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Tipping Point: The Diversity Threshold for White Student (Dis) Engagement in Traditional Student Organizations

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, TIPPING POINT: THE DIVERSITY THRESHOLD FOR WHITE STUDENT (DIS) ENGAGEMENT IN TRADITIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS, by DHANFU EL-HAJJ ELSTON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

TIPPING POINT: THE DIVERSITY THRESHOLD FOR WHITE STUDENT (DIS) ENGAGEMENT IN TRADITIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

by
Dhanfu El-Hajj Elston

During a time when most institutions of higher education are in search of underrepresented student participation, Georgia State University (GSU), a majority White institution, has observed a lack of involvement of White students in co-curricular activities. The purpose of the research study was to critically examine White students' (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations at this university that has a significant student of color population. I used case study methodology that allowed for a breadth of conceptual frameworks and research options. The methods of collecting data included interviews (formal, informal, and oral history) of current and former students, as well as campus administrators. In addition, the use of archived texts and photographs, yearbooks, organization rosters, and university enrollment statistics allowed for crystallization of data, layered interpretations, and document analyses. I used the data sources to interpret GSU White students' perceptions of campus climate, racial interactions, leadership among students of color, and racial identity that influence their (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations and campus life. In exploring the "rhetoric of diversity," I argue that the experiences and attitudes of White students can inform the policy debate on institutional mission and offerings.

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A Dissertation

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in
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in
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Atlanta, Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Sigrid Yvette, and children, Jasmine Renae and Kamau Ajani Freire.
May my work inspire you and make your lives a little easier.

As Charles H. Wesley (1929) noted in *The History of Alpha Phi Alpha: A Development In College Life*, this dissertation is dedicated to “the youths who march onward and upward toward the light.”

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I often wonder how a young Black man from Southern California accomplished the hurdle of completing a doctoral degree. It did not take me long to realize that this accomplishment was a communal effort. I am indebted to an innumerable and invaluable number of supportive individuals through this process. Foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Donna Breault, Janice Fournillier, Philo Hutcheson, and Joyce King. They offered me guidance, expertise, and encouragement throughout every phase of this dissertation. I am especially grateful to my committee chair, “Mama Janice,” for challenging and pushing me to dig deeper as a scholar, researcher, and student. I will forever cherish the experience of being your first doctoral student. From this point forward, we are inextricably tied to one another, and for that, I am proud.

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engage in a scholarly topic that not only aided in my growth, but can contribute to the betterment of Georgia State's campus culture provides me with a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

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~ D.E.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study, I have defined the following terms in agreement with their usage in the related general literature:

1. Balkanization: A phenomenon where students have a tendency to group themselves racially on campus (Duster, 1991).
2. Diversity: “Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, economic class, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, and learning styles” (Achugbue, 2003, p. 25). However, many of the research participants referenced diversity in relation to race and ethnicity that is different than their own.
3. Greeks: Students who are members of Greek-lettered organizations.
4. Incept: The official Georgia State University undergraduate student orientation program. All first-year, entering students are required to participate in Incept.
5. Integration: “Patterns of interaction between the student and other members of the institution especially during the critical first year of college and the stages of transition that marked that year” (Vincent, 2006, p. 3).
6. Institutional departure: “The departure of persons from individual institutions” (Tinto, 1993, p. 8).

7. Leadership: Leadership involves an individual taking on a formally recognized role in an organization or group and becoming engaged in the responsibility to guide, coordinate, and direct an organization or group in order for that group or organization to be able to obtain its goals and objectives (W. P. May, 2009).
8. Minority: “A term often used in the United States to refer to persons who have historically been in the demographic minority when compared to Whites” (Achugbue, 2003). In this dissertation, the term is often used in reference to students of color that, in some cases, are the majority in traditional organizations.
9. Racial Identity: Traditional racial identity theory proposes that one’s racial group membership is integral to one’s identity (Helms & Piper, 1994). Racial identity is defined as a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group (Helms, 1990). It assumes that certain stages of identity are healthier than others. Accordingly, one’s racial identity may influence a person’s activities, belief, and daily decisions.
10. Racialization: Racialization is defined by Miles as “the process of categorization, a representational process of defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively) somatically” (1989, p. 187). White students can be recognized as a racialized group in the current United States of America racial order; however, Whiteness is not “racialized as subordinate” (Ahmad, 2002, p. 102).

11. Social Justice: A process and goal that moves society toward equal participation of all groups to meet the mutual needs of all (Bell, 2007).
12. Spotlight Programming Board: Spotlight is the official programming board for Georgia State University. Spotlight coordinates activities that enhance and enrich the quality of student life by addressing the needs and interests of its diverse student body.
13. Student Engagement: The amount of time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities and extent to which the university motivates students to participate toward student success (Kuh, 2003).
14. Student Government Association: A student government association is described as “a type of organization which by virtue of its composition is entitled to represent the student community as a whole” (Friedson & Shuchman, 1955, p. 6)
15. Student Involvement: The amount of psychological and physical energy that college students devote to collegiate activities, such as studying, faculty interaction, and clubs (Astin, 1984).
16. Student Leaders: Student leaders are those who are actively engaged at the leadership level within a student organization. “Student leaders” is a general term referring to students who hold elected or appointed positions in student organizations on campus including, but not limited to student government, orientation team, or programming board. Astin defines the term student leader as “a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (1984, p. 297) .

17. Students of Color: An umbrella term for all groups that identify as racial/ethnic minorities. I argue that the label “students of color” requires an in-depth understanding of “race” and ethnic identity.
18. Traditional Student Organization: For the purpose of this study, traditional student organizations are limited to those groups traditionally known for power and prestige on college and university campuses. At Georgia State University, traditional student organizations refer to the Student Government Association, Spotlight Programming Board, and Incept: New Student Orientation team.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the United States of America becomes progressively more diverse, at what point do previously underrepresented groups become the new racial majorities? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the projected population of White citizens will decrease to less than 50% of the total U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). In the case of many current U.S. colleges and universities, the transition in racial majorities has already begun. Higher education institutions often espouse the desire for a diverse citizenry. However, I question whether White students' comfort levels are challenged as many colleges and universities begin to reach referential thresholds or tipping points in racial demographic enrollments and campus participation. As colleges and universities in the United States have become more racially diverse, observations of students' choices for campus engagement or disengagement has led many campus administrators to explore issues of institutional and campus organization departure (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). I have also observed increased balkanization, or racial self-segregation, among college students at one institution. My research seeks to critically examine the experiences of White students in traditional organizations that are most noted for power and prestige at Georgia State University (Georgia State), a large, public university in the southeastern United States (IRB approval was granted to name the institution). In this introductory chapter, I provide a justification for my dissertation, a statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and brief description of the associated chapters.

The concept of fleeing patterns by the racial majority, termed “White flight,” is rooted in the belief that a racial majority group will withdraw or depart an area when joined by a substantial population of the minority group (Cunningham, Husk, & Johnson, 1978; Frey, 1979). An understanding of the “White flight” phenomenon can allow researchers to study the impact of higher proportions of Black students on the decline of White enrollment in public schools, specifically in the areas of student interactions and campus organization participation. The racial attitudes and perceptions of students often result from an institution’s historical past of racial interaction. Desegregation of schools in the United States is an example of the challenging, time-consuming process of managing racial transition toward a more integrated society.

Substantial efforts to desegregate Southern schools did not take place until the late 1960s, years after the United States Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* legal case ruling of 1954. When desegregation occurred, the historic event produced major changes in interracial contact. In the midst of the court decisions, a major concern was whether the attempt at racial integration would cause White families to leave desegregated districts. While school desegregation continues to serve as a national legal precedent, and the tumultuous interracial interactions of the 1960s remain relevant today. Racial contact in schools may affect such domains as: the levels of campus involvement, organization participation, student academic achievement, racial attitudes, social outcomes, and institutional departure. Academic scholars have continued to evaluate the merit and accuracy of the “White flight” phenomenon in secondary education (Bagley, 1996; Clotfelter, 2001; Cunningham, et al., 1978; Giles, Cataldo, & Gatlin, 1975; Zhang, 2008). Most recently, researchers have shown an increased interest

in college and university enrollment patterns and collegiate social experiences, as national trends reflect the declining racial majorities of White students in higher education (Antonio, 2001; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Closson & Henry, 2008; Cowan, 2005).

The consistent demographic shift in the United States toward greater racial diversity has not only changed the racial composition of student bodies, but also the racial dynamics on the campuses (Chang, 2002). Academic institutions are sometimes viewed as microcosms of society, and thus, can potentially reflect its shortcomings. Social opportunities and campus organizations situated at colleges and universities are reflections of the campus' racial dynamics. Yet, little information is known by scholars in the academic community about the perceptions of White college students regarding campus engagement in an increasingly racially diverse collegiate environment. The racial transformation of student engagement has the potential to reflect radical change in an institution's cognitive, political, and cultural approaches to dealing with the phenomena (Demers, 2007). This qualitative research dissertation is my attempt to critically examine the phenomenon of White student (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations. The unique underpinnings of my experiences at Georgia State's institutional transition, combined with the limited research on the topic of White student engagement, provide an appropriate justification for the study.

Justification

My experiences as a student affairs professional at Georgia State University, the gaps in student engagement literature regarding diversity, and my exploration of GSU history drew me to the topic of White student (dis) engagement. Annually, graduate

students in the fields of college student personnel, higher education, and educational leadership begin their careers as student affairs practitioners at colleges and universities in the United States of America. As a new professional, I expected my extensive coursework, new and innovative higher education theoretical orientations, research methods, and practicum experiences to assist in the retention of college students. I anticipated that my social identity as an African American male, with an upbringing in the multi-ethnic educational environment of southern California, would prepare me to address the obstacles that faced students of color. Surprisingly, the intercultural competencies that I developed over a lifetime led to my research and exploration of a group that I would have never considered underrepresented – White students.

In 2004, my first post-graduate position as a student affairs practitioner included the development of programs and activities that promoted student engagement at Georgia State University, a large, urban, doctoral-granting, research institution in the southeastern region of the United States of America. I chose to work at the institution because of its racially diverse educational setting. Over 40% of the university's total enrollment is comprised of students of color. In my role as the campus advisor for leadership development, I was exposed to student populations and their divergent viewpoints on the campus climate. I soon realized that few White students were involved in many of the traditional student organizations. The limited participation by White students was somewhat of an oddity considering their racial majority status at the university. As an adjunct faculty member, I taught New Student Orientation and Honor's leadership courses that enabled me to build relationships with students and listen to their campus experiences. Through my conversations with White students, I learned that many of

them chose not to participate in campus activities that were frequented by students of color.

One of the first documents that aided in my understanding of the perceptions of Georgia State University's students was the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year. The study examined student leadership values at both the institutional and national levels. Over 1000 randomly selected Georgia State students completed the web-based survey. I used data from the MSL question regarding feelings about the campus climate to evaluate racial and gender differences for students at Georgia State. The survey results (see Table 1, pg. 6) reflected a statistical difference in campus climate scores between African American/Black and White/Caucasian students. African American/Black students ($M=5.37$, $SD=1.179$) had statistically significant higher scores for their perceptions of the Georgia State campus climate being open, inclusive, supportive, and friendly than White/Caucasian students ($M=4.90$, $SD=1.308$). Prior argues that, "the task of the researcher should... be to follow a document in use" (2002, p. 68). Thus, the MSL survey results served as an introductory document in the exploration of White student (dis) engagement. The MSL quantitative data was insightful and helpful to me; however, it did little to assist in my understanding of the lived campus experiences of the White students.

Table 1
Cell Sizes, Means, & Standard Deviations of Campus Climate Scores

Race Codes	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
White/Caucasian	4.90	1.308	449
African American/Black	5.37	1.179	264
Asian American/Asian	5.14	1.268	106
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5.33	1.155	3
Latino	5.32	1.203	37
Multiracial or Multiethnic	5.17	1.191	106
Race/ethnicity not included above	5.48	1.051	27
Total	5.11	1.261	992

My understandings and interest in the experiences of White students became more expansive through my analyses of the campus student newspaper. Two articles published in Georgia State's school newspaper, *The Signal*, further sparked my interest in the engagement topic. Published weekly, *The Signal* includes articles developed by a student editorial staff. Each article was written during the spring 2007 academic semester; however, both writers provided a different perspective on racial segregation and campus involvement. One of the articles, "*Campus Climate Survey Yields Black Students Most Active, Involved While White Students Feel Left Out*," written by Gaulden, was published on Tuesday, January 23, 2007 in *The Signal*. Gaulden explored the rationale for student clustering, or grouping together, at the racially diverse Georgia State University. She referred to a 2005 study conducted by the University Senate Cultural Diversity Committee to explore racial clustering. According to Gaulden, the Senate Cultural Diversity Committee claimed "overall students are satisfied with the climate and environment of Georgia State University" (Gaulden, 2007, p. 7). In latter portions of the article, Gaulden provided a cursory mention of previous *Signal* articles related to racial factors that influence student involvement. Gaulden noted that a previous student survey

reflected a higher level of campus climate satisfaction from Black students than White students. As a reader, I was left wondering what were the planned interventions based on the survey results. The representatives from the sponsoring committee seemed more interested in sharing that there was no racial problem at the institution than in addressing the issues raised from the research.

The Signal published an additional race-related article within a short timeframe after the previously mentioned article. Bruce (2007) questioned whether Georgia State was experiencing White flight, a phenomenon wherein Whites move away from areas that are moving toward racial integration. A notable portion of the article included the author's posing of the question to a campus administrator in the Office of Student Life and Leadership. Similar to the earlier article, the interviewed campus administrator believed that White flight was a matter of personal perception. The comments by the campus administrator were awkward and failed to support the overwhelming outflow of White participation in campus organizations that I witnessed. Bruce (2007) concluded her article with encouragement for opportunities to broaden cultural integration at Georgia State. As the student voice of the campus, *The Signal* addressed issues and concerns about which many students, faculty, and staff might have been unaware.

An academic review of the sociological aspects of "White flight," along with previously published literature on student engagement and college racial interactions is developed in the literature review chapter of this dissertation. The neglected areas in published literature, specifically on White college students perceiving themselves as minorities, led me to ask myself difficult questions about the potential influences of racial patterns in higher education. "Are White students fleeing campus organizations, and if

so, why? Are administrators and practitioners failing to evaluate critically the demographic changes throughout the campus? Is there space in the academic community for a researcher of color to study White culture?" The responses to my inquiries and conference presentations on White student engagement were minimal at best. An examination of student engagement issues seemed to have the potential for a more informed insight into the changes in higher education.

The propensity of the United States' students to seek higher education in greater numbers has grown concurrently with an increasingly critical need for education. As the national economy of the United States of America becomes more globalized and complex, larger numbers of students will continue to seek access to higher education. The changes in the racial make-up of college applicants will increase the overall level of competition for admission to higher education institutions and the campus leadership positions within these institutions (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Horowitz, 1987). The institutional transition and limited engagement opportunities can potentially cause difficulty for students who had traditionally received these benefits because student interpretations cannot be separated from the context and history of an institution (Geertz, 1973). It is impossible to predict the results of historical changes within colleges and universities; however, social action, such as the recruitment and encouraged involvement of students of color, can have unanticipated consequences for student interaction and institutional policy (Merton, 1936). I believe that the intersections of my personal experiences, literature research on student engagement, and future directions of higher education provided me with an appropriate justification for an examination of the unique educational problem.

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

During a time when most institutions of higher education are in search of underrepresented student participation, Georgia State University, a majority White university, has observed a lack of involvement of White students in co-curricular activities. Previous studies on collegiate interracial interactions conducted by researchers at campuses with widespread racial diversity are uniquely different than Georgia State, due to the university's unique geographical setting and historical background (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Cowan, 2005). At Georgia State, White students are the largest racial demographic, yet are underrepresented in traditional student organizations, and the phenomenon has become a subject of discussion and inquiry for administrators.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of White students in traditional student organizations at Georgia State University, an urban university with a significant student of color population. The following research questions served as the guide for my study:

1. What are White students' and administrators' perceptions of the institution?
2. What are White students' perceptions of traditional student organizations?
3. How do these perceptions influence White students' engagement and/or (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations?

Overview

The overall structure of this study takes the form of six chapters, including this introductory chapter. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I present a review of academic literature to provide a context for framing the complex issue of student (dis) engagement in diverse educational settings. In Chapter 3, I present the historical and current contexts of the Georgia State University campus. The conceptual framework and research

methods for this qualitative study are discussed in-depth in Chapter 4. My research findings are presented in Chapter 5. The final chapter includes a summary and discussion of the major findings of the research study, implications for policy and future research, and a postscript.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I dialogue with literature related to the major areas of student involvement and engagement, campus racial climate, interracial interactions, White racial perspectives, diversity, and White flight. Although many areas of higher education point to the value of involvement and student engagement, there exists a limited body of literature related to White students' perceptions of campus racial climates in which they are the racial minority during the post-desegregation era. The review of presented literature influenced and impacted the way I approached the study and my decision to focus on White student (dis) engagement.

A byproduct of the post *Brown v. Board of Education* legal decisions of the 1950s and 1960s is the increased collegiate enrollments of students of color, and the decrease in White student enrollments. In 2008, White collegiate undergraduates decreased to less than 65 percent of all undergraduates nationally (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The demographic transitions of collegiate enrollments in the United States are also reflected in students' social opportunities and the racial dynamics of the campuses (Chang, 2002). Published literature on student involvement and engagement was an excellent starting point in unraveling the topic of this dissertation - White student (dis) engagement.

The first earnest discussions and analyses of student organization diversity in higher education emerged in the 1970s. A content analysis of articles published in the *Journal of College Student Personnel*, an exemplar of scholarship in college student development, from 1970-1992 allowed me to explore research origins and evolutions of

college diversity. I was particularly interested in how the research on student organization leadership has changed related to racial identities. Initially referred to as the *Journal of College Student Personnel (JCSP)* and later renamed the *Journal of College Student Development*, the *JCSD* is currently the highest ranked journal in terms of calculated impact that specializes in research on college students. Similar to the changes in education after the Civil Rights Movement, scholarly journals such as the *JCSD* addressed academic issues resulting from the changes in college access. Through my review of the *Journal of College Student Personnel* and *Journal of College Student Development*, and existing literature, I examined the processes that create differences, the mechanisms that link such processes to educational policy, and how the effects of policies became entrenched in our social institutions.

An examination of article citations within the *Journal of College Student Personnel* and *Journal of College Student Development* allowed me to ascertain the extent in which the journal played a significant role as a source of literature related to diversity issues. I identified the primary topic in each of the diversity-oriented journal articles. Through my analysis, I was able to compile the number of *JCSP/JCSD* citations of racial diversity topics from 1970 through 1992, which proved to be invaluable in understanding the development of written literature related to diversity issues in higher education (see Table 2, pg. 13). As many scholars have previously noted, racial diversity on college campuses has the potential to influence retention, job prospects, racial understanding, satisfaction with college, openness to difference, and critical thinking (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Cowan, 2005; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001). Analysis of the earlier

literature in the *JCSP* helped me to understand that diversity topics, especially in the area of student organization participation, were rarely discussed in scholarly publications until the early 1970s and progressed in numbers of publications into the early 1990s.

In addition to the concerns noted in my *JCSP/JCSD* review, there is a scarcity in the recent body of literature and observations of the White student (dis) engagement phenomenon. Previous studies and research on student engagement by race are limited to the experiences of students of color and the coping mechanisms developed as a minority in a majority White educational setting; however, there is limited research on White students as perceived minorities on campuses or in student organizations (M. Davis, et al., 2004; DeSousa & King, 1992; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Flowers & Pascarella, 2003; Pascarella, 1996; Watson & Kuh, 1996).

Table 2
JCSP/JCSD Diversity Articles by Subject Area, 1970-1992

Area	Number	Percent
Racial Attitudes & Perceptions	26	29.9%
Counseling	18	20.7%
Retention & Attrition	10	11.5%
Academic Aptitude & Achievement	7	8.1%
Student Organization Participation	6	6.9%
Alienation	6	6.9%
Literature Review	5	5.8%
Admissions & Recruitment	3	3.5%
Legal Issues	3	3.5%
Black Colleges	1	1.2%
Career	1	1.2%
Financial Aid	1	1.2%
TOTAL	87	100%

In addressing the issues associated with collegiate interracial interactions, there is a recent emergence of empirical research on racial diversity and its effect on the development and engagement of White students at colleges and universities in the United States (Antonio, 2001; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Closson & Henry, 2008; Cowan, 2005). The phenomenon of White student (dis) engagement in student leadership has provided a unique line of inquiry for Georgia State administrators and has become a subject of discussion and research to a broader audience. In the exploration of the changes and tipping point in campus culture related to student organization participation, determining the point at which student engagement culture from a historical origin becomes contemporary is rather challenging. My systematic review of published literature can assist scholars in understanding the transition to racial diversity in student leadership.

Student Involvement & Engagement

In an attempt to understand the nuances of White student engagement, an important starting point was the historical context of student involvement at colleges and universities. Horowitz' *Campus Life* is one of the strongest texts highlighting continuities in the history of college student life (1987). Horowitz seeks to fill the void in analyzing college student life in the history of the United States of America from the late eighteenth century through the early 1980s. The text of the book is effectively organized around the literature of student engagement and categorizes students across eras into the broad themes of collegiate “insiders,” “outsiders,” and “rebels.”

The most insightful portions of the book were dedicated to the nearly 100 years from the late 1800s to early 1980s, when college men and their extracurricular activities

dominated campus life. The transition of the elite campuses from places of scholarly pursuit to a fraternal subculture of cheating and adversarial relationships with faculty, defined the “insiders.” According to Horowitz, the “outsiders” were from relatively poor socioeconomic backgrounds and focused on academic success in order to excel professionally. Students in the “outsider” category created strong relationships with faculty members and were minimally interested in extracurricular subjects, primarily due to their exclusion by the dominant fraternal structure of the institutions. “Rebels” are defined by Horowitz as the political and social radicals who came to define the campus life traditions of the previous century. Horowitz’s use of narrative was beneficial in explaining the systems that came to define the “rebels” of the mid- to late 1900s. The enrollment of minorities at universities and their ultimate exclusion from campus activities led to a period of opposition to the status quo in the academic curriculum and student life. Although very different in institutional context than Georgia State, vivid examples of student rebellion and military response at Kent State University and Jackson State College aided in my understanding that some of the categories of student groups were often blurred or interchangeable in the power structure of colleges and universities. Horowitz’s explanation of social groups and their interactions over the decades allows for the connection between historical issues and contemporary literature on student involvement and engagement.

The early works of Astin provide some of the foundational definitions for student involvement and leadership that are frequently used in higher education (1984, 1985, 1993). Beyond the general concept of involvement, which is defined as the amount of energy students spend in certain activities, several themes have emerged as indicators of

involvement and student success. Astin's theory of student involvement predates my study on engagement and evolved from research studies in the 1970s related to college dropouts. Astin's studies of student persistence, retention-enhancing themes of extracurricular involvement, frequent student interaction, studying, and full-time enrollment served as the foundation for additional studies. Astin's theory of involvement included elements that revealed the positive effects of involvement on achieving academic success (1984, 1985). The components include the primary notion that students can learn simply through involvement, and that researchers and college administrators can use the theory of student involvement in the development of positive learning environments and increased student retention. I would argue that students' mere presence on campuses does not lead to authentic engagement and interactions. As I observed, without purposeful interactions, students tend to become disconnected from an institution, potentially resulting in poor performance or, in the worst cases, institutional departure.

The departure of students from colleges and universities are at a cost to institutions, the individual student, families, and communities. Tinto has provided wide-ranging research on student attrition at colleges and universities in the United States (1993, 1998). Tinto's research includes practical actions that institutions can and should take to reduce attrition. In *Leaving College*, Tinto focuses on the personal experiences and processes of student integration (1993). A number of students enter college at a non-traditional age, and Tinto addresses the literature gap by previous researchers who limited their studies of college students to those students who entered college directly after high school. A primary goal of Tinto's text is to distinguish institutional from systems

departure. Prior to Tinto's research, the context of institutional departure was limited to a broad view of the higher education system versus specific student experiences at an institution. The research led to Tinto's development of a theory of institutional departure.

The unique components of Tinto's longitudinal model include his use of previous empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and the combined works of educators in the academic and student affairs communities. Based on my previous readings on student retention, many researchers have failed to view retention in a holistic manner. The model that Tinto (1993) proposes consists of five basic components: pre-entry attributes, goals commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and outcomes. According to Tinto, academic and social systems define the experiences of students and their ultimate decision to depart an institution. The academic systems include the educational experience in the classroom, combined with the relationships built with faculty and staff members. Social systems of Tinto's model embrace the formal day-to-day activities in the life of a student, including their participation in co-curricular activities. A major conclusion of Tinto's studies is that the key to effective retention is campus climate, a strong commitment to quality education, and the building of a strong sense of inclusive educational and social community on campus. In efforts to increase retention rates, many universities have referred to research on the student experience and attempted to use the research to guide current practice.

Following the earlier academic works, numerous scholars expanded the research into student engagement and its high correlation with learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Higher education scholars made the

transition in terminology from “student involvement” to “engagement” based on a more in-depth overview of purposeful activities that lead to student success and graduation. The researchers found that active engagement, both inside and outside of the classroom, positively affects a wide range of student outcomes. Student engagement outcomes are affected by the human, social, and cultural capital that students bring to college and institutional aspects of size, selectivity, and social climate that they experience once on campus. Kuh (2001) suggested that student engagement is a measure of institutional quality. Therefore, it can be presumed that the more opportunities afforded for engagement within the student populous, the better the institution. Much of Kuh’s research has thoroughly highlighted the benefits of student engagement on student success, retention, graduation, and student learning (Kuh, 2001, 2003, 2007; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 2005; Kuh, et al., 2003). In Kuh’s research, an area for additional exploration is the historical background of an institution and its effect on engagement, which I explore in the contexts chapter. Other factors that influence the levels of student engagement at an institution are the campus racial climate, historical practices of inclusion or exclusion, and the institution’s current mission.

Campus Racial Climate

With the observed changes in collegiate racial demographics, scholars have conducted recent studies in attempts to contribute empirical data to the limited research on the development of college students in diverse contexts (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 2002; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; DeSousa & King, 1992; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Watson & Kuh, 1996). The Chang (2002) study expanded

research on “balkanized” behaviors of college students through an exploration of student organization racial structures. “Balkanization” refers to racial self-segregation of students, especially in student organizations (Antonio, 2001). Antonio (2001) sought to similarly address the impact of racial diversity on racial understanding, cultural awareness, and interracial interaction. The results of Antonio’s research did not support Chang’s claims of balkanization (2002). Data collection in Antonio’s study included a limited population of college students attending the University of California, Los Angeles, a single, large, racially diverse institution. The racially diverse environment could have potentially influenced friendship group characteristics on engaging in interracial interactions. Students who participated in the study viewed their institution as racially and ethnically segregated; however, they viewed themselves as an exception to the racially divided student community. Antonio shared that strong institutional commitment to diversity can improve the perceptions of race relations on campus and potentially influence student values and learning.

Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) further explored whether and how racial diversity in the undergraduate student body affected the intellectual, social, and civic development of the college undergraduate. The authors’ topic resulted from an exploration of legal rulings allowing applicants’ racial backgrounds to be included in college admissions. The current study utilized a new dataset of contemporary students and focused on the racial composition of the institutions. The authors explored the educational relevance of cross-racial interaction and how campuses can best structure such opportunities. The research detailed that diversity experiences are positively associated with most student outcomes of intrapersonal development. The findings of the study underscored the

concept that experiencing cross-racial interaction during the undergraduate years can positively affect a range of student outcomes, including intellectual ability, civic interest, and social skills. An important result of the study was that the composition of the student body is a primary determinant of interracial interactions. Although more racially diverse institutions possess the demographic compositions to maximize cross-racial interaction, they also tend to have certain campus conditions that create more difficulty for students to have such experiences (S. R. Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The authors' discussion of campus conditions and climates were very relevant to my research interest in evaluating campus racial environments and raises additional questions. Literature on the effects of campus diversity that are biased toward racial homogeneity reflects the scarcity of diversity in institutions of higher education in comparison to the racial composition of the national population.

In the case of Georgia State, the university's admissions statistics and student organization rosters reflect exponential growth in enrollment and campus participation among students of color. The racial climate and institutional ethos of colleges and universities are often a result of years of policies and practices. Students' participation and engagement in campus organizations are no different; in fact, the current practices are often a prime indicator of racial dynamics. Hurtado, et al. (1998) explained structural diversity in higher education and its impact on students. A notable aspect of the research was the argument that the "larger the relative size of the minority group, the more likely it is that there will be minority/majority conflict over limited resources" (p. 287). The competition for resources and leadership opportunities among racial groups at GSU has created a series of contentious interracial interactions.

Interracial Interactions

With the exception of a few recent articles, there have been few studies that address the interracial interactions of White students when they perceive they are in the racial minority. In early studies that used quantitative methods, it was determined that “students of color interact across race or ethnicity with a greater frequency than do White students” (Hurtado, Dey, & Trevino, 1994, p. 14). The self-segregation perspective in Hurtado’s study was hypothesized to be a result of hostile or exclusionary environments for the students of color. However, students in the minority groups were never truly able to self-segregate in a predominantly White campus environment.

The previous study raised the question of whether Black and White students place the same level of emphasis on interracial friendships. Fisher and Hartmann’s (1995) article explored this question via an open-ended questionnaire that was completed by 240 undergraduate students. Results of the study reinforced previous conclusions that race is still a salient issue among college students and universities should embrace the forthcoming challenges to enhance the academic environment. The qualitative responses provided rich data on personal experiences and belief systems of the students who participated in the study.

In an attempt to establish causal relationships in interracial and intraracial groups, Cowan (2005) designed an observational study of African American, Asian American, Latino, and Caucasian American college students. The purpose of the study was to explore if students at racially and ethnically diverse campuses self-segregate or frequently interact with students of other groups. Student observers visited each campus and independently observed the same group on four observational days. Results of the

study determined no difference between numbers of interracial and intraracial groups. The unique nature of Southern Californian educational institutions promotes diversity as the “norm rather than the exception” (Cowan, 2005, p. 59). Individuals in the study represented similar socioeconomic statuses, and thus, decreased self-segregation that is often visible at institutions with Caucasian American students who possess more financial wealth. Differences in study results consistently reflected the unique dynamic of each institution. In a separate study, researchers raised additional questions of whether balkanization would reach higher levels once the underrepresented groups reached a critical mass and potentially outnumbered the White groups (Chang, et al., 2004). This question of majority-minority ratios served as the foundation for my research exploration of White student engagement in campus organizations.

Chang has further pursued a line of interracial interaction inquiry by studying student organizations on college campuses (Chang, 2002; Chang, et al., 2004; Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; Denson & Chang, 2009). Chang’s (2002) article analyzed campus racial groups as he argued that racial dynamics on campuses would become more complex as a result of the increased racial and ethnic diversity. Chang shared that without cross-racial interactions, students become too comfortable in operating apart. The hypothesis of Chang’s article was confirmed in a later exploratory study of Greek organizations, where he found that despite racial shifts in collegiate enrollment, Greek organizations remained racially homogenous (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002).

In approaching the literature of interracial interactions from an interdisciplinary manner, I explored a few recent psychological research studies that provided valuable insight into the phenomenon of White student (dis) engagement. Quantitatively focused,

the research honed in on some causes and consequences of an avoidance-focus for interracial interaction (Britt, Boniecki, Vescio, Biernat, & Brown, 1996; Brown, 1998; Plant & Butz, 2006; Plant & Devine, 2003; J. N. Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Avoidance-Focus explores instances wherein people desire little or limited contact with outgroup members, yet are unable to avoid the interaction (school, work, etc.). Research on the topic of avoidance-focus studies the process of the perceived strained and unpleasant experiences of non-Black college students during interracial interactions. Psychological outcomes to intergroup relationships add a new dimension to the research on collegiate interracial interactions. Flaws in the Plant and Butz (2006) study include the failure to examine anxiety prior to the study, as well as the manipulation of expectant behavior by informing the participants they would meet with someone Black. Qualitative components to the mentioned studies would have provided stories, which could lead to implications for policy and practice. The discourse surrounding diversity and interracial interactions must extend beyond the traditional conversation of numbers and recognize the construction of social identities. Perspectives and attitudes of White students must be further explored to understand the nature of collegiate interactions.

Whites & White Racial Perspectives

Fundamental research questions in my dissertation revolve around GSU students' perceptions of the campus and their racial identity. Whiteness consists of a body of knowledge, ideologies, norms, and practices that have been constructed over the history of the United States of America. These practices of Whiteness affect how we think about race, what we see when we look at certain physical features, how we build our own racial identities, and how we operate in the world. Whiteness is shaped and maintained by legal,

economic, political, educational, religious, and cultural institutions. Perry (2001) maintains a general theme of defining “White raciality as cultureless” (p. 58). Consistent with the research findings on Whiteness by the previous authors, “this research only touched the surface of that and came on some disturbing and unexpected findings, namely, the active construction of postcultural Whiteness” (p. 86). An exploration of Whiteness in working-class neighborhoods and suburban communities provides insight into this phenomenon and the attitudes associated with it. Most of the student participants in my dissertation study were raised in homogenously White suburbs that shaped their belief systems.

In the exploration process of White student (dis) engagement, the deconstruction of White perspectives toward student engagement is critical. Educational researchers have argued that culture is a derivative of racial identity development, which constructs and reconstructs social boundaries in schools (Lewis, 2003a, 2003b; Rothenberg, 1990). According to Rothenberg (1990), “the new racism expresses itself by using ‘code words’ in place of explicitly racist language and arguments”(p. 49). Other authors have built upon Rothenberg’s research in the process of deconstructing White identity.

Gillborn and Kirton (2000) review the experiences of students in a lower socioeconomic area of England. The demographics of the environment, which include a substantial non-White population, consist of a number of Whites who perform at levels lower than their peers in minority ethnic groups. According to the authors, “In this way the inequalities born of class structures, institutionalized funding and selection procedures, are racialized so as to fuel racist sentiments that project minority students and their communities as the problem, and White working-class youth as race-victims” (p.

272). Through the interviews of different students in varying levels of education, the researchers identified White students with internalized racist attitudes even at an early age. Blame for the lack of educational funding in the study was directly connected to the minority population at the school, which reflects the discourse that White students hear at home and in their communities, and shapes their perceptions. I note that the hierarchy in Europe frequently begins with class structure, while the source of United States social stratification is often racially based. In a similar fashion, the same ideology of White cultural construction is present amongst working-class men. In an ethnographic study of working-class men and women, the personal experiences of Whites in schools, jobs, and communities shaped their racial perceptions of good and their own cultural identity. Weis and Lyons Lombardo (2002) describe Whites' attitudes as, "the social construction of this goodness in relation to the badness of others provides justification for their own privileged standpoint" (p. 7). Critiques of jobs and affirmative action practices by White men afford them the opportunity to shape their own identity by comparing it to other non-Whites. Within this class structure, some of the men have created their own cultural space by finding predominantly White environments, which allow them the greatest opportunity for social connections.

Twine's (1996) article is another modern example of White cultural construction. Twine uses an ethnographic approach to determine the role that residence plays in White identity construction. The women subjects of multi-racial ethnicity were raised in a predominantly White environment and were asked to reflect on their experiences with their White counterparts. Prior to their college matriculation, all of the women in Twine's study were products of suburban culture with "immersion in a family and social

network which embraced a racially unmarked, middle-class identity” (p. 208).

Socioeconomic segregation allowed the women opportunities to ignore their ethnic status; however, they became aware of their cultural status as they aged. The women’s interviews provided insight into the White suburban culture. Based on their responses and reflections, there seemed to be a “socio-economic milieu dominated by consumerism” (p. 210). Additionally, the women in the study were taught not to identify as a particular ethnicity. Most of the White women experienced a disconnection from the culture during dating age when the women were rejected by their White male peers. The White women in Twine’s study were limited in their inclusion into the traditional White culture in their surrounding community.

Helms has extensively explored White racial identity development (WRID) and defines it as the process that Whites undergo when formulating identification with their own socioracial group (Helms, 1995). According to Helms, the overarching goal of the White racial identity development model is that Whites abandon personal racist beliefs and oppose institutional structures that promote racism. The schema for the model include contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independent, immersion/emersion, and autonomy. According to the sequence of statuses, Whites move progressively from a basic recognition of race to a final status of creating a new definition of Whiteness that no longer feels the need to oppress members of other racial groups. In her attempt to generalize racial identity theory, Helms (1995) posits that “racial interactions occur on a group level” and individuals rarely develop their identity independently of group interactions (p. 190). In her final chapter, Helms suggest that White students’ perceptions of racial proportions might influence their group character, a consistent set of group

behaviors, which can be further pursued through qualitative research on minority-majority ratios and college student engagement. Recent qualitative studies conducted by Gallagher and McKinney have provided invaluable data and insight into the perceptions of White students (Gallagher, 1995, 1999, 2003a, 2007; McKinney, 2005).

The exploration of Whiteness as a social identity is important in understanding and acknowledging what research participants in my dissertation study articulate. Gallagher's (1995) article is a compilation of qualitative interviews that focus on topics of privilege, identity politics, and White culture. The informants shared their individual processes of negotiating Whiteness in multiracial environments. Responses from the informants included their overestimation of the numbers of minorities, which Gallagher investigates in a later article (2003a) and finds that racial stereotypes and perceptions of group threat contribute to the inflation of minority group size. In my review of McKinney's (2005) text, the autobiographical stories from White college students in her classroom deliver a rich source of information about White culture and the ways in which the students express their personal ideologies. McKinney analyzed years of qualitative data and summarized the results. Two recent dissertations, Foster (2006) and Schmidt (2005), both reinforce the work of Gallagher and McKinney. The authors of the dissertations delve into the belief systems of White college students and determined that their research participants maintained contradictory beliefs toward equality and equity, which mirrored White racial attitudes of the mid-1950s in the United States. In studying an institution where White students are the minority in traditional student organizations, understanding the racial perspectives and methods of communication can assist a researcher in developing substantive research questions in a study.

In the discussion of racial issues, the political climate in the United States often causes a polarization of viewpoints. White students are intertwined in this discourse, due to the schools' representation of culture. Myrdal (1944) produced a well-known text that highlighted the sociological and political challenges associated with Black-White race relations. Decades after the Myrdal study of race relations of the mid-1900s, Whites still experience "a troubling moral conflict in their minds because of the discrepancy between their profound belief in the egalitarian 'American Creed' and the racist manner in which people of color are treated" (Southern, 1995, p. 272). Many U.S. citizens believe in the ideals that any person can achieve in society with hard work and determination, although those beliefs have not been reflected in the upward mobility of people of color. A manifestation of this racial conflict is the difficulty that students have in communicating their beliefs and resulting actions regarding diverse settings. Research conducted by Bonilla-Silva (2002; 2000; 2004) and Perry (2001) explores the semantic judo that takes place when interviewing White students and making inquiries related to racial issues. According to Bonilla-Silva (2002), White students' responses appeared more racially prejudiced in qualitative interviews than in quantitative surveys. A primary theme of Bonilla-Silva's studies is White students' creation of a new form of "race talk" that is designed to prevent the appearance of being viewed as racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). The students in the aforementioned studies used a variety of linguistic statements, such as "I don't know" and "I am not sure" to make their responses less confrontational. Perry (2001) presented similar findings to those of Bonilla-Silva; however, she focused more on the "practices on how White students make sense of their own identities and the identities of people of color" (p. 86). The previous authors' qualitative findings on White

student culture are insightful, and yet challenging for me as the term “diversity” is often referred to in an ambiguous manner by educational scholars and practitioners. Indeed, as I will discuss later in the findings, participants in this dissertation study often communicated a similar form of racial and diversity discourse.

As individuals and groups affected by Whiteness, society influences and shapes these institutions. Thus, Whiteness is constantly evolving in response to time, location, and social forces. Many researchers have studied history as a means of understanding both the construction of Whiteness and how Whiteness plays a role in maintaining a system of racial oppression. The privileges and economic benefits of Whiteness are frequently offered in the labor arena - benefits, which on closer inspection often reveal how a small wealthy elite uses Whiteness to maintain their societal position. Tatum (1999) argues, “the task for Whites is to develop a positive White identity based in reality, not on assumed superiority” (p. 94). In diverse university settings, the competition of societal position can be manifested through student leadership positions and an organization’s status.

Diversity

Colleges and universities in the United States of America recognize that they not only have to be more inclusive, but also they must provide an environment that will effectively retain and develop the growing population of ethnically and racially diverse students. The affirmative action legal decisions and policies (“Gratz v. Bollinger 123 S. Ct. 2411,” 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger 123 S. Ct. 2325,” 2003; University of California Regents v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265,” 1978) are excellent examples of how the “complicated reality of diversity” is applied throughout educational settings (Osgood, 1997). Baez has

argued that “diversity” has become a highly politicized buzzword that fails to support social justice in education (2000, 2003, 2004). In an attempt to expand perspectives in higher education, the term “diversity” has taken root and since evolved. As Baez (2000) notes:

Proponents of diversity sought other words to capture their intent and goals. They chose terms such as “multiculturalism” and “pluralism,” which supplanted “diversity” but signified the same thing: an alternative to, or replacement of, the Western tradition in higher education. (p. 44)

Although the diversity terminology has not transformed the broader academy, its use has become pervasive in academic lexicon. Students in the earlier studies in this literature review used “diversity” to describe social differences between Whites and students of color. Baez’s (2004) encourages individuals and institutions to think differently about difference. Baez states, “The knowledge of difference must be seen as problematic because its concepts can take hold of individual (and their institutions) in such a way that they discipline themselves to act in particular ways” (p. 300). An example of the actions can be the “flight” of students from institutions and campus organizations as the racial demographics transition toward more diversity.

White Flight

White flight refers to the sociological concept of racial segregation and resulting integration in housing patterns. According to research from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, it was discovered that most White families remained in newly integrated neighborhoods as long as the comparative number of Black families remained very small (Frey, 1979; Grodzins, 1958; Myerson & Banfield, 1955). However, once a substantial

number of Black families integrated the neighborhood, the remaining White families would depart the community in mass exodus. Schelling, referred to the “referential racial threshold” of neighborhood departure as the “tipping point” (1971, p. 181). The racial balance of power that Schelling refers seemed very similar to the racial dynamics of student organizations at Georgia State University. The noted concepts are potentially valuable in evaluating the majority-minority statuses of students in the current research project, as they make cultural decisions on campus engagement.

Schelling’s (1978) book is an earlier, yet valuable text that reviews the concept of how individual choice can lead to segregation. In Chapter 4 “Sorting and Mixing,” Schelling argues that there are quantitative benchmarks and discriminatory practices that lead to racial moving patterns. A discussion of quantitative constraints focuses on the idea that no two groups are able to have numerical superiority within a set of given boundaries. If either of the groups insists on being a local majority, the only mixture that will satisfy them is complete segregation. The ability for a more affluent White group to live wherein in an environment Blacks cannot afford to reside is also an example of the “separating mechanism” (Schelling, 1978, p. 142). Even in areas where Whites and Blacks may not mind the presence of each other, they may wish to avoid minority status. The result ends with the minority group evacuating, and thus, creating a segregated neighborhood. Schelling posits that there are lower limits beyond a 50:50 ratio to the minority status that can be tolerated by either racial group.

The individual choices of location preference were exemplified through a study of eating locations among an integrated minor league baseball team. The general premise is that players are relieved to have an excuse to sit without regard to color, and the cafeteria

line prevents having to make an embarrassing choice; however, the decision is more difficult when the White player is the seventh at a table with six Black players.

Atmospheres such as this create a threshold of self-consciousness and can lead to complete and sustained separation. The decisions to separate are individual, but the consequences are aggregate. Schelling (1978) shares that “if segregation exists and they have to choose between exclusive association, people elect like rather than unlike environments” (p. 146).

According to Schelling (1978), the underlying result of the White flight phenomenon was a chain reaction within the process of segregation and resegregation. Schelling posits that everyone who selects a new environment affects the environment of those they leave and those they move among. In the final discussion of the book, Schelling notes that each person, Black or White, has his or her own limit or “tolerance” towards the percentage of residents of opposite color. If the racial limit is exceeded, Schelling argues the residents will relocate to another geographic area where their own color predominates. The status of race relations has changed considerably since the publication of the early “White flight” literature; however, researchers continue to study racial migration in an educational context. Fitzpatrick and Hwang (1990) argue that socioeconomic status (SES) is a “symbolic image of residence” (p. 766). Economic status as the embodiment of the American dream has become the benchmark of personal and professional attainment in U.S. culture. Upwardly mobile people can afford to move to the suburban areas that are most attractive. The authors argue that SES can also serve as a structural barrier that excludes certain groups of people due to their SES. With this view in mind, SES also functions to discourage potential residents in the lower realm of

status. Black suburbanization serves as a vehicle to observe this communal relationship and the flight in predominantly White communities.

Clotfelter (2001) revisits the effects of interracial contact in public schools. His paper examines recent changes in racial composition and enrollment patterns, and the impact on White losses. The “White flight” phenomenon is not only used to describe the movement of Whites from one district to another, but also the tendency to avoid districts with high interracial contact.

Prior to providing an in-depth review of the study, Clotfelter (2001) begins with a comprehensive overview of the background of school desegregation and recent patterns in school enrollment. Much of the desegregation research after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was in opposition to the concept of “White flight,” as a reason to explain further segregation of schools. A majority of the research in subsequent years has used the White flight theory as a fundamental basis for understanding school migration and social interactions (Crowder, 2008; Zhang, 2008). Recent patterns confirm that schools at the metropolitan level tend to be extremely segregated.

Summary

The review of literature points to several key issues that informed my approach to this dissertation study, and points to the challenges and opportunities for student engagement as institutions become progressively more diverse. The study and exploration of diverse cultures is critical to undergraduate education (Rothenberg, 1990). While diverse educational settings are promoted by some colleges and researchers as nurturing environments for global competencies, the perspectives of White students can directly influence their choices of student organizations. The studies described also

provide varying reports on the effects of these different campus types on student engagement and interracial interactions. However, at Georgia State University, White students do not participate fully in these activities even though they are the racial majority. Negative feelings of an institution's campus climate among White students have the potential to manifest themselves, not only in a lack of engagement in campus activities, but in student success. Georgia State University has already surpassed the "White flight" ratio of 30% students of color, which has resulted in unique campus racial dynamics.

Colleges and universities have the potential to be more than "vehicles of cultural continuity" (D. B. Davis, 1968, p. 704). They have the potential to be empowering forces that create change within an individual's life and society as a whole. Indeed, issues of campus climate, racial interactions, student engagement, and racial identity continue to influence the diversity of higher education institutions and the (dis) engagement that takes place among students. The reviewed literature serves as a basis for this study, but the research must be linked to the historical factors that influence institutional change. By foregrounding the institutional history of Georgia State University, we can further understand the current racial dynamics in traditional student organizations. Therefore in the following chapter I turn my attention to the changes in student organization racial dynamics that have taken place at GSU.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTS

This narrative is very important in my study that looks at White students' perspectives on (dis) engagement. Georgia State University campus organizations evolved as students of color created cultural groups and formed their own engagement niche after being alienated from the historically White organizations. Indeed, interpretations (in this case, by students) cannot be separated from the context and history of an institution (Geertz, 1973). In this chapter, I briefly examine the institution's founding, racial desegregation, early minority student participation, Black student involvement in the 1980s, and activism of the 1990s. The history of segregated schools and colleges continues to affect the climate of racial and ethnic diversity on college campuses. It is impossible to predict the results of historical changes within colleges and universities; however, social action, such as the recruitment and encouraged involvement of students of color, can have unanticipated consequences for student interaction and institutional policy (Merton, 1936). Historically rooted cultural issues at Georgia State can be overlooked based on an individuals' limited knowledge of institutional history, lack of desire to address issues of change, or, in some cases, fundamental ignorance. In this chapter, I utilize archival data from GSU Pullen library and oral history interviews with a former administrator and student to describe racial transition and student engagement in campus life at Georgia State during the early 1990s.

Institution Founding & Student Engagement

Georgia State University was founded as the Evening School of Commerce for the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) in 1913. Under the leadership of

Wayne Kell, the school served as an educational opportunity for the numerous Atlanta residents who worked downtown and preferred evening courses, and thus was considered the night division for Georgia Tech. The school began with a small enrollment of 44 students. Course offerings were limited to business classes that were held in a rented building located at the intersection of Cone and Walton Streets in the Fairlie-Poplar District of Atlanta, Georgia. During Georgia State's founding, entrance requirements mandated that students be of sound moral character and not less than eighteen years of age (Georgia School of Technology, 1913).

In 1928, George M. Sparks succeeded Kell as the Director of the Evening School and was later appointed to the position of the school's first president. By this period, the moral and ethical requirements of student conduct reflected a more traditional collegiate tone, as students grouped themselves into clans of insiders and outsiders without regard to the institutional rules (Horowitz, 1987). As Smith notes in his historical dissertation:

The Young Men's Christian Association was the largest student organization on campus consisting of more than four hundred and sixty members during the Academic years 1912-14 according to the General Announcements.

By the 1920-21 Academic year a *Blue Print* listing of Georgia Tech student organizations included the Ku Klux Klan, Anak Society, Acis Senior Society, Koseme Society, Skull and Key Club, Bull Dog Club, Cotillion Club, Y.M.C.A., Student Association, Honor Court, The Technique, Glee Club, Quartette, Mandolin Club, Marionettes, Band, Rifle Club, Signal Corps, and the Co-op Club. (2005, p. 51)

Many Evening School students participated in the campus life of the Georgia Tech day school. Enrollment grew to 1,119 students, which made the Evening School the largest evening school in the southern region of the United States. The Evening School was granted permission by the State Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia to establish an independent institution in 1933. Overcrowding at the school, due to increased enrollment, was a problem until the World War II era when a number of male students were called to armed service. During the World War II time period, women represented the majority of admitted and enrolled students (Smith, 2005), which provided a dramatic shift in demographics at the Evening School.

As the Evening School sought to find an identity that reflected its adult education mission, student growth continued to climb and change. After a brief stint of affiliation with and name change to the Atlanta Division of the University of Georgia, the school enrolled a record number of veterans. Campus life began to take a hybrid tone from traditional institutions, as fraternities, honor societies, and student organizations became commonplace (see Figure 1). Georgia State College (GSC), as it was named after 1955, provided Student Services offices to meet the demands of a changing campus. However, the campus and students of Georgia State College were unprepared for the wave of unrest as a new group of students sought admission and participation in collegiate life.



Figure 1: The Rifle Team, 1953

Racial Desegregation

Many United States citizens relished in the potential opportunities of the landmark 1954 Supreme Court ruling that struck down state-sponsored segregation of the United States of America's public schools (Patterson, 2001). The *Brown v. Board of Education* case opened the door to an ongoing discussion of the intersections of race and class in the U.S. public school system. As a major organizing center of the Civil Rights Movement, Atlanta was known as the "city too busy to hate" during the late 1950s and early 1960s (O. L. Shelton, 1961). Unfortunately, the "too busy" phrase failed to connect with Georgia State College when Blacks sought to desegregate the institution. The *Brown v. Board of Education* legal ruling outlined the unconstitutionality of segregated education; however, numerous public institutions, including colleges and universities, fought the ruling and expressed no desire for compliance. For Georgia State, the desegregation effort would lead to a six-year battle that ultimately ended in the first Black student's admission to the college.

According to the college newspaper, *The Signal*, the legal action at Georgia State began when four Black students, Barbara Hunt, Iris Mae Welch, Myra Elliott Dinsmore,

and Russell T. Robert, appeared before Georgia State College Registrar, J.D. Blaire, on June 15, 1956. The Black students' applications were denied by Blaire for being "incomplete" ("Negroes ask school entry", 1956) and reinforced the institutionally racist policies of maintaining a homogeneously White student body. Anderson (1993, p. 151) refers to institutional racism as:

a form of ethnic discrimination and exclusion through routine organizational policies and procedures that do not use ethnicity or color as the rationale for discrimination, but instead rely on nonracist rationales to effectively exclude members of ethnic groups.

The student petitioners alleged that the college's practice of requiring recommendations from two alumnae were part of an institutionally racist policy designed to maintain segregation. Blaire rejected the students' applications on the grounds that they failed to receive certification of "good character" by two alumnae. The decision to deny the students' application was additionally upheld by then President Sparks and the Georgia Board of Regents. The legal cases of the Georgia State applicants and other Negro applicants at surrounding Georgia colleges took years to move through the sluggish channels of the United States' judicial system, but the white students and administrators at Georgia State were making their voices heard.

The vitriolic rhetoric and hatred toward Blacks attempting to desegregate Georgia State was clearly evident among white students who frequently voiced their feelings and opinions. An editor of *The Signal* relayed the following comments:

Let us say now: we believe in segregation. We feel it is the only answer to the racial problem. We can see nothing in integration but racial strife. We realize no

reason for mixing the races in schools and colleges now or in the years ahead.... Now it is our move.... To defy the court openly would be to enter upon anarchy; the logical end would be a second attempt at secession from the Union. And though the idea is not without merit, we should try all legal means first. ("Segregation policy", 1956)

In spite of such racist comments, the students' cases moved forward. In a later *Signal* editorial ("Four Negroes acting unwise", 1957), the author referred to the Negro applicants as acting unwisely:

Within the surrounding area of Atlanta, there are more institutions of higher learning for Negroes than in any other city in the United States.... Instead you have either sought out or have been sought out by the NAACP to argue and force your case. In many states this in itself is illegal; it is called barratry.... Attempting to obtain at an all-white institution an education easily available in Atlanta at an all-colored institution, is not justifiable in the opinion of the Signal.

Despite the opposition to desegregation on the part of white students, administrators, and politicians, in June of 1958 a legal ruling at the University of Georgia ended discriminatory admission in the state of Georgia. In 1959, Georgia State College's policy of requiring alumnae signatures for students' admission was deemed unconstitutional by U.S. District Judge Boyd Sloan. The court rulings opened the door to integration at 19 institutions in the Georgia college system. Two Black students, Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter, were admitted to the University of Georgia, Georgia's land-grant university, in 1961 as a result of the court's removal of exclusive admission policies. Unfortunately, it would be nearly three years after the 1958 ruling on discriminatory

admission practices before Georgia State College would follow suit and the first Black person would step foot onto Georgia State's campus as an enrolled student.

Georgia State College remained a segregated institution until 1962 when Annette "Lucille" Hall was granted admission after a lengthy court battle ("First Negro studies", 1962). Lucille Hall, a former social studies instructor in the public school system, was a graduate of Spelman College and Atlanta University. At the age of 37, Hall was admitted to the Institute on Americanism and Communism at Georgia State College on June 12, 1962. Shortly after Hall's admission, Maybelle Reynolds Warner enrolled as the first full-time Black student, and she majored in music education. The barrier to Black students' admission to Georgia State had been broken and opportunities were now available for other Black students to follow. Over the next few years, Black students would become dissatisfied with just being admitted to Georgia State College and moved toward integration into all areas of campus life.

Early Minority Student Participation in Campus Organizations

In the 1965 *President's Annual Report*, Georgia State College President Noah Langdale, Jr. reported, "in general, student conduct and morale have been excellent, reflecting the maturity of the student body and the high quality of student leadership" (Georgia State College, 1966, p. 24). Langdale's reference to student leadership was on reflective of the White student population, as students of color were excluded from most campus organizations. Even after the desegregation of the college by Black students, very few references were made to the experiences of students of color in the annals of Georgia State College's history. However, a student movement was taking place on the campus; as President Langdale noted, "there is an increasing interest by the students in

co-curricular activities. A large portion of the students consider their college experience as their primary concern” (Georgia State College, 1968, p. 32). During this period, students began to take a more active role in university governance through the Student Government Association (SGA). In 1967, the SGA merged the separated day and evening governing bodies into one entity. As the SGA increased in activity, the Black students at Georgia State began the formation of student organizations that represented their interests and needs. The derogatory and denigrating images of Blacks in campus life, often perpetrated by members of White Greek organizations, would soon be replaced by new organizations that represented the empowerment of Black groups. One archival photo (Figure 2) included White Greek members perpetuating historically oppressive images of Black by performing skits in blackface. Another image (Figure 3) highlighted the crowning of Miss Black GSU by the organization Black Students United, as Black students were prevented from participating in the Miss GSU pageant.



Figure 2: Greek Week Blackface Skit, 1968



Figure 3: Black Students United, Crowning of Miss Black GSU, 1970

Greek life had served as an integral part of student life of White students at Georgia State since the 1950s. Black students quickly moved to identify their stake in the Greek life of the institution. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, the oldest Black Greek-lettered organization was founded at Georgia State College on August 8, 1968. Alpha Phi Alpha was soon joined on the campus by two more Black Greek organizations, Delta Sigma Theta sorority and Omega Psi Phi fraternity. The Black Greek groups were extremely active in the black social experience at Georgia State (Figure 4). By the late 1970s, two additional Black Greek organizations, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, had established chapters on the campus. Support for the Black fraternities and sororities was strong among the Black students at Georgia State College. Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) refer to the potential of Black Greek-lettered organization to foster support, leadership, and a sense of activism in their members. The participation of Blacks' participation in Greek life and other cultural groups reflected the activism among students of the era.



Figure 4: Greek Members, 1976

As student growth continued, Georgia State's physical expansion led the State Board of Regents to confer the institutional title, Georgia State University (GSU). Similar to other colleges and universities in the late 1960s and 1970s, students of color and White students began to exude a sense of power through activism and radicalism (Altbach, 1997; Johnstone, 1969). In one archival photograph, a Black fraternity member poses next to the poster of H. Rap Brown, nationally-known former student activist and member of the Black Panther Party (Figure 5). President Langdale briefly mentioned the level of activism at Georgia State University in his annual report, as he noted, "the local SDS chapter... has continued to be active, although it has not achieved popular appeal. The Black Students United was active in expressing itself on a number of issues of interest to black students" (Georgia State College, 1969, p. 46). Photographs from the university's *Rampway* yearbook reflect numerous cross-racial interactions among students and organizations, including the election of black students in university-wide positions.



Figure 5: Fraternity Member, 1970

A number of milestones in interracial interactions took place during the 1972 academic year at Georgia State University. Miller (1995) argued that sports culture served as a conduit to foster racial interactions that would not normally take place. Athletics at Georgia State provided an opportunity for students to support one another across racial lines. It was during the 1972 year that Black basketball player Buddy Persons was selected by the GSU student body to receive the “Most Popular Panther” award (Figure 6). During the same year, Marcia Briscoe was elected as both Miss GSU and Miss Homecoming. Marcia was the first Black woman to receive the honors at Georgia State. Ms. Briscoe’s election gained national acclaim and was highlighted in *Jet Magazine’s* article on the phenomenon of Black queens being elected on white college campuses (“White college campuses”, 1972). As the GSU campus continued its growth, it was clear that Black students would be intertwined in the fabric of student organizations and campus engagement.



Figure 6: Most Popular Panther, 1972

Throughout the 1970s, Georgia State's student enrollment continued exponential growth and the numbers of student organizations reflected that growth. In the 1975-76 academic year, GSU's Incept Orientation program was growing in campus notoriety and was noted as a contributor to the increased enrollment at the university (Georgia State University, 1976). It was in the 1976 *President's Annual Report* that racial demographics were first recorded in university documents. The university's enrollment averaged 20,541 students, with 13.9% of those students being Black Americans (Georgia State University, 1976).

Black Student Involvement in the 1980s

Nearly twenty years after the desegregation of Georgia State University, students of color leadership in campus activities lagged behind, especially in some of the most prominent organizations: Student Government Association and Incept Team (Figure 7).

Although representing 21% of the 21,366 students during the fall of 1984, minority students maintained limited leadership roles in campus organizations. A monumental barrier in student leadership was broken when Dexter Warrior became the first Black Student Government Association President during the 1984-1985 academic year. As noted in the *Annual Report*, Dexter was a “conscientious, articulate spokesman for student views” (Georgia State University, 1985, p. 18). Vice President of Student Services William S. Patrick identified Mr. Warrior’s election as “evidence of continued racial harmony” (Georgia State University, 1985, p. 4). In the same report, Dean of Students William R. Baggett expressed frustration with the limited numbers of students who desired to participate in leadership roles. In reference to the three historically Black fraternities on campus, Baggett shared that it was difficult to advise the organizations because of their small chapter size and recruitment efforts that were dissimilar to the traditionally white fraternities. The reflections and notations of student affairs administrators were a small component of the larger campus affirmative action efforts. However, the statements and beliefs of White campus administrators omitted acknowledgement of the policies and practices that systemically excluded students of color from accessing the well-known leadership opportunities such as Incept, Spotlight, and the Student Government Association. The inclusion of more students of color in campus groups was accelerated through Georgia State’s recruitment and admission of more racial minorities.



Figure 7: Incept Team, 1984

In the fall of 1985, Georgia State University began the operation of a university-wide Minority Recruitment Plan as a result of a recommendation from the United States Office of Civil Rights. The goals of the initiative were to increase the recruitment of racial minority students, faculty members, and staff members. Georgia State's Office of Admissions was specifically targeted for emphasis in minority recruitment. Black student enrollment increased 22.6% from 1975 to 1985, representing nearly 16.8% percent of enrolled students in 1985. According to GSU administrators, much of the increased enrollment of African American students was a result of new admissions outreach to minority students and the creation of their new brochure, "From A Black Student's Perspective" (Georgia State University, 1985). The Georgia Board of Regents also published a recruitment brochure targeting minority students during that same year. In addition, the Office of Affirmative Action actively relayed its recruitment goals by meeting with forty-eight faculty search committees during the 1984-85 academic year,

with the attempt to increase the numbers of minority faculty members. However, minority students who attended Georgia State University had their own opinions of the campus environment and rationale for increases in campus diversity.

In an oral history interview with Ms. Conrad (pseudonym), a former Black student leader and campus administrator at Georgia State, she shared her reasons for choosing to attend Georgia State,

I liked the fact that Georgia State was downtown. It didn't really excite me to be on a campus with a dorm or a football team... I was impressed with Georgia State's commitment to access and academics. I knew I could get a good education for the money.

Ms. Conrad further described her first perceptions of the campus and how she was recruited to participate in campus activities by a supportive group of Black student leaders:

When I first came to Georgia State it was like I didn't know anyone. I just wanted to go to school and go home and study. When I got to this major large campus it was very, very White - not much diversity, but there was a strong African American community of student leaders who were seasoned. They brought me in and groomed me. My first organization that I joined was Black Student Alliance. I decided to do that [BSA] because I could not afford to just be out here by myself not know anyone, being a first generation college student. I didn't have mom and dad to give me that journey and that essence of what it means to be in college, so I was totally on my own. By joining the Black Student

Alliance, I had close friends... they all took me under their wings and groomed me as a freshman.

The network of involved Black students was strong and they strategized among themselves and a few supportive faculty and staff members on the process of gaining entry into the elite leadership positions.

The stories of the Black student leaders and White administrators in the Division of Student Services were vastly different. Mr. Poller (pseudonym), a white campus administrator during the late 1980s and early 1990s, shared that the administration charged with overseeing campus life was diligent in seeking participation from African American students. Mr. Poller recalled, “back then, Incept, Spotlight, SGA... had all administrators scratching their heads and saying ‘how can we get the African American students involved? We need more African American students.... It was predominantly run by White students at that time.’” Ms. Conrad’s reflections and memories of White campus administrators at Georgia State were much different than Mr. Poller’s:

They were very stale, they didn’t give opportunities to African American students. They always dealt with their favorites... I remember applying for Incept. I wanted to be an Inceptor so bad. I went out for it twice and was told that I wasn’t qualified. Come to find out, the Dean of Students only wanted a small quota of Black males and Black females. And then I saw the pattern.... Spotlight, particularly in the late 80s to the early 90s, only had one African American female and one African American male. I ran for Director of Spotlight and I didn’t get it. I was competing with a white male, and come to find out some

of the people who were making decisions took him out to eat [and promised him the position] before the selection process was complete.

Despite Ms. Conrad's hard feelings and disappointment in not being allowed to participate in certain organizations, she and other African Americans recognized the importance of their campus engagement. Ms. Conrad later shared:

African American students had a saying..., "I burn the candles at both ends. I know your world, I know mine." So I have to be able to burn the candles at both ends. But a lot of White students, they only burn the candle at their end and that's it. They don't care if our end is burning, flaming, extinguished, or whatever. It's their world.

In the late 1980s, a series of racially charged events would further drive a wedge in the purported "racial harmony" of the GSU campus. The GSU Pi Kappa Alpha (Pikes) fraternity's "Soul Party," where members would imitate African American performance groups in Black face, received local media attention (Georgia State University, 1987). Although GSU administrators quelled campus disruption from the Pikes event, the fuse of anger was lit among minority students. The frustration of African Americans and other underrepresented groups would ultimately ignite a series of events that would change the face of Georgia State University for years to come.

New Era of Activism – Impact of the 1992 Sit-In

African American students were determined to advance their status and receive respect at Georgia State University, even if it meant civil disobedience. Zimmerman (1969) argues that student acts of disobedience were often rooted in their desire to "advance moral ends" (p. 32). By 1992, dramatic shifts in minority student campus

participation at GSU were underway. In the *Annual Report to the President 1991-92*, the Student Life section noted that the Division of Student Services was actively encouraging the employment of minority students in their offices, in alignment with the other university affirmative action initiatives. Student Services worked with the newly formed Office of African American Student Services and Programs to develop a variety of new programs for Black students. During the 1991-92 year, African American students held leadership positions as Student Government Association President, Chair of the Spotlight Programs, Graduate Life Chair, GSTV Director, and Video Resources Director. As much as university progress was made in minority student participation and campus engagement, 1992 proved to be a challenging year for Georgia State University.

Georgia State University welcomed Dr. Carl Patton as the new university president in July of 1992. Dr. Patton's first year at the helm of the university was highlighted by racial tension among students. The university's student newspaper, *The Signal*, provided me with dynamic insight into the campus climate and a series of events that would change the institution. African American Studies courses were offered for the first time at Georgia State University according to one fall semester's headlines. During the early months of the fall 1992 semester, a number of *Signal* articles noted the racial climate and discussions that were ongoing among students. Titles such as "Race Relations Forum Begins" and "Honest Dialogue Key to Racial Understanding" were commonplace until November 6, 1992 when an incident caused a major campus upheaval.

"Student Protests Rock Georgia State" was the bold title in the Tuesday, November 10, 1992 issue of *The Signal*. The encounter began when a member of the

white Sigma Nu fraternity wrote a racial epithet on a trashcan and placed it in front of an organization room belonging to an African American Greek-lettered fraternity. Failing to receive an appropriate response from the university, a large group of African American students staged a protest in the office and building of President Carl Patton, virtually shutting down the business of the university (Figure 8).

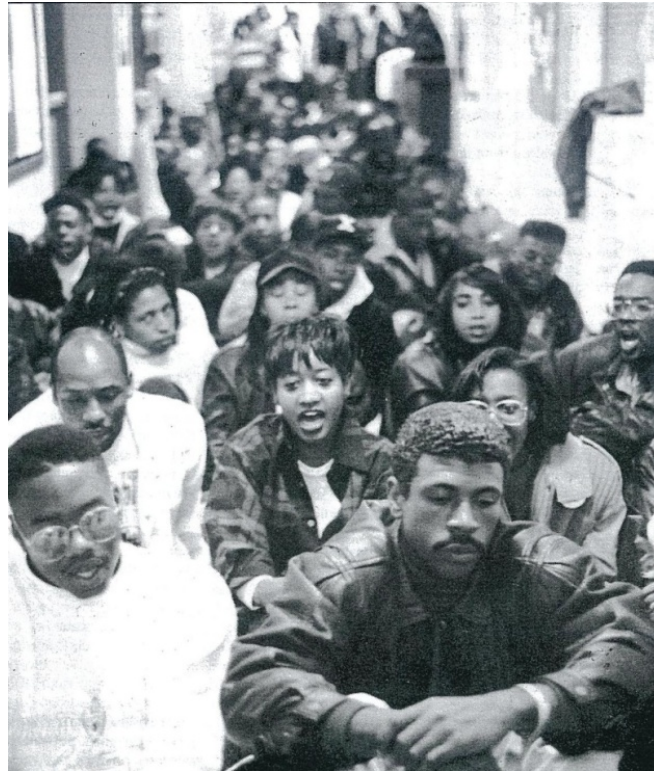


Figure 8: Student Protest, 1992

Nearly 20 years after other African American students fought for Black Studies programs at many other colleges and universities throughout the United States, the students at Georgia State were staking their claim for the inclusion of an African American Studies department that represented their interests (Bradley, 2003). The protest and demands of the student protestors led to a series of university changes, policy implementations, position reassignments, disciplinary actions, and curricular offerings to appease the minority students. However, factions of White student leaders and Greek organization members protested the president's concessions. The counter-protestors felt that President Patton's decisions were politically motivated. One student's frustration was written in the editorial section of *The Signal* ("Patton's unreason", 1992, pp. 12-A):

So why didn't Patton take action? It may have been that it looks bad enough for GSU to appear racist on the local news, but the thought of Peter Jennings opening his broadcast with: "And in Atlanta today, a university's rookie president had peaceful protestors forceably [sic] removed from his campus," probably had Patton shaking in his boots.... Patton has definitely set a precedent in his first few months at GSU, and it's a dangerous one at that.

The expression of the editorial was reminiscent of the Georgia State articles during the desegregation era of the 1950s. Media outlets took note of the GSU campus protest, with the story being published in national magazines such as *Black Issues in Higher Education* (Winbush, 1992). Over the course of the school year, a new tone had been set and the *Signal's* previous semester's articles of racial harmony were replaced with editorials and debates regarding hot-button issues such as affirmative action, the Georgia flag, gay rights, and other culturally divisive topics.

The results of the 1992 sit-in were reflected in the *Annual Report to the President 1992-93*, although the specifics elements of the uprising were noticeably absent in the formal university document. President Patton commented on the 1992 upheaval in his article “A message from the president” (Patton, 1993):

It was about a year ago that we dealt with issues raised by students concerning racial insensitivity.... Since that time, we have established a renewed commitment of cooperation and understanding.... A major achievement of which we are extremely proud was the establishment of an African-American Studies department.... Additionally, new programs in the Dean of Students Office include:

- Multicultural awareness programming and the creation of a human relations committee consisting of faculty, staff and students....
- Fraternities and sororities have been moved under the authority of the Office of Student Activities and a Greek council is being created....
- The Office of African American Student Services has been moved to the Division of Student Life and Enrollment Services.

Following Patton’s remarks, years of GSU minority student concerns regarding access to campus leadership experiences were confirmed in a short statement by the Interim Dean of Students:

The Dean of Students Division... has undergone a significant catharsis over the past year in the aftermath of student protests during Fall quarter. Subsequent to the protests was an investigation and review of the Dean of Students Division by an internal committee and external consulting firm.... The review committee and

consulting firm confirmed that the department was lacking in quality management, leadership, and sensitivity to issues of diversity. (pg. 3)

By 1993, the African American enrollment stood at 26%, nearly a 10% increase from the two years prior. As noted in the Admissions report, “affordability, location and scheduling convenience led to the highest percentage of African American students at a predominantly white institution in the state and region” (Georgia State University, 1993, p. 18). Minority students’ fight for institutional resources and access to all areas of campus life in an institutionally racist system was not expressed in any of the formal reports. Mr. Poller commented on the idea that the cause of the sit-ins was a result of a few outliers and shared,

I really felt like after those student sit-ins the majority of the student population felt like Georgia State and Dr. Patton had honestly got rid of people they felt were the problem. At least that was the student’s perception on the problem. They moved forward after that and I do not really remember any resistance at any point.

Senior Georgia State administrators set a course for putting the 1992 year behind them and the university.

A new Dean of Students, Kurt Keppler, was hired in the subsequent year as many of the former student affairs administrators either resigned or were reassigned to other positions by university officials. By the 1993-94 academic year, the Office of African American Student Services and Programs, established in 1991, served as a university-wide resource promoting diversity through programmatic initiatives. In accordance with the university’s Affirmative Action Program, each department sought to hire and advance

minority employees. Photographs of student organizations between the late 1980s and mid-1990s illustrated the influx of participation by minority students and retreat of white students in campus organizations (Figure 9). White students were the majority group in most of the pictures until the late 1990s. As the organizations became more diverse, there seemed to be an exodus of white students and ultimate resegregation by students of color, ultimately leading to a new cultural system of White disengagement in the most prestigious Georgia State University organizations.



Figure 9: Incept Team, 1996

Georgia State University Today

Georgia State University was an ideal case location for my dissertation research. The university's historical shifts in racial demographics have created a new institution that does not visually mirror its past. Today, as a large, urban, public, doctoral-granting, research institution located in the downtown heart of Atlanta, Georgia, the GSU enrollment total is 31,465 students (23,470 undergraduates), which reflects an increase of 22.2% over a ten year period. Admission to GSU is considered competitive, as only 52% of applicants are accepted on an annual basis. A majority of students are commuters who reside in the metropolitan area. Nearly 3000 students reside in the three on-campus residential facilities. The institution has a unique enrollment of racial and ethnic diversity, which provides campus racial dynamics that are different from peer institutions of similar size. Of the total student enrollment, the following are percentages by race: White 40%; Black 26%; Asian 9%; Hispanic/Latino 4%; American Indian 0.3%; Multiracial 2%; Other 2%; 12% Not Reported; and 5% Non Resident Alien. Female students represent 60% of the enrolled students. The racial demographics and political structures in the city of Atlanta, Georgia have radically changed over the past four decades (Kruse, 2005) and Georgia State has seen large enrollment increases from students of color, where minority enrollment has increased from 44% of the campus population in 1993 to 60% in 2008. In 2010, Georgia State was recognized a national model in graduating minority students, according to the Education Trust. The university increased its minority retention rate by 18.4 percentage points between 2002 and 2007 (Education Trust, 2010). In addition, the institution ranked fifth in the United States in the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to African American students. As frequently

noted by university officials, Georgia State's multicultural student demographic is part of its appeal. The university's mission statement (Georgia State University, 2011) reads,

As the only urban research university in Georgia, Georgia State University offers educational opportunities for traditional and nontraditional students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels by blending the best of theoretical and applied inquiry, scholarly and professional pursuits, and scientific and artistic expression.

As an urban research university with strong disciplinary-based departments and a wide array of problem-oriented interdisciplinary programs, the goal of the university is to develop, transmit, and utilize knowledge in order to provide access to quality education for diverse groups of students, to educate leaders for the State of Georgia and the nation, and to prepare citizens for lifelong learning in a global society.

Georgia State's communicated commitment to diversity in its mission statement and other university promotional tools has not necessarily been reflected in White student behaviors. A fundamental precept of "tipping point" theory is that an individual's behavior depends on the beliefs and behaviors of their associated group. White student control and numerical majority status in traditional student organizations have been replaced by students of color committed to taking advantage of the leadership opportunities being offered by the university. The homogenously White environment from the days of former university president, George Sparks, who refused to desegregate Georgia State, is barely recognizable. A current day visitor to Sparks Hall would observe a racially and ethnically diverse group of students moving about the campus. The loud

bump of hip-hop music can be heard in Library Plaza during break periods, while Muslim women in hijab (head scarves) can be seen rushing to the lunchtime prayer session for the Muslim Student Association. White students still represent the largest population of students; however, they are noticeably absent from certain student organizations.

My presentations on the literature related to White students' racial interactions in diverse settings were previously shared with Georgia State University administrators; however, I received minimal feedback or response. In one particular situation, a top-ranking official in Georgia State student affairs attended one of my preliminary conference presentations regarding the racial interactions at Georgia State and never made any comment to me about it. I had hoped that my initial research would lead to a divisional focus on a clearly identified topic related to campus climate and engagement; however, nothing ever moved forward. I began to question whether the same discomfort regarding issues of race that was being expressed by White students was consistent among administrators at Georgia State. It was at this point of personal enlightenment that I realized the only way that I would begin to understand the lived experiences of White students would be to interview a cross-section of involved and non-involved students, along with current and former administrators. I attempted to gain a holistic view of the students' experiences by looking at the history of the institution and comparing it to the interviews and my personal experiences.

Conclusion

Black and White students' perceptions of Georgia State campus life have changed dramatically and provide important contexts for the study of White students' (dis) engagement. College administrators sometimes refer to campus life as the glue that

maintains the organization; however, glue has the potential to be toxic in the context of institutional history and student culture. Hurtado, et al. posit that “a college’s legacy of exclusion can determine the prevailing climate and influence current practices” (1998, p. 283). The diversity of Georgia State University’s student body has continued to be a compelling issue in the attempt to achieve racial balance. My knowledge of the institution’s historical context played a significant role in my interpretation of my participants’ perceptions of the institution and therefore needed to be part of the study. In addition, it became yet another layer in a holistic presentation that is so important in case study methodology that I describe in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

A case study is a way of organizing data so as to keep the focus on totality. One who conducts case studies tries to consider the interrelationships among people, institutions, events and beliefs. Rather than breaking them down into separate items for analysis, the researcher seeks to keep all elements of the situation in sight at once. The watchword is holistic (Weiss, 1998, p. 72)

According to Schwandt (2007, p. 193), “methodology is a particular social scientific discourse (a way of acting, thinking, and speaking) that occupies a middle ground between discussions of method (procedures, techniques) and discussions of issues in the philosophy of social science.” In this chapter, I provide the conceptual framework and methods used to explore and provide “thick descriptions” of White student (dis) engagement (Crotty, 1998, p. 18; Geertz, 1973; Ryle, 1949). I will discuss the rationale for the choice of methodology and how it facilitated the research process in terms of the design, implementation, and representation of findings.

Case Study Methodology

Case study research is a methodology that allows for the study of unique phenomena like White student (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations at a racially transitioning institution. My goal was to explore the experiences and perceptions of White students at Georgia State with greater analytical depth and a variety of tools as methods. Yin defines the case study research as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of

evidence are used” (2003, p. 23). It therefore was a perfect fit because the perceptions of White student engagement are limited to the real-life period in which the study was conducted. Generally, this methodology allows researchers to answer one or more questions which begin with “how” or “what.” Yin also includes “why” as a question to be answered in case study research methodology. This methodology therefore afforded me the opportunity to design the study using various types of questions. More importantly, I could explore why White students at GSU are disengaging from traditional student organizations.

Researchers use case study methodology when the social behavior or situation is so unique that other methods involving larger groups of participants are not possible (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Researchers that use case studies confirm that the methodology can be a disciplined force in setting public policy and reflecting on the human experience (Stake, 2005). In the analysis of an institution, case studies are not designed to represent the world, but to represent the case through methods that enlighten the reader’s understanding of the case. Case study research often involves collecting and examining various observations and records of an individual’s experience and/or behaviors.

Critics of the case study and other qualitative methodologies argue that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability and generalizability of research findings. Simons (1996) argues that the researchers’ large amounts of time spent with participants and continued exposure to the study of the case biases the findings. However, many educational researchers continue to successfully use case study as a methodological framework in carefully organized studies of real

situations, issues, and problems within educational institutions. The boundaries of a case allow scholars to represent sociological issues within its actual context.

Case study methodology was particularly useful in the current study, as I attempted to acquire a detailed contextual view of White student engagement in campus organizations. Case studies can also assist in understanding social and familial factors that might be part of the development of certain behaviors and perspectives. The studies can serve as the conduit to answer many of the numerous questions in educational environments. My goal was to use the methodology to produce a report that may influence policy and encourage broad discourse at Georgia State University and other institutions in the academy.

The research questions in case studies are often targeted to a limited number of events or conditions and their interrelationships. Based on the literature review in Chapter 2 and contexts of Chapter 3, case study methodology enabled me to highlight the issues of engagement, interracial interactions, diversity, and Whiteness that informed the research topic. In addition, the use of case study methodology enhanced my view of how White students at Georgia State make sense of their own realities in a comprehensive way. One cannot provide a holistic view of the case of Georgia State without presenting the story of the institution that is both the setting for the study and the context of the study.

Through case studies, researchers are able to understand the development in a process as it happens. The questions posed can take into account the time period and history of individuals and institutions as factors that influence the study (Spradley, 1980). The boundaries for my dissertation case study of Georgia State included enrolled students

and staff members during the 2009-2010 academic year. I focused my oral history interviews of former students and administrators during the time periods from the late 1990s through early 2000s. Without any sense of intentionality, case study research can answer questions related to unanticipated or unplanned events, such as White student (dis) engagement at Georgia State University. To “undertake an investigation into a phenomenon in its context” (Rowley, 2002, p. 18), I utilize the following conceptual framework for basic research assumptions and direction in the process of understanding the lives of White GSU students.

Conceptual Framework

Constructionism is the epistemological foundational theory rooted in the belief that knowledge “is being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). A key principle for constructionism is that the mind is actively engaged in the construction of truth and knowledge, and knowing is an active process. The core principle of constructionism is that human beings construct the meaning of the world we live in (Crotty, 1998). The construction of knowledge is most evident in the social experiences of college students and the documents that result from their interactions. This conceptual framework undergirds the design of my research study on White student (dis) engagement and provides the assumptions that allow me to link my collected data and research questions. As noted in Prior’s (2002) text, using this conceptual framework in this study allowed me to “investigate some of the ways in which human subjectivity and human identity are tied up with documentation” (p. 92).

Schwandt (2000) describes the interpretivist point of view in great detail and situates it as an epistemological stance. For this research study, I utilized interpretivism as a theoretical perspective that grounds my “philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). In an attempt to understand the sociocultural experiences of White students, the interpretivist approach provided me with a breadth of theoretical perspectives and research options. Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics are derivatives of the interpretivist framework and were used as additional theories to assist in the exploration of White students’ (dis) engagement at Georgia State University.

Theoretical perspectives.

According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), the assumption of symbolic interactionism is that “the human experience is mediated by interpretation.” Different groups of students will define objects and situations in terms that have cultural meaning. Symbolic interactionism aided in my interpretation and analysis of data collected from observations and interviews. I operated from the perspective that students within the same White culture may have shared or varying perspectives of their experiences as racial minorities in traditional student organizations at a predominantly White university with high levels of involvement by students of color. Throughout my analysis of the student interview data, I recognized that the different backgrounds and social experiences of the White students could lead to engagement or disengagement in campus life. Crotty (1998) warned that as the primary researcher, the perspective of the actors must be cautiously considered to learn about a social phenomena.

The utilization of hermeneutics as a theoretical perspective allowed texts to be used in the transmission of meaning. Schwandt (2000) describes hermeneutics as a

radical process for further interpretive understanding. The use of data from archived texts allowed me, in my role as the researcher, to derive meanings that were buried within objects, whether they were written or visual documents. Documents such as university articles, reports, student organization rosters, student newspaper articles, and the research results from a quantitative leadership research study allowed me the opportunity for rich interpretation and analysis of data (Crotty, 1998). A thorough review of university documents highlighting racial demographic changes in campus organizations was helpful in understanding the experiences of White students related to involvement. Photographic images that I used as texts in a photo elicitation process that allowed interviewees to further share thoughts, perceptions, and meaning of their GSU experience.

The holistic nature of the case study methodology directed me to the important questions of historical origin and how they serve as catalysts to increased racial imbalance. In studying a cultural phenomenon, it is critical to identify the historical evolution of beliefs and ideals. Research questions can provide an in-depth analysis of complex social issues as they relate to education, as long as they are consistent with the research methodology. Additionally, this process enables researchers to view how the participants make sense of their own realities. Throughout the use of qualitative research design, and specifically case study methodology, the researcher's role as an active learner is emphasized (Creswell, 2003). An understanding of the limitations and strengths of case studies allowed me to grow as a researcher and assisted in the design of my research study on student engagement.

Implementation

In my study of White student experiences at an institution undergoing racial transition toward more students of color, evaluating the setting was critical. My research on the university's history and personal knowledge of White student (dis) engagement made Georgia State an appropriate case. The methods of collecting data for this study included interviews (formal, structured, and oral history) of currently enrolled students and former campus administrators, document analysis, archival research, and visual research. Results from the interviews required content analysis to narrow the acquired information (Crotty, 1998). Document analysis of archived texts (yearbooks, organization rosters, and university enrollment statistics) allowed for rich interpretation, analysis, and crystallization of data (Crotty, 1998; Janesick, 2000; Richardson, 2000).

Methods are the specific techniques used to acquire data in a research project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). An investigation of the influence of minority-majority ratios on White student engagement was an important cultural analysis in my research study; therefore, the selection of methods was of extreme importance. Along with the established methods, the selection of Georgia State University past and present students and administrators as an appropriate case served me well in obtaining a volume of rich data related to the understanding of experiences of White students as they relate to engagement in leadership roles in campus organizations.

Participants.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, where I chose "particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I targeted those students and administrators that were well-informed and had strong perspectives on the diversity of student organizations at

Georgia State. The primary participants in the study were White students who were involved in traditional student organizations and those who were not involved in the same organizations. I invited eight current and former students to participate in the study over the course of two semesters. To recruit the participants, I asked campus administrators in student affairs, academic departments, and recreational sports to nominate students with whom they worked to participate in the study. I cross-referenced the selected students with organization rosters from the Office of Student Activities that allowed me to determine the students who have been involved in the Student Government Association, Spotlight Programming Board, or Incept Team. I selected the aforementioned organizations to maximize the settings where experiences with racial difference would be regular and racial diversity concerns would be prominent. Each of the organizations has undergone major racial shifts in student leadership and are known in the university community for being prestigious involvement opportunities. Only student participants of sophomore status or higher were selected for participation, as students higher than sophomore classification are more apt to have an understanding of the campus culture and environment. The former and current administrator participants were individuals with knowledge of the university's campus organizations. Former student and administrator interviews provided historical context for the racial changes in campus organizations.

Student profiles.

Chase

Chase is a 21-year-old, White, male sophomore student from an Atlanta suburban neighborhood. As an avid sports enthusiast, he had a desire to attend either Georgia Tech

or the University of Georgia, but was unable to be admitted to the institutions due to his low grades. His father is an alumnus of Georgia State, so he was familiar with the campus early in his childhood, but after those early years, he had minimal interaction with the university until he enrolled. Once enrolled at Georgia State, his involvement in campus activities was limited. Chase felt a cultural disconnect from the GSU campus and social life, which eased his decision to transfer to UGA at the conclusion of his sophomore year. He longed for a traditional campus environment wherein he could fit.

Daniel

Daniel is a 20-year-old, sophomore, White, male student who excelled in sports at a suburban Atlanta high school. Daniel considered Georgia State as an educational option, but did not apply until late in the admission process. Prior to being accepted to the university, he had never visited the campus, yet the downtown Atlanta environment appealed to him. As an on-campus student, Daniel's friends were a small group of White males who were involved in Greek life or intramural lacrosse. He enjoyed the cultural "vibe" of the campus and would frequently observe the Black Greek organizations "step" when disc jockeys played hip-hop music on the university plaza. Daniel's favorite music genre is Hip-hop that is frequently played at GSU social events. He was consistently chided by his White friends for spectating at campus cultural events where Hip-hop music was played, although most of his interactions were executed from afar. After two years of matriculating at Georgia State, Daniel decided to transfer to the University of Georgia in which he could more actively participate in a more traditional college campus.

Gabe

As a 23-year-old, White, male, senior student, Gabe has witnessed Georgia State evolve over the period of his matriculation. The product of a long lineage of Georgia State alumni, Gabe's preference was to attend a different institution, but he decided on GSU due to its ROTC program. He had frequently visited the GSU Village residence halls that were located near the Georgia Tech campus when his brother was an enrolled student, but the urban campus and older residence hall did not appeal to him. Gabe focused primarily on his academic endeavors until he joined an Interfraternity Council (IFC) fraternity. He decided to participate in the Student Government Association because he was unimpressed with the quality of their performance. Gabe felt that students of color were intentionally controlling the power of traditional student organizations and preventing White student involvement. Through his SGA involvement, Gabe was able to make strong connections with White campus administrators and share his thoughts on improving the campus climate. He felt that the university's emphasis on diversity was forced and executed to the detriment of White students.

Helen

Helen is a 21-year-old, White, female, high academic-achieving senior from a northeastern county of Georgia. For a "southern girl" with allergies to grass and hay, Georgia State's urban campus was a perfect fit for Helen. Being raised in a strong religious household, Helen was not interested in attending any of the larger Georgia colleges that were well-known for a party atmosphere. She immediately joined a freshman learning community during her first semester and became engaged in a variety of student organizations. Helen was one of the few White students who supported a range of campus events, regardless of the racial demographics, although she preferred to

attend and hoped for more events that were catered toward White students. She never joined any of the traditional student groups or Greek organizations, but was highly regarded by other students across different racial and cultural affiliations. With plans to graduate in three years, Helen enjoyed her Georgia State experience and was preparing to move toward graduate study at an institution with a more traditional campus.

Jessica

Jessica is a 20-year-old, White, female, sophomore student from a fast-growing, affluent Georgia county. After reconciling her disappointment with not being accepted to her first choice institution, the University of Georgia, she chose Georgia State. Upon enrolling at Georgia State, Jessica fell in love with the campus and residence life. Residential living was the conduit to her learning about and connecting with the GSU campus. Living in downtown Atlanta required some “getting used to,” but she quickly became engaged in the Residence Hall Association (RHA) and Spotlight Programming Board. As a member of RHA, Jessica was responsible for residential students’ participation in campus life, but she was consistently frustrated by the lack of willingness of White students to engage in activities. She felt that she was selected for a leadership role to assist with White recruitment in campus programs; however, she viewed the task as daunting.

Karen

In her third year at Georgia State University, Karen is a 21-year-old, White, female of sophomore status who is just “taking her time” and enjoying the campus experience. She grew up in a metropolitan Atlanta suburb and always dreamed of attending college in a city environment. Her parents balked at her desire to attend Georgia State and viewed the institution as second-tier to the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech. Karen was very

intentional in her choice of Georgia State and appreciated the differences between the diverse GSU campus and her racially homogenous, upper-class high school. Karen was often an outcast from other Whites because she chose not to participate in clannish behaviors. Although she viewed Greek life as “snobby,” Karen joined a sorority and became very active in leadership roles. Throughout her Greek experience, Karen found difficulty in encouraging her sorority members to expand their social networks and participate in campus activities.

Kyser

Kyser, a 22-year-old, White, male, senior student, only intended to attend a traditional university campus, but failed to connect with any of the institutions during tours and visits. As a high school student, he enjoyed socializing in the downtown Atlanta area and toured Georgia State on a whim. Kyser instantly fell in love with the campus and described it as, “a vibe thing.” He began his involvement through joining a freshmen learning community and immediately became engaged in an assortment of student organizations. Kyser felt that being selected to the Incept team was a bold start, as he was the only White male in the group. The relationships that he developed through Incept helped him develop a racially diverse group of friends. At one point, he was recruited and considered joining an historically Black Greek fraternity, but was afraid of being viewed as a racial token by the broader campus. His participation in intercultural oriented activities allowed Kyser to explore his Whiteness and work toward encouraging other Whites to limit their use of stereotypes.

Tony

As a 22-year-old, White, male, senior student, and self-described introvert, Tony quickly learned, through his involvement at Georgia State, that he had previously lived in a cultural bubble. He attributed much of his personal development to joining a freshmen learning community, which led him to join an IFC Greek fraternity during his first year. Extensive leadership in Greek Life, led Tony to campaign for and win an elected Student Government Association seat. He maintained relationships with students of color from his learning community, but spent most of his social time with his fraternity. As Tony became more involved in other student groups, he attempted to encourage other White Greeks to participate, yet to no avail.

Administrator profiles.

Ms. Conrad

Ms. Conrad maintains extensive Georgia State University institutional history from her initial enrollment as a student in the late 1980s through her transition into an administrative role. As an African American, female, she began her student experience with excitement and zeal for campus involvement, but became dismayed by the lack of leadership opportunities for Black students. Ms. Conrad was an active participant in the 1992 sit-in and was offered a staff position after graduation. Since her promotion into a staff role, she has observed the racial shifts in student organizations over nearly two decades.

Mr. Elliott

Mr. Elliott is a younger Black professional who worked within the student affairs division in the late 2000s. His role was to work with students and encourage their development in specific university programs. Having attended predominantly White institutions, as a

student, Mr. Elliott was impressed with the extensive involvement among students of color at Georgia State. In his work role, White supervisors and administrators charged him with increasing the participation among White students in his program. After a variety of uncomfortable experiences regarding his role in promoting more White inclusion, he decided to depart Georgia State for a new job opportunity.

Mrs. Howe

Mrs. Howe is a White female who was born and raised in the Atlanta area. She attended a predominantly Black high school after a majority of Whites moved to schools in other districts to prevent from attending an integrated school. Mrs. Howe transferred to Georgia State in the mid 1990s after attending another college, and quickly became engaged in campus life. She held a number of executive positions in traditional student organizations and decided to pursue a career in student affairs upon graduation. Mrs. Howe returned to Georgia State in an administrative role after completing graduate school. The demographics of GSU had changed dramatically since her undergraduate years when White students were the dominant racial group in campus leadership. African American students now held most positions in traditional student organizations. Ms. Howe worked with student groups through positive and sometimes tumultuous racial interactions.

Mr. Poller

Mr. Poller, a White male, began his career at Georgia State during the 1980s. After a series of promotions, he found himself in a leadership role and supervising student groups within the Division of Student Affairs. Mr. Poller recognized the increased desire for students of color to become engaged in campus life, although he felt the university was

not prepared to handle the new racial dynamics. He maintained close relationships with White senior-level administrators and did not blame them for the racial upheaval at Georgia State in the early 1990s. By the mid 1990s, Mr. Poller was reassigned by new administrators to another campus position in which he no longer supervised student organizations. He observed the racial transition in traditional student organizations from primarily White to mostly African American prior to his university departure in the early 2000s upon feelings that the new student affairs administrators were not in his favor. Mr. Poller transitioned into a new career profession.

Interviews.

Speculations for answers to my research questions arose from my interview data collection process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Constructionism allows the researcher to emphasize the stories of participants. In my study, the rich and honest nature of the interview dialogue provided me with a holistic picture of White students' experiences in Georgia State campus life. I conducted multiple interviews with current and former students, and current and former administrators. Interviews were scheduled after casual conversations and meetings with the interviewees to allow time to build relationships that lead to honest, thorough, and descriptive responses. All of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

My research questions have a very clear racial component and I made that a very overt element of my interview questioning. The creation of broad, open-ended main questions allowed the conversations to dictate the follow-up questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). My intent was to treat each participant as an expert on the subject of student engagement, which assisted in rapport building. Following the "opening-the-

locks” pattern of discovery through interview discourse from the Rubin and Rubin (2005) text allowed me to uncover data, as experienced by the participants and conveyed in their own language. After interview transcription, follow-up interviews were used with certain participants to verify information and further pursue critical information or themes shared in the initial interview.

Oral history interviews.

Oral history interviews of former Georgia State University students and administrators provided me with further understanding of the racial transition at the institution. Davis (1968) explores the academic similarities of cultural anthropology and historical disciplines. Davis posits that there are challenges and opportunities for historians to reinvestigate cultural patterns and their influence on the history that is created. The convergence of the two areas of culture and history were explored in my dissertation, as Davis states that “all history is cultural history, and objects once dismissed as insignificant except for antiquarian collectors may now be soberly scrutinized as ‘cultural artifacts’” (1968, p. 697). In addition, the author argues that historians have lacked sensitivity towards cultures and their associated subcultures.

Additionally, oral history interviews provided me with an avenue to revisit research in order to identify gaps regarding student engagement at Georgia State. I conducted oral history interviews with three former administrators that were present during Georgia State’s racial transition in student organizations during the 1990s. The conversations with participants were challenging and constantly evolving as I became more comfortable with the participants and grew as a researcher. According to Errante, “the oral history event itself must foster this sense of trust, respect and validation as the

remembering and telling and listening and probing unfold” (2000, p. 20). My method of conducting the oral interviews allowed me to delve further into the experiences of the students and administrators and place those experiences within a historical context. A personal transformation took place throughout the research process, as I used the data from the oral history interviews to identify social situations on the Georgia State campus.

Archival data.

Georgia State University Pullen Library served as an excellent resource in finding documents that aided in my framing the historical context of racial changes in campus organizations. Archival research led me to analyze important historical documents such as student newspaper articles on racial conflict, the university president’s annual reports, and *Rampway* yearbook photographs. Primary sources are ideal in the conducting of research and “repositories are most likely to have the necessary evidence, whether the researcher is pursuing the surviving material of a particular person or organization” (Grigg, 1991). “A document serves to constitute an event or phenomenon of which it is itself part” (Prior, 2002, p. 68). Further review of additional documents allowed me to understand the experiences of students in a more holistic manner. Previous reports and studies related to students’ perceptions of campus climate by race can be beneficial documents. I used the document analysis experience to delve into the social and involvement experiences of White students at Georgia State University by writing an historical chapter that provides background context for the current study.

Visual data.

The utilization of hermeneutics as a theoretical framework allows current and archived texts to be used by scholars in the transmission of meaning. Aspects of

hermeneutics guided my data analysis and interpretations. The photographs of student organization transition that I found through my early archival research were the most critical documents in foreshadowing the direction of my study on White students at Georgia State University. “Visual research methods has also become increasingly widespread throughout the social sciences” (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008). Visual and written texts work together to represent different types of knowledge, and usually visual knowledge cannot be directly or adequately translated into written words; however, I found unique opportunities for its use in this study (Pink, 2004, p. 396). Although visual photographs inspired my interest in the topic of White student (dis) engagement, I did not realize the types of responses that visual data could elicit, until I shared historical photos of the racial changes in student organizations with my professional colleagues. A number of my colleagues expressed amazement in seeing the visual representation of Georgia State’s racial changes.

I have been excited to see the demographic changes of membership within some of the organizations once I review of the archival data. “When we photograph, we re-create our unexamined, taken-for-granted perceptions,” and the obtained photographs can validate the historical changes in racial composition in student leadership positions (D. Harper, 2000, p. 729). The use of visual images will never tell the complete story of the informants; however, they served to complement the written analysis. A critique of using visual images is that they are potentially subjective, based on the perspective of the photographer (Emmison & Smith, 2000). I used the images carefully with the knowledge that I “should not approach an image with the assumption that it represents reality” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 65). Visual data can assist me and my audience in “imagining

wholes from parts” of the student experience at Georgia State University (Coover, 2004, p. 194). As previously noted, photographs can be useful in understanding the cultural experiences as that will be described through the student interviews. “This approach to cross-cultural image-making builds relationships between images as well as different viewing conditions to create an experience of context” (Coover, 2004, p. 197). The final interpretation and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of White students at Georgia State University required thorough analysis of all of the collected data.

Representation

Many ethnographers utilize the “naturalized transcription” process, but “denaturalized transcription” allowed me to focus on the informational content of the interview (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005) and illustrate the lived experiences of White students at a university that has witnessed shifts in student organizations’ racial balance. Interview statements that raise additional questions from the transcribed material were selected for further review. In treating the interviews as general conversations, I analyzed the questions that I asked in my role as the researcher. There is great complexity in the interactions between human beings, and my analysis of the organic flow of the interview conversations aided in my personal development as a researcher (Scheurich, 1995). Student membership within the same White culture may have shared or varying perspectives of their experiences as racial minorities in traditional student organizations at a university with high levels of involvement by students of color. As the primary researcher, the perspective of the participants was cautiously considered to learn about the social phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Content analysis of data from the study of racial dynamics and majority-minority ratios were cross-referenced with topics

from my literature review to determine whether there was consistency between my data and previous research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Document analysis of archived texts (yearbooks, organization rosters, and university enrollment statistics) allowed for rich interpretation and analysis of data (Crotty, 1998; Prior, 2002).

At the conclusion of the data collection for this dissertation, I managed a sizeable quantity of written and recorded data. I spent two semesters of the study analyzing and synthesizing the data (Appendix A). The process of personally transcribing the interviews was the most time-consuming and intense aspect of data analysis; however, it allowed me to reflect further on the interview conversations (see Table 3, pg. 81). During the early phase of analysis, I assigned all participants pseudonyms to protect their identity. The data and key for the pseudonyms that I collected were maintained in two separately locked file cabinets within my office. Additional university documents were also secured and organized for accessibility throughout the analysis process.

Table 3
Research Questions & Data Sources

	RQ#1 What are the White students' and administrators' perceptions of the institution?	RQ#2 What are the White students' perceptions of traditional student organizations?	RQ#3 How do these perceptions influence White students' (dis) engagement?
Primary Data Sources			
Documents	X		
Interviews	X	X	X
Photo elicitation interviews	X	X	X
Visual data	X		X

At the representation stage of the research design, I coded the interviews to establish consistent findings and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The coding process is about “going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks” (Coffey, 1996, p. 30). I chose to use a combination of hand coding, and digital and qualitative software to “expand, transform, and reconceptualize the data” (p. 29), allowing me to see the information through multiple lenses and move toward interpretation. Early analysis began with my utilization of the Wordle software (Figure 10), which allowed for the creation of word clouds as an educational research tool (McNaught & Lam, 2010). The software program allowed me to work with my authentic interview text and visually see word frequency to start the development of potential themes. I began an initial line-by-line coding process, followed by focused and axial coding to create emergent categories and findings (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to the previously stated coding process, I used the NVivo qualitative software for easier textual data management and retrieval of coded data.

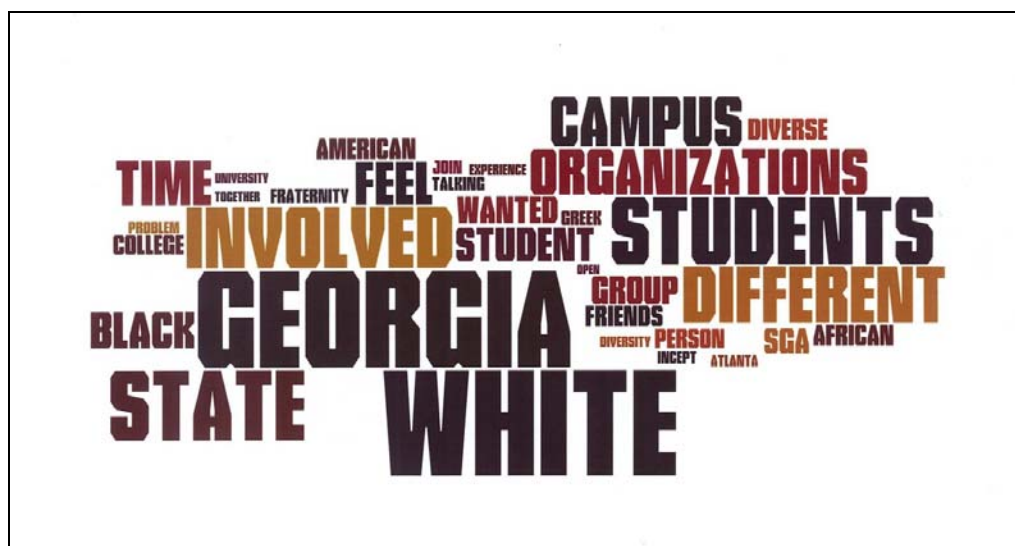


Figure 10: Wordle: Student Interviews

Students painted vivid descriptions of their selection of Georgia State, impressions of student organizations, and their rationales for (dis) engagement in campus activities. Additionally, student respondents shared their ideas of how to make student life more appealing to current and future White students. A process of photo elicitation allowed students and administrators, alike, to view historical visual images of Georgia State and reconcile their present experiences with the institution's past. Lastly, participants commented on the positive experiences and attributes of attending and/or working at a racially diverse university in the southeastern region of the United States. From these basic findings, I created a series of subcategories to further describe the lived experience of White students in student life and traditional student organizations (Appendix G).

The final step of interpreting the results of the proposed study involved crystallization of the data to validate my research design (Janesick, 2000). Crystallization is an interpretation method that allows for an interdisciplinary approach to the evaluation of data. All established findings that I identified through the data analysis process of the study were narrowed down to a smaller focus for written results. On occasion, follow-up with research participants was necessary to verify the accuracy of their responses. During the final period of analysis, I added my personal reflections, feelings, and critiques to the overall narrative.

Ethical stance.

Any research conducted, especially of a qualitative nature, must adhere to strict research design and methodology to maintain ethical standards. Prior to any fieldwork, my first step was to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study.

Before the interviews, I had all participants sign an informed consent form and complete a personal data form. Records were kept private to the extent allowed by law and shared information was not relayed to teachers, staff, or advisors that may have recommended the student participants. A primary reason for IRB review and consent form is the protection of human participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005), but a major issue in my research design was my desire to remove anonymity from the institution case, Georgia State University. In the critical analysis of my proposed study, it is important for readers to know where the university is positioned socially, culturally, and geographically (Nespor, 2000). According to Nespor, “research that ignores the historical and geographical processes that produce and maintain places in larger networks of practice becomes complicit in the silences and exclusions upon which those spaces are premised” (2000, p. 554). My belief is that removing anonymity from the Georgia State University and personal disclosure as a researcher would assist in orienting future researchers. Needless to say, the process for receiving this approval was quite arduous, as universities are commonly nervous and skeptical of critical analysis of their institutions. The Georgia State University Office of Legal Affairs thoroughly reviewed my proposal for the removal of anonymity over a two-month period, and ultimately approved my use of the university’s name in this dissertation study through the Institutional Review Board.

Role of the researcher & trustworthiness.

Another significant line of inquiry in this dissertation was my role as the principal investigator in the research. Alridge argues that “it is... the African American scholar who faces double-consciousness as a researcher” (2003, p. 26). Throughout this

educational process of becoming a researcher, I have wrestled with promoting my historical and cultural connection to the African American community, while writing and communicating the topic of White student engagement to an academic audience of predominantly White educators, researchers, and administrators.

Over time, awareness of personal biases assisted in balancing my subjectivity. To allow for the development of new knowledge and meaning of the observed phenomena of White (dis) engagement, I entered the field with limitations of my personal biases. In studying White students, recognizing my insider-outsider status as a researcher assisted me in observing the subjective components of their behavior. I ensured trustworthiness in this study through a combination of member checks and peer debriefing. Member checks were also used to verify the qualitative research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I invited each of the research participants to review their interview transcript. Advisement from my doctoral committee and my personal level of moral integrity toward academic scholarship guided my ethical stance. Teleological ethics, along with critical philosophy and advocacy, situate me closely with participants as I attempt to positively contribute to academic scholarship (W. F. May, 1980).

The analysis and representation includes my interpretations and critique of the data, as opposed to an actual “truth.” In my research role, I am situated as both emic and etic in this project, where I maintain insider and outsider perspectives (Merriam, 1998). In the spirit of disclosure and ethical research methods, I acknowledge that my beliefs and interpretations are derived from my personal experiences and position as an administrator at Georgia State University. As an employee of the institution, I have been granted an opportunity to witness a unique phenomenon of White student (dis)

engagement in traditional student organizations. Although I do not currently work in a campus student affairs unit, my knowledge of the campus culture from my previous role as a student affairs practitioner provided me valuable insight and direction in researching student engagement. As I would love to see myself as an insider, based on my university affiliation, I am still a cultural outsider to the students, which assists in framing my arguments. “This approach to cross-cultural image-making builds relationships between images as well as different viewing conditions to create an experience of context” (Coover, 2004, p. 197).

In order learn about and experience the lived experiences of White students at Georgia State, I conducted extensive interviewing and analysis of documents to explore the beliefs and thoughts of the participants. The process of research representation was more challenging as I used interpretivism as a theoretical construct. We interpret truths from a cultural standpoint and I acknowledge that I am telling the students’ stories through the lens of my interpretation. In addition to my chosen theoretical orientations and research methods, my role and subjectivities as an African American male dominate my writings, as I observe the oppressive forces that exist in schools and the broader society (Crotty, 1998). The results of this dissertation are not intended to be an indictment of the less politically-favorable aspects of Georgia State University’s culture, but rather used to improve the retention environment of all students.

Conclusion

Educational research is critical in explaining complex social educational problems, such as structural constraints and human agency (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001). Through the established methodology, I aimed to explore White

students' perceptions of Georgia State and its traditional student organizations.

Methodology such as case study fosters researchers' ability to become sensitive observers of cultures by conducting studies and forming assessments within a culturally relevant framework (Simons, 1996). There are clearly challenges in the use of case study and all other research methodologies; however, there are larger societal implications to not digging deeper into the causes of the results. My delving into Georgia State White students' experiences and their perceptions of campus climates provided me with invaluable insight into a university that is undergoing racial transition and tipping toward more engagement from students of color.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Every person has either experienced or observed a “tipping point” or “point of no return” where things will never go back to the way they were. Gladwell’s (2000) definition of a tipping point as “the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point” was based on Schelling’s (1971) model of racial segregation. Clotfelter (2001) argued that there is a consistent pattern of racial transition, with White students departing urban, public institutions. I would add that the demographic shifts are also taking place at institutions of higher education. Denson and Chang (2009) claim that academic and social gains from student engagement can be made by students who attend racially diverse institutions. Unfortunately, the history of racial segregation in higher education has made those gains more difficult to attain. In this chapter, I re-present White students’ perceptions of Georgia State student life and leadership in traditional student organizations. The narratives I construct in this chapter based on my analysis of the data are important in understanding: (1) White students’ perceptions of Georgia State and its traditional student organizations, (2) their use of GSU as a transitional space, and (3) how these perceptions contributed to their (dis)engagement.

Perceptions of GSU

The Georgia State University campus environment is viewed differently through the lens and era of each observer. The comments from interview participants about their rationale for choosing Georgia State quickly evolved into a series of conversations about their perceptions of the university prior to enrollment and once they made a commitment

to enroll. The images that the students painted of their perceptions of the campus were vivid and aided in my expansion of knowledge from previous participant observations.

Prior to conducting my research interviews, in an effort to explore the experiences of White students, I participated in a campus tour of Georgia State that targeted new or potential students. After perusing a few of the brochures that were distributed by the Georgia State Welcome Center, I was drawn to a double-sided, two-dimensional brochure (Figure: 11) that highlights the Welcome Center tour for prospective students. According to my short discussion with staff and students in the Welcome Center, the brochures are included in the university's admission packet and were also distributed by counselors during their visits to high schools. Upon a cursory view, the document was similar to other marketing brochures that are provided by collegiate institutions. One side of the document includes short blurbs about the information sessions and the process for scheduling tours whether you are an individual or coordinating a larger group. In my quest to obtain thick, rich data, I focused my analysis on the visual images on the front of the brochure and the stories behind their inclusion (Geertz, 1973) .



Figure 11: Welcome Center Tour Brochure

Thematically the images and text of the brochure highlight the excitement of attending an urban university. Four of the six photographs on the cover of the brochure depict the downtown Atlanta area. Two of the photographs were situated next to each other to show the dichotomy between day and night life in the Atlanta city. Since the hosting of the 1996 Olympic ceremonies, Centennial Olympic Park has become a notable landmark in the Atlanta downtown. Georgia State University capitalizes on the proximity to the historic site by including it in the brochure and administrators tout its urban appeal. Students were prominently featured in the other two brochure photographs. A young,

White woman stands with exuberance next to an enlarged map of the Georgia State University campus. The remaining photograph includes a group shot of students in front of the Student*University Center. Based on my observation of the students' racial identities, there was one black female, one Asian female, three White females, one White male, and two Black males. I was drawn to this image on the brochure because the students were wearing shirts that are consistent with those of the Incept team, a group of students who serve as tour guides during new student orientation. I recognized some of the students from previous personal interactions, but I never remembered the Incept team being so ethnically diverse. During my tenure, I observed the Incept team consisting primarily of students of color, with the majority being of African descent. I later learned that the university's promotional materials were a frequent source of humor for many administrators of color. According to them, Georgia State would frequently invite additional White students to participate in certain photos to provide a more welcoming environment for potential White students. I began to wonder if administrators were attempting to place the previously touted diversity initiatives back into the proverbial box and was it working in enhancing the experiences of White students? My interview participants were expressive when our topics turned toward their personal perceptions of the university.

Choosing to attend Georgia State.

There were a multitude of complex issues that influenced the participants' decisions to attend Georgia State. For the purpose of cohesion, I explored the most salient themes that emerged from the data. Student choices were influenced by college options, family relationships, and location of the institution. Student often expressed that Georgia State

was not their first-choice but served as a “back up plan” for those students still awaiting the opportunity to transfer.

Students in the study noted that GSU was not their first choice:

In high school, I wasn't very strict on my grades. I was not really thinking about my grades as far as going to college, but I found out that with my grades I was limited to go to schools like Georgia Tech and Georgia, schools that I would have gone to if I would have had the grades. That's when I had the opportunity to come to Georgia State.

- Chase

Originally, I wanted to go into civil engineering over at Georgia Tech, but I quickly realized my math skills were kind of in the toilet...[laughter]. So, for the most part I kind of ruled that out. I visited the UGA campus. I applied there and didn't get in because I went to a hyper competitive high school. I went to high school in Marietta and it was just ridiculous how their [other students'] grades were... they had 3.5 grade point averages and 1300 SATs. So pretty much it was just that and Georgia State and State was it.

- Tony

I think some of my friends were like Georgia State was their back-up plan and they say that “Georgia State back-up plan.” I think that if they can choose to go to any school, I don't know if it would be Georgia State just because it is in the city. It is a different type of school.

- Chase

Transferring.

There are a variety of perceptions that are a part of the experiences of students when they plan to transfer from Georgia State. In many of these cases, students express some ambivalence while deciding whether they will transfer. Two of my study participants, Chase and Daniel, had made decisions to transfer to other institutions and shared their plans with me during our interview conversation. I was very familiar with Chase from his enrollment in a freshmen learning community that I taught one year prior. He had become a model student leader and was extremely involved in campus activities. Needless to say, I was surprised when he communicated that he would be transferring. When asked why he was leaving, he shared, “It’s just always been my plan to go two years at Georgia State, spend two years in the city with urban life to see which one I like better.” That term “urban life” was raised once again. I asked Chase to explain what he meant, he answered, “There are some things that I don’t like about Atlanta like traffic and crime. I got my car broken into like three times.” His reference to urban was not only a reflection of his feelings about crime and safety, but also the social experiences of living within a metropolitan city. Daniel described the differences in the social experiences between Georgia State and another traditional university, and his reason for transferring:

I mainly left because, [University of] Georgia was always... if I could go there I would go, but I could not get in out of high school. Growing up, my family were Georgia Bulldog fans, as well as myself. Athens is just a fun college town. The biggest difference that I have experienced from here to Athens is that... it is not that you do not get the college experience here... but when you leave school [at UGA] you’re still surrounded by kids from 18 to 23-24 years old that are in the

same position that you are. If you leave here [Georgia State], you've got three homeless people over there, you've got businessmen...that works a block away from my dorm. The city has much more to offer to other people, but as far as a college town experience it is lacking that. Atlanta is a big city. Downtown Athens is like three blocks of it [laugh].

Family influence.

The comments from the students were quite intriguing as I explored the concept of family and community influence on college choice. The encouragement and discouragement from family members were woven into students' conversations regarding their selection of Georgia State:

I would say that my dad going to Georgia State and pushing Georgia State for me is kind of rare, just because most other students are involved in communities that their parents are involved in. I just hadn't met many people that are like, "Yeah my dad went to Georgia State" or "my mom went to Georgia State." That were like they loved it and were really pushing me to go to Georgia State, because most of my friends their parents went to Georgia, Georgia Tech, or Georgia Southern. Not many of my friends were like, "yeah my parents went to Georgia State and loved it." I just haven't heard any of my friends back home say any of that, so I think tradition come down to the child's decision to go to Georgia State.

- Chase

"My cousin is an alumnus of Georgia State. He graduated in 1988 with a bachelor's in accounting and he recommended it, even though the school itself has changed so much over the past 17 years."

- Tony

My parents wanted me to go to [Georgia] Tech. I got accepted, but didn't want to go... . They wanted me to get a job that would make a lot of money, so I would be comfortable. You know parents usually want better lives than they had when they were kids.

- Karen

I think...the fact that I had not seen anything didn't really bother me because I had not heard any bad things about it [Georgia State]. All you ever hear isI have not heard anything bad other than it is a commuter school that is trying to not be a commuter school. That's all. A lot of the kids that I knew were actually commuting students.

- Helen

Urban institution.

Regardless of whether students had minimal or extensive ideas about the campus, the students shared vivid images of their feelings once they stepped on campus. As most incoming students experience Georgia State through campus tours and visit or vicarious experiences of former students and parents, the Incept: New Student Orientation program was the formal introduction and indoctrination into the university's campus environment. The impressions of Georgia State University, and more importantly, its being situated in an urban environment arose throughout multiple conversations.

As far as look ...as far as the environment, I really did not know where I was going. I have driven through and I have seen the Georgia State little logo on some buildings, but I have never been to the courtyard or walked around just to

see the area. But as far as the people, driving through you see groups of students walking together.

- Daniel

When me and my dad went to Incept ... we were just like, "wow." Obviously, you can't really judge Georgia State by Incept alone. I obviously wasn't going to be like, 'Oh with that said, I'm not coming to State now because I'm not going to fit in,' but it was just that for that brief moment.

- Tony

It was a lot to get used to. It really was. When we finally get to the Student Center everybody is there and I guess just being on the streets of Atlanta, going to school, and walking into the building right in the middle of Atlanta was just something to get used to. I remember Incept, one of the questions was about the LGBTIQ and it was like stand up if you associate under this category and it was just something new for me. Those questions do not really just come out and you answer if you feel like answering them. It was really weird for me because that was the first clue of the diversity here. It is just so open and broad to talk about, but it is obviously something that you see every day and you just do not go about talking about it, so that was new.

- Jessica

"a different kind of...[pause] kind of like - not like a counter culture, but just like a different kind of culture is around Georgia State."

- Chase

It is an urban campus, so it does not have the traditional college campus feel. It is basically all of the stuff that everyone perceives Georgia State as not having that they were pretty much saying, "I do not want to go here."

- Tony

Different from the norm.

As the dissertation study progressed, I arrived at the realization that most of my White student participants were from suburban areas with minimal racial or socioeconomic diversity. The participants in this study were quite mindful of those differences and described their most salient ideas about those differences. From their initial semester of enrollment until their current period of matriculation, the students expressed perceptions related to topics of high school differences, diversity, visibility of personal Whiteness, and the lack of an inviting environment.

Obviously, it was very different because very few people's high schools are going to be as diverse as Georgia State's. [The high school Gabe attended] is the older high school and it is in the county, so there is definitely a component, for the lack of a better term, "the old White money."

- Gabe

For the most part, I would say the culture of [Georgia County], the place and the school, is different from Georgia State. It is very homogenous, it is mostly White upper middle class, and it is suburban. It is a portrait of suburbia. Because I played sports and because I was involved with a wide variety of activities, I had interactions with lots of different demographics. It did not really register to me necessarily as much, but looking back the demographics were very different.

- Kyser

I think a lot of times it just becomes a race issue to the people. It is what you see, so you can look at somebody and assume they are something, when in fact they are something completely different. I think for me diversity is just different and it does not matter what that difference is.

- Helen

My thing, as far as diversity now, I would like it to be something that roughly mirrors the school. Diversity is not just a racial thing...but it is sort of unquantifiable. Like everyone is proud and I would not say at all that there is any sort of racial tension at Georgia State, which just gets to the bit where it is like, "well that is the way it is."

- Gabe

That was my impression that yeah we have a lot of diverse people, but they do not talk to each other. They do not interact and yeah maybe you have your few student leaders who do stuff together but..... I think for me it is more so we happen to have all these different groups of people, but we are not doing anything with them.

- Helen

"Just conversing with students of other ethnicities, they would just pause and give me a weird look and say, 'Dang you really are White.' I am like, 'what are you talking about? I am talking to you normal.'

- Chase

I would have to say, as little as it was, that day at the carnival when the fraternities were doing their line chants and that stuff you see in movies and I was just like “this is happening in front of me. This does not happen in [Georgia city].”

- Daniel

Speaking from my perspective as a White male I think the thing that will detour some people is again they do not see themselves represented enough. So for myself as a straight, heterosexual, White, Christian male, I do not see a lot of that perspective represented already, so I do not necessarily want to gravitate towards those things by my nature.

- Kyser

Student Engagement

In the recent years of Georgia State, increased enrollment and participation in campus activities by students of color have shifted the balance of organizational power away from Whites, in comparison to the early years of the university. Student and administrator participants noted the areas of residence life, campus leadership organizations, and the representation of White and minority students as major contributors toward White students' choices to participate in campus life.

I just really noticed that the White student involvement had dropped significantly. I am leaving Greek life out because that is kind of over there, but with Incept, it had definitely shifted. The White students were nonexistent. I remember coming back and working here and I think at one point... there was a task force on how to get White students more involved. That was the problem. While at other universities, it is all about how to get the minorities involved or how to make it

more diverse. Here, it was the opposite of that - like how do we make it more diverse, but on the flip side.

- Mrs. Howe

The conversations have basically been unless it is Panhellenic and IFC [White fraternities and sororities] stuff, the White students do not really have a lot to do - well not a lot to do, but they do not seem to want to have a lot to do with campus life if it is not one of those types of things. That is like the pigeon hole for White traditional campuses.... The flip side is like they start asking hypothetical questions like, "Are they [Whites] intimidated by the fact that there are A LOT [emphasis] of involved African American students? Is there some kind of something at play there that is not really been talked about?" And those are basically the main questions. It is like we want to talk about who is not involved, what kind of people do we not see here, and then there is some vice versa on why do you think that is.

- Kyser

Moving in the dorms put the perspective on you too. It is not just one type of ethnicity, one type of background, it is a whole bunch of people and you have to live with those people.... Back at home we all had the same lifestyles and we got accustomed to that, but being here we brought different lifestyles into The Commons [residence hall].

- Jessica

There are more African Americans involved in the Georgia State community and [pause] when I saw those numbers I was confused. I was like, "really?" But, I

guess so since they have the data. It does not really stand out until you first come to Georgia State - as far as what the numbers are on paper.

- Chase

There is a perception among a large percentage of White students on campus that most student organizations are run by African Americans. They are not really geared towards White students and that they don't feel like they belong. Now I have found that to be the opposite by actually getting involved, but I'm talking about the students who might feel that way. They are the ones that don't take the time to actually get involved themselves.

- Tony

One of the thing that struck me as interesting – I daresay unique - were the types of students who are involved at Georgia State. Overwhelmingly, it seems that our student leaders at Georgia State were either [racial] minority or minority women, mostly Black in general, which is interesting and different for me because from my student experience, going to a predominantly White institution. Student leaders outside the Black communities were White, SGA presidents were always White and those are positions we could never obtain or achieve.... Because that was my norm, it was a bit of the culture shock to see the most influential students outside the Black community were Black or were minorities or even minority women. I was a bit taken back, but I was like, "Wow!" It was actually like I was on Mars because this does not seem to make sense at a PWI.

- Mr. Elliott

Student organization leadership.

Whether their feelings were positive or negative, the White students at Georgia State argued that organization leadership was an integral part of campus life and had shaped their beliefs and ideologies. Participants explained that most students' introductory experience to campus life then led them to a series of other activities.

"It has definitely worked for me. The more involved you are, the more you have an invested interest in staying."

- Gabe

You start with Incept and then you go to all the other organizations like SGA and Spotlight. Maybe not so much the Greek organizations because that's a whole different setup. It's kind of linked in a broad threadlike sort of way.

- Tony

When you are a person who decides to get involved, it is normally a lot of the same people.... You cross paths with a lot of people, so there is a network built there of people that have made the conscious commitment to be involved in a campus life for a period of time. So you end up seeing a lot of the same people and you notice a lot of the patterns. The more you are around these people, the more you notice, "Man! Why is it always the same people?"

- Kyser

It is sort of getting lackluster. A lot of it is also because people like to set themselves up in their own little resume padding sort of thing.... A lot of these organizations on campus are just shells and it is very hollow and very... superficial. Their feelings of self-importance do not really make an impact.

- Gabe

I mean with all things being constant, I have seen a lot more Whites on campus doing things, getting more involved - like SGA. I think it goes with acceptance to Georgia State, as well. I know I have heard rumors going around that, "Oh they accepted more White people this year!" I am like, "Great! Cool!" It doesn't matter, but I think it deals with the numbers here at Georgia State too.

- Karen

In my discussions with the participants in my research study, the racial dynamics of four prominent organizations, the Incept team (Figure 12), Spotlight Programming Board (Figure 13), Student Government Association (Figure 14), and Greek life, were key in determining White Georgia State students' leadership, engagement, and disengagement.

Incept: Are there any White people at this school?

If you ask me, I would say to be an orientation leader. I do believe that being an orientation leader here on campus sets those students up to be leaders across the global garments of race, ethnicities, and so forth. Because you are an orientation leader, you have the opportunity to network with everybody on campus, you are able to chart what your leadership experience or your college experience would look like.... I would say it is the position that has the power and prestige at its finest. It is that must do position in order to be an organization leader - hands down.

- Mr. Elliott

There are things, as far as these organizations go, that are sort of the same on the surface. I kind of see the same kinds of groups of people dominating a lot of these

things.... Let's take Incept for example - not particularly a high experience. I remember being a freshman and... coming from a medium-sized sort of rural town and to have Inceptors sort of be in [step] routine kind of things were very much like, "I do not know what is going on and this is very strange."

- Gabe

"I would put Incept - and maybe I am biased, but it was presented to me as a hugely prestigious opportunity to be involved on campus and to rub elbows with a lot of important people."

- Kyser

As little a thing as it was, the day I went to Incept there was only two White kids on the whole Inceptor team. Maybe if that was more of an equal ratio, it might make the White kids that are coming in... consider applying.

- Daniel

From what I've seen, it starts in the beginning - Incept. If you're a freshman, you're very impressionable and don't know the campus culture. They don't know how things work on this campus... so you start with them. You make Incept much more diverse. I know there's been a push to do that because I've gotten plenty of offers to do Incept - and I would do it, except I don't have the time and I'm getting too old. It starts there and then it's kind of the domino effect.

- Tony



Figure 12: Incept Team, 2009

Spotlight.

When you have people that like rap music running Spotlight, they are going to go out to the music they like, and not what some random student who wouldn't even get involved on Spotlight anyway wants. It's also based on money issues because we have to include costs and so there's a lot of other factors mostly market-based. It's really personal preference.

- Tony

I think a lot of times it is because they [White students] are nervous. "This is my organization. This is what it has always been." In Spotlight, I feel like it is just comfortable for them to market to who is going to come because you want to have a successful event.

- Helen

This is one of the biggest things that bugs me. Panther Prowl [evening social event] and Spotlight do so much to open it up to everybody and make it invitation

friendly where it is not just predominantly one type of people that feel like they are not suppose to be going. I do not have any ideas for that because they are doing as much as they can to bring them out.

- Jessica



Figure 13: Spotlight Programming Board, 2009

Student Government Association.

“It is definitely the first student government that you see that is the same about a few hundred students who are participating in a lot of these organizations while the vast majority of the students do not.”

- Gabe

“Well, unfortunately, I know the people in the social groups that I work in are predominantly White students. They don’t see SGA as serving them. They see it as serving mostly the African American community - you know minorities.”

- Tony

You just do not see it[multiracial teams working together]. To have a solid multiracial ticket without tokenism. We said “Alright guys, we are go to combine [a slate] that resembles the school,” when traditionally student government had been heavily dominated by minorities. Also, this was done because student government has very low turnout in elections, which I think is intentional. Why would you want high turnout when it is just you and your buddies exchanging offices?

- Gabe

Yes, they [slate of SGA officers] were a very, very healthy White ticket [group of individuals campaigning together], but also they wanted people to know that SGA existed and I feel like that was completely overlooked. These are people. It does not matter what color they are. They know that they are White, they know it is going to be different for them, but why is it such a problem that it is a White

ticket? We always had the Black tickets and the same people. The same people kept getting put into office because nobody needed to vote for them. There was no real opposition and so the fact that they came out with the ticket.

- Helen



Figure 14: Student Government Association, 2008

The Greek tower.

A common thread throughout the student interviews was the role of the Greek system as a safe haven and social space for White students on the Georgia State University campus. Most of the interviewees were affiliated with Greek-lettered organizations, as either a member or participant in their activities.

You are always hanging out with the same group of people.... I think it is just a way where people are more comfortable just doing their own thing, finding their own group of friends, meeting them by themselves.... It's just so much easier because you do not have to try when you are in a fraternity. The older brothers that are there already have a foundation and they know people, so when you hang out when them you meet their friends. It is an easy way to grow; it is an exponentially growing process. You do not have to try to be a part of it, it just happens.

- Daniel

I think Greek is another thing. Again, it is different being here than a traditional college because there is not really housing for it, just the hallway. I think that [new housing] could bring a different group of people or it could outreach the other people and might actually get people more involved on a spread out campus because they have a close connection with those type of people.

- Jessica

As far as most students, most students are alike. Most students are freshmen coming to this university thinking "what is there to do?" Most students see the

fraternity as a comfort zone more than other organizations because it is social. It is a great social network, a great social benefit.

- Helen

The African American Greek life on campus, they do stuff during the day when students are on campus and they see that stuff. All the students see that stuff, whereas [White] Greek life, we do all of our stuff at night when nobody is on campus. Nobody really sees or recognizes anything that White students are doing because we do all our stuff kind of later or not necessarily too early.

- Karen

“something turns me off about that [White Greek life] because of the culture of it.”

- Chase

“The conversations have basically been, unless it is Pan-Hellenic and IFC stuff, the White students do not... seem to want to have a lot to do with campus life.”

- Kyser

“I am going to hate to say it, but a lot of my fellow Greek members aren’t as involved except for their organizations and that’s probably it.”

- Tony

“The Greek system here at Georgia State is kind of like a Ivory Tower compared to the rest of the school.”

- Tony

White participation: “I’m different than the others.”

Despite their beliefs and rationales for lack of participation, some of the students from the study were unique student leaders who participated in campus organizations and maintained racially diverse friend groups regardless of their racial minority. There was a consistent recognition that White students who participated in campus life and interacted with students of color were special. The students were sometimes uncomfortable in expressing their exclusive role of being a White student leader.

So I do feel like I am kind of a... [pause] I do not want to use the term “special” case because I do not want to seem like I am tooting my own horn, but I was raised that it is wrong to judge other people because they are different from you. I have followed that for my entire life.

- Kyser

I really think it is just me. I am not scared of people. If I just hang out with White people, I think I would be bored all the time. If I hang out with any one group of people, I think I would be bored, and I so I have always just sought out people. I have a very strong personality, I really enjoy being around people, and I think I enjoy learning about different kinds of people, which is why I was doing really well in intercultural relations because I get to learn about different cultures.

- Helen

It was inviting to me because I was interested in it.... Basically, if a generic person came here with an open mind and he was trying to absorb what the school had to offer then I would say yes. If the person comes here and expected to live how they lived in their 90% White suburb, then that person would have a big

problem... because it is not a suburb at all [laugh]. I chose to take it all in because it all interested me. I was also interested in it before I got here - as far as culturally.

- Daniel

I think I kind of wanted to do my own thing. I did not want to join a sorority and just follow them. I wanted to do something new, so I did an FLC, I lived on campus, I did hall council, and then I became an RA, which is a different path for a lot of [White] people.

- Jessica

When you bring that group that you are very close with and you do not think about it, you are not very salient about the differences between you and a different group of your friends or people with whom you are involved on any level. They [White students] bring to back to the salience. They bring you back to being really aware and say, "Wow, Kyser you are hanging around a lot of Black people!" In a way you are kind of like, "Oh, wow, I have never thought about it!" and you wonder where they are coming from with that. To an extent, you know that they are giving you some kind of push back. I have definitely experienced that.

- Kyser

Once It Tips: Reasons for White Disengagement

Based on the evidence of racial shifts in student involvement from the historical context chapter and the conversations with current students, the Georgia State University scale of engagement has dramatically tipped toward students of color. The referential

threshold at which the White majority group withdraws after being joined by the minority group can be used to understand the racial dynamics of student organizations at Georgia State (Fitzpatrick & Hwang, 1990). In this section, I will share my findings on White student disengagement resulting from their changing majority status, beliefs of reverse discrimination, connection with administrators, and Black culture.

Majority-minority status.

The change in racial perceptions of Georgia State among the White students frequently evolved from their initial entry into the university to their participation in extracurricular activities. An increased level of familiarity with the campus environment shaped their opinions of Whites being numerically marginalized to a minority status. When I inquired about the numeric values and percentages of the campus population and student groups, the participants responded,

Just because there are more African Americans involved in the Georgia state community [pause].... It does not really equate to what it looks like when you first come to Georgia State; the demographics as far as what they are in numbers on paper.

- Chase

I think White probably is 80-85%, Black is probably 15-20%, but that just does not sound right to me though. I really want to say Black is like 80-85%, but that is just based on what I have seen. It is not really the university as a whole though, so it is really hard to estimate. I really want to say that White is dominant and Black is the next class... the next percentage, and then Latino would probably be

a lesser value about 10% or so or maybe 5% and then Asian American would probably be like 3%.

- Jessica

“I would say 60/40 if we are talking about Black and White.”

- Chase

“[pause] Maybe Black around 40, White maybe 20, then Latino, Hispanic would be probably another 20, and Asian another 20%.”

- Karen

Students argued that setting a specific number of students within a racial category would be akin to a quota system. However, the claims of desiring an equitable system for student organization involvement were sometimes contradicted by the implication that there should be a set number of positions available for White students.

The fact that when these things are brought up they can often be sort of switched back to, “Well, this is somehow racist....” Why is it bad to try to proportionally set organizations to mirror the school? [mumble] We are actually going to broaden the school and not everyone is a big fan of that.

- Gabe

“I think it would be terrible to have to map out of an equation saying we need three Asians, we need two Hispanics, and we need six White people, but I think that is kind of what we need.”

- Helen

I have always been taught you have to be fair. This is tough because not necessarily like quotas - like how many of each race or ethnicity that you should

have in your group. I think there should be some sort of thing that says, "Okay you have to have at least three of each."

- Karen

According to the participants, racial representation was the key toward encouraging White student engagement.

"Somebody should look at an organization and say 'oh, somebody looks like me,' even if they are no way shape or form like them at all."

- Helen

That is so difficult for me to answer because I do not care, but as an average White student, maybe 50-50. If they just see half of them and say, "Yeah, they look like me and like to do things with me. Maybe I'd like to go to these things or get involved." I do not want say dominant, but I want to say pretty equal - an equal amount.

- Jessica

To be honest with you, and this maybe a little steep, but when I consider the average White student and the way that I have seen them be drawn to groups, I think it will have to be 50-50 to be totally honest.... This may be seen boldly, but I do not think very many White males, especially from my background of racial and culturally hegemony..., do not think they want to enter into a group where they were outnumbered... for whatever reason.

- Kyser

I would say this, if you are a White student... or any student, it is not just the case of how many people are like you. It is at least the percentage of how many people

do not look like each other is the case. You would be much more likely to join if there was a group of 10 and you were the only White student if every other percentage is 10% Asian, 10% Hispanic, and 10% this. You are much more likely to join that than say if you were joining an organization which is 95% Asian and you are the only White student.

- Gabe

I would think it would have to be at least 50:50 because you want the balance where that Asian or African American student felt comfortable coming in and joining the group, but you also want the balance so that the White male is comfortable too. A White male is not going there. Mainly, they probably do not have the history with people like this [varying race/ethnicity]. They do not have anything in common and their cultural backgrounds are different - I mean everything is different! Yeah they would have something in common if they would sit down and have some conversation, but that is not likely to happen.

- Mrs. Howe

Comfort level: Fear of losing part of themselves.

In my investigation process of evaluating whether White students at Georgia State were truly disengaging in campus activities, student participants referred to their comfort level being influenced by the racial demographics of an organizations student population.

The kind of logic that is used is that it [an organization] is open to these students but they do not want to participate.... that... has been used in the past for why the minority students aren't participating. Well, they could, but they just did not want to.

- Gabe

The perception is that these organizations... are not inclusive. Although, when I have talked to them, many of the student leaders say that they try to be inclusive, but it doesn't seem to happen. You know when you have the perception... I believe that perception is everything.

- Tony

It is not because they do not want the White kids coming around – it's just not threatening, but intimidating. I would probably have trouble if there is a group of 10 or 15 kids hanging out just doing whatever. I probably would not be the person to introduce myself whether they were White or Black.

- Daniel

I know two of my friends they lived up in [Georgia county]. They had never seen Black people or Hispanic people before, so that was like a shock to them. They didn't really know what to think about that. They want to associate with White people because that is all they know and that is what they were told to associate with. There are still really, really racist areas in Georgia that I am hearing where these girls are coming from and it is shocking to me.

- Karen

I still think White people are scared to get involved, especially in a heavily African American Black population. It is kind of a scary thing. Especially if they came from an all White high school, they do not know how to interact with people. They do not even know what to talk about because it is the other way around. Everything we know about Black people is what they have observed,

watched on TV, or hearing rap lyrics.... There is such a strong underlay of stereotypes on this campus that people.

- Helen

I feel like there is no incentive for anybody else to apply because it is such a huge task.... One person cannot do it. It has to be people who are genuinely wanting it to change. I feel like people are too comfortable right now.

- Helen

The thing with students nowadays is that students are some of the most racist,... because White students, they do not want to hang out with Black students in these organizations.... It just has to be a sort of a comfort zone where it is just seen as their own.

- Gabe

Not the target audience or catered to.

A notable aspect of the commentary from the participants was the pervasive feeling that Georgia State only caters to students of color.

I have kind of wondered that myself, so I have done some of my own research. What I have understood is that people were very upset when students of color started coming. They started catering towards their purpose to reach them, and in their turn of programming, kind of never held on to who was there in the first place. I think that is what is happening now. They're programming is to who comes. Under what I have known, they were actively seeking out especially Black students to be part of their executive boards.... I feel like that is how you can reach people, but in that forgot about their original audience.

- Helen

If the organization does cater to a certain group, they are obviously not going to say you can't join. But a person who is not of that racial group is not going to join because it doesn't cater to our needs.

- Tony

A lot of the organizations on campus are tailored specifically for one type of student and that could be anything from ethically, gender wise, or politically.... I understand, "Well, it is open to everybody," but it is the Latino Women Society, so you are not going to get a lot of non-Latino women to join that society. That is a lot of the organizations.

- Gabe

I feel like there is a very large rank of reasons why White people are not getting involved. They are not catered to. The things that go on on-campus I feel like in theory people think that, "Oh, this is what White people want to do," but they never asked. I have never been approached and asked, "Well, what do you think about this?" I have been a heavily involved White student and I would not be offended if somebody came up to me and said, "We are thinking about doing this event, what do you think? Is this something..?" In Spotlight, if you want to reach White people you have to do things that they want to do and do not just watch MTV and assume. It is a silly thing to think that they are getting their facts from TV shows, but we have such a different demographic.

- Helen

I think it is reverse silos where here [Georgia State] you would see Black students in more premier positions, whether it be SGA or in charge of campus events. So you will see non-minority students in... I could not say silo because I do not think there are organizations that cater to them specifically, but it seems just to be a lack of wanting to be involved.

- Mr. Elliott

Reverse discrimination: Not a fighting chance.

A stirring aspect of my interview discussions were the beliefs by Whites that Black student leaders initiated discriminatory practices to discourage White student participation in campus organizations. Through their stories of being on the plaza, the White student participants in the study defined discrimination through issues, such as not receiving flyers from promoters.

"I think there is a constituency of [White] people who believe that there is so much more here toward African American students who they are kind of at a disadvantage."

- Kyser

We [her sorority members] weren't just picking and choosing who we wanted. We are taking people because we like their personality, not because of the color of their skin or what they look like. I mean there are Black sororities that will not take White people.

- Karen

When you get to the big organizations like Spotlight, SGA and stuff like it is hard to say, I do not know what the actual sort of makeup, but you have to have enough that [White] people would think there is at least like a fighting chance.

- Gabe

In a lot of cases, it was all just like conceded.... It has been said, "Why wouldn't a lot of the White students want to run for homecoming? Why wouldn't a lot of White students want to join SGA?" It is often because you would not win because there is not that strong campus presence. I was told by one of my friends, "I never thought you guys were going to win!" and I was like, "Why would you say that?" He is like..., "I never thought I would ever see a White SGA president," which actually takes you back a little bit. Obviously, there have been White VPs, but never a White president. You do not see a lot of White students in the top spots like SGA presidents or homecoming kings and queens.

- Gabe

I get passed all the time for flyers like I do not get flyers and I am like, "Why do I not get one?" That is fine, but you are just causing more problems towards the issue that you are not being diverse in Atlanta and Georgia State. You see it on campus, people passing out flyers in the residence halls and ...the Student Center.... I think that is probably the biggest issue and... it is not something that is subtle.

- Jessica

Administrators.

Another critical finding during this study was the role that administrators played in shaping campus engagement. Former administrators from the past two decades communicated previous initiatives to encourage students' of color participation and their observations of White student withdrawal.

They were very stale, they didn't give opportunities to African American students. They always dealt with their favorites... I remember applying for Incept. I wanted to be an Inceptor so bad. I went out for it twice and was told that I wasn't qualified.

- Ms. Conrad

I honestly think, and this is my really shallow viewpoint, the professionals that I would typically work with in student affairs... understand the need for diversity. They have gone through classes of training, they have gone through all of this hand-holding, make peace with everybody. You feel like those conversations are department level only, but not with students or with my friends. Friends did not understand that I was the advisor not just for the White fraternities, but also to the African American chapters too.

- Mrs. Howe

If you ask me and this is my opinion, I cannot substantiate it but I feel like our administrators would be comfortable if organizations became overwhelmingly White as opposed to diverse or a mixture of students. I get the impression that there is a discomfort with a lot of the organizations being overwhelmingly run by students of color and I do not think our administrators are really promoting

diversity.... They don't want students to actually work with each other. They only want to change the demographics of what our organizations look like. If every organization, in my opinion, went from overwhelmingly Black to overwhelmingly White tomorrow, I believe that our administrators would think they did a good job and that diversity push would end there.

- Mr. Elliott

Student participants claimed that campus administrators are involved in determining engagement options, and for whom, at all levels.

"There are not many White campus administrators.... Especially ones who are in charge of the programs."

- Helen

If there is a tipping point, a lot of the [Black] staff and faculty just basically got the things like, "We are going to increase minority student participation to the max," and you are going to keep going until it is at 100%.

- Gabe

"[Senior-level administrator] are very sincere in doing things [related to White student engagement] and some that are higher up. It is just the middle staff that are a little lackluster about doing it."

- Gabe

I know that [being White] is why I was able to be on the selection committee for the Hall Director.... They're [administrators] focusing on different ethnicities other than Black and African American.

- Jessica



Figure 15: Hip Hop Music in Library Plaza, 2010

Black culture.

Opportunities for White students to explore new cultures were met with mixed responses from the student participants. Activities and events sponsored or frequented by African American students have the potential to cause further disengagement from disinterested White students (Figure 15).

The main thing I wanted to make sure I could say was that stuff was cool to me because that is what interests me..... If somebody did not like rap music they would completely be turned off by everything going on. It is just known it wouldn't probably work out.

- Daniel

In the courtyard, if you are walking and you see people "stepping," it can freak some people out. They do not know what is happening and they are like, "Why is this train of people stepping in front of me? What are they doing? I just wanted to go to class." It is an inconvenience too when they see that. So in turn, they are turned off by it.

- Helen

A lot of things are heavily involved with dancing and there are not a lot of White people who like to get on the dance floor, especially when you are around Black people who can dance very well. It is intimidating and in every Panther Prowl they play tons of rap music that yeah people might listen to in their car, but they are not going to go out there and get on the dance floor. I do not think I am self-conscious, but I know I cannot dance. When I am joking around doing it [dancing], it is like, "What the heck are you doing?"

- Helen

Response to Visual Images

Visual images of Georgia State student organizations compiled from archived editions of the *Panther Yearbook* empowered participants to think about how the university has changed and the future implications of the changes. The incorporation of photo elicitation techniques into my research interviews added a new sense of depth into the experiences of White students (D. Harper, 2002). Although I enjoyed the emotional stimulation of participants' comments by adding photos in my research, I am still mindful of the power dynamics that exist in subjective photographs. The photographs were not able to tell the complete story of the informants; however, they complemented their other interview statements.

Near the latter part of each interview, all participants were shown an organizational photograph of Spotlight Programming Board, Student Government Association, and the Incept team from academic years of the late 1980s, mid 1990s, and late 2000s. The students' initial responses to the photos, included statements, such as

“Pretty significant change [Laugh],” “Wow,” “That is crazy,” “Oh my goodness,” “Get out of here!”, and in one case, just plain laughter. Mrs. Howe’s response to the photograph of the 1996 Incept team was, “I think that back then it was probably 50:50 in terms of diversity and then I do not know somewhere along the way there is not any diversity.” After scanning a more recent photograph, Mrs. Howe commented, “I do not really know what the racial makeup of Georgia State really is today. Is that representative of what the population at Georgia State really is? Is the White population only 10%?” A former member of Spotlight, Mrs. Howe commented on that organization’s photographs (Figure 16):

Spotlight totally shifted! Spotlight used to be pretty much all White and it shifted where everybody in the whole team was African American. I mean I am not saying that it was a bad thing, but Georgia State often would say, “We are so diverse!” but yet there are pockets of diversity. It is not a blended approach.

In viewing the earliest SGA photographs, Mr. Elliott shared,

If I had to guess, I would say just the history behind a lot of those positions. Those positions historically were held by White students and that became the status quo, so whether it was said or unsaid, the position of the SGA president, “This goes to a White student.”



Figure 16: Spotlight Programming Board, 1989

Students shared their analysis of the organizational change. Jessica shared, “It does not freak me out...or ... say anything that it is all Black or majority Black. That does not bother me. They used to be majority White. It really bothers me that it is the only two races.” Daniel responded to a recent Incept photograph (Figure 17),

This is an accurate picture. I do not know how or what the ratio was back then racially, but when you think of the overall ratio of Georgia State if you put these groups of people together this is what you think of. This is what I think of when you ask me what the racial percentage or diversity is here. This is pretty accurate as far as if you were to times it by a 100. This is what it would look like in my eyes. It is not the lack of applications or a lack of interest; it is just that this is the population of the school. This is pretty accurate as far as the whole school, but I do not know what a group can do to appeal to other races. If someone else can answer it, it is a great question [Laugh].

Gabe referred to the same photograph and commented:

I would see the pictures here and I would say if you are White person... you would not be like, “Oh I got a good shot or a fighting chance.” You are like, “Clearly I do not fit in.” There is something that is not good. Now... is that the same way that Black students in this picture felt back there [referring to photograph from the late 1980s]? Possibly?



Figure 17: Incept Team, 2006

Confusion.

As participants gazed over the nine photographs, some individuals were utterly confused. The racial compositions from an earlier period of Georgia State's history were exceptionally different from their current experiences with the same organizations. Karen shared, "See that is so different from today. It is so different" (Figure 18). Daniel mentioned,

This is what I think of when you name these programs because that is when I was here [pointing to recent photographs]. I do not know. This is a surprise to me, just because I do not know much about the history of this school.... I expected these [older photographs] to look more like this [recent photographs], but it is not a good or bad thing.... It is a surprise to me, to say the least. I thought they were all going to resemble these two pictures [recent photographs], but clearly they do not. I do not really know what else to say.

Kyser took a considerable amount of time to peruse all of the photographs and talked through questions that he had,

My first question is had the demographics of the student body changed? [Pointing at photos from each era] Essentially, archetypically majority White, then fairly mixed, but mostly Black and White and pretty heterogeneous.... It looks about 50% Black, 50% White during the mid-90s, and then you see more racial diversity but majority African American and more multiculturalism, but a lot fewer White people. Have the demographics shifted or is it just been... fewer and fewer White people. It is kind of like a vicious cycle where fewer White people are willing to

get involved. Those would be my two questions. Kind of crazy to see it in print like this.

GSU is changing.

The overwhelming response from students to the organization photos was that Georgia State University is changing. The study participants took note of those changes based on their personal and professional experiences. Mr. Poller had previously worked with the Student Government Association (Figure 19) and noted,

When I left Georgia State, it was the exact opposite, “How do we get the White students involved [laugh]?” It is 180 degrees from I would say about ’96 or ’97. You had a good mix and then the late 90s and into the 2000s, I think the change happened where the African American students became very, very involved in student activities at a higher rate than their White counterparts.

Helen also recognized the demographic changes, but felt that it was a positive transition for Georgia State. She shared, “I know that we have gone through a shift and I think the fact that we have gone through a shift is very positive because we have catered to all these kind of people.” Jessica noted how difficult a process it is for students to see the changes on a daily basis, “There has definitely been a change. It is not visual just looking around, but looking and comparing between the years, there is definitely a change.” Jessica added that she anticipates the demographic shifts to continue in future years,

I think it will only progress. I think the White population would decrease. I think it would progress as more diverse people would become involved. I do not think if you wanted to keep the average White student involved too..., I do not think they would do so.

The apparent changes in student organization led me to ask additional questions as to whether these visual changes would affect the engagement options and choices for White students. Jessica responded, “That is such a hard thing to think about or think of ideas. Even though I have just said that things have changed, I think actually getting down to it... change [in White participation] becomes tough.” Karen also acknowledged the changes and doubted whether White students would ever return to their previous levels of involvement. She also asserted that the changes at Georgia State reflect a difference in societal values:

I don't know if it will ever go back and I don't think it really matters. If we have people that are there that can effectively lead a group, I don't think it matters. We are giving more people opportunities to come to school, so it looks like we have more minorities at this school and really it is not. I don't think the differences are that big. I think a lot of us are becoming a lot more equal.

Even with her egalitarian outlook of campus involvement, Karen was hesitant to say that the racial tilt was better for students:

I don't know if it will be better or not. Seeing more people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds getting involved in different things, I think that is going to benefit Georgia State a lot. We cannot discriminate and we cannot say, “Oh, we already have too many Black people or White people in this group so we can't take anymore.”



Figure 18: Incept Team, 1989



Figure 19: Student Government Association, 1989

Who's responsible for the changes?

The recognition of change at Georgia State was not without thoughts of how the change came to exist. The former administrators and a few students provided arguments for the racial transition in student organizations. At most institutions, strategic plans are created to set goals and evaluate the success of those goals. Mrs. Howe, shared some of initiatives to increase minority student retention during her early tenure at Georgia State:

Even when I worked here there were conversations and task forces on how do we get people involved. It is definitely in the forefront of people's mind or at least it was. I do not know if it still is. When there is recruiting processes and we were putting out applications, we'd say, "Where are we going to put out applications and who are we going to target?"

Mr. Poller argued that the diversification of the professional staff was the first step toward the visual changes in the student groups:

The students are... and this may be a stereotype, but I think a lot of time they are drawn to who is the advisor. We diversified out staff too, to make it look more like the student body.... The first goal was to diversify the Dean of Student's staff and I think that worked dramatically too. One became three, three became six, and six became 12 - I am talking about the number of African American students who got involved. I think all students saw the door open. "This is a fair system and I can get in on my own merit versus the good old boys clubs." I think when you look back at it..., SGA was loaded in type student population.... It was majority all White students voting.... [Minority]Students felt like they had the confidence in joining a group, "I will be welcomed. It does not matter. I am going

to get in based on my own interviewed merit, versus the little boys club.” Looking back on the 80s stuff, that is probably how it was perceived.

Mr. Elliott did not have the same level of institutional history as Mrs. Howe and Mr. Poller; however, he noticed that limited friendship groups led to the continued balkanization of student organizations:

I cannot talk to you about why it transitioned because I was not here. In my experience, one of the things that I have noticed is that when we do recruit for Inceptors, Inceptors themselves recruit their friends or people they know. Overwhelmingly, who you are is who you tend to hang around. If we have a team of 18 individuals and 13 of those 18 individuals are of Black African decent and you tell them, “Please, go recruit your friends,” they are naturally going to recruit people that look like them because those are their friends. In addition, when you have incoming freshman looking at the orientation team, they naturally resonate with people who look like them.... I would say our team continues to stay overwhelmingly minority because... students are coming in and are able to recognize... students who look like them.

As a student leader who has witnessed recent stagnation in racial diversification among student groups, Tony claimed,

It is the fault of both parties.... It is the fault of the student who ... sees an organization from the outside.... They are not going to take the time to research an organization, attend meetings, or try to get involved. They think that they [the organizations] have to come to them to do it. It is also the fault of the organizations for not thinking outside the box. Not that... I am not saying they

are doing that, but it's like... it's kind of embedded in peoples' brains half the time. It's kind of subtle. I've been guilty of that. Thinking, hey, I'm going to talk to these people, but these are people that I already know.

Mrs. Howe connected the racial dynamics of Georgia State with her experience of being one of the few White students attending a predominantly Black high school in metropolitan Atlanta:

I remember my high school and it was all White.... All of a sudden, my middle brother got to high school and it was probably 50:50. Then I got to high school and it was 80:20. It was just like the fear I guess of having to interact with people that are different than them. Whatever point that happened - that few years in there and then now you are dealing with this group [pointing to the photographs]. I am sure to the White students it is probably very intimidating to come in when they have never had to be the ones to do that. As an African American, you are used to having to go into situations where you are probably the only person that looks like you, but for White students it has never really been that way.

The comments shared by shared by Mrs. Howe are an indicator of the challenges that current administrators will face in appealing to White students when some of the most prestigious organizations are visually represented by students of color.

Appealing to Whites

As the demographic pendulum of Georgia State University has swung toward increasing racial diversity, the conversations regarding White student engagement will continue within the campus community. An important aspect of my research study is my ability to use the information provided by participants to enhance the lives and social

experiences of Georgia State students (W. F. May, 1980). Students and administrators interviewed were asked to provide directions and initiatives that should be enacted to encourage future White student participation in traditional organizations and the campus, in general. The responses ranged from cynicism in reaching White students to ideas that participants deemed as plausible.

I see it to be a problem, but not that there needs to be less African Americans involved and we need to have more White people and more Asians, but I feel like we just need to have a broader amount of people.

- Helen

People get every defensive and people's scars get thrown out. So my advice to that is be very deliberate and to target [Whites] as far as all the low level stuff. I was already very skeptical about the staff and faculty involvement directly trying to recruit students for anything.

- Gabe

I think the problem is the tradition of it. Let's say that five years ago it was a highly White population who did everything and then one year it changed. The people who came in the next year do not know that it was like that before. So I feel like it is just the tradition that is going to be a struggle to seek people out, especially if your whole entire board is of the same ethnicity.

- Mr. Elliott

I think I did that as much as anybody else did, but I do not think I made a special effort that, "Oh, that was why students really need to get involved." I do not think I went about it that way. I think I was more, "Hey, you would be a good fit for

this. You are really into music, why have you not looked at getting into Spotlight and bringing some concerts here?" I think I tried to hit it more, "You have talents and things that you can add to the community too. Why are you not in it?" For some students it might have worked, but for the most part [shrugs her shoulders]. It is hard at that age to come into a group where you are the only one and none of your friends want to join you... to be that little lone ranger out there trying to make a difference.

- Mrs. Howe

I like live dance and if you can get people that play a crazy different number of things, live dance are definitely the way to go if you are trying to reach the White people. If you look at a White concert and you look at a Black concert, there is going to be the pit in the front where people are thrashing around and all that kind of stuff and that is what interests me. When I go to concerts that is what I am looking for. Black people booty shaking [dancing] scares White people. I much rather enjoy live bands.

- Helen

"I think they [promotions geared to Whites] are getting better - the ones for Incept and for FLCs this past year. Even the big billboards... around campus, I think they were really good."

- Jessica

Over the past year, the Spotlight Programming Board has sought to diversify their events by adding more music that caters to a White audience. Unfortunately, the events were not very well attended despite the claims by the student interviewees that the events

would be successful (Figure 20). The bands that performed were nearly completely ignored by White students and students of color alike. Daniel commented on the rock band performances:

There were not good [laughs]. I think it was almost like something to... I mean there was a crowd, don't get me wrong, people were watching them. But... when the DJ is up there, you can hear the music leaving the Student Center and you just walked that way to see what is going on. They [rock band] were playing and it didn't sound that good from a distance, so it was probably harder to attract people anyway and also the music they were playing just simply wasn't music that people would want to hear.

In 2011, Georgia State University kicked off its inaugural season of football. Students referred to the addition of a football team as an opportunity for increased engagement and retention:

I do not want to say that basketball tends to go towards one kind of group of people, but I really do think that it kind of forms that way. I think football will bring more people out probably more White people out and I think that's awesome! It will bring more people out for basketball too and it is just like one big circle. Maybe people will start getting used to going out on campus and going to different events and things like that. I hope that when the football season comes, then housing will jump start and people will want to live on campus to go to the football games on Friday and basketball games on Saturday night. I am just so excited for it. I really do think it is going to be something big and the football team is diverse itself too.

- Jessica

“YEAH! I mean not initially [it will not change campus life]. It is not going to be, ‘OH WOW!’ but we will probably get more retention among White males.”

- Gabe



Figure 20: Live Band Performance, 2010

Positive Opportunities

Near the conclusion of my interviews, a number of students thanked me for inviting them to participate in the study. Based on their final comments, the interviews served as a reflective and cathartic opportunity for students to revisit their Georgia State experiences, as most viewed the institution in a positive spirit. Each student participant was diverse in his or her own way, yet they provided a common narrative of positive experiences related to freshman learning community participation, new perspectives, racial interactions, and the appreciation of Georgia State University as a unique place.

“I cannot look too much into the past, but there are more people that I know now that are running or want to be involved. They want to make a difference in Georgia State, which I think is awesome.”

- Karen

To be honest, I don't think it was a difficult transition at all because being in the Emerging Leader Program [freshmen learning community] helped getting to know people on campus. It was less of a demographic culture shock. You get to appreciate Georgia State a lot more if you are involved, than if you just go to class and go home.

- Tony

I think some of my friends that I talk to come to Georgia State because it is good for filmmaking, so they love it here. It is just whoever you are talking to, they love it for filming and photography - the different kinds of majors that you can't get at more traditional schools.

- Chase

There are definitely those that do what really reaches out to them, but there are the other few [White students] that they really just could care less. They would just come to class and finish college and get on with their lives. When you are placed in that kind of situation, like Georgia State, I think you have no choice but to do something. I feel like it is going to be a part of your life either way.

- Jessica

I would say I definitely learned the most. I probably would not have learned this much out of my first two years in college at any other schools, because so many things happened that wouldn't have happened in other schools. So now I know how to assess those situations and move forward in the future.

- Chase

I think, either way, it is still going to impact you whether you want it to or not. I think you have to do something about it whether you want to or not. You are still in the classroom, which is the same thing as walking around the streets of Atlanta. You are still in the classroom that is diverse in itself and you still have different opinions and the mindsets people are bringing to the table. You still have to think about that and you have to be aware of that in yourself, so even coming to class is something that you have to have mindset for.

- Jessica

I mean it is definitely different because I don't see as many White people as I usually do. It is definitely different, but at the same time, it gives me good perspective on coming from other people's perspectives that are the minority. I would definitely say it is a good experience.

- Chase

When I was involved with the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Week committee, there were a lot of multicultural or stereotype breaking activities. The activities were designed to educate through stereotypes. It seemed like some people had a hard time with those because it was like, "I know these are designed to help people learn something, but I do not want to let go of what I believe." I feel like, to some extent, people do not know how to rectify this, learning something new or gaining something new and not feeling like they have lost a part of who they are.

- Kyser

I think I will be more culturally aware and accepting and I think that is something that everybody should possess. I think it is a great quality and I think it provides better understanding between different people and I think that is something everybody should have, especially if you are going to go to business or things like that. Either way, I think it is going to contribute greatly to what you want to do in the future just because the entire world is changing, as Georgia State is.

- Jessica

Ideally, I feel like Georgia State has all the tools and the ingredients to become a microcosm for the rest of the world. I mean, at least for the country to say, "Here, look, there are lots of different people that do not necessarily have anything in common and can coexist not only tolerably but peacefully." Ideally, I would love to see this be. It sounds a little cheesy, but like a beacon of peace to show people that it can be done. I feel like if anyone can do it, we can and I would love to see it move in that direction.

- Kyser

There are so many different people and that is what is so interesting to me because I want to learn about different things. I don't want to keep doing the same thing that I have been doing. I want to see different stuff. That is why I get involved to... have views with different people. That is what I have to do when I get a job and I know that is exciting to me.

- Karen

On a more social level..., my extracurricular activity has bled into a lot of my social groups. For example, when I did Incept there were three White students, two White males on the team and it was a majority African American composition. Because of all the time that I spent with them and the way that we bonded, to this day, they are some of my very best friends.

- Kyser

"I would say, even in my four years here, I think Georgia State is better regarded now than four years ago."

- Gabe

If you get here and you are expecting it to be something, it is probably not going to be what you are expecting. It is almost like you just have to show up and take it all in as something new and different, versus comparing it to back home and another college town or another school. It is not going to be like other places. It is a completely unique environment experience.

- Daniel

Conclusion

In conducting this study, I was able to identify the perceptions of White students' engagement in traditional student organizations when they are the racial minority. The resulting perceptions of campus climate by White students not only affected Whites at an institution undergoing racial transition, but can send ripples and possible fissures through an academy that has only succeeded in creating a welcoming and supportive environment for faculty, staff, and students of color, in comparison to the horrendous past of higher education exclusion. Georgia State University's history of institutional racism and exclusion of students in campus organizations continues to shape the institutional ethos and perceptions by all students. In similar fashion to Cowan's (2005) study, I sought to explore causal relationships for student group interactions by race. As GSU has tipped toward a dominant presence of students of color in campus life, White students have withdrawn from organizations and activities that they were previously engaged during earlier time periods. White students' perceptions of Georgia State as a transitional space upon entering the institution, then shapes their choices for (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations throughout their matriculation. In the next chapter, I summarize and discuss my dissertation study findings, provide implications and future research opportunities, examine my experience as an African American researcher, and provide concluding remarks for student engagement in higher education institutions that are racially tipping.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In President Mark Becker's (2009) Georgia State University Address, he stated, "We have one of the most interesting and compelling student bodies in the world. Our student body is diverse in race and ethnicity to the point that it represents the future demographic profile of our nation." Educational scholars have long sought to determine whether a degree or mere presence in a diverse society is tangible evidence of student discovery and development. This dissertation sought to critically explore White students' (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations at Georgia State University, an institution that has a significant student of color population. To this end, I have examined three primary questions using qualitative research methodology:

1. What are White students' and administrators' perceptions of the institution?
2. What are White students' perceptions of traditional student organizations?
3. How do these perceptions influence White students' (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations?

In this final chapter, I summarize and discuss my findings, as well as implications for institutions undergoing racial transition in student organizations and recommendations for future research. Next, I discuss my role and experiences as an African American researcher in this study. I conclude this chapter with my final comments on the changing nature of Georgia State University and higher education.

Summary of Major Findings

Perceptions.

The exploration of White students' perceptions of Georgia State University is directly intertwined with the historical time period in which they attended the institution. Prior to the 1962 desegregation of Georgia State University (GSU), the student population was White and oriented to non-traditional aged commuters. Minority activism on the campus began in the late 1960s and continued through the early 1990s when students of color demanded more access to campus leadership opportunities (Altbach, 1997; Johnstone, 1969). The increased activism of GSU minorities corresponded with the outflow of White students in traditional student organizations, as they felt too many concessions were being made for students of color. Shifts in the GSU campus demographics have mostly influenced the perceptions of current White students.

The opportunity for a high school student to chart his or her own path and make a decision to attend a college or university is an important milestone. Student participants only viewed Georgia State as a viable option after not being accepted into their school of first choice. Georgia State was commonly considered "a back-up plan" once White students recognized that their academic performance would not grant them admission into other more prestigious Georgia higher education institutions. Two of my participants transferred from GSU after sharing with me that they had always planned to use the school to transition to a more traditional institution.

In his longitudinal model of institutional departure, Tinto (1993) argued that family background was one of students' pre-entry attributes that affect retention and attrition. The encouragement and discouragement from family members was an

additional factor that shaped students' perceptions and selection of Georgia State. Very few participants had family members that had previously attended the institution; therefore, they did not have the same institutional connection as with other schools. In some cases, parents discouraged their student from attending GSU and referred to it as a lesser institution that was beneath their children's standards and status.

Despite Georgia State's attempt to market itself as a unique downtown experience, White students' often rejected the concept of an urban appeal and recognized the differences from their normal environment. One student referred to the campus as a "concrete jungle," while others noted the high rates of crime, although GSU's rates were comparable to other campuses of similar size (Georgia State University, 2010). A common finding was their recognition of the differences between Georgia State University and their high schools, specifically referring to the racial composition. A majority of the White student participants were from suburban areas with minimal racial or socioeconomic diversity. As recent scholars have noted, one component of Whiteness studies includes that White students view themselves as colorless or the standard for society in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006; Gallagher, 2003b; McKinney, 2005). The paradigm of not recognizing White race or ethnicity has changed for students at Georgia State University. The large population of students of color, in comparison to other institutions, caused the students to become cognizant of being White.

In my introductory chapter of this dissertation, I referred to a leadership research study that was conducted at Georgia State. The results of the question regarding students' feelings about the campus climate indicated a significant difference between the students of color and White students. When asked if Georgia State was an open and

inviting environment, White students recorded the lowest mean scores for that particular question.

Engagement.

In the multiple conversations about campus diversity, students shared their observations of racial segregation in Georgia State University campus groups. Conversations among White students regarding the racial demographics of traditional student organization were commonplace. Additionally, visual images of Georgia State student organizations from the Pullen Library archives reflected substantial shifts in traditional student organizations. Chang's (2002) research studied the balkanized behavior of student groups at racially diverse colleges and universities, specifically in student organizations. Previous studies have confirmed that students who reside on campus are more engaged than their counterparts (Pike & Kuh, 2005); however, for the residential students in the study, on-campus living only reinforced their minority status in campus involvement. As DeSousa and King (1992) noted in an early article, the social meeting spaces on college campuses are the focal points of connection for Black students and other minority groups. White students provided multiple examples of the large amount of students of color who participated in campus events, while White students were limited in their engagement.

Research has shown a net effect of leadership skills among engaged college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). White student participants in this study argued that organization leadership was an integral part of campus life and recognized that introductory experiences to campus life often led to a series of other activities. Unfortunately, few White students in this study chose to engage in those elite leadership

experiences. Participants in the study noted the Incept team, Spotlight Programming Board, Student Government Association, and Greek life as being some of the most prestigious organization engagement opportunities. Based on university organizational rosters, with the exception of Greek life, White students were racially underrepresented in the student groups. Students communicated their disappointment in seeing the same groups of students of color dominate leadership positions.

Since the organization Incept team's creation in the early 1970s, Inceptors have served as the face of Georgia State University for new students and parents. The Inceptors who assist as mentors during Incept often serve as role models for campus participation. The increase in minority faces on the Incept team was observed by White students in the study. Most of the study participants readily recalled their memories of Georgia State through their experiences during Incept: New Student Orientation. Participants were concerned that the performances during Incept were "too Black" and not inclusive of the White student population. As most college administrators would expect burgeoning student leaders to seize and apply for opportunities, such as Incept, few White students sought to join the organization in recent years.

Spotlight Programming Board was recognized as a vehicle to encourage student engagement through a wide range of co-curricular events and activities. The mere fact that they are responsible for social activities was an additional reason why students held Spotlight in high esteem. Having personally attended numerous campus events as an administrator and supporter of student groups, participants reinforced my observations of Spotlight events being comprised overwhelmingly of students of color, and specifically African American students. A fundamental theme in my conversations regarding

Spotlight with White students was that the organization was not committed to serving their programmatic desires. Students believed that Spotlight's demographic attendance resulted from the organization's executive members' lack of willingness to recruit White students and comfort in marketing to a known captive audience.

Student participation in collegiate Student Government Associations has long served as an opportunity to develop leadership skills, as well as "deal directly with advocacy, institutional politics, and substantive change" (W. P. May, 2009, p. 386). The visibility of the SGA officers and their control over resources provide them access to upper-level administrators and enabled them to control the programmatic direction of campus offices and other student organizations, thus becoming racially competitive leadership positions. A major assumption among participants was that students of color were less inclusive than Whites and intentionally withheld opportunities from other students. Students of color were frequently blamed for the organizations' dysfunction and lack of broad campus participation.

The Greek system was identified as a place of comfort for White students on the Georgia State University campus. Most of the interviewees were knowledgeable of or an active participant in White Greek-lettered organization activities. Chang and DeAngelo (2002) posit that White students at racially diverse institutions were less likely to join Greek organizations than White students at the least racially diverse institutions. Despite the authors' claims, White students at Georgia State identified a strong presence and frequent interactions with sororities and fraternities on the campus. The cohesive nature of the Georgia State Greek system began early in most of the students' academic careers

and now serves as a their White cultural connection in the midst of a highly diverse campus.

Only a small cadre of White student participants pursued leadership roles in student organizations at Georgia State and considered themselves a small minority among engaged students. The involved students were proud of their campus participation and attributed their involvement to a unique personality type. Among the involved White student participants, most were self-reflective and intentional in their social risk-taking. They referred to the negative responses that they received from fellow White students and were frequently asked about their friendship with other racial groups. Instilled family values of inclusivity and previous cross-racial interactions prior to attending Georgia State increased the comfort level of the White student leaders and provided them with the confidence to be in a group wherein they might be the racial minority. Helms' (1995) White racial identity development model refers to a higher order schemata for Whites that seek to abandon personal racist beliefs and oppose institutional structures that promote racism. The most involved White students in the study attempted to move toward the higher WRID schemata. Unfortunately, after joining certain groups some of the students retreated back to White social spaces, which could reflect a reversion to a lower WRID schema.

Reasons for disengagement.

White students were very astute in their analysis of the racial dynamics in GSU student organizations. They knew and explained what was cool, what was interesting, and what drew other students to disengage. The earlier historical outflow and flight of White students in campus groups has since led to a culture of disengagement and

resistance to being in the social presence of students of color. The varying levels of White student disengagement resulted from their changing majority status, beliefs of reverse discrimination, connection with administrators, and Black culture.

Research participants acknowledged that their racial minority status in traditional student organizations was a key factor in their choice to disengage. Gallagher (1995) noted that White college students' beliefs on topics of privilege, identity politics, and White culture are manifested in their daily interactions. A number of students in the study conceded that participation levels were based on an individual's personal comfort and their minority status within the group. Some of the participants were comfortable with a being a racial minority in student organizations, while others were most comfortable with a majority White demographic. In response to my request of the racial demographic percentages at Georgia State, White students consistently overestimated the percentage of students of color. The overestimation of race mirrored the research conducted by Gallagher (2003a). African American students at Georgia State represent less than 30% of the undergraduate population; however, they were viewed by White students as the largest racial demographic of the student population. Although leadership positions in campus organizations were abundant, a major factor in the discomfort among Whites was the decreasing likelihood that they would see others who looked like themselves.

A product of being at an institution such as Georgia State, where issues of culture are frequently discussed, is that White students have become more cognizant of their cultural values. Perry (2001) argued that White youth often construct their identities in cultural isolation; however, the students in the study expressed differences in culture as a

reason for disengagement. Limited involvement and familiarity with campus organizations led the students to believe traditional student organizations were exclusionary and only targeted its programming efforts toward students of color. An aspect of my interview discussions were the beliefs by Whites that Black student leaders initiated discriminatory practices to discourage White student participation in campus organizations. The prejudices of student participants often resulted from their familial upbringing that taught prejudice was justified or their limited experiences with students of color on the Georgia State campus. With respect to organization involvement, participants referred to White students as a racially underrepresented group that was being oppressed at GSU. Multiple White students shared a similar story of being passed over as Black promoters for events distributed flyers for culturally-based social activities. Participants viewed this act as a form of reverse discrimination.

Another major finding during this study was the role that administrators played in shaping campus engagement. Former administrators in the study describe university initiatives implemented in the early 1990s to encourage students' of color participation and recent directives to focus on White student withdrawal. The leadership within the Division of Student Affairs launched an initiative entitled, "Broadening the Engagement," to encourage participation among underrepresented students; however, many staff members shared that the initiative was indirectly focused on increasing White student engagement. White students felt a difference between Black and White administrators' commitment to their issues related to student engagement. White students interviewed with minimal campus engagement in student organization questioned the sincerity of staff member's of color desire to create a diverse campus

environment and were hesitant to raise racial issues for the fear of being judged. The more engaged White student participants described comfort in speaking to administrators of varying races about issues related to diversity. Some of the participants made claims that they were the beneficiaries of an intentional approach to White student recruitment in student organizations by campus administrators.

Throughout the interview process, White student participants commonly referenced African American cultural and social events. The experiences and relationships with Black students communicated by White students reflected their ability to pick and choose certain aspects of Black culture that serve their personal interests. Students admitted that their personal lack of self-confidence was often the source of discomfort in mixed-race settings. For the White students who chose to explore new cultures, it is often done in a voyeuristic manner where they can view the activities from afar. Participants who chose to participate in activities and organizations frequented by students of color were chided for their cultural interests. Lipsitz (2006) argues that the foundation of Black art and culture are deeply engrained in the experiences that create them. In general, the participants communicated that their friends were just apathetic about participating in any social activities that were not predominantly White in nature, as opposed to intentionally withdrawing due to the racial dynamics.

Positive opportunities.

Although many of the participants noted the challenges of White (dis) engagement, most viewed Georgia State University in a positive spirit. According to participants, White students are becoming more engaged in campus life as the stature and notoriety of GSU increases. The diversity and vast engagement opportunities are part of

the University's experience that most White students would not receive at institutions with different racial demographics. As Georgia State University has become more racially diverse, student participants expressed positive racial interactions based on their involvement with other racial groups. The most involved White students attributed much of their initial risk-taking in campus activities to their participation in learning communities during their first semester of enrollment. Participants in the study that were members of freshmen learning communities expressed feelings of racial comfort in the smaller cohorts of the program. Additionally, the White students shared how the program provided exposure to topics, such as communication, the campus environment, intercultural relations, and leadership (Hotchkiss & Moore, 2006). Students encouraged the university administration to create and require more opportunities for White students to explore their whiteness, which would help with the overall campus racial dynamics. In the midst of the diverse feelings about campus life, student participants were resolved to the fact that Georgia State was a unique place and they were proud of it.

Discussion of Findings

As I review the findings, it is apparent that Georgia State University's historical foundation and resulting demographic changes have resulted in White students' perceptions of the racially diverse campus as a transitional space. Therefore, I have chosen to focus my discussion specifically on the issues surrounding participants' individual and structural thinking. This discussion will be organized into the three following sections, (1) a transitional space, (2) rhetoric of diversity, (3) implications for Georgia State and higher education and (4) suggestions for future research.

A transitional space.

Through my early archival research on the history of Georgia State University, interviews with participants, and dialogue with the data, I have established a fundamental conclusion that White students view the institution as a transitional space that serves a unique function at a particular point in their lives. Whether the students planned to transfer to another institution or make the best of their college experience at Georgia State, the racially diverse campus setting was a paradigmatic shift from many of their previous educational experiences and cultural upbringings. The perceptions of the university reflected a world turned upside down, in comparison to the White social structures of United States suburban neighborhoods in which most White participants were raised. Those opinions, beliefs, and perceptions that were shaped by family members, friends, and general stereotypes of urban settings heavily influenced White students' choices to engage or disengage in traditional student organizations and campus life at Georgia State.

In the case of Georgia State, White students in this study entered the university with a lack of commitment to being a part of the campus. Many college administrators and practitioners subscribe to the theory that campus engagement is a critical aspect of student retention and matriculation toward graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, that process of encouraging student engagement becomes considerably more difficult when families had discouraged attendance or communities paint the urban institution as a crime-filled, dangerous place to be after dark. From the time that White students step onto the GSU campus during Incept, they are exposed to the diverse nature of society and often reflect on the social bubble in which they were raised. Helms (1995)

notes that White racial identity development is seldom done in isolation, and is commonly subject to group behaviors. As students in the study shared, the exposure to difference has the potential to immediately cause a retreat of White students to environments wherein they feel most safe and comfortable.

Campus life at Georgia State is urban life. In the midst of the large buildings and normal hustle of downtown daily life, students of color have carved out their own social space in traditional student organizations and campus life since students' activism in the late 1980s and 1990s. A "complicated reality" (Osgood, 1997) of the diversity at Georgia State is White students' difficulty in reconciling their acceptance of the concept of diversity, while being opposed to cultural aspects of students of color. "This romanticism contributes to the possessive investment in whiteness by maintaining the illusion that individual whites can appropriate aspects of African American experience" with little thought to the divergent opportunities and cultural dynamics of their activities (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 120). Yet, White students still have a choice. Those choices become more difficult with regard to engagement in traditional student organizations. If GSU is their back-up plan and not somewhere White students initially wanted to attend, few White students will choose to engage in activities in which their cultural norms are challenged and they are required to wrestle with being a racial minority.

Rhetoric of diversity.

As Georgia State University undergoes a racial transition from its historical past, and current White students view it as transitional space due to its diverse nature, I have recognized the varying levels of rhetoric related to the institutional concept of diversity. As scholars promote the benefits of racially diverse environments for student learning

and development (Antonio, 2001; Chang, 1999; Denson & Chang, 2009; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Kezar, 2007), educators and administrators must realize that just being in this environment does not lead to competencies. Student participants in this dissertation study have shown that they can develop cross-cultural skills by matriculating at a racially diverse institution, but not necessarily. In Georgia State University president, Mark Becker's University Address (Becker, 2009), he described, "moving the needle on the perceptions of Georgia State." But what exactly does that mean? For the students in the study, their perceptions often contradict the espoused mission and values of the university. Additionally, faculty and staff members charged with implementing strategies toward the further promotion of our diverse campus require trust that administrators' comments regarding diversity are more than rhetoric, which is difficult to see and feel when I watch President Becker's comments made in front of a backdrop of senior-level White administrators that in no way mirror the racially diverse student population.

My analysis of interview statements and university documents, combined with my personal experiences as an administrator, have led me to conclude that members of the Georgia State community hide behind the word "diversity." When interviewed, students referred to the lack of diversity in traditional student organizations, but they meant the limited representation of White students. Administrators in the study made references to their being nudged to encourage White participation, even when their efforts had previously failed. The creation of initiatives, such as "Broadening the Engagement" seemed to have been done with the implicit directive to increase White involvement at all costs. The challenge in the mentioned initiative is that we approach the symptoms of a problem without truly addressing why White students are disengaged and the direct

correlation to the historical gains of students of color. Institutions of higher education throughout the U.S. are searching for increased participation among students of color, but GSU seems to have dismissed the gains and successes with these students. Georgia State minority retention and graduation rates are touted locally and applauded nationally; however, there is a zero-sum game when it comes to students' of color engagement in campus life. Administrators clumsily maneuver through a process of determining which racial groups are dominant and marginalized in student organizations.

Recognition that student of color engagement at Georgia State has tipped beyond Whites' threshold of comfort is part of a twenty-year trend and has reinforced the rhetoric of crisis. Crises are social constructions related to the ideology of the viewer. Tatum, in her (1999) book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, notes that the reality is that a majority of White students sit together as well. The shared cultural experience of students of varying race and ethnicity is just as similar. The only difference is that Whites question why the others do it. In the case of GSU, our rhetoric of crisis does not seem to be about solving the issue of disproportional engagement in student organizations. Students in the study shared that participation in Student Government, Spotlight, and Incept was tied to the potential for personal gain and bolstering claims for resources. Students' (dis) engagement and encouragement of more White diversification is directly linked to their beliefs of and desires for traditional power that are being held hostage by students of color (Bonilla-Silva, et al., 2004).

Many times, university ideologies vie for supremacy through the offering of competitive rhetorical narratives related to diversity. Some individuals offer the well-intended beliefs of colorblind human beings wherein only performance matters.

Unfortunately, for some in the Georgia State community, that approach has led to increased engagement among students of color. Another viewpoint calls for unification without the weakening or fragmentation of the student population. Individuals who prescribe to this approach feel that the promotion of culture does not have to be done at the expense of the White majority population. Responses from participants in this study support my claim that campus administrators' positive rhetorical description of an urban campus has not aligned with the White students' perceptions of the campus. Regardless of ideological approach, I opine that Georgia State must move beyond managing diversity, with a hypersensitivity toward census data, and evolve toward honoring our diversity. Education researchers must bypass the political rhetoric and look for clues on how they might proceed and what might be feasible to do, dismissing the notions of scientific neutrality and universal truth (Fine, 1994; Novick, 1988). We must embrace who we are as an institution. How we define success in our efforts to be a diverse institution cannot solely rest on university executive leadership, but must include staff, faculty, and students of all races in the dialogue. The rhetorical belief that the next generation of students will be fine because of racial integration and exposure is taking us down a negative spiral. Georgia State University and other institutions must have the courage and intellectual aptitude to make change; otherwise, lack of activity is done at the detriment of our society.

Implications.

The following is a list of implications that have grown out of the findings of this study:

- The declines in White student retention and disengagement in traditional organizations are directly linked with their perceptions of the university. An

exploration of the ideology of Georgia State University White students will aid in shaping curricular and co-curricular offerings to increase their overall quality of student life.

- The rapid changes in higher education student demographics have the potential for serious effects and broadened policy implications. Heightened engagement by White students can lead to a broadly diverse educational environment wherein students gain cultural competencies that are required in a global society (Chang, 1999; S. R. Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, et al., 1994; Hurtado, et al., 1998). Increasing demographic shifts in collegiate enrollments will continue to affect the racial dynamics of campus environments and student organizations, and thus, influence White student engagement, retention, and institutional departure (Chang, et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993).
- The concept of achieving the American Dream is rooted in the educational opportunities afforded to an individual. Therefore, there is a clear relationship between universities and the ideals of achievement in the society of the United States of America. Unfortunately, the mission, aims, and goals of universities often lack congruence with the economic, political, and social structures of society (Veysey, 1965). Georgia State University is a prime exemplar of the social challenges and dilemmas faced by institutions as they seek prestige in the broader academy (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002). To accomplish its multi-faceted mission, Georgia State has experienced exponential growth in various areas, such as enrollment, student life, and facilities within the last ten years.

These increases will influence the engagement and disengagement of students enrolled at the institution.

- When leaders attempt to change organizational culture, while it is true that something will change, many of the changes are unpredictable and sometimes undesirable (Demers, 2007). Each higher education institution maintains a unique culture that is often difficult to evaluate. Regardless of the challenges in enacting change, the various organizational theories provide administrative practitioners with a lens to abstract events that are occurring around them. As opposed to the business model of managing change, university leaders must understand that people's meanings and interpretations drive the organizational shifts of an institution.
- An institution's cultural paradigm often changes over time. In the investigation of White students' (dis) engagement, voices of people of color sometimes become inconsequential. Without a holistic approach to student engagement, the institution falls into a cyclically regressive pattern of racial identity relationships. Students of color are now faced with challenges of maintaining the gains that former students fought so hard to achieve. Additionally, regressive policies and initiatives deemed by students as designed to keep them in their place, may ultimately change their perceptions of the institution. Those sparring patterns are not only felt by students of color, but also faculty members and administrators of color. The ethical professional dilemmas experienced by people of color to implement racially insensitive policies and programs may cause future departure and dissatisfaction with the institution.

Suggestions for future research.

This study has provided important information about the perceptions of a group of White students at Georgia State University. After completing such a project, many new questions arise as others are answered. The following is a list of suggestions for several courses of inquiry for future research:

- The study of the phenomenon of White student engagement will offer Georgia State University administrators the opportunity to learn from evidence and expand their thought, to recreate their own level of understanding, and inform judgments on policy directions during a time of institutional change (Demers, 2007). A mixed method research design could provide critical statistical and qualitative insight into the beliefs, perceptions, values, and stories of White students (Greene, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). Information from the study could serve as a foundation for new opportunities in student engagement and social programming.
- A unique area of inquiry at Georgia State University are the stories of students of color that can be overlooked as researchers explore the phenomena of White student (dis) engagement. Solaranzo and Yasso (2001) offer that counter-storytelling is a method of telling the stories and experiences of those not in power. Students of color have made positive gains in enrollment, retention, and student engagement at Georgia State and their stories can serve as a model for other institutions undergoing racial transition. A comparison of the perceptions of Black and White students at “tipping” universities can assist policymakers in creating inclusive academic environments.

- Educational institutions have long shaped how individuals are racially socialized (Lewis, 2003b). Derald Sue (2003) argues that monocultural learning environments, curricula, and pedagogy do a disservice to students. A number of students in the study mentioned how their experiences in learning communities during their first year at Georgia State connected them to campus life and aided in their development of racially diverse friend groups. An exploration of currently existing curricular programs, and those that can be created, can serve as a mechanism to integrate classroom experiences and student engagement in an overarching learning environment.
- The history of segregated schools and colleges continues to affect the climate of racial and ethnic diversity on college campuses. The policy debate regarding the topic of racial power and privilege in college access has been in existence for a number of decades and requires further investigation. The case of Georgia State University cannot be completely understood without delving into broader national issues in higher education and southern education. Today's educational problems are products of yesterday's solutions, providing historians and educational scholars with opportunities to dialogue with the concept of the responsibility of higher education.

Postscript

My attempt to understand the unique social phenomenon of White student (dis) engagement in traditional student organizations at Georgia has caused me a high level of personal and professional excitement, as well as angst. As the researcher, it was difficult to establish a balance between my role as observer and relationships with the participants,

as personal reflexivity was a concern. While knowing that my presence was constantly shaping the environment, I had to acknowledge that my identity as an African American male influenced my subjectivity. In addition, White participants were sometimes reserved in sharing issues of a racial nature with a person of color. As Britzman noted, “although the ethnographer is busily reading the setting, the participants are busily reading the social markers of the ethnographer” (Britzman, 1995, p. 142).

Examples of my White participants’ hesitation to answer questions or their discomfort in certain topics were pervasive. I was pleasantly surprised that most of the participants were candidly open and honest with me; however, I recognized a series of coded phrases and contradictions when our discussions turned toward issues of race and equality. The students frequently used generic terms, such as “people” or “individuals,” as opposed to referring to someone as Black or White. The previously described generic terms were prevalently used by participants in the study when the issue was racially contentious on the GSU campus or in society. Additionally, phrases of “I don’t know,” “Not sure about that,” “Maybe some Whites do,” and “Not that I’ve heard” were used when students faced discomfort with the question or their answer.

Throughout this investigative process, I stayed mindful of the behaviors, mannerisms, and nuances that could not be seen by the reader, but aided in my analysis. My first few interviews provided me with the footing in finding my place and the discomfort associated with it, as students sometimes made contradictory, and in some cases, racially insensitive remarks. As I listened, I began to question my own professional experiences at Georgia State and asked myself internally, “What kind of place is this?” I found myself consciously code-switching in a scholarly, bi-cultural way.

Over time, the interviews became more comfortable as I realized that my voice had been silenced for many years and the dissertation research was my path to raising it.

Adjustment is important in the research process, but if I am too careful, I can adjust myself out of existence. Through my conversation with White students, I was able to judge my excellence and humanity through my connection with those like and unlike me.

A question that was most asked of me, albeit not by participants, but colleagues, was, “Why do you want to study White students?” I clearly understood their questioning, as students of color have and continue to be marginalized in the United States educational system. Engagement in campus life among students of color at Georgia State provides me with a daily sense of pride as I have the opportunity to watch their personal and professional development through leadership roles in traditional student organization. However, in my quest to become a scholar in higher education, this study allowed me invaluable insight into the background, experiences, and demographics of White college students. I believe that there is space in the academic and professional arenas for an African American researcher to explore Whiteness because I am rooted in the ideal that social justice is not synonymous with revenge. It is a politically tranquil process for me to focus on educational issues that are closely aligned with my social identities; however, I chose to examine a cultural phenomenon that lacked familiarity. Traditional conversations regarding diversity are limited to numerical representation of individuals of varying race; however, I believe my exploration of student engagement at Georgia State University can assist all students in developing cultural competencies that benefit them personally and society in general. My desires to educate and retain students in higher

education are not limited to any particular social group, and I am committed to encouraging student development in a diverse learning community.

An urban campus, such as Georgia State University, “is not merely a university located in a city; it is also of the city, with an obligation to serve the needs of the city’s diverse citizenry. It has special concern with issues of urban life. It offers access to higher learning to people of all classes.... It listens to the community as a means of keeping in touch with its mission and its conscience” (Bonner, 1981, p. 48). Georgia State’s history of institutional racism and exclusion of students in campus organizations continues to shape the institutional ethos and perceptions by all students. This dissertation has aided in my recognition that school environments are cultural in nature. In my analysis of the cultural changes at Georgia State, there are still many challenges and gaps to be filled, as I seek to understand the experiences of modern day students. “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is” (Geertz, 1973, p. 29). However, my case study of Georgia State describes the evolution of a southern university and how its representation affects the people within it. In most cases, universities want positive historical viewpoints and are very hesitant to allow critical scholarship on their practices. I argue that the marginalization of students in higher education is not just a social condition, but a scholarly condition that requires further exploration.

Osgood (1997) argues that “it was the complicated reality of diversity that worked most powerfully against fully realizing common school ideology in the Boston public schools” (p. 397). In this statement, Osgood implies that educational institutions often tout diversity as a priority, but rarely have strategic plans for diversity and for creating

and sustaining inclusive educational environments. The “complicated reality of diversity” is that there is a disconnect between rhetoric and reality in the area of diversity, as colleges and universities in the United States have typically failed to turn their stated commitments of diversity into tangible action. Additionally, many educators and politicians have lacked the commitment and moral fortitude to pursue the policies that affect true change. In the case of Georgia State University, changes in student engagement policies were only a result of legal rulings and major student uprisings. Recognizing the importance of diversity means embracing the experiences, perspectives, and expertise of other cultures to create an atmosphere and educational culture that not only admits students of color, but also accepts and welcomes their presence and participation. Thus, capturing White students’ perceptions of Georgia State’s campus climate is an inherently incomplete process due to the nature of historical change.

The dream of racially diverse campus environments espoused by higher education scholars, policy-makers, student activists, and administrators of the past is a noble undertaking. The mission statement of Georgia State University reinforces the institution’s desire to develop students with global competencies; however, no dream can be actualized until all parties involved wake up. After spending an extensive time period interviewing participants, along with observing and evaluating images and documents that represent Georgia State’s campus culture, I agree with Prosser’s (2007) statement that we must view “school culture as a dynamic system of distinct subcultures” (p. 14). A university, such as Georgia State, that has surpassed the tipping point of racial transition, must recognize that educational and social gains made by students of color may have actual and perceived influences on White students. Some scholars argue, with regard to

race, “some areas become so distorted, they reach a tipping point where turning the trend back becomes difficult, if not impossible” (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005, p. 25). The crisis of White student (dis) engagement at GSU, as communicated by participants in the study, may ultimately serve as a megaphone that arouses the ears of campus administrators to address intercultural relations at the racially transitioning institution.

Student success and cultural competence begins with a solid commitment to education that includes classroom experiences in combination with an inviting social environment. Issues of student success are not just academic issues, but are policy-relevant where theory is translated into practical applications. The focus on student retention will continue to dominate the agenda of policymakers, as they require administrators at postsecondary institutions to provide evidence of academic success, which is often interconnected with student engagement opportunities. Thus, the experiences and attitudes of White students can inform the policy debate on institutional mission and offerings.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Research Management & Timeline

May 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proposal submitted to Georgia State University Institutional Review Board
December 2009 – March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presented prospectus topic at the NASPA Multicultural Institute (Dallas, TX)• Recruited participants and scheduled interviews• Conducted interviews• Archival research• Transcribed interviews and field notes• Ongoing data collection and analysis
March 2010 – May 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow-up interviews• Transcribed interviews and field notes• Ongoing data collection and analysis• Created draft of GSU historical transition
May 2010 – November 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NVivo and hand coding of data• Document and interview analysis
November 2010 – February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Final data analysis• Write up results and discussion

APPENDIX B
IRB Protocol Consent



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999
Phone: 404/413-3500
Fax: 404/413-3504

In Person: Alumni Hall
30 Courtland St, Suite 217

March 23, 2010

Principal Investigator: Fournillier, Janice B

Student PI: Dhanfu Elston

Protocol Department: Educational Policy Studies

Protocol Title: White Student Engagement in Traditional Student Organizations

Submission Type: Protocol H10368

Review Type: Expedited Review

Approval Date: March 19, 2010

Expiration Date: March 18, 2011


The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study and enclosed Informed Consent Document(s) in accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services. The approval period is listed above.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.
2. For any research that is conducted beyond the one-year approval period, you must submit a Renewal Application 30 days prior to the approval period expiration. As a courtesy, an email reminder is sent to the Principal Investigator approximately two months prior to the expiration of the study. However, failure to receive an email reminder does not negate your responsibility to submit a Renewal Application. In addition, failure to return the Renewal Application by its due date must result in an automatic termination of this study. Reinstatement can only be granted following resubmission of the study to the IRB.
3. Any adverse event or problem occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Adverse Event Form.
4. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is obtained and that no human subject will be involved in the research prior to obtaining informed consent. Ensure that each person giving consent is provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The ICF used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB; the approval dates of the IRB review are stamped on each page of the ICF. Copy and use the stamped ICF for the coming year. Maintain a single copy of the approved ICF in your files for this study. However, a waiver to obtain informed consent may be granted by the IRB as outlined in 45CFR46.116(d).

All of the above referenced forms are available online at <https://irbwise.gsu.edu>. Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,


Susan Laury, IRB Chair

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00000129

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies

Informed Consent

Title: Student Engagement in Traditional Student Organizations

Principal Investigator: Dr. Janice Fournillier, Principal Investigator
Mr. Dhanfu Elston, Student Principal Investigator

I. Purpose:

You are invited to be in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to look at how students at a university with a large amount of students of color see campus clubs. You are invited to be a part because you are a current student, former student, current administrator, or former administrator that is familiar with student involvement in student clubs at Georgia State University. A total of 18 participants (10 students, 4 former students, 2 current administrators, and 2 former administrators) will be selected for this study. Participation will not require more than 90 minutes of your time. One or two interviews will take place between the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 school year.

II. Procedures:

The Student Principal Investigator, Dhanfu Elston, will oversee the research study, along with the Principal Investigator, Dr. Janice Fournillier. Mr. Elston will select students, based on names mentioned by Georgia State teachers and staff that know student activities. Current and former administrators will be selected from our knowledge of campus offices.

If you decide to be involved, you will participate in one or two (1-2), recorded, 30-45 minute interviews with the Student Principal Investigator. We might ask you for a second interview if the interviewer has additional questions or needs you to make a statement more clear. All current students and current campus administrator interviews will take place on the campus of Georgia State University in a private room. Interviews of former students and campus administrators will either take place on campus or at the home of the person. The interviews will be conducted during a time that works for you. Before the interview, the Student PI will get the completed and signed informed consent form from you.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information about college life.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Involvement in the study is your choice. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you can ask that your interviews not be used in the research. You may skip questions or stop at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose anything that has been promised to you.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Fournillier, Mr. Elston will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) and/or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the sponsor). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The audio files and typed notes will be stored in a locked drawer in the office of Mr. Elston. Electronic information will be in folders on a secure computer in the office of Mr. Elston. All audio files and consent forms information will be kept apart from the typed notes. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Call Dr. Janice Fournillier at 404-413-8262 or email at jfournillier@gsu.edu, or Mr. Dhanfu Elston at 404-413-2056 or email at delston@gsu.edu, if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX D

Participant Profile Form

Participant Confidential ID _____

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT PROFILE FORM

Academic Information

Classification: ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior

Major(s) _____

Minor(s) _____

Final High School GPA: _____ /4.00 scale

Current Undergraduate Cumulative GPA: _____ /4.00 scale (please do not estimate)

High School Type: ☐ Public ☐ Private Other _____

Estimate of High School Racial Demographics (by percentages):

_____ %White/Caucasian

_____ %Asian/Asian American

_____ %African American/Black

_____ %Native American/American Indian

_____ %Latino/Hispanic/Chicano

_____ %Biracial/Multiethnic

Future Career Aspiration

☐ _____

Please Specify

☐ Unsure at this time

Background Information

Family Structure:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two Parents | <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian (not a parent) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single Parent Household (father) | <input type="checkbox"/> Single Parent Household (mother) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other_____ | |

Race/Ethnicity:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Asian American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American/Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic/Chicano |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native American/American Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Biracial/Multiethnic |

Sexual Orientation

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual

Socioeconomic Background

- ☐ Low income / Poor
- ☐ Middle income /Working Class
- ☐ High income / Affluent

What is the HIGHEST level of formal education obtained by any of your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than high school diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma or GED |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some college | <input type="checkbox"/> Associates degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Masters degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate or professional degree (e.g. JD, MD, PhD) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know | |

Which of the following best describes where you are currently living while attending college? (*Choose one*)

- ☐ Parent/guardian or other relative home
- ☐ Other private home, apartment, or room
- ☐ College/university residence hall
- ☐ Other campus student housing
- ☐ Fraternity or sorority house
- ☐ Other

Since starting college, how often have you been an involved member in college organizations? (*Choose one*)

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequently |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time | |

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Student Interviews:

1. What brought you to Georgia State?
2. Can you tell me about your previous school? How is it the same or different from Georgia State?
3. Could you describe your campus involvement at Georgia State?
4. In your opinion, which organizations have the most power and prestige on campus?
5. How do you describe yourself in racial/ethnic terms?
6. How does that (race) influence the activities that you choose to engage in?
7. How does the campus environment affect your attitude and experiences related to student involvement?
8. What specific events or activities caused you to struggle as to whether you would participate?

Former Student Interviews:

1. Could you describe your campus involvement while at Georgia State?
2. Which organizations had the most power and prestige on campus?
3. How have campus organizations evolved since you were enrolled?
4. Based on your knowledge of current campus organizations, what organizations would you participate in if you were a student?

Campus Administrator Interviews:

1. What are your observations of campus organizations since you have been here?
2. Have you had conversations with other peers about campus involvement choices by demographic groups? If so, what was said?
3. How do you think demographic changes that are currently underway will affect the experiences and attitudes of students related to student involvement?

Former Campus Administrator Interviews:

1. What role did you and what were your experiences with student organizations?
2. How have campus organizations changed since you were an administrator?
3. Did you or other campus administrators notice any changes in minority student participation?
4. What conversations were had among administrators related to racial and demographic changes during your tenure?
5. How do you think historical events at events at Georgia State have influenced the demographic changes in student involvement?

APPENDIX F

Participant Profiles

Student Profiles

NAME	GENDER	INVOLVEMENT
Chase	M	Student Assistant, Intramural Sports
Daniel	M	Intramural Sports
Gabe	M	Greek, SGA
Helen	F	Student Assistant, Religious Group, Advocacy Organization
Jessica	F	Residential Assistant, Spotlight
Karen	F	Greek, Advocacy Organization
Kyser	M	Student Assistant, Incept, Media Organization, Honor Society
Tony	M	Greek, SGA

Administrator Profiles

NAME	RACE	WORK AREA	GSU AFFILIATION ERA(S)
Ms. Conrad	B	Student affairs	1980s, 1990s, 2000s
Mr. Elliott	B	Student affairs	2000s
Mrs. Howe	W	Student affairs	1990s, 2000s
Mr. Poller	W	Student affairs	1980s, 1990s, 2000s

APPENDIX G

Findings Derived from Interview Data

FINDINGS	CATEGORIES
PERCEPTIONS OF GSU	
	Choosing to attend Georgia State <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transferring • Family influence • Urban institution • Different from the norm
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	
	Student Organization Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incept: Are there any White people at this school? • Spotlight Programming • SGA • The Greek ivory tower
	White Participation: I'm Different
ONCE IT TIPS: REASONS FOR WHITE DISENGAGEMENT	
	Majority/Minority Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort level and fear • Not the target/catered audience
	Reverse Discrimination: Not a Fighting Chance
	Administrators
	Black Culture
RESPONSE TO VISUAL IMAGES	
	Confusion
	GSU is Changing
	Who's Responsible for the Changes
APPEALING TO WHITES	
POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES	