexity within the “Aggie Family,” but within my interviews, it became clear that the history and traditions of the university speak to certain students more than others. In turn, these students help to reinforce already well-established institutional narratives.

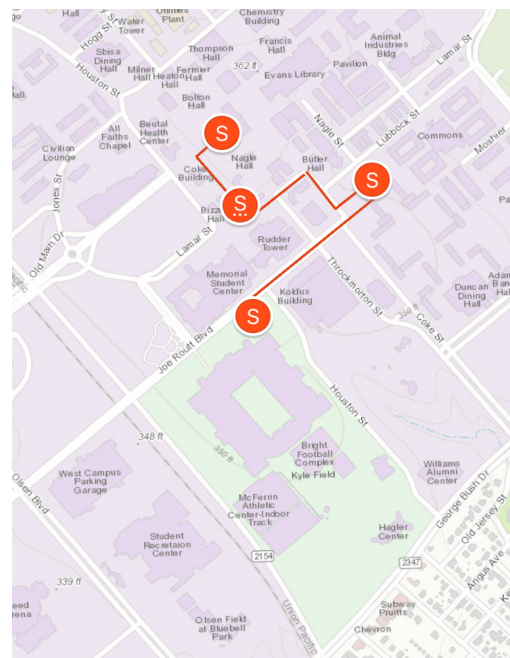
As a critical race and intersectional scholar, it was not my intent to single out certain groups of individuals as I was analyzing this data. However, there was a particular group that emerged (quite physically, in fact) first when it came to identifying themes among the narratives of my participants. White men were the first to volunteer for this study and it was typically because they had an intense enthusiasm for Texas A&M University. And they exhibited the characteristics the university’s story stock had framed, having a deep respect for the history and traditions of the university, and a desire to pass along these values. It became hard not to equate these patterns with the fact that this university was first established (as well as many of the traditions) *for* them. Why wouldn’t they feel welcome here?

There are several important findings that led me to such conclusions. First, as was discussed in the last chapter, white men often took me to places that were included on the official campus tour for prospective students, a form of parallel evaluation that connected “their Texas A&M” with the official version displayed by the university. When I mentioned this observation

to a participant, Paul, who was also taking me to “historical” spots on campus, he laughed and replied, “*I’ve been indoctrinated...They have me for life*” (emphasis added). White men were much more likely to take me to more well-known spots on campus, those that encapsulate many Aggie traditions, including Academic Plaza, the Memorial Student Center (MSC) and Kyle Field. For example, all of Kevin’s stops during his interview were also stops on the official campus tour.



(Official Campus Tour)



(Kevin’s Individualized Tour)

Figure 3. Comparative Tour Screenshots

This group of participants also connected their personal experiences with the institutional story stock by making explicit references to the university’s history and traditions. As Kevin explained of Academic Plaza, “*This is really one of my favorite places on campus... It's nice to just observe people. But really, Academic Plaza is where some of the most important traditions that we have at A&M either take place or represented in some form by a statue or otherwise.*”

For Kevin, Academic Plaza is one of his favorite places *because of* the fact that it houses so many traditions. His individual telling of Texas A&M mirrors what is prescribed of Aggies by the core institutional narratives. The photographs captured by White men also typically captured the *entirety* of these traditional places, as opposed to a certain aspect or part of a building or space. In comparison, other groups including White women and participants of color, chose more minute aspects of a particular place, including a classroom, meeting spot, or even something as small as a particular hallway they walked down most often.

Sometimes, the conversation veered into a discussion of the impact of increasing numbers of students on Aggie traditions and in a couple cases, it was explicitly noted that there seems to be an increasing lack of adherence. As Kevin added:

“I don't know if the student body has changed a whole lot. I've started to see a little bit of sort of *disregard* for the more common traditions. I don't see near as many people saying, "Howdy" anymore. Not nearly as many people saying, "Howdy" anymore. The university has really ramped up its acceptance rate recently. And I think that might have something to do with it. I feel like the traditions that people used to just always take part in are sort of becoming *diluted* by people who are in the top ten percent of their class and want to get a good education from a good school, and don't realize the kind of things that go on...Right, yeah, 'cause A&M has a huge international student population as well, and they don't care at all. I've met a few that are really into it, but for the most part, they only come to A&M because it's such a good institution. And so that accounts for a large percent of the student body. So that has something to do with it as well.” (emphasis added)

Kevin's use of the words "disregard" and "diluted" are interesting here. Although these terms could be neutral, when you put them in tension with Kevin's high level of identification with the university, discussed above, they become evaluative and negative – having the traditions "disregarded" and "diluted" is a problem.

However, less adherence to traditions wasn't necessarily perceived as being a negative thing by all students in this group. Another White male student, also a non-traditional student, noted that change is simply unavoidable. Paul added:

"Things are going to change and A&M has got a good foundation that's you know, most of the stuff, they do a lot of conferences and you have Fish Camp and teach people about the traditions, and I think also for the most part though that *someone that's going to come to A&M is semi-aware of what they're getting into and they're prepared to kind of accept the traditions.*"

Paul cites Texas A&M's strong foundation as capable of withstanding increasing numbers of students and continuing to pass on the traditions. He also recognizes that Texas A&M's core institutional narratives are even known by non-members, prospective student who are "semi-aware of what they're getting into" and should be ready to accept the university's traditions.

It's also important to note that this particular group of students did have their own complexities, and some even had a more nuanced take on the relationship between traditions and diversity. Two of these participants explicitly noted there was a *need* for change. For example, when asked if different types of students may have different experiences, Henry responded, "I want to say that the University is trying to improve its sexual assault responses and hate crime responses and stuff like that. I think we're doing better. I don't think we're great, but I think we're doing better than we were."

However, as opposed to critiques I received from other types of students, these criticisms always appeared very *uncritical*. Although they knew there was room for improvement, it was also important for them to note that the university is already making important steps to foster inclusivity and that the “Aggie Family” is prepared and welcoming of it. However, it should also be noted that offering explicit critique was very difficult for many of my participants. And it was something I could relate to, and often face on a personal level. As members of Texas A&M, it’s difficult to critique a place you *chose* to be a part of and a place that does grant you privilege. I could see and hear the hesitation in my participants when asked about their challenges or things they didn’t like about a particular place or the university. It was often in less obvious places within our conversation and their stories that critiques emerged naturally.

Aggie Legacies

At Texas A&M, there is also a large number of Aggie legacies, students who have had other family members attend the university before them. They represent another form of evidence of just how strong the passing of Texas A&M’s history and traditions can be, and it comes as no surprise that they express citation, quotation, and parallel evaluation with the university’s institutional story stock. In some ways, the stories of those Aggie legacies made it seem as if becoming an Aggie was a preordained destiny. Although some admitted to attempting to resist this path initially because they wanted to forge individuality, most felt that it was the place they were *meant to be*. As Jillian, a White woman, recalled:

So originally, when I was applying for colleges, I applied to UT, and I was like, "Dad, I don't want to go to A&M just because you say it." You know I want to make sure this is where I'm supposed to go, not because you deem it so. Almost like my rebellion (laugh).

I'll go to UT. You can't stop me... But I took a campus tour, *part of the reason why I was so excited to be a tour guide because that tour was the thing that was like, "Okay wait, this is where I'm supposed to be."*

Both of Jillian's parents attended Texas A&M and although she thought about "rebellious" and going to UT Austin (a rival campus), she ended up where she felt she was supposed to be. However, what's particularly interesting is that she cites the official campus tour as a central reason for realizing she wanted to go to Texas A&M, an important *occasion for telling* the university has constructed purposefully to reinforce its core institutional narratives.

Aggie legacies are important for many reasons. First, they are a key mechanism for reproducing the organizational narrative created by Texas A&M University. These students highlight Aggie traditions and values as essential to their own A&M experience (citation/quotation and parallel evaluation), they share those experiences with other Aggies, and are happy to pass along the significance of maintaining them. And in many cases, it is because these values were passed on to them by other Aggies in their family. They wore Aggie onesies as babies, went to football games long before they were current students, and were being "indoctrinated" from the very beginning. And when they got to Texas A&M, they knew how things worked. Their families had given them the pragmatic information about how to be a student here, as well as instilling the pride of being a member of the "Aggie family."

A preconceived notion I had was that, given the demographics of the university, it would be unlikely that I would have participants that were Aggie legacies as well as racial minorities. Fortunately, I was able to hear the stories of two. And what was interesting is that the experience of these legacies wasn't necessarily any different from those students who identify as White. One participant, Robert, a Hispanic male, is a second-generation Aggie. His parents were

both Aggies before him, along with his sister, and he was heavily immersed in the Aggie culture from a young age. And because of that, he says he's had a rather "traditional" Aggie experience. Aggie traditions, particularly Silver Taps and Muster, are important to him because they exemplify what it means to be part of the "Aggie Family" – "Even if they don't know you, they will show up for you." It was only through his position in an organization on campus that he realized that his legacy status gave him a different trajectory than other Hispanic students:

Robert: ...seeing and hearing different Hispanics speak about their experiences on campus, it has changed my view a little bit...

Alex: In what way?

Robert: Just because not everyone is obviously the same, right? So, if you're a first-generation Aggie, or first-generation in Hispanic culture,.. your experiences are so different. And so, me coming in as a second-generation Aggie, or second-generation Hispanic on this A&M campus, I think that *my experience has been traditional*.

(emphasis added)

Robert's legacy status, despite being a racial minority, afforded him a "traditional" Aggie experience. The identity of "Aggie legacy" provided him some protections from feelings he could have felt as a racially underrepresented member of the university. However, this particular feeling of belonging was not shared in the same way by other minority students.

When Individual Experiences Deviate from Institutional Narratives

One of the most difficult findings that I had to grapple with was the fact that, despite being able to *critique* the university and sharing experiences of feeling like they did not belong because of their racial identity, almost all of my marginalized participants still explicitly told me

that they have pride in being a part of the “Aggie Family.” One of the most representative moments of this dynamic happened with Magnolia, a Hispanic woman, who when asked about her decision to come to Texas A&M as a first generation-Aggie, responded:

It was really scary trying to figure out where I wanted to go, just because it's six hours away from home and I can hardly ever go home. *Family's a really big thing to me, but I really fell for the whole, the Aggie Family I guess.* I really fell for the whole wanting to make everyone feel included. *And at times, I feel like I'm not representative* just because of where I'm at in the whole ethnic thing, but I still feel that people really try, nonetheless, to make me feel accepted, or when they feel like, I don't fit there. So it's interesting because even though at times *I feel uncomfortable in certain situations, or about traditions, or about being here,* there's still people that try their best to make you feel included, knowing that you're going through all of those thoughts of feeling uncomfortable.

There is an interesting juxtaposition in this quote that is at the heart of why I was drawn to this tension. Magnolia draws an important connection between her own family and the “Aggie Family,” and the inclusiveness that is naturally accompanied with both. But, at the same time, she also interrogates the very thing that brought her to Texas A&M by revealing that she can still feel uncomfortable and underrepresented by the foundational values that construct the “Aggie Family,” including the university’s traditions. The reputation of this family was enough to draw her to the university, but her experience and ethnic difference complicated it. Although she expressed citation, quotation, and parallel evaluation between her own narrative identity and that of the university, she also offers a clear critique – she is not represented at this university and it makes her feel uncomfortable.

I was not prepared for this tension. My participants recognized Texas A&M as not *inherently inclusive*, as the university would lead us to believe, but also not *inherently exclusive* either – and many times, actually welcoming to their difference. That being said, I think it’s important to identify the ways in which racially underrepresented students expressed *critique* as a means to highlight deviations that exist from the institutional narrative. As I explored earlier, the culture created by the institutional narratives at the university really foster the experiences of the White male students and Aggie legacies. However, there is far more diversity of experiences, some that align with certain aspects of these students’ experiences and others far less.

Somewhere in the middle.

Another group that also lent itself well to the “macro” culture at Texas A&M was White women, a few of which were very enthusiastic about being a part of the “Aggie Family” and also highlighted traditions within their photographs and stories. One particularly enthusiastic participant, Becca, is a third-generation Aggie whose family is physically memorialized several places around campus. As Becca described,

My family is a very defining part of why Texas A&M is so special to me, because it feels like I'm very connected with them here...Walking down these sidewalks and being like my mom walked these sidewalks to go to class. Like that's so cool to me. Then my grandfather walked these sidewalks to get to class, and my brother, and my uncle. That's just really cool to me.

Although she is Jewish, which does not fit into the Christian-based component of the traditional Aggie narrative, she said that this was never an issue.

Despite the fact that White women did highlight more traditional aspects of Texas A&M, as opposed to minority women and men, the ways in which this manifested was a bit of a deviation from their male counterparts. While a handful of White women did identify traditional monuments within their photographs and stories, some very enthusiastically as a matter of fact, there were specific ways they did so. Instead of photographically capturing the entirety of a particular building or space, they often focused on more minute aspects of their Texas A&M experience, including the bus they rode, the most prominent path they took leading up a building, a small space they always studied, and the people they spent time within a particular place.



(Captured by Michelle: “My first picture is of the 01 (Bonfire) bus, because I ride to classes on it everyday and it's a major part (and major pain) of ‘My Texas A&M’.”)



(Captured by Jillian. From her interview: “I kind of picked this spot, like I took it like over there just because coming from the buses, as a freshman, so I had to always ... I went to that bus stop right there and always kind of had to walk that way. It was kind of hard of figuring out how to get across such a big campus. This was my destination.”)

And their stories focused less on the more historical aspects of the university or the explicit traditions. It was the people they spent time with that mattered most to “their Texas A&M.” For example, both Spenser, a White male student and Becca, a White female student, shared pictures they took of Kyle Field. Spenser’s picture captured the entirety of the field and was accompanied by the following caption:



(Captured by Spenser)

Both football games and midnight yell have a special place in my heart. Never in a million years will you ever hear the roar of thousands of students cheering on your Aggies. When you are in the game and the screams of your fellow Aggies ring in your ears you can't help but yell right along with them. It is here where your inner Aggie will show, there are no 2%ers allowed here. Everyone is a die hard Aggie and I am overjoyed that I'm a part of the Aggie family. No matter where you sit you'll be greeted with a "Howdy" and you'll yell right along with whoever you're with.

On the other hand, Becca's picture was a close-up of her and her brother at an Aggie football game. (The picture is blurred to mask participant's identity.)



(Captured by Bessa)

And her caption focused on her family and the connection she feels to them: “I am a third-generation Aggie; therefore family is a big part of “My Texas A&M.” When I walk around campus, it feels like home because of all the stories and visits I have shared with my family here.” She does not focus on the explicitly cite traditions associated with being at an Aggie football game, such as Midnight Yell, saying “Howdy” (an official Aggie greeting) or the “2%ers” (students who don’t participate in Aggie traditions, including not leaving a football game early). Instead, the importance of being at Kyle Field is that it represents a memory and connection she has with her family. It’s not that she does not care about those traditions because, as I noted above, she’s very enthusiastic about those components of being an Aggie as well.

However, she prioritizes the people she has spent time with or is reminded of in those “traditional” spaces, instead of the importance of the traditions themselves.

Some of these themes were also true of students of color. They too tended to focus on more minute aspects of buildings and the people they spent time with in those places. For example, Valeria, a woman who identified as Hispanic, only took photographs and toured me around *one* building. She talked about memories outside of the Liberal Arts Building (LAAH), but it was the spaces in that particular building she thought I needed to see the most. With the exception of two photographs, out of the 31 I received from those participants that identify as racial minorities, no building or monument connecting to a traditional aspect of Texas A&M was the focus on a photograph.

Finding people “like me.”

One of the key ways in which minority students expressed their critique was through stories about how they resisted complete assimilation into Texas A&M by seeking out groups of friends or organizations with “people like them,” other underrepresented students. Two particularly important spaces for marginalized students that crossed racial and gender lines were the Multicultural Services office and the Student Programs office. In total, I received four photographs of these two spaces, one from a student who identifies as a Hispanic woman, another a Puerto Rican male, another from a student who identifies as a multi-racial male (Hispanic and Asian), and the last from a Black male.



(Captured by Magnolia)



(Captured by Sam)

These four participants also included these places as spots on their walking tour interviews, along with one additional Hispanic woman, furthering highlighting the importance of the connections and memories they had in those spaces. This is not surprising as these two offices are the hubs of many identity-based organizations, including the Student Conference of Latinx Affairs (SCOLA), Southwestern Black Student Leadership Conference (SBSLC), and Excellence uniting Culture, Education, and Leadership (ExCEL). It's also important to note that Multicultural Services has its own official website where they include "diversity" as its *first* value, followed by the remaining Texas A&M core values.

The importance of this space is fitting, given minorities' own recognitions of the "macro" culture that exists at Texas A&M and who helps to reify said culture, the "Good Ole' Boys." More importantly, they also recognize that their experience is different. Sam, a Hispanic male student and the one who coined this phrase in the study, wasn't considering going to A&M at all originally because he wasn't the "archetype" A&M student. As he put it, "I guess the stereotypical 'good ole' boy' conservative culture didn't vibe with me." And now that he's here, he still doesn't feel like he fits into that culture, but found groups where he did fit in, including in the Student Programs office. That being said, he still noted the value of the "Aggie Family" and has worked it into his own Texas A&M experience. He added:

I've been in there for three years now, so I really just kinda, you know, when you come to our campus and you're like oh everyone finds their place here, I was like yeah, whatever. If you're the stereotypical A&M student I guess you do. But I definitely found my place even though it isn't with like the larger A&M spirit, I guess...I'm definitely appreciative of like, the family sense of A&M...Sometimes we're all a family. I've found

the balance between the familial, cultural, traditional aspect while somehow avoiding the "Good Ole' Boy" aspect of it.

Many identity-based organizations are where my marginalized students found a place where they feel safe, which is how one of my participants, a Latina woman named Magnolia, described what it felt like the first time she walked into Multicultural Services. As she explained of her experience there:

I feel like every person that I've met in there is so inclusive, not just in the fact like, oh, your whole life is very inclusive of your culture, as well as who you are as an individual. I don't want to say like why people aren't allowed, they definitely are. But a lot of the people that are in there know that the majority of campus is white, and it's kind of it's all of our safe space to just be ourselves, talk in Spanish, talk about different foods, talk about family things that are cultural issues that you don't want to make political. It's not like you talking about your culture should not be a political stance or anything, it should just be you talking about whatever it is freely.

What was also interesting about her story is that she came to Texas A&M knowing that it was predominately White and she would have to interact with people who were different than she was. She had grown up in a predominately Hispanic community and she intentionally avoided finding a "subculture" in her first years at the university because she thought that was going to be the key to finding herself. However, it's when she finally decided to become part of an organization that had people "like her" did she really start to understand her own identity and what "her Texas A&M" meant.

Many of these students of color I interviewed also had the desire to give back to those students who face similar challenges in finding their place at Texas A&M. Most were first-

generation Aggies and in a handful of cases, first-generation college students. The story of “their Texas A&M” didn’t stop at the present, but also projected their role at the university in the future. Magnolia also described this desire and how she felt she was paving the way for other Latinx students, and that was the reason she stayed at Texas A&M even after a difficult start on the campus. Luckily, she also had a professor tell her that she was needed here. As she continued:

Next year I'm really hoping to take over that organization I was talking about and I feel like in that sense I can give back. So the biggest issue that we started this program was because a lot of us in our junior and senior years realized there was a lot of things missing our freshman year. A lot of us were first-generation Aggies or first-generation college students in general, and we didn't really know how to navigate in these spaces and you just overall needed someone to talk to. We created this organization as a way to give back to them, pass on our knowledge as mentors and as friends. I feel like me linking forward that organization would be a really good way to give back.

It was clear that finding subcultures or identity-based groups with people who had similar backgrounds was more ideal for my participants than attempting to assimilate into the “macro” culture. This is because when we are negotiating our identities and making sense of our place in an organization, it’s important for us to find people “like us.” Doing so is a form of critiquing and resisting the institutions narrative of what it means to be a part of the “Aggie Family.” In this case, it shows that what it means to be an Aggie is more malleable for some students. They can still be part of the “Aggie Family,” even if they don’t ascribe to every tradition and value. And in most of the stories of students of color, this has been welcomed by Texas A&M. However, in

one particularly negative instance, one of my participants experienced blatant racism in an attempt to give back to other minority students.

Ramon, who had attempted to run for a diversity-based position in a prominent campus organization, received extreme backlash for the changes he was proposing as part of his platform to make the campus more inclusive. He brought me to the room where he had been in conflict with the rest of the group and it was one of the few times during this study where I was taken to a place that was specifically deemed “negative.” Although he had faced racial microaggressions on campus before, he described it as the only place he had experienced explicit racism on campus:

[So members of this organization were asking questions] and talking about participating in the traditions, talking about all that campus culture type of stuff. And I was giving them the point, that it's assimilation versus integration.

And tolerance, and acceptance, diversity, and inclusion. These are all, word is different, has different meanings, have different connotations. So I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be included, and it's the same thing for all students. And even then, I don't want to have to change myself to be a part of the group, that's not how it should be.

So I try to give this person a concrete rounded answer, and they're not supposed to follow up with you, but they did follow up, and they said, the question was, "Are you ashamed to be an Aggie?"

Aggie means white, and it means white American, it means white Anglo Saxon Protestant, and all these sort of things, because naturally, when you have an all white school for so long, and all the institution are white, all the statue of people are white, all

the names on the plaques are white, all the traditions are mainly white people, all of them aspire to be like white people.

Ramon's story is an example of what Linde (2009) would classify as *rejection*, but this form of relation to the institution was unique and a deviation from the stories of my other minority participants. In all honesty, I expected this level of critique from more of my participants from underrepresented groups. That being said, it also makes sense that some students might curtail their critiques because I was their audience, a member of Texas A&M.

Individual “Narrative of Difference” Can Shift Institutional Stock Stories

Unlike the “Good ole’ boys” and Aggie legacies, underrepresented students do not necessarily express forms of relation in the same way. While racially underrepresented students did connect their own narratives to the institutional story stock through citation and quotation, citing the importance of the “Aggie Family” in particular, and parallel evaluation, highlighting some of the same moral values as the university, they also pushed back against the *integration as assimilation* model presented by the Texas A&M's core narratives.

Although they feel included in the “Aggie Family” broadly, minority students often have to find other spaces to connect with “people like them,” a recognition that the majority of students at Texas A&M are not. By joining identity-based organizations and wanting to give back to other minorities, students are resisting full assimilation into the “macro” culture and highlighting that not all Aggies are the same. If Texas A&M has a genuine commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion, they will have to recognize the limitations of their institutional story stock. The “narratives of difference” of racially marginalized students highlight this. In order to be truly inclusive, the entirety of Texas A&M has to provide the comfort and support

that is found in Multicultural Services or identity-based organizations in the Student Programs office. What is it about those spaces that we can emulate campus-wide? How can we better account for the experiences of *all* Aggies in this family? In what ways do our core institutional narratives need to shift? These are the types of questions the university needs to start asking as we move forward and continue to become more diverse.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

When I first began this study, I was deeply intrigued by how higher education institutions and their members talk about difference. And it's this tension between institutional and individual "narratives of difference" that has remained at the heart of this study. This project has taken many different forms to become what it is in these finalized pages and I embrace its continued evolution. That being said, the goal has always remained the same – To give back to my Texas A&M community and conduct research that sheds light on how we can make higher education institutions more inclusive.

In this iteration of the project, I was guided by the work of Charlotte Linde (2009), who contends that "Narrative [is] the link between the way an institution represents its past, and the ways its members use, alter, or contest that past, in order to understand the institution as a whole, as well as their own place within or apart from the institution" (p. 4). For Linde (2009), institutions answer the question "Who are we?" through the cultivation and (re)working of an institutional story stock, central stories that every member of an organization is supposed to know and help pass along. In order for these stories to continue being told, organizations grant *occasions for telling* or *occasions for narrative remembering*, including regular occasions (e.g. annual meetings), irregular occasions (e.g. retirement parties), places, and artifacts. Finally, Linde (2009) also provides a helpful model for understanding the relationship between institutional and individual stories, by identifying ways that individuals express *forms of relation* with the institutional story stock. Linde's work is descriptive, as it simply sought to identify what happens narratively within organizations. I extended this work by applying it to the context of

“narratives of difference” within higher education institutions to explore the *impact* of this narrative relationship between institution and individual.

Using Linde as a framework, I constructed the following research questions to guide this dissertation: *How does Texas A&M’s institutional story stock (re)present values of diversity and inclusion over time? How do institutions and individuals use memorialized places as occasions for telling? How do students express forms of relation between the institutional story stock and their individual narratives of difference?* The findings that emerged in response to these questions also extended Linde’s work in some ways. In particular, I argued that there are *unexpected* occasions for telling that should be accounted for by organizations, including crises (in this case, race-related incidents) and events/programs that are physically untethered to the particular place the stories are about. I also highlighted the importance of paying attention to organizationally constructed occasions for telling that are used by members in unintended ways. Although these findings and those of this study do not provide all the answers for how to better align institutional and individual “narratives of difference,” they do highlight meaningful implications for higher education institutions, organizations in general, as well as the field of communication.

Thus far, research in organizational communication has tended to focus on one side of the institution-individual dialectic, prioritizing either institutional processes or the impact of these processes on individual members. I offer this project to highlight the importance of studying the interplay between institution and individual, and how they enable and constrain one another in the construction of identity. Although my own work focuses specifically on higher education institutions, it is my hope that this study will provide additional tools for communication scholars broadly to study identity in organizations. In this chapter, I will explore several meaningful

implications of this project that extend both theory and practice, including extending work on diversity and inclusion through narrative theory, how narrative theory can inform crisis communication, competing models of inclusion in academic life, the connection of space and memorialization, and the interplay between institutional and individualized stories. I will also discuss the methodological implications, limitations, and future directions of this work. But first, I begin with a discussion of my most overarching contribution – the concept *narratives of difference*.

Narratives of Difference

When I was diving into the literature in the early stages of this process, one of the hardest theoretical challenges was finding a conceptual model to describe the specific type of narratives I was interested in exploring – those that relate to talking about difference in a way that captured the interplay between institution and individual, and the complexity of identity construction in this context. In the end, it made sense for me to devise my own concept, “narratives of difference.” The term itself was inspired by the title of Chris Weedon’s (2004) book *Identity and culture: Narratives of difference and belonging*. Although she doesn’t explicitly identify “narratives of difference” as a type of narrative, it was fitting for what I was trying to capture in my own work.

“Narratives of difference” are tellings of meaningful experiences about an organization and/or individual in relation to its/his/her/their identity. “Narratives of difference,” whether written or spoken, have some form of temporality, connecting past, present, and future, whether explicit or implied. These narratives are also important for sensemaking as it relates to identity (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). Although this study focused on the socially constructed identity of

race, “narratives of difference” can be used to explore many different identity constructs, including gender, ability, and sexuality. “Narratives of difference” are tools researchers can use to explore institutional-individual relationships as they relate to inclusion and the co-constitution of member and institutional identity.

These specific narratives have several similar components outlined by narrative theory, including a rupture in the normal course of events (Monteagudo, 2011), a causality of said rupture (Browning & Morris, 2012), an audience (although this can also be the narrator), some form of temporal ordering, although it does not have to be linear (Mishler, 2006), connect past, present, and future (Monteagudo, 2011), and are situated within space and time. Like my own conception of narratives in general, which also includes these key components, “narratives of difference” are meant to be less constraining than more traditional views of narratives, a critique made by Boje (2006) of many narrativists. I also equate “narratives” and “stories,” and this flexibility is important when using narratives as a means to explore identity, a messy, incomplete, and complex construct.

This concept also extends ways to understand identity beyond social constructionist perspectives and social identity theory, which are commonly used to study identity within institutions in organizational communication. Social identity theory frames identity as the answer to the question “Who am I in relation to others?” (Allen, 2011). As Allen (2011) argues, “Most human beings divide their social worlds into groups, and categorize themselves into some of those groups” (p. 11). Social identity theory is an important influence of how I conceptualize “narratives of difference” because who we are is very much defined by the groups we are members of and how we position ourselves in relation to other groups (Allen, 2011), including within higher education institutions and organizations. However, by combining this with

narrative theory, it allowed me to account for the fact that our identities are not assessed at static moments throughout our lives. Narratives are the means by which people build upon past experiences to make sense of their identity currently, and who they wish to be in the future.

Using “Narratives of Difference” to Study Diversity and Inclusion

Narratives, including “narratives of difference,” are useful for informing research about diversity and inclusion. First, they extend the ways critical theorists can explore what they find most important – people and power. Critical theories often focus on the lived experience of different groups and utilizing narrative theory can provide a useful tool for using storytelling as a way to explore this. Stories are an impactful way we can learn about ourselves and the ways in which these “selves” are situated in the world (Bruner, 2002; Kirby, 1991; Linde, 2009; Schnurr, Van De Mieroop, & Zayts, 2014). Life narratives also help account for the ongoing construction of identity (Kraus, 2006; Taylor, 2006; Weedon, 2004) and the multiplicity of the stories that impact our lives (Bruner, 2002). Stories help us make sense of who we are and reveal ways we can challenge existing power structures, whether at an interpersonal, organizational, or societal level. For example, in this study, my participants’ personal narratives reflected the difficulty and messiness of understanding their own identities, including forming positive identification with a university that marginalizes them. However, by exploring the ways they told stories and how their stories compared to others like or unlike them, it revealed that students of color resist full assimilation into the macro culture at Texas A&M by forming relationships with those who share their racial identity and joining identity-based organizations.

“Narratives of difference” can also be used to explore how organizations understand difference, and how individuals experience difference in relation to those organizations. This

applies to higher education institutions, but also organizations in general. Typically, diversity and inclusion efforts are explored either from a university perspective *or* the perspective of groups impacted by inclusion issues or initiatives. Narratives can connect the institution with the individual (Kramer & Berman, 2001; Linde, 2009). The argument goes something like this: Organizations are narratively constructed and they tell stories to their members about what it means to be part of that organization; Organizational members use narratives to make sense of the role they are told to play and how their individual identities fit in; These individual narratives then help shift or reify the organizational narratives. And the cycle continues. The ultimate goal of studying the reciprocity of institutional and individual “narratives of difference” is to implement forms of change where difference is no longer a marginalizing force in organizations. However, *both* institutional *and* individual forces need to be accounted for to do so effectively.

Narratives and Crisis Responses

Exploring the tension between institutional and individual narratives can also illuminate ways to construct more effective responses to crises. Organizations’ responses during a crisis can be critical to their reputation and the crisis management effort as whole (Coombs 1999; Benoit 1997). A crisis can disrupt social order and has the potential to damage the reputation of organizations, a “valuable, intangible asset relevant for financial success of the organization”(Schultz et al., 2011, p. 21). To add to this already difficult task, meeting the expectations of multiple stakeholders becomes particularly difficult when dealing with a race-related crisis, as “the element of race will typically increase the volatility of the situation” (Williams & Olaniran, 2002, p.299). As organizations, colleges and universities must balance these concerns because it dictates their reputation, their ongoing relationship with the

community, and can impact their bottom line (Leeper & Leeper, 2006). Ultimately, it is crucial for any type of organization, especially in a diversifying and global world, to be prepared for these incidents and know how to deal with the many moving parts of these crises.

These types of institutions also need to be particularly cognizant of the many voices that exist on college campuses simultaneously. Leeper and Leeper (2006) rationalize that if colleges and universities stick with simply disseminating messages rather than creating a dialogue with important publics, "they may suddenly find themselves embroiled in conflict and confronted with a crisis" (p.129). Or in some cases, like the incidents explored at Texas A&M, universities may unintentionally foster repeated incidents. Luckily, this study illuminated the ways in which narratives can be used to better avoid this and construct more effective responses.

A key characteristic of narratives is that they connect past, present, and future, and it's this feature of temporality that helps us extend our understanding of organizational crisis responses. Chapter IV revealed that Texas A&M's responses to race-related crises only addressed the *present* impact of the crisis, but failed to account for the impact of past events or the ways in which the organization would address these issues in the future. This is an institutional focus on narrative *moments*, as opposed to narrative *flows*. For example, in the case of Richard Spencer's speech at Texas A&M, the university put on the Aggies United event as the sole response (a narrative *moment*), as opposed to using the Aggies United event as the first step in a series of responses that could be used as continuing opportunities to alter the narrative surrounding diversity and inclusion (utilizing narrative *flows*). The latter is more effective in regards to crisis response strategies because it connects the impacts of the past, with present strategies, and communicates what will be done in the future. These types of responses are not only *reactive*, but also *proactive*.

Competing Models of Inclusion

Trends in higher education are increasing the pressure on universities to consider how the values of diversity and inclusion are situated within their core institutional narratives or as Linde (2009) classifies them, institutional stock stories. In order to explore how these values have been (re)presented in the institutional story stock at Texas A&M University, I traced through important “magnified moments” in the university’s history of racial inclusion and current *occasions for telling*, specifically the use of memorialized places, that the institution uses to negotiate the role of “narratives of difference” in its institutional identity. What I found is that Texas A&M has framed its core institutional narratives, which are grounded in its (military) history, traditions, and core values, to reinforce the notion of the “Aggie Family” as inherently inclusive. The result is the advancement of a model of *inclusion as assimilation*. As long as newcomers, regardless of their identities, are willing to assimilate into the existing culture, they will be welcomed here.

Such a model of inclusion can stunt institutional progress aimed at increasing diversity and creating an inclusive climate because it is top-down. It is disseminating parameters for how to fit into “who we are,” as opposed to being open to a dialogue with students that can help shift the institution’s identity in mutually beneficial ways. If colleges and universities stick with this model, they could find themselves confronting repeated crises (Leeper & Leeper, 2006). Avidad and Vasquez (2016) give us an alternative communicative model for the social inclusion of minorities. Informed by critical communication theory, social constructionism, and understandings of reducing oppression, it is built on the idea of increasing the participatory power of minority groups through strategic communication between them and groups in charge. By utilizing “organized intergroup interaction around dialogue and collaboration,” organizations

can better understand how to address systems of exclusion from those who are being excluded (Avidad & Vasquez, 2016, pp. 189-190). Within higher education institutions, the result is creating a more equitable environment for organizational members, including students, and helps to safeguard universities from having to continually address identity-based crises.

By including students in the conversation, universities can learn how to improve their current diversity and inclusion efforts. For example, diversity statements and committees are an important part of fostering inclusion in higher education institutions, but we need to make sure that these initiatives aid us in making *real* change instead of becoming justifications for inaction (Ahmed, 2012). As this study revealed, there is a mismatch in what values are prioritized in institutional narratives versus individual narratives. Although undergraduate students revealed that their diverse experiences and identities did not necessarily align with the history and traditions of the university, it is these things that are *still* at the heart of Texas A&M's core institutional narratives and their key mission statements. If the university's core values do not align with the diverse experiences of its students, the efforts of diversity leaders is already diminished because their larger organization is communicating different priorities. Therefore, a revision to official organizational statements is needed.

Individual "narratives of difference" also reveal that how diverse students make sense of their identity is rather complex. In order to increase the efficacy of diversity initiatives, this has to be reflected in how higher education institutions understand identity. To begin, intersectionality needs to move to the forefront of analysis of inclusion efforts (Allen, 1998; Hill Collins, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Although I designed this study to explore race, gender also became an important identity construct in the differences of student experience. Scholars and administrators have a tendency to reduce issues of discrimination to the

Black-White paradigm. However, intersectional and other minority scholars note the importance of moving beyond this binary to address the vast forms of discrimination that exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Chou & Choi, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Diversity initiatives need to address this complexity.

It's also important for higher education institutions to address the discomfort Whites experience when discussing issues of race and discrimination. As this study revealed, dominant groups are drawn to the current "macro" culture of Texas A&M University, which includes traditions that some of my participants were almost protective of. Because of this, these types of students may be resistant, but remain essential for change because they help to reify the current core institutional narratives. We need to make sure that diversity initiatives actually put the interests of those they are designed to help first (Ahmed, 2012), and quite honestly, that may mean making these values less "digestible" for majority groups.

Space and Memorialization

Two of the most effective *occasions for telling* institutional stock stories used by Texas A&M University to affirm the stability of their core institutional stories are memorialized places and campus tours constructed around these places. First, physical monuments and buildings around campus work as occasions for narrative remembering because they evoke a symbolic reminder of the highly esteemed traditions Aggies practice. Official tours for prospective students, then, link together these places into coherent narratives about "who we are" and what you should do if you join the "Aggie Family." The impact of this use of space and memorialization has important implications for all organizations, not just higher education institutions.

To begin, organizations need to heed the impact of how space utilization impacts their institutional story stock, and more specifically, what it communicates to organizational members about its values. In the context of Texas A&M, its most significant memorialized places pay homage to a time when the university was an all-male, all-white institution. The impact of this, as I learned from some of my participants, is exclusionary to those who do not identify with this history. Universities need to grant occasions for *more complete tellings* of its history. For example, when controversies surrounding the removal of Confederate statues were the center of attention in the aftermath of the violent white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, some schools responded not by removing their own statues, but by erecting memorials to honor a more diverse history. The University of Chicago unveiled a statue of the first black woman to earn a doctorate there, Yale University changed the names of buildings to honor more diverse graduates, and the University of Virginia put in place plans to create a memorial for the 5,000 slaves who built and cared for the institution (Svrluga, 2017).

I recommend that university administrators need to utilize space and occasions for telling in a more inclusive way. Memorialized places need to capture a more complete telling of the institution's history. Places and artifacts, particularly statues and memorials, need to be constructed around the lives of *diverse* individuals who have had an important impact on our campus. Why not create a statue of Arthur Dunn at Texas A&M University, the first recognized African American prospective graduate and the exemplar used by the university to promote inclusivity during integration? These places and artifacts should also be student-driven. Students of color and identity-based organizations should have a direct hand in designing what this would look like because it's their experiences we also want to recognize as essential to the "Aggie Family." This would communicate that these historical narrative *also* matter and better prioritize

“narratives of difference” within institutional stock stories. The organization doesn’t have to undermine the story it already tells, it simply needs to expand it, which my participants revealed would actually lead to increased feelings of belonging.

Second, campus tours are another means through which universities can help their institutional story stock better (re)present their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Tours are highly “sanitized,” present the best versions of a university, attempt to illustrate a unified organizational culture (Kramer & Berman, 2001), and can even be deceptive in what they present (Pezzullo, 2007). Tours also have story-like qualities and elicit processes of sensemaking for visitors (Burdelski, et al., 2014), including students and their parents who must negotiate if they fit into the university they are touring. At Texas A&M, official tours are used to emphasize the many memorialized places discussed above, so these occasions for telling could also be constructed around more diversified historical narratives. Tour guides should include *numerous* and *explicit* stories about the history of diversity at Texas A&M. For example, when the tour stops at the portrait of James Earl Rudder, who is credited with integrating the university, it would also be a meaningful opportunity to talk about the impacts certain members of underrepresented groups have had on the university as well. When the tour stops at the Quad, it would be beneficial to discuss how the Corps of Cadets has become more inclusive. And one of my strongest recommendations in this sense is for an easy revision at the MSC tour stop. Currently, the tour stops on the first floor by the entrance, at a large picture of Texas A&M’s official seal. Instead, I suggest that the tour stops at the same exact place, but one floor up at Multicultural Services. This place was identified by most of my racially marginalized students as essential to their Texas A&M experience. The university should take the opportunity to let prospective students of color know this resource exists and that they find it an important place to highlight.

If inclusivity is the goal for higher education institutions, not only do they have to make decisions as to which values are prioritized in their core institutional narratives generally, but also how these narratives are shared and displayed in different spaces.

Institutional and Individualization of Stories

Narratives are an effective way for communication scholars to explore the relationship between organizations and its members, as well as how this relationship informs institutional and individual identity construction. Storytelling is central to organizational functioning and helps institution's construct a coherent culture that advances particular behaviors for its members (Kramer & Berman, 2001). Likewise, stories are sensemaking tools that individuals use to make sense of their own identity (Bruner, 2002; Kirby, 1991; Linde, 2009; Schnurr, et al., 2014), including their role as organizational members. Taken together, narratives illuminate the interplay of institution and individual, and how they reciprocally influence the identity of the other.

Within the context of this study, the tension between institutional and individual “narratives of difference” was at play. At the institutional level, Texas A&M has managed to construct a stable institutional story stock grounded in its history and traditions, and represented strongly in the “Aggie Family.” At this university, being part of the “Aggie Family” is a unifying force and students across all racial groups take pride in being a part. However, how exactly the “Aggie Family” is defined is more malleable than the university presents. While the institution has promoted the values of the “Aggie Family” as inherently inclusive, the experiences of diverse students challenge this. They resist full assimilation into this depiction by joining identity-based organizations and creating supportive communities with other students from

similar backgrounds. And we've come to understand this through their individualized "narratives of difference."

From a pragmatic standpoint, it's beneficial for organizations to have a cohesive identity (Linde, 2009). And as my participants revealed, even when they feel marginalized at the university because of their race, ethnicity or culture, they can find a sense of belonging in being part of the collective "Aggie Family." That being said, an institutional narrative identity can be coherent *and* inclusive. They just have to be willing to consider the narratives of those they have hidden, ignored or erased.

Lastly, this tension between institutional and individual narratives has important theoretical implications for how narratives connect the processes of sensemaking and socialization. Kramer and Berman (2001) define organizational culture as the product of shared meanings and understandings. Narratives help students make meaning of how they fit into the university, and the university in turn has a better understanding of how they need to manage these narratives, some of which are in conflict with the institutional narratives they are trying to stabilize. It's important to manage these many narratives because they help universities better socialize students into the culture they have constructed. At Texas A&M, the university has been partially successful because the "Aggie Family" is universally appealing in certain ways. However, the way the university itself conceptualizes the "Aggie Family" doesn't fully encapsulate all of the experiences of its diverse student body and is still in need of (re)working.

Methodological Implications

Along with the theoretical and practical implications, I think it's also important to briefly note the implications I draw from the particular combination of methodologies I employed in this

study. First, I think this project helps make a case for using autoethnography as part of critical research (Adams, 2017). Given researchers' various forms of privilege, it's important for critical scholars to constantly interrogate their roles within oppressive power structures, especially if they are exploring identity constructs they do not personally identify with. I began this study with an autoethnography because my motivations for doing this type of work are important and needed to be analyzed throughout this project. Autoethnography goes beyond researcher reflexivity and uses writing as analysis. That is why the autoethnography that opens this dissertation, my own ongoing narrative, has evolved over the last year and in many ways is still incomplete. My autoethnographic prologue is meant to influence other critical scholars to consider this methodology to help maintain the rigor and transparency necessary in qualitative research like this.

The combination of photovoice and interviews in this study also proved to be productive in several ways. Having my participants take photographs *before* the interviews primed participants to think about the topic ahead of time and fully engage with it. It also gave me the opportunity as a researcher to compare the content of their photographs, which participants had more time to consider and capture, with the unanticipated questions I asked during interviews.

Walking tours were also a very illuminating method for this particular study. Students at Texas A&M were able to *show* me, instead of just *tell* me about their favorite places and memories on campus. Being in the particular spaces they were talking about also gave my interviewees the ability to interrogate those spaces in real-time. As an interviewer, I was able to make my own observations and see how my participants interacted with the space. Walking with my participants also seemed to break down the typical constraining power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee, and my interviews with students at Texas A&M became natural

conversations and I thoroughly enjoyed the interactions. Taken together, the combination of these different methodologies better reflected the complexity of the human experience and identity (Wilhoit, 2017).

Limitations

Given the complexity and many moving parts of this study, there were several limitations that may have impacted my results, but also inform opportunities for future research. First, I only interviewed current undergraduate students. Because of this, I was only able to explore the experiences of those who have chosen to stay at the university, *voluntary* members, even if they have had negative experiences at Texas A&M University. It would have been meaningful if I was also able to interview individuals who had left the university because they were unhappy or lack of belonging had influenced them to transfer somewhere else.

Secondly, the size of the university is something to take into account. Texas A&M has over 60,000 students, a majority of which belong to dominant racial groups and have been socialized into reifying the macro culture of the university. Investigating the same problem at a differently-sized university, with different demographics could have added even more complexity to my understanding of the tension between institutional and individual “narratives of difference.”

Third, in regards to tours, I only observed official campus tours for prospective students. These tours are usually composed of participants from mixed backgrounds. They are also a group of individuals who is seriously considering becoming members of the university and therefore, have an increased interest in the content being shared. However, what happens if the school is giving a tour to a different audience, perhaps the predominately Black high school that

made headlines when they were accosted by A&M students back in 2016? Is that type of tour different? And if so, why and what are the implications of this? The answers to these questions will also have important implications for how the university shapes its institutional story stock to include diversity and inclusion.

Finally, I think it is again important to reiterate the implications of my dual role as both researcher *and* member of Texas A&M University. Although I attempted to remain reflexive at every step of the process, my positionality may still have impacted the analysis of my data in unconscious ways. It also could have impacted the way my participants presented stories to me. These interviews were another storytelling occasion and they know I was another student at the same university, which means their stories were for a specific purpose and specific audience.

Directions for Future Research

When I initially designed this study, I intended to include undergraduate students *and* graduate students as participants. However, in order to make the project more feasible for the timeframe, I narrowed this down to undergraduate students at Texas A&M because they are most familiar with the history and traditions of the university. However, I think to also conduct the photovoice and walking tour interview portions of this study with graduate students would be beneficial in the future. As a graduate student myself, I have been inundated with the culture of Texas A&M University in a much different way than undergraduates, and it's typically in my own communities that I hear intense critiques about the institution that I assumed I would get, but *did not*, from my undergraduate participants in underrepresented groups. The positionality of graduate students could illuminate other important limitations to how diversity and inclusion are accounted for within institution's stock stories.

The limitations of the study that I outlined above also lead me to additional directions for future research. First, given that this study focused on *current* students, I was only able to explore the perspectives of individuals who had chosen to be and remain members of Texas A&M. A future iteration of this study could also incorporate exit interviews with those underrepresented students who made the choice to leave to university, in order to assess the impact of institutional “narratives of difference” on this decision. Secondly, I think it would be meaningful to observe different types of tours, beyond official university tours for prospective students. It would help explore the question of how core institutional narratives are (re)worked for different audiences in different contexts.

Another important tension that emerged during this study that I think needs to be given much more scholarly attention is the relationship between free speech and hate speech. Texas A&M, along with many other public institutions, cite free speech as the reason they cannot prevent or limit certain potentially racist events. However, protections for individuals against hate speech is much less reinforced because the policies are not nearly as clear. Future research should address this tension and seek to answer the following important questions: *What is considered hate speech? When does free speech become hate speech? When should protecting individuals from hate speech outweigh protecting free speech at an organizational level? How is/should hate speech or race-related incidents be incorporated into crisis communication plans?*

Some Final Thoughts

As I reflect back on this process, there are many important lessons I’ve taken away as a scholar, a member of academia, and just as a person. The process has also highlighted the limitations I still have and must continue to engage with as I do this type of work in the future.

As someone who researches higher education and issues of identity, I've realized that I still continue to struggle with not creating an unnecessary binary within my scholarly identity. Even as I was preparing for my dissertation defense, I was still contemplating how the way I presented this project prioritized my goals as an organizational communication scholar versus those that are grounded in my critical sensibilities. However, these parts of my identity should not be in contest with one another. Instead, I should more naturally see the ways in which these pieces compliment and positively inform each other.

Another challenge I've had to continually engage with is the fact that the institution I research is also the one that has granted me the privilege to become a scholar. And at times, I am questioned about whether or not my research is disrespectful to academia in some way. Because I have received funding from the university for this project, I will be sharing my findings with members of Texas A&M's administration, something I have done before for other studies. In the past, I have been confronted by members of the organization and asked if I'm doing research in a way that is fair to the university. And this was certainly something I was conscious of while writing this dissertation. However, more than ever, I think I've conducted work that truly highlights my intentions of wanting to *improve* my university, while still offering important and necessary critiques. Texas A&M University and other institutions of higher education need to do more to promote diversity and inclusivity, and I'm not afraid to have a strong voice in that endeavor.

This project has also forced me to confront the uneasiness I feel being part of a critical scholarly community. During my dissertation defense, I was asked about why I had identified myself as a "radical post-structural feminist." And the truth is, I don't want to identify as a specific type of feminist at all because I often feel like critical scholars have a tendency to create

unproductive silos, and promote a “right” way to address certain issues. I am proud to be a feminist and critical scholar, but it has created biases that almost made me overlook important findings in this study, findings that could actually be helpful for promoting these important scholarly agendas. The stories of my participants reminded me that many people don’t view the world in such a divisive way and there is still hope for bridging differences. However, critical scholars also play a part of creating division and I think we need to recognize that. Because of this, I want to more deeply engage with dialogue in my future scholarship. *Everyone* needs to learn how to have better conversations and to be more balanced, especially in intense times.

There are of course other little things that I wish I hadn’t done or could have done better, such as not designing a study that utilized so many methodologies. But at the end of it all, I can genuinely say that I still *like* this project (which is something not all people can say) and am immensely proud of it. There are many different directions future iterations of this work could go, but I’m excited by these possibilities.

In the final weeks of completing this dissertation, members of Texas A&M University received an email from its President, Michael Young, about the recent controversy surrounding racist photos being resurfaced in old college yearbooks. It served as yet another reminder of why I do this type of work – Because these issues are still incredibly relevant and we still have a long way to go. And by “we,” I mean we as individuals, as members of higher education institutions, and as a society. As his message read:

Over the last week, racially charged photos have become a topic of national discussion.

We know that, regardless of the time period, such images are markers of bigotry and prejudice. There is no excuse for it and similar images are part of our university’s history as well... Years ago in our community and, sadly, on occasion even now, we see the ugly

reality of discrimination... We love our university and we acknowledge its history in all its dimension because it has formed us and made us who we are today. There is so much good here and there are so many people who embody our values. This is what truly makes Aggies, Aggies.

While the cynical part of me wants to immediately begin to critique this message, and would be warranted in doing so, I choose to close this dissertation with a sense of hope. This statement makes an explicit recognition that Texas A&M is not exempt from a history of bigotry and prejudice, which is a progression from many of the responses we have seen since the period of integration. There is good here at Texas A&M. But now it's time to take the goodness of the "Aggie Family" and continue to interrogate our own past and (re)work our institutional narratives to make this community a truly inclusive place. And this is a charge I make for all of higher education.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Photovoice Questions (These will be included within the prompt as questions “to think about” when they are collecting images for this portion of the study.)

- Where are the places at Texas A&M you spend the most time?
- What places hold the most memories for you?

Walking Interview Questions

Demographic Information

Pseudonym:

Age:

Race/Ethnicity:

Sex:

Standing at Texas A&M (ex. Freshman/1st Year):

Warm-Up Questions

- So why did we begin at this spot?
- Why did you choose to come to A&M?
- What stories did you hear about Texas A&M before you got here? From who?

Broad Questions (Space & Narrative-Based Questions)

- Why did we come here?
- What’s the story behind this space at Texas A&M for you? What memories do you have here?
- What do you like about this space? What do you dislike?
- How has this space changed since you’ve been at Texas A&M? How has your use of this space changed?
- Who do you spend time with in this space?
 - Tell me more about him/her/them.
- How does this space play into the history and stories told about Texas A&M?

De-Briefing Questions (Participants and I will find a space to sit and talk at the end)

- Why did you choose to capture this image? Why didn’t you take me to this place during the interview? (If they didn’t take me to a place they captured in the photovoice part of the study.)
- Do you think different groups of people would have the same types stories/memories in this space?
- If you were to design a tour for incoming students, what destinations would you include and why?
- How do these spaces we’ve talking about play into what is happening at Texas A&M in regards to diversity and inclusion?

Closing Questions

- Is there anything I haven't asked that you think would be relevant?
- Would you like to ask me anything?

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

My name is Alexandra Sousa and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication. I am currently conducting a study for my dissertation about the ways students construct narratives about their experiences at Texas A&M. I am seeking undergraduate students, in any class level and from any major, at Texas A&M College Station. If you are an undergraduate at Texas A&M, I am hoping you will consider participating in this study. Tell me about *your* Texas A&M.

This project has been approved by my committee, as well as Texas A&M's internal research review board (IRB). Your participation will consist of a taking three images that you feel represent “your Texas A&M,” and a walking interview where you will discuss these images and guide the researcher to important places for you on campus, while you also talk about important memories and stories you’ve had at Texas A&M. In total, your participation should take 1-2 hours, about 30 minutes for the first portion of the study and 1-1½ hours for the second.

Your participation would be very valuable and greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me *directly* at ansousa1161@tamu.edu or (978) 400-1764. At this time, I can give you more information about the study, answer any questions you have, and give you a copy of the information sheet. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

IRB INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research Study: “*This is my Texas A&M:*” *Exploring the layering of narratives in institutions.*

Investigator: This study is being conducted by the Principal Investigator, Alexandra Schuur Sousa, a doctoral student in the Department of Communication, at Texas A&M. She can be contacted at (978) 400-1764 or ansousa1161@tamu.edu.

Supported By: This research is supported by Texas A&M University, but is not receiving any monetary support.

Why are you being invited to take part in a research study?

You are being asked to participate because you are an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University, College Station.

What should you know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you
- Whether or not you take part is up to you
- You can choose not to take part
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind
- Your decision will not be held against you
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact Alexandra Schuur Sousa at (978) 400-1764 or ansousa1161@tamu.edu. You may also contact J. Kevin Barge (kbarge@tamu.edu), the advisor overseeing the project.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu, if...

- You cannot reach the research team.
- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which students construct narratives and experience being members of Texas A&M University. Understanding student experiences is important for schools to properly design spaces and messages in ways that meet the needs of its members. Participating in this study will shed light on how universities can do this better and improve the experiences of all students.

How long will the research last?

We expect that your participation in this research study will take approximately 1-2 hours, with the potential for occasional follow-up questions after participation in the main portion of the study.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about 50 people in this research study at this site.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

If you say “yes” to participating in this study, your involvement will have two central components. You will first be asked to take three photographs that you feel represent “your Texas A&M.” *This* should take about 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on what you choose to capture. Second, you will be asked to participate in a walking interview, where you will discuss these images and guide the researcher to important places for you on campus, while you also talk about important memories and stories you’ve had at Texas A&M. This should take about 1-1½ hours. You will only interact with the interviewer, Alexandra Schuur Sousa.

The researcher will collect your photographs. The interviews will be audio-recorded and the walking path of the interview will be recorded using a mapping app. No identifiable information will make it possible to connect you to these recordings or images. Your identity will be kept confidential in the use of these recording methods.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

Participation is voluntary. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind later?

Participation is voluntary. You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you. The data collected before your withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the final study analysis.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and other records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete privacy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the TAMU HRPP/IRB and other representatives of this institution.

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Alexandra Schuur Sousa will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in Alexandra's locked office.